Welcome!

Lynn Fels

Notes from the Field celebrates the teacher researcher’s commitment to a reflective teaching practice, to life-long learning and (perhaps to his or her own surprise) a willingness to be surprised. An insightful teacher researcher considers the world through a novel lens of inquiry: one of curiosity and childlike engagement. Learning through research is a collaborative journey of shared inquiry, questioning and reflection; a teacher researcher does not do research on his or her students but rather engages with them as co-participants in order to critically and creatively explore this curious thing we call education.

Philosopher Hannah Arendt inquires of educators whether they love children enough so as to engage them in the world’s renewal not as we would have it, but as they would imagine it in their own time and place in relationship with others. Writer Jana Milloy asks us to attend to a moment as "a child of duration." A moment’s encounter with a child may be a defining
factor in all that that child becomes; hence we must consider with compassion and care the educational experiences that we co-create with our learners. As educators we recognize "teachable moments," but Malloy's moments are not lessons to be taught, but moments that catch our hearts, that shake us wide-awake, that cause us to ask ourselves, how in this moment of encounter, am I being marked? How is a child being (re)marked in my presence?

Philosopher David Appelbaum speaks of what he calls a "stop," a moment of risk, a moment of opportunity. A stop, he tells us, occurs when a traveler (teacher, researcher, child) encounters an obstacle, and is momentarily paused in action. A stop is a moment of hesitation, a moment that calls our attention to what is hidden—a vulnerability, an intimacy, a longing. At stop invites us to question our habits of practice and to engage anew. A stop is an invitation to understand things, events, experiences and/or relationships from a new perspective.

Teacher inquiry seeks moments of illumination, stops that call us to attention, that remind us that as educators we truly have choice, and that in our choices of action, we are called to ethical engagement. This is risky work that we do as educators, as teacher researchers: to be willing to encounter ourselves anew. As educator Maxine Greene reminds us, we must be wide-awake, if we are to meaningfully engage in the world's renewal with the children and youth with whom we share our classrooms. They are, through their learning in relationship with us, today's action, tomorrow's hope.

This fall, I watched a cohort of teachers receive their Master of Education degrees, as they marched proudly across the stage, beaming bright smiles into the audience. I remembered our journey together in the past year; their struggles, their challenges, their stops, the moments that called them to who they are as educators, as human beings in relationship with each other and the students they teach. And I was reminded of how, through their work, they helped me learn how to be the educator that I seek to become: wide-awake, curious, attentive to surprise, tension, as I lay down a path in walking (Varela, 1987) with my students. Reciprocity is a gift and responsibility.

Teacher inquiry encourages us as educators to share our narratives, to engage in performative explorations and reimagining, and to challenge what we already think we know. Once upon a time, the university researcher was a "fly on the wall," someone who sat at the back of classrooms, taking notes, then writing articles that explained, "what the teachers are doing wrong." By taking ownership of the research of what occurs in their classrooms, teacher researchers have opened a window to the heart of their work. They ask difficult questions: Am I using curriculum as a way to control the classroom? How does my choice of evaluation mark a student? Who am I in this role of teacher? These are difficult questions that require honest reflection. As poet and educator Carl Leggo invites us to consider, "To what (or whom) have I given my heart?"

Our guest editors, Gabriella Minnes-Brandes and Deirdre M. Kelly, along with their graduate students, all teacher researchers, have committed themselves to the task of reimagining evaluation through a practice of play, collaboration, exploration, and social justice. We celebrate in this issue—not only the insights and learning that their research brings to us—but also the spirit of teacher inquiry, in which we are called to question our habits of engagement and to embrace new possibilities in conversation and action with others who share our passion for learning.

"Not walls of cement, but...."
the melodies of your temperature."
—Eugenio Barba, 1995

Our thanks for their curiosity and courage to imagine education within and beyond the walls of the classroom, breathing new life into the role of teacher as researcher and advocate, reminding us of who and what we might be in the presence of those with whom we learn.

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