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THIRTY TWO WAYS TO TELL A STORY OF TEACHING

Self-narrative and pedagogy

BREAKING THE UNION

I couldn't get them out of my head for weeks, those words:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold¹

I knew the words of old somehow and I had recently heard the actor, Liam Neeson reading them on the BBC television programme called 'W. B. Yeats: A fanatic heart'². The sound and the meaning of the words distracted me like a flickering shadow at the window as I tried to get on with writing this chapter. I needed to look past the words and shut out the feeling of dissonant unease, follow my plan and write about how my life experiences had made me the thoughtful and creative teacher I have become. But the page stayed blank. I didn't feel very thoughtful or creative. I felt increasingly uncertain, uneasy and flat on my feet. Not for the first time, it felt as though things were falling apart. The news was full of war of one kind or another. Whole societies being torn apart. People on the move making perilous journeys over deserts and seas, too often ending in tragedy. The wars kept spilling out into what had seemed like safe places like Paris, Brussels and Istanbul. Feeling helpless to help, we all carried on with our lives. What else could we do?

The long lead up to the referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union trundled on endlessly in the background of the spring and early summer, dominating the television and newspapers or popping up in conversations. People seemed to be saying things that had been unacceptable just a few weeks before. Shouting about immigrants and sovereignty. In June the Labour MP for Batley and Spen, Jo Cox was shot and stabbed to death outside her constituency surgery and then suddenly, well it felt like suddenly, we seemed to be on our way 'Out of Europe.' Union broken; things falling apart.

When we went on strike for two days I was shaken and confused when several friends who are union members crossed the line and went to work, seeming to say one thing and do another without any noticeable difficulty.

'You are over-reacting' said my wife and best friend, 'Don't take it so personally, people have to make up their own minds.' It did feel personal; like I didn't really know them at all anymore. As though I never really had known them. They seemed like strangers, getting on with their day, breaking the union for one reason or another. When some students arrived at the gate for their very last day at the university, I gave them a leaflet and told them I was sorry not to be joining them today; that it was a national ballot and that the issues we were fighting for really mattered for the future of higher education. They were friendly and supportive as they continued to their lecture; looking back full of goodwill and calling 'Thanks for everything Mike.' I am almost sure that they meant it. I waved and looked away. It felt like a strange place and a strange moment to say goodbye and good luck. Good luck.

My son rang:

'We're on a break'

'What sort of break?'

'I've moved out.'

I managed not to say 'what about the children?' which was the first thing my Mum had said to me when my marriage came apart in 1993. But I kept thinking 'what about the children?' They had all

¹ W. B. Yeats: *The Second Coming*.

² BBC Four, 3rd April, 2016.

seemed so happy from the outside. The chapter seemed far off, in the distance somewhere. It would have to wait until I had sorted things out - in my head at least.

Kevin died. He was my first head teacher when I started teaching. We had been friends ever since. Twenty years later we were teaching together at the university and I was still learning from him. He had always encouraged me and he had this uncanny knack of always bringing out the best in other people. We used to walk and talk together, sometimes with family and friends. At his funeral, I told them all that I had once read a story to my class of eight and nine year olds about a King who was kind and wise and strong and that one of the children had said that Kevin was the king of our school. I called him King Kevin for a while after that and he said 'oh yeah, do you think I'd be doing this if I was royalty?' And now I think and say out loud: 'yes I do actually: you would have always been a teacher and you could never have stopped yourself from caring, and leading and helping people. Kind and wise and strong. We all walked with you in one way or another and you brought out the best in all of us:

I was more than somewhat lost
But I thought that I might stand up straight
And find my stride
That I might have a song to sing
When I went walking with a king.'

I had scribbled the little rhyme into a notebook a couple years or so before when Kevin had told me that he was terminally ill. The centre cannot hold. I went up to the old school where I had worked with Kevin decades before, but neither of us was there. It felt like autumn on the field behind the playground and the children and some staff looked puzzled through the fence. I had to get on. Back at work, I tried to put all of this to one side. I needed to reach past these events and situations to make the links between the events of my life, my beliefs and my precious pedagogy. To 'improve upon the blank page,' as Nicandor Parra put it in 1968 (p.113). I thought about that quote and found the poem that it came from:

Young Poets

Write as you will
In whatever style you like.
Too much blood has run under the bridge
To go on believing that one road is right.
In poetry everything is permitted.
With only this condition of course:
You have to improve upon the blank page.

That reminded me of autoethnography:

. . . an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal and the cultural

Ellis and Bochner (2000, p739)

I tried to improve upon the blank page and reflect upon how things seemed to be shifting and changing in different ways at such a pace that summer. Things were being shaken and broken in my world, and in the world 'out there': locally, nationally and internationally. New uncertainties were pushing me towards new perspectives in making connections between the personal and the cultural and, of course, this is what I needed to write about. As the crime writer Jim Thompson put it: 'There are thirty two ways to write a story, and I've used everyone but there is only one plot – things are not as they seem' (Polito, 1997, xi).

THE STORIES WE TELL

I have come to see this sort of self-narrative writing as research as well as a kind of problem solving 'therapy' of self-nurturing and care that is crucial to me as a teacher. **In this book we share stories of experience from teachers that demonstrate the self-nurturing nature of reflective writing while telling the tale of education in our changing times.** A reviewer had once taken exception to a story from childhood that I had included in an article about education, writing that he or she was tempted to say 'get over it' as they read my piece. I knew what they meant; self-narrative can read as self-pity or solipsistic self-indulgence, but they had missed the point. I was 'over' the particular incident in that sense and now attempting to 'embrace vulnerability with purpose'³ by drawing upon it for illumination and understanding of the wider issues that it was part of. One of the fundamental elements of autoethnographic research is the recognition of how self-narrative is constructed, changed and developed in relation to grand, group and individual narratives. Hayano (1979) used the term to refer to the work of 'insider' anthropologists, researching their 'own people' (p101) arguing that in a post-colonial era ethnographers needed to study their own social worlds and sub-cultures. 'Autoethnography' has evolved, developed and widened to include an inspiring and sometimes bewildering variety of narrative approaches, methods and techniques. One of the central aspects of this work is that the narrative places the self within a social context where the researcher performs the roles of both participant and researcher, stepping 'in and out' of the story as much as this can be reflexively achieved. In this respect autoethnography becomes, as Reed-Danahay puts it, 'both method and text' (1997, p.6). Memory can provide the lens for an examination and reframing of understanding of the self and the cultural, past, present and imagined future. I have also learnt that memories are themselves contractions that can shift and change in relevance and meaning in what Goodson describes as 'the genealogy of context' (1992, p. 240).

In drawing these chapters together, Jess Moriarty and I argue that the stories demonstrate that reflection and reflexivity in relation to personal memory is a key element of being a teacher. Pedagogy is the synthesis of knowledge, belief and action (Rouse, 2008) where teachers' knowledge of subject meets their theory of learning through discourse in practice (Alexander, 2008). Teachers need to examine and reflect upon what they 'know', 'believe' and 'do' in considering the way they work. Memories of experience are a key resource in this process as we reflect upon them from new perspectives. But the meaning and relevance that we find in memory must be regarded as temporal and contingent not fixed and permanent as we consider them within different contexts. In my own experience for example; as I came to see myself as a teacher, I came to understand my experiences of education in a new way. I came to understand those experiences in another way again as I became a researcher of education and could see them in the context of the history and policy of education. Writing of one sort or another has been the central tool for me in the reflective analytic process throughout my career.

While I avoided or struggled with the chapter as the summer turned to autumn and then to winter, I was reminded that while fissures and ruptures in the fragile union between memory and identity can be disconcerting, autoethnography does have the potential to de-construct the researcher and the writer as subject in order to, as Jackson and Mazzei (2008) put it, 'confront the limits of a reliance on experience and narrative voice' (p. 300). As Jess Moriarty highlights in chapter ? (this volume), Richardson (1997, 2000) led the way in arguing for writing as a 'creative analytic practice' that invokes evocative analytic thinking entailed within the construction of text. With Denzin (2006) and with Ellis and Bochner (2000, 2006), Richardson demonstrates that the analytic process takes place primarily within the planning and construction of a narrative. Therefore the crafting of the story is a process of analysis and the story itself represents that analysis at a particular point in time. **This kind of reflexive autobiographical narrative writing is especially suitable for those involved in teaching as**

³ Adams, Holman-Jones & Ellis (2015), p40.

it entails the key element of reflexivity that asks questions about how we learn and why we do things the way we that we do. To understand and develop ones own pedagogy involves exploring where it came from and how we have arrived at the point where we are.

Each of the authors in this book, who work in various phases of education, demonstrate the various ways in which reflection on and analysis of life experience informs and contributes to the ethos, method and content of their teaching. In telling their stories they also tell stories of the culture and process of education. The individual stories of experience need to be culturally located to avoid de-contextualisation and individualisation in this analysis. The aim, as Goodson (2013) argues, is to 'provide a story of individual action within a theory of context' (p.31). This offers the opportunity to consider the narratives as examples of how individuals and groups respond in different ways to institutional and national policies on education. In these chapters, the authors offer illumination from a number of perspectives, of how practitioners of education make meaning of their lives and work in our changing times:

Julie Everton uses her storytelling and playwriting skills in chapter ? to create a number of 'acts' from school to university with her own story at centre stage, almost 'accidentally' becoming a university lecturer via a community creative writing group that she joined and then ended up running. Her faith in creativity as the key ingredient of education survives in the era of student fees and an increasingly competitive environment in higher education.

Holly Taylor shows in chapter ? how her development as an undergraduate student drew her towards primary teaching as a profession despite her earlier efforts to avoid following her father into the classroom. Studying education as a subject encouraged her to reframe her own experience and to be persuaded that she could thrive and contribute to the learning of others in the early years of schooling. She draws upon the skills of reflection and narrative analysis in negotiating the uncertainties of her profession and her 'new' identity as a mother.

In chapter ?, **Sean McEvoy** returns to his own family roots and his own time as a pupil at school to trace some of the influences that have shaped his passion and his pedagogy as a teacher of English literature in secondary and further education: what excited him as a learner in his early teens has never left him, while his understanding of how people learn and the role of teachers in the process has continued to develop. Remaining optimistic about education, Sean argues that future generations may well look back at our current educational policy and strategies of change with incredulity and contempt.

Contempt for and resistance to the de-humanising effect of neoliberalism in higher education sits at the heart of **Alec Grant's** chapter ?. Alec uses his autoethnographic experience and writing skills to vent his rage at the system but also to show how he has taught through collaborative writing and publishing with students, former students and colleagues. The piece examines the dilemmas and contradictions of teaching in the area of healthcare and the 'ersatz form of academic work' encouraged by the neo-liberal agenda while at the same describing and demonstrating the teaching and learning within the 'welcome oasis' of co-inquiry and writing together.

John Cratton has come to understand himself a little more in writing chapter ?. Still wondering 'how the hell' he became a teacher, John identifies the same inclusive values driving him now as an independent educational consultant that took him from supply teaching in Australia to directing education at a local authority in the north of England.

In chapter ?, **Jess Moriarty** shows how a range of inspiring teachers, including her mother helped her to move on from her conviction that she hated the idea of being a teacher. Her autoethnographic exposition draws upon poetry and storytelling to share stories of events and eras that have impacted on her teaching at university. Jess's chapter demonstrates how autoethnography can provide the space, conditions and opportunity for autobiographical memory to act as a site of narrative construction.

Susan Diab takes an experimental approach through chapter ? by exploring her pedagogy by revisiting a number of youthful 'projects' which she undertook as a child that were kept safe by her

late mother. Wandering around the 'museum of Susan' yields some unexpected perspectives on her younger self that adds new understanding of herself as a teacher and lecturer.

Relatively new to the profession, **Kristian Galea** offers multiple reflections, through a number of voices in order to reflect on the fractured and splintered perceptions of his own journey into teaching in Chapter 7. The creative montage of experiences will have immediate relevance for those who teach or wish to teach.

Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan opens chapter 8 by introducing her 'writer-teacher self' in the context of her own education of 'privilege' in apartheid-era South Africa. The chapter offers an evocative and analytic insider account of Kathleen's qualitative, poetic narrative inquiry into her professional learning about teaching writing in changing culture, and draws attention to poetic professional learning as a generative practice that others might use in unravelling narrative tensions in their own stories of experience.

WHERE DID WE GET TO?

It took me a long time to decide that I might be a teacher after all, and I am still not sure. I would have rejected the idea out of hand in my teens and twenties, along with anyone who knew me at that time. This had as much to do with self-confidence and low self-esteem as it did with my own ambivalence towards schools. I just didn't see myself that way. But I became a primary school teacher in 1991 at the age of 31, taught children in a number of settings until 2004 and adults of all ages at university since then. I had a story that I wanted to tell. I told a version of it in my doctoral thesis and later in a book (Hayler, 2011). Reading it again, in preparing this chapter it seemed like a sort of hero narrative (Campbell, 1972). It is about someone overcoming a number of difficulties, struggling against the odds to become a teacher and make a contribution as a teacher-educator. I did not skate neatly over the difficulties, challenges and changes along the way but sought and found explanation to the mystery of me becoming a teacher through a story of my own struggle, resilience and eventual transformation: wild boy, troubled youth, expelled from school, factory worker, labourer, father, evening classes, degree, teacher, teacher-educator/researcher/writer. It worked for me, my doctoral examiners and at least some readers of the book who have been in touch over the years to say that aspects of my story resonate with them. But returning to the story with a view to bringing it up to date made me see it clearly as a moment in my own development. The events of the summer of 2016 had brought new emphasis, and new things to mind, changing the hue and character of aspects of the story in my reading of the narrative.

As his life turned upside down, I was reminded that my son had taken me with him on his very first day at school in September, 1989 and showed me how things had changed since I was a boy. I did not have to leave him in the playground and he really was clearly going to be much happier at school than I had been. A door opened for me as well as for him that day. This memory took on new relevance for me as I looked on rather helplessly as his relationship with his partner disintegrated. I was also reminded in parting from Kevin in that summer of 2016 that meeting and working with him had made all the difference for me when I was new to teaching in 1991. He was a local working class boy made good who was very much his own man by then. As a student and then a teacher in his school I came to believe that I could be a good primary school teacher without pretending to be someone else. After his funeral a colleague had reminded me that she had been a student at the school after me, when Kevin had left, and that I and the team had offered her a similar welcome and the opportunity to grow and learn. **I had learnt something from Kevin about giving people space and time to learn. Her words reminded me that we are inspired and also moved to evolve and change as teachers by sharing stories of success and challenge in our work, and that we are not alone when things go just as we hope in the classroom - or when they go completely wrong.**

Through autoethnographic writing I came to recognise that 'I became a good teacher' in those years (Hayler, 2011). Or rather that's what all the appraisals and inspectors said. I continued learning, became more confident and developed my knowledge about how children learn. I came to believe, as I still do that evaluating, reflecting upon and developing ones own approach are the key skills for a teacher. But I have never completely escaped the feeling that someone might come into the class

and ask me what I am doing there and tell me to leave. While the skills in critical reflection have helped me to shape and change my practice they have also fed my insecurity about the whole process of teaching and learning and my place within it. This is largely about me and my own experiences of school: as well as being excluded from secondary school I also failed in a number of ways as a learner. There are large gaps in my knowledge and skills. Also, while teaching within a few miles of where I was born and grew up sometimes gives me a sense of progress and triumph over the past, it also serves as an occasional reminder of that feeling of failure and some of the pain of my childhood and youth as it did when I taught in school. In the early days this fed into my mixed feelings about schools and the education system. The 1990s were a time of increased regulation, prescription and proscription for teachers. In primary schools, the National curriculum led on to the Literacy Hour and the Numeracy Hour with headteachers and local authority advisors dancing to the OFSTED tune. Hargreaves argues that the growth of a competitive knowledge economy across the world diverted schools and teachers from 'ambitious missions of compassion and community' towards the 'tunnel vision of test scores, achievement targets and league tables of accountability' (2003 p.xvii). The preparations for the inspections that I have been involved with dominated school activities for months and drove management and some staff to, and sometimes beyond, the point of breakdown.

As this collection demonstrates, teachers of all kinds have individually and collectively found ways of negotiating their way through what sometimes seems like a blizzard of change. In their study of becoming a teacher, Bullough and Knowles contend that: 'Individuals are never passive receptors of social norms or presented content; they always remake them in some fashion' (1991, p138). Lacey's (1977) concept of a 'sociology of the possible' as a lens through which the collective and individual 'strategic compliance' of teachers can be understood implies a 'purposive, guiding, autonomous, element within individual and group behaviour' (p.67), where policy meets pedagogy within the classroom:

The individual actor, who is at the intersection of 'biography' and the 'social situation', has some freedom to manipulate and change the situation while at the same time being constrained to adjust to it (p.95).

I have felt the constraint grow and the freedom shrink during my career as a classroom teacher and as a teacher educator. Generally I have and do, enjoy the work. I have felt that it mattered, and it still matters, sometimes too much. In school I tried to be fair and kind and gentle. I tried to encourage independence in the children but increasingly there was something about the system that both controlled me and put me in a position of control over the children. It was more than making decisions and organising the teaching. Sometimes it felt as though the teachers were planning and trying to control what the children thought as well as what they did. I felt a tension and a contradiction that I still feel between the possibilities of facilitating learning in open ways and the teacher's role and responsibilities of controlling learning in narrow ways with defined outcomes. I think that in struggling with, rather than ignoring this contradictory tension, teachers are forced to be creative in their pedagogy.

I turned to my own education as a teacher, initially through an MA, studying language and literacy, child development and gender in a social context. This added to my questions. I could see the ways in which pressure and stress as well as values are passed down the line from politicians to children and the part that teachers and lecturers play in that process. I was able to research, examine and write about this but I never managed to change it within my own situation as a primary school teacher. I affected a rather individual approach to strategic compliance, arguing against regimentation and formulaic curriculum content and teaching strategies while in practice I pretty much followed the manual and measured myself as a teacher in a similar way to everyone else. In the year 2000 I moved on to working as a teacher and advisor with children who were at the margins of the mainstream system. This gave me further opportunity to reflect upon what happens

to some children and their families in schools. Teachers often saw me as the person who would 'deal' with the children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. They listened to advice and adapted their work and classrooms to support children but once a child had been referred to our service or become part of our school it was clear that there had been a shift in responsibility and there was often no way back into the mainstream. So I found myself at the edge of the system again. Working with children who did not fit in, trying to find ways forward through the maze of the education system not only for children and their parents, but also for me as a teacher. It was rewarding, if often stressful work. I taught a small group of excluded children in the pupil referral unit in the morning and then went out to different schools in town to support children who were at risk of exclusion. As few of the young people that we supported were able to access and enjoy mainstream school in the 'normal' way and there was a certain amount of expectation and dependency from both children and the teachers we worked with, I began to wonder again if, with the best will in the world, I was really part of the problem. **It was an uncomfortable thought at the time, but it drove me towards further reflection and eventual change. Telling our tales and hearing about others' experiences can offer the opportunity that teachers need to be reflective learners and to value such moments of reflection and change.**

The political and educational landscape has shifted considerably in recent years and there is no doubt that state education and the profession of teaching is under a kind of siege with a shortfall in recruitment and large numbers of teachers planning to leave the profession (NUT, 2016; Lightfoot, 2016). Yet many people still become teachers because they want to contribute to making the world a better place (Priyadharshini and Robinson-Pant, 2003; Kelchtermans, 2005; Troman and Raggl, 2008; Marsh, 2015). Many of the teachers and students of teaching that I work with now continue to resist the standardised curriculum scripts and reach beyond the technical tasks of teaching in forming and building communities of learning. The danger is that the regressive discourse of accountability changes the way that we all think about our lives and work and that teachers come to internalise and accept the situation 'as it is'. This is not a new concern in education. Lacey characterised this sort of 'internalised adjustment' as a social strategy in which the teacher believes or comes to believe that 'the constraints are for the best': he or she is 'really good', whereas 'strategic compliance' involves a strategy in which he or she is 'merely seen to be good' (Lacey, 1977, p72). Related and more recent constructs of subjectivity may also be sites of resistance, or 'refusal'. Ball (2015) considers three modalities of truth: the truths 'told about us', 'the truths we tell about ourselves' and 'the truths we tell to others' (p.2). If as Foucault (1981) argued, the construction of the 'subject' is a central aspect of governance and control, it is also where we may begin to think about ourselves differently in refusing the 'script' of neoliberal education:

The starting point for a politics of refusal is the site of subjectivity. It is a struggle over and against what it is we have become, what it is we do not want to be (p.15).

I took on some part-time initial teacher-education work at the university in 2004. It felt strange and exciting to be back in the same rooms that I had worked in as an undergraduate and where I did my own teacher training. I felt very positive and authentic and knew what I wanted to do for a job at last. When I started a full-time job in the school of education at the university it felt like coming home. And so it was. But coming home is often a mixed experience. Like many teacher educators, such as Jan, who I interviewed in 2007, I found that the problems and pressures that I had felt in schools were pursuing me into university:

Lots of the changes that happened in schools in the 80s and 90s seemed to filter through into teacher education . . . I found myself teaching the teachers to teach the literacy hour which I ran away from ('Jan' in Hayler, 2011, p.72).

Academic freedom seems far away for someone who is teaching a method and a philosophy that they profoundly disagree with. In the past there had been more flexibility. As Sean McEvoy demonstrates in his story (this volume), there have always been things that teachers and teacher educators thought they did too much or too little of. Things they thought were questionable or had doubts about. The difference with the legislation of the last thirty years is that it has legally required teachers and lecturers to follow methods that they often disagree with. This is the case in university schools of education where teacher educators are required to train students for a system and method they often profess to oppose and which goes against their readings of educational research. Research and writing about education has given me a personal and professional understanding and allowed me to work within and develop my professional knowledge and practice in teacher education. Using methods of self-study and sharing experiences with others has been a way of examining my self within a subculture and aspects of that subculture and the wider culture within my self. The perspective provided by the process offers me a way forward in my work that connects past experience and present mind with future plans and action. As a writer I remain in the middle of the story. The story continues to change and to develop as I and the profession of teacher education continue to change and develop.

TEACHING ROUND THE CORNERS

While I have come to understand and agree with Schon's (1971) point that all real change and learning involves feelings of 'being at sea, of being lost, of confronting more information than you can handle' (p.12), and the day job still undoes me from time to time, I have found some sea legs while sailing on the ocean of education. It was my experience of trying to negotiate the tension between narrative autoethnography and the requirements of a doctoral thesis success that helped me to develop my work as a teacher in a different way. The tension is a typical example of the issues that arise between traditional frameworks of assessment and approaches which foreground narrative inquiry, analysis and modes of assessment (Hayler, 2011). I learnt a lot from this process and given that the undergraduate students I work with face a similar challenge in balancing comparable requirements, I used this framework in designing the 'Reframing Identity' module in 2012.

The aim of the module is to support and encourage students to explore their understanding of education and to develop critical engagement with their past experience, current knowledge, and ideas for the future. I encourage the students to draw upon their studies, placement experiences and reading from earlier in the course. The module hinges around the written assignment in which students critically reflect upon their own learning experiences in order to analyse and evaluate the educational principles and values that underpin their understanding of education. In the first sessions we focus on the nature of memory, and writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2000). Discussion centres upon 'creative analytic practice' and the crafting of story as a process of analysis. The students further reflect upon their own view of education and how this has been informed by their own experience through a writing task following each session, beginning to serially assemble a draft of the assignment.

Later in the module we consider the way memory is used in autobiography by looking at life-history and narrative approaches. Students consider the process of constructing their own stories of education. As part of the process I share some of my own experiences of education. Working in small groups the students prepare and share poster presentations on their understanding of the terms 'identity', 'culture' or 'narrative'. Each week we return to the serial assignment and discuss how they are approaching their writing, what they are learning as they write, and what they will do next. Towards the end of the sessions we begin to work in smaller groups and consider ways of making sense of stories of experience. I introduce them to the progressive/regressive approach (Sartre, 1963; Denzin, 2001) as a way of considering their data. The concept of the individual, defined as a praxis that both produces and is produced by social structures (Sartre, 1982) forms the basis of the progressive/regressive method as it combines psychological and sociological explanations of human

action. Here narrative is located in a particular historical situation. Sartre (1963) structured an analysis that first looks forward from a particular point towards a conclusion of sorts as well as back to the historical, cultural and biographical conditions that moved the narrator. This situates the memory and interpretation of actions in time and space, illuminating the uniqueness of the individual while revealing commonalities of the sub-culture. In practice the students consider and develop their own texts assembled over six weeks and follow this process based on the progressive/regressive approach. While this simplifies and reduces the progressive/regressive model to a somewhat mechanistic level, the results have been sometimes astounding with students writing autoethnographic assignments that bring new understanding of their own experience to bear on new understanding about the development and nature of education in England. Encouraged by an environment that places reflexivity at the centre of a critical narrative pedagogy, from the middle of their stories, the students come to know and narrate something about themselves, and by narrating the subjective experience, they come to share something about the way that education works; then and now. I always learn from them. **Through the process of teaching and in reading their stories of education I am brought back to my own learning and development as a teacher and as a writer; the union abides. In the genealogy of context the other unions now seem bruised and tested, transformed and changed, rather than broken as I saw them in the summer of 2016. We learn to live in new ways.**

As you will see in reading their accounts, the authors of this volume have responded with skill and insight to the space and the framework provided in contributing a collection of engaging and insightful narratives. As the editors of this collection, Jess Moriarty and I have identified very strongly with the experiences and insights shared by the authors as we worked with them in the development of this book. We invite you to follow their personal and professional journeys of becoming and being teachers, and perhaps to reflect upon your own journey of education and how you might tell that story.

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