

CHAPTER TWELVE

SEEMING, BEING AND BECOMING: LIFELONG LEARNING AND TEACHER TRANSFORMATION

P. A. DANAHER

Abstract

Education exhibits light and shade, substance and illusion, hope and despair, reflection and anticipation. Education demonstrates the recurring ambivalence and uncertainty at its centre by creating new and powerful opportunities for some learners and their teachers and by helping to perpetuate others' marginalisation. For some, personal growth is accompanied by collective affirmation and the experience of being and becoming; for others, appearance is all and the potential associated with seeming is not translated into a lasting reality.

This chapter presents a dialogue with the students' works about the theme of "seeming, being and becoming" by linking their respective concerns and the convergences and divergences among those concerns with selected contemporary educational scholarship. In particular, the chapter examines education research that highlights the intersections and contradictions between lifelong learning and teacher transformation, which function as distilled encapsulations of the students' writing. The proposition is propounded that learners' and educators' woven words can be very powerful in promoting these enduringly sought aspirations. At the same time, seeming, being and becoming can readily turn into unattainable chimera and evanescent glimpses of other worlds that can leave learners and their teachers feeling dissatisfied and incomplete.

Introduction

Living, working and learning in the world today are continually challenging and complex experiences. This is true heedless of whether one resides in a penthouse riverside apartment in Brisbane, Australia, a tribal village in Papua New Guinea, a favela in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil or a township outside Johannesburg, South Africa (while acknowledging the fundamental differences among the contexts framing these examples).

Seeming, being and becoming, the focus of the preceding chapter and this one, are likewise significantly recurring themes that are closely aligned with the challenges and complexities of living, working and learning in the 21st century. Being (the present state) and becoming (the future state) are crucial contributions to what is sometimes called “achieving one’s potential” in educational contexts – the development of multiple subjectivities, the attainment of self-actualisation and (in diverse ways beloved of historical and current fiction) the fulfilment of destiny. Seeming functions as a timely reminder and a useful ‘reality check’ – that all is not what it sometimes appears, and that we (learners, teachers, humans, sentient beings) need to peer behind the surface and the superficial to what those with whom we seek to communicate are really saying about their understandings of the world.

Writing for personal and professional transformation, the organising theme for this section of the book, links with the book’s emphasis on words being woven for manifold purposes and with varied effects. In this section, this and the other chapters highlight some of the ways in which writing can generate the profoundly powerful outcome of transformation – of significant and often long-lasting, even permanent, change in outlook, understanding and behaviour.

Against this backdrop, this chapter reflects on the preceding chapter, containing selected students’ writings about seeming, being and becoming, and connects those writings with the author’s ongoing research and teaching interests in the enduringly important relationship between lifelong learning and teacher transformation. Establishing this connection is one means of guarding against the potential charge of writing being solipsistic, self-indulgent or trivial. This is because authentic and effective writing is indispensable to processes as varied as constructive feedback, critical reflection, futures-directed communication, well-intentioned dialogue and sustainable change locally, nationally and globally. It is certainly crucial to educators – including pre-service teachers, teachers and teacher educators – discharging their responsibilities to facilitate lifelong learning and to promote productive change and transformation.

This chapter consists of the following four sections:

- An engagement with the students' writings presented in the preceding chapter
- Locating the students' writings in broader contemporary educational scholarship
- Using that scholarship as a springboard for linking the themes of seeming, being and becoming with the crucial relationship between lifelong learning and teacher transformation
- A concluding reflection on that relationship vis-à-vis weaving words and writing as research.

An engagement with the students' writings in the preceding chapter

As is the case with the other chapters featuring the students' work in this book, the preceding chapter presents writings that are courageous, creative, diverse and timely. The students have elected to take up the theme of seeming, being and becoming in highly varied and yet very effective ways, reflecting simultaneously their own different backgrounds and experiences and their common focus on being pre-service teachers and becoming educators in their own right. Their writings also reflected a shared commitment to using the writing process to communicate their developing understandings of what it seems like to be successful teachers as well as engaged and informed citizens in the contemporary world.

One index of the complexity and diversity of the students' writings in the preceding chapter was the themes that they have selected to frame their work. In the students' poetry, Kim Fox's "If I Should Happen Upon You" expressed the poignant pleasure combined with the potential pain of re-engaging with over-familiar yet long-forgotten family photographs, specifically of her great-grandmother Eunice, thereby synthesising the powerful love of generations of family members. For Matthew Hunt, "Escape" was his obvious selection as a theme, given that "I myself use gaming as an escape" and that "video games have become more than just a hobby" for him. The final stanza of his poem "Escape" shared what happened when a power shortage meant that the game was temporarily at an end: "No escape tonight...Fear unplugged". John Mulroney's ambitiously chosen theme was "Life", and his multi-layered poem "The Washing Machine" cleverly conveyed several crucial rites of passage and commonly experienced emotions in his and others' lives, as reflected in the lines "Washed and baptised", "Cleaned and dried" and "A tangle, a twist". Stephanie Rex articulated "[m]agic, enchantment and mysterious

worlds” as her chosen themes, encapsulated in the playful poem “Wicked Me”, including the reference to “widdershins”. Finally, Natalie Romanet created an effective soundscape in her poem “Nature’s Sea Song” by deploying such immediately recognisable lines as “Crash of the waves on rock and sand”, “Gush and splash, trickle from rock” and “A sparkling laugh, child’s splash”, in the process tellingly communicating “the feelings and moods that are described” of a type of landscape very familiar throughout the world.

Similarly in the students’ drama, Melissa Andrews’ scene “Happy Families”, part of a larger play production, told of Alice’s response to her son Daniel’s decision to move out of the family home and focused on the theme of “the emotional struggle of letting a child go”. In “Places in Time” Melanie Harris used a double parallel structure to experiment with what seems to be reality and what reality really is by recalling the memories of a man in a coma and by signifying his wife’s and his children’s concerns for him and their hopes for the future, with the two parallel elements being fused intriguingly in the last few lines of the script. Matthew Hunt returned to his chosen theme of “Escape” in his final scene of a film set in the mythical land of Enigami, with eight-year-old Jake being knighted for his crucial role in saving his community from invasion. Matthew shared with us that “My intent with this script is to suggest that while people may seem happy they may not be so. Instead they may be escaping into their mind and running away from their problems”.

The students’ writings reflected a corresponding complexity and diversity with regard to their selections of literary genres and writing styles. Kim Fox’s poem “If I Should Happen Upon You” demonstrated the creative power of a long-familiar family object in stimulating new feelings and thoughts. Intriguingly, Melissa Andrews’ play scene “Happy Families” was planned originally “as a dramatic piece”, but as the writing evolved Melissa found that “comedic elements emerged from the characters and situation”. Matthew Hunt’s “Escape” was avowedly “not a song”, despite being “based on the layout of lyrics” that would presumably resonate strongly with the gamer represented in the poem. Furthermore, Matthew conveyed all the students’ growing awareness of and facility with different writing types in his “knowledge of different writing conventions required for different types of poems/scripts” and of “how the rules change for each”. John Mulronev overcame his initial hesitation to deploy a series of evocative “similes and metaphors” in “The Washing Machine”. Stephanie Rex built on “the narrative style of poetry” to create “Wicked Me”, and she found that the “alternate rhyme scheme”, “with the second and fourth line in each verse rhyming”, an effective structure for

communicating her purpose. For Natalie Romanet, “When writing this poem my intent was to construct a very visual text in the sense that someone would be able to read it and sense the feelings and moods that are described”.

Moreover, the students in the preceding chapter reflected directly on their experiences with writing their respective texts. Many of them acknowledged that that writing was not easy: Kim Fox noted that “my excitement at being able to show myself through creative writing was quickly undermined by fear”; Melanie Harris stated that “Although I enjoyed writing elements of the play scene, I did not really enjoy the overall process as it felt quite unnatural”; Matthew Hunt shared that “When writing this poem I struggled with the ending”; Stephanie Rex recorded that “Prior to creating this poetry piece I was unfamiliar with the process for constructing a poem”; and Natalie Romanet reflected that “I approached this task with great hesitation as I felt that I had very limited knowledge of how to construct my own literature”.

Yet these student authors also observed that once the creative process had commenced it seemed to develop a life of its own (an experience that has been paralleled in writing this chapter). For Kim Fox, once she found the inspiration that she needed from a photograph of her great-grandmother, “As if she had touched my mind herself the words to my poem started drifting in waves”. Melanie Harris “loved writing both the narrative and the poem”. Matthew Hunt reported that in his film scene about Jake “acting out and visualising the action in my lounge room helped with the directions”. Likewise for Stephanie Rex “the narrative style of poetry came naturally to me and allowed my ideas to flow and combine to create a snapshot of a wicked witch”. Natalie Romanet found that “as I progressed and began writing it was not as scary and difficult as I thought it might be”.

Despite this common success, some of the students indicated that they were initially reluctant to share their writing with others, highlighting its personal significance and their vulnerability to potentially uninterested or uncomprehending responses by readers. For instance, Natalie Romanet reported that:

Another difficulty was in the process of editing and making adjustments. I found this extremely difficult as feedback from my teacher and peers changed my initial ideas completely and I do not think the final result conveys the same meaning to the reader.

Yet the students also communicated the value of the feedback that they had received from such readers: sharing her poem with her family

members, “I knew my words needed no altering” (Kim Fox); “I did enjoy the feedback and help with areas in my poem: it needed polish to conform to the style in which I was writing” (John Mulroney); and:

When I submitted my poem on the [online course] forum Janice [the course coordinator and the editor of this book] replied with a suggestion for my final stanza. I was much happier with her suggestion as it artistically stated what I was trying to say, and got the message across clearly. (Matthew Hunt)

Finally, it is clear that all the student authors learned extensively from the dual processes of writing and of reflecting on that writing. Given the focus of this chapter, it was particularly noteworthy that some of the students referred directly to the association between that learning and their roles as educators. For instance, Melissa Andrews drew on a well-known adage to inform her future pedagogical approach: “I really like the motto ‘fail to plan, plan to fail’ I will definitely allow time for planning in my English lessons”. Melanie Harris recorded that “In future I would like to find myself in a situation which requires me to attempt to write another play which would hopefully provide me with a spark to create better learning experiences for my students”. In addition, for Melanie, “Helping students with writing creative texts not only requires teaching them about how to write texts but also encouraging them to explore their ideas and be comfortable with the audience they are presenting to”. And Stephanie Rex stated explicitly:

As a future teacher of English, I believe it is important for pre-service teachers to engage with tasks and literature that they will encounter and teach in their own classrooms. I believe this task has provided me with the necessary skills to be a better teacher of English for my future students.

Locating the students’ writings in contemporary educational scholarship

The teacher education literature abounds with accounts of the impact of writing on pre-service teachers’ developing understandings of being and becoming educators in their own right. Structured writing experiences have been demonstrated to assist student teachers in science education (Shin & Nam, 2012), in teaching poetry (Dymoke & Hughes, 2009) and in integrating technology into classrooms (Tonheur, van Braak, Sang, Voogt, Fisser, & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2012). Such experiences have also enabled

hearing impaired pre-service teachers to connect with hearing children (Bailes, Hulsebosch, & Martin, 2010), have enhanced the practice of pre-service English as a Second Language teachers (Guénette & Lyster, 2013) and have empowered Asian American women preparing to teach in multicultural environments in the United States (Gordon, 2013). Examples of effective writing experiences for pre-service teachers have included diary entries reflecting on critical incidents (Gabryś-Barker, 2012), using metaphors to assist student teachers to re-imagine their students and themselves (Kitchen, 2011), narrative inquiry as a lens for exploring curriculum development (Ciuffetelli Parker, Pushor, & Kitchen, 2011) and exploring the affordances of weblogs and videologs in enhancing capacity-building in using multiple digital modalities within online communities of practice (Kajder & Parkes, 2012).

At the same time, it is appropriate to acknowledge identified limitations of the impact of these structured writing experiences on pre-service teachers' understanding of what it is to be and to become teachers. For instance, Pace (2010) reported that "... reflective writing does not come naturally and students need help to understand the purpose of the process, as well as how to go about it ..." (p. 10), and he referred to "... writing by pre-service teachers, which was purely descriptive and contained no critical analysis, ..." (p. 11). Similarly, Kitchen (2012) warned that "As [reflective practice] becomes commonplace [in teacher education] ... , there is the risk that it may become less rigorous" (p. 87), and he argued that "One way to enhance reflective practice among preservice teachers is to improve the quality of [written] feedback provided by teacher educators" (p. 87).

The phenomenon of flow mentioned by two of the student authors has been conceptualised by Csíkszentmihályi (1998) to denote a state of concentrated focus on an activity or experience. Furthermore, several teacher educators have taken up the notion of flow to analyse their work with their teacher education students, including the use of structured writing experiences. Examples have included learning about the arts, creativity and the natural environment (Jones, 2013), developing cross-curricular approaches to art and science in primary schools (Parker, Heywood, & Jolley, 2012) and generating understandings of transcendent music making (Bernard, 2009).

More broadly, the literature also presents several studies of the development of authentic identities by pre-service teachers, including through the use of writing. For instance, narrative rehabilitation and bibliotherapy have been used effectively to enhance mathematics pre-service teachers' identity work (Lutovac & Kaasila, 2011), while pre-

service teachers' autoethnographic writing has facilitated the development of more self-aware, self-reflective and open dispositions towards student diversity and a commitment to social justice (Mills & Ballantyne, 2010). Likewise a Culturally Relevant Pre-Service Teacher Intervention Model was developed to assist pre-service students to develop an enhanced understanding of their identities as future teachers and their potential work with African American students and communities (Ashby Bey, Blunck, Lewis, & Hicks, 2011). Lamote and Engels (2010) identified four elements of student teachers' increasingly effective professional identity development: commitment to teaching, professional orientation, task orientation and self-efficacy. By contrast, pre-service teachers at greatest risk of burnout and dropout once they begin teaching tend to have naïve, unrealistic and poorly developed professional identities (Hong, 2010).

Many of these ideas were encapsulated by a recent study of professional identity creation for Australian pre-service teachers:

The importance of reflection in supporting the continued professional learning of preservice practitioners is well recognised In making the transition from student to teacher, preservice teachers create their own professional identity. Their ability to articulate this identity is examined through a new construct, a "teacher[']s voice" ... [which] develops when preservice teachers interpret and reinterpret their experiences through the processes of reflection. A teacher[']s voice is articulated as part of the person[']s self-image. (Sutherland, Howard, & Markauskaite, 2010), p. 455)

The students' writings profiled in the previous section of the chapter therefore resonate strongly with the current educational literature related to the development of pre-service teachers' professional identities and particularly to the important role of structured writing experiences in facilitating that development. Implicit in that resonance is an understanding of the relationship among seeming, being and becoming with regard to professional identity articulation and growth. It remains to make that understanding rather more direct, which is the focus of the next section.

Linking seeming, being and becoming, lifelong learning and teacher transformation

It cannot be denied that the work of educators is complex, diverse and at times highly challenging. That work has to take account of wider

sociocultural constructions of learning and teaching and to engage with broader political pressures (including accountability and standardisation). Teachers' interactions with their students therefore take place against a backdrop of competing demands and discordant discourses, many of which they are unable to control but which exercise an increasingly powerful influence on what they do and who they are.

Taking an implicit cue from the students' writings in the previous chapter, teachers' professional work and identity development can be viewed as a series of intertwining journeys of varying duration and with varied aspired and achieved destinations. The intersections among seeming, being and becoming are thus integral elements of those journeys, as is clearly demonstrated by published scholarship that traverses disciplinary and national boundaries that nevertheless frame the possibilities and the specificities of individual current and prospective teachers' identity enactments. For instance, these enactments have been analysed among pre-service English language teachers in Hong Kong (Trent, 2010), among pre-service special education teachers participating in a practicum in an urban centre in the United States (Smiley & Helfenbein, 2011), by a highly qualified science graduate undergoing a career change to teaching (Wilson & Deaney, 2010), among artists experiencing a similar career change to teaching (Hall, 2010), among former primary school teachers and now teacher educators in the United States (Young & Erickson, 2011) and by a group of current doctoral students seeking to become teacher educators in Canada (Kosnik, Cleovoulou, Fletcher, Harris, McGlynn-Stewart, & Beck, 2011). Particular themes within this scholarship include the findings of " ... teacher professional identity as lived experience in the context of educational change" and " ... multiple roles, struggling voice and forging professional identity in the changing educational landscape" (Smit, Fritz, & Mabalane, 2010, p. 93). Moreover, " ... dissonance may play an important catalytic role in pre-service teacher identity development ... " (Galman, 2009, p. 468). Similarly, "Teaching contains a salient component of 'heart-consuming' labour" and "Teachers can be seen as emotional workers in teaching" (Yin & Lee, 2012, p. 56). Furthermore, " ... teacher educators can use fantasy and desire as an impetus for discussion about/working through the anxieties of the profession of teaching art and art teacher identity", and "These pedagogical fantasies support the student teachers' desires for power/recognition, love/connections, and salvation/social justice" (Hetrick, 2010, p. iii). Likewise, in a study that " ... draws attention to how teachers reconcile competing pressures", "The ongoing pressure for performativity and constant change destabilises their work,

yet they remain committed to meeting the needs and interests of their students” (Jephcote & Salisbury, 2009, p. 966).

More specifically, seeming, being and becoming are also powerful themes in the crucial relationship between lifelong learning and teacher transformation. This relationship consists of multiple elements, including materiality and bodily matter (Mulcahy, 2012), engagement with cultural hegemonies (Peters, 2012), a renewed focus on heutagogy (Blaschke, 2012), an acknowledgment and an elaboration of the power of becoming (Hager & Hodkinson, 2011), using available environments (including virtual ones) to progress the project of becoming (Zuiker & Ang, 2011), maximising links between schools (and other educational settings) and their respective communities (Chapman & Aspin, 2012) and – in keeping with the book’s *raison d’être* – using writing to facilitate both lifelong learning and teacher transformation (Walsh, 2012).

From my perspective, lifelong learning and teacher transformation with regard to educators’ work and identities are neither automatic outcomes nor easy attainments, but instead are ideals towards which educators strive with varying degrees of success. If we return to the journey metaphor introduced above, lifelong learning and teacher transformation emerge as possible landmarks along our shared and separate journeys, but there are several other potential landmarks as well, including a sense of ‘treading water’ and of being in a ‘dead end’ role, professional and personal frustration, and self-perceived burnout leading to dropout and attrition from the profession. Certainly underpinning my conviction of the possibly powerful relationship between lifelong learning and teacher transformation are assumptions about professional agency and autonomy, individual and collective capabilities, and contextual capacity to enact those capabilities that are not always evident and available.

Conclusion

For me, the students’ writings in the previous chapter present an engaged and thoughtful array of reflections on experiences and aspirations that augur well for their own professional careers and contributions as well as for the educational settings and the communities where they will be working. In particular, their musings on seeming, being and becoming, expressed through literary forms with which they demonstrated varying degrees of familiarity and comfort, generated themes that resonated with, and also added value to, the published literature about educators’ work and identities.

Seeming, being and becoming also emerged as significant elements of the complex and contentious connection between lifelong learning and teacher transformation. Both the students' writings and the selected published scholarship evoked a yearning for such a connection being strong, resilient and durable over place and time, and in some cases those features were in evidence. At the same time, the students' writings and the published literature revealed instances where the connection was not well-established, and where educators at multiple sites along the continuum of experience struggled to understand and to engage meaningfully with their contexts. In that struggle are revealed much of our common humanity.

A recurring motif of the preceding chapter and of this one, and indeed of the book as a whole, is the proposition of the power of the process of weaving words and of the potential impact of writing. My analysis of the students' writings above highlighted the power of their woven words, by distilling what I saw as the emergent themes from those writings and by establishing direct links between those themes and contemporary educational scholarship. Likewise several published studies have demonstrated the practical utility as well as the long-term influence of writing – as reflection, as research, as learning, as veritable transformation – in the lives of educators of all types and in all contexts. Certainly this power of weaving words and of writing for multiple purposes needs to be allowed full rein if seeming, being and becoming are to be good companions along the journeys of lifelong learning and teacher transformation, rather than turning into unattainable chimera and evanescent glimpses of other words that never materialise.

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