

Joni Hesselgrave

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### Provocation Post #3: Life-writing and Literary Metissage as an Ethos for Our Times

Provocation: In the chapter, *Metissage 2: Mixed and Mixing Identities*, author's Hasbe-Ludt, Chambers, and Leggo (2009) consider identities and their related stories. They say on pg. 69 "to interrogate identities at this time of global and local shifts in power, one cannot observe this world safely from the inside of one's front yard only. Each one of us must go out into the world and engage with others, in dialogue and action, putting our identities on the map to be traced by others (Bauman, 1993). Each of us has to be open to learn about others without prejudice and with trust in a mutual intent to do no harm."

Task: As a teacher candidate, what are the implications of life-writing as a mechanism to achieve this goal? Specifically, how might life-writing as praxis be an opportunity to bravely interrogate identities? How does that opportunity lend itself to braiding together a diverse classroom community?

When I first discovered that we would be doing life-writing throughout this course, I was apprehensive. I need to talk about myself?!? I need to share it with my professor and peers?!?!?!? WHAT (cue sweating)!!! During my initial years of university (2001-2004), I never talked about myself in a single writing assignment. Pursuing a History minor, I took dozens of History courses and was forbade from using the pronoun "I" in my essays. Subjectivity was frowned upon while objectivity was held to the highest esteem. It was not as stringent in other courses, but objectivity was still the safest route to take. "Facts were facts" ...right? No one seemed to argue that. After third year, I took a fourteen-year hiatus, returning in 2018. Things had changed dramatically! Reflection and critical thinking were woven through every course. Self-reflection was a requirement and contributed significantly to my writing assignments and grades. We were expected to question ourselves and our thinking as it related to course content and readings. What did "I" think? How did "I" fit into what I was reading and learning? What would "I" do in the context of place, space, and time? What has my

role been in the past, what is it now, and what will it be in the future? How does my role relate to the role of others? Essentially, I was doing what Hasbe-Ludt, Chambers, and Leggo (2009) call life-writing: “Life-writers strive to understand the complex concepts of identity and subjectivity by situating themselves within multiple geo-cultural worlds and scholarly landscapes” (pg. 67).

Going from never using “I”, to using it extensively, was an adjustment—one that I welcomed and found refreshing, yet struggled with at first. It took me longer to write my assignments. I had to be more thoughtful and challenge myself to write what I believed rather than regurgitating (i.e. citing) what others believed. I had to examine situations and scenarios, address how I fit, and relate that to how others fit. I have seen this educational approach in secondary and elementary classrooms as well—trickling its way down and becoming part of the K-12 curriculum in meaningful ways, such as in the self-reflection. Interrogating identity through self-reflection can help one see how their identity relates to the identities of others. Self-reflection, practiced in a diverse classroom, can braid that classroom community together by focusing on common themes and building on acceptance and respect of divergent themes. Like the patterns and different colours in a blanket, quilt, or scarf, it is the patterns and differing identities in a classroom community that make it beautiful and unique.

Thinking of life-writing as a type of self-reflection helps me better understand the concept. It allows me to relate it to a practice I have done before and will help me to teach the practice to my students—a practice that Hasbe-Ludt, Chambers, and Leggo rightly argue is extremely important in the world we live in: “It can gift us with a means to face the crises that confront us, learn from them, embrace our mixed stories of relatedness, and put them to use for the common good”; noting that “the new millennium needs autobiographical writing that is

educative and reflective, mirroring that author's life through his or her own and others' past histories and stories"; and since the "self does not exist in isolation" (Griffin, 1995 qtd in Hasbe-Ludt et al, 2009, pg. 68) this "is a task that is best done communally" (pg. 69)—that is, "the interpretive voice of one writer, teacher, or learner, is a response to the multiple words and worlds and identities that surround her and that live within her; it can be altered or eliminated, but it can also change the world" (pg. 68).

How do we get the young students we teach to believe this? How do we get them to "buy in" to life-writing as transformative praxis? If we, as adults and mature university students, are nervous/apprehensive/uncomfortable about the practice of doing and sharing our own life-writings with our professor and peers, how do we make sure that our future students do not feel the same way? The key is to start the practice early, in the primary grades (journaling, reflecting, self-reflecting), so that students are familiar and comfortable with the process, not shocked when comprehensive life-writing is introduced later in their educational journeys (like most of us were). Creating Zinga's "ethical spaces", as discussed in our last provocation, is also essential. But my question is, are these two pre-conditions enough to make students feel comfortable and safe in a world that is often highly inauthentic and judgmental?