

Why Bother? *A Métissage*

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Abstract: Why bother? It is a question that provokes, frustrates, and baffles educators and scholars. It is a question that drives us to improve and causes us to throw up our hands in despair. As doctoral students, three of us came to this question in our attempts to situate ourselves and develop a clearer understanding of our motivations to continue our studies and embark on critical feminist oriented research. In this paper, we reflect on how our experience using métissage, an expressive and poetic art form that weaves together stories, can inform our work and research as feminists. Through our stories braided together and situated in our specific socio-cultural contexts, we build alliances to challenge the hierarchies of power, knowledge and education.

Keyword: métissage, intersectional feminism, arts-based research, storytelling

Introduction

Why bother? It is a question that provokes, frustrates, and baffles educators and scholars. It is a question that drives us to improve as well as one that causes us to throw up our hands in despair. As doctoral students, in our attempt to situate ourselves and understand our motivations for doing critical feminist research, we came to this question. As we will describe, feminist art-based research and education creates opportunities for emancipatory and empowering counter-narratives (Clover & Stalker, 2007; Darts, 2004). Feminist arts creation can build alliances to challenge hierarchies of power, create opportunities for transformative social learning and is centred in aesthetics of hope and beauty (Clover, 2019). A central goal of feminism is to support actions that lead to a more just world (Ahmed, 2017). In this paper, we reflect on how our experience using métissage, an expressive and poetic art form that weaves together stories, can inform our work and research as feminists. We identify knowledge as being subjective, located in place and experience. Métissage is both a writing and a research praxis as it “embraces the varied identities and ways of knowing that are bound to arise from different places and cultural experiences” (Burke & Robinson, 2019, p. 156).

The root of métissage, *métis*, comes from the Latin *mixtus* or *mixticius* meaning *mixed*. Métissage was originally used to describe a cloth woven from different threads (Chambers et. al. 2012; Burke & Robinson, 2019). In Canada, *Métis* is a word used to describe one of the three Indigenous groups who originally come from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous heritage. It is a complicated identity as there is no consensus between Métis and Canadian society about who is included in this group (Chambers et. al. 2012; Burke & Robinson, 2019). From a colonial lens, it was commonly viewed by Europeans that métissage as the negative or derogatory practice of racial mixing (Donald, 2012). Alternatively, Glissant and Dash (1989) describes the métissage arising from the intermixing of people in the Carribean due to colonization as a cultural creolization process in his seminal work *Carribean Discourse*. He describes it as a potential for cross-cultural relativity and a way to see beyond “imposed understandings of self, history, and context” (Donald, 2012, p. 537). It is from this place of potential and relationality, derived from interwoven threads or stories, rather than fear of heterogeneity that we approach métissage. It is an autobiographical tool to better understand both our individual stories and the connections between our lived experiences and our research aims (Bishop et al., 2019).

Métissage Through a Feminist Framework

Feminism in the contemporary world must evolve because of the practice of “women's culturally plural practices” (Vintges, 2017; 2016, p. 17). Feminist storytelling/making has created spaces for rewriting the singular narratives of oppression and resistance. Dobie (1990) re-establishes this argument in her work by drawing on the importance of plurality within feminism. She states that “...it does not have, not ought it strive for, a single voice” (p. 1). Such an exercise of expression through the art of stories is creating spaces for “rewriting of personal, political and hybridised histories” (Metta, 2017, p. 75). The shift to heterogeneity of stories has in turn led to a reimagining of narratives of resistance to the traditional discourses of sexism, racism, colonization, and the marginalization of women. The gap in women’s access to art spaces - their absence or misrepresentation in museums and exhibitions and lack of women’s artwork showcased - can be attributed to issues of inaccessibility to resources and a devaluation of their abilities (Dobie, 1990). Many of them have also been confined to domestic spaces, further contributing to a lesser

number of women telling stories from their perspectives. However, Hua (2013) points out that narratives and storytelling have been used in history to “generate agency for the subjugated” (p. 31), building within these stories a sense of belonging and making alternative forms of expression and radical feminist imagery as “that which can be seen, thought, known and produced once patriarchal relations of power are rendered visible” (Clover, 2019, xv).

As métissage offers “contradictory ways of being, knowing, thinking, doing and relating” (Etmanksi et.al., 2019, p.2), it embodies the spirit of feminist thought and practice. Feminism has recently opposed the linear idea of women’s oppression within a singular understanding of patriarchy. Butler (2015) states that gender oppression is differentiated based on the “cultural contexts in which it occurs” (p. 6). As women from different geographical places, we speak about our position as women and the enactment of patriarchy within our particular social and cultural contexts. Métissage to weave our stories together, offered us the leverage to explore our tangential understandings of girl/womanhood and the intersections of our position in society and its overlapping hegemonic structures. Through the act of creating and weaving our métissage, we were also able to create a safe space to tell our stories. Such safe spaces also become avenues for “everyday resistances incorporated into educational spaces” (Kazmi, 2022, p.70)

Feminism has historically been framed by the idea that the personal is political but recently, intersectional and decolonizing feminisms propose an alternative idea, that the “personal is collective” (Weatherall, 2020). This is reflected in our work here as we speak of feminism from our varying perspectives as women from different socio-cultural and political contexts. We recognize the impact of patriarchy in all aspects of our lives, and yet know that patriarchy seeks to maintain divisions of inequity. As feminists, we value Butler’s (2015) articulation of precarity to describe how patriarchal control, most obvious in the actions of the nation-state, determines which bodies are designated worthy of protection or, alternatively, of violence and death. What is politically significant about Butler’s (2015) claim is the “differential distribution of precariousness upon which political actors should prioritize political intervention, namely those whose lives are immediately at stake” (p. 34). Therefore, we must consider the urgency that this call implies, to attend to those most at risk, as we centre feminist values and work with collective well-being in mind. In her analysis of public protest against the state, Butler (2015) affirms how bodies, assembled together, can challenge disposability and “are demanding to be recognized, to be valued, they are recognizing a right to appear, to exercise freedom, and they are demanding a livable life” (p. 26). This demand to be seen and recognized momentarily seems to blur the boundaries of privilege between the plurality of bodies. Or does it? Gathering together, working collectively to disrupt injustice is possible. Yet, as the past years have shown, white protestors were less likely to be hurt or incarcerated even in protests against the unjust killings of black and Indigenous bodies (McHarris, 2020). In using métissage, we must maintain a critical lens to name and define the possible outcomes of differing positions.

Feminist arts-based scholar Darlene Clover (2019) proposes that the role of the feminist radical imagination is to allow “that which can be seen, thought, known and produced once patriarchal relations of power are rendered visible” (Clover, 2019, xv). The challenge for arts-based research and activism is how to attend to differing levels of privilege and position while strengthening the power of collective responses and actions. Catherine Etmanksi (2019) points out that arts-based methods like métissage are not inherently “action-oriented, democratic, or participatory in and of themselves” (p. 255). Métissage, if taken up as a tool for feminist imaginings, must bring to light dynamics of power that may at first seem seamless and simultaneously, generate ideas of what the future could be. As an art form that seeks to braid together stories, researchers using métissage must be accountable to the boundaries and outcomes of difference while reflecting how a story that emerges as a collective braid can contribute to justice.

In feminist arts-based studies, researchers develop a practice to acknowledge biases, expectations, and power differences so they can then move forward and reflect on their intersections with participants’ stories (Rice et al., 2019). To share power in an artistic collaboration and to understand how feminists can take up power, we must be willing to remain in a process of self-location, and ask, “Who am I in relation to others?”. This process requires a great deal of work and is often undervalued in academic writing (Brewster & Lykke, 2014). Further, writing can be a means to express these affective and felt orientations to places, landscapes, and the spaces of women’s lives (Lorimer & Parr, 2014). In our métissage, we are both researchers and participants. Our stories guide our identity and place in the world. In the work of braiding our stories together, métissage may offer an opportunity to “recognize that all accounts, whether written, told, or imag(in)ed, are partial truths and that the truths of aggrieved groups must be proliferated if we hope to create a more just society” (Rice et al., 2020, p. 219). De Leeuw (2015),

feminist poet and geographer, illustrates in her work how scholars like herself, who examine intersectionality, call for the complex and layered nature of women's identities and stories to be embedded into research work. Likewise feminist health scholar Carla Rice (2020) invites us to think about identity as invisible, embodied and emergent, influenced by the symbolic and organic forces around us. In our *métissage*, we attempt to find connections that help us understand each other, and how we can answer our guiding question, "Why bother?".

Métissage as Research

Métissage "values both the individual and the collective and supports the complex, and often messy unfolding of our shared human tapestry" (Bishop & Etmanski, 2020, p. 233). We began with the question "*Why Bother?*" and separately wrote stories and poems and took photographs and made art. Following the idea of a traditional braid that weaves three equal strands of hair, we split our individual stories into three separate sections, without consulting each other. We refer to these three sections as strands. Chambers et al. (2012) describes the collaborative process as individual authors writing a longer piece and then segmenting it to be woven or braided by lead authors.

We approached our weaving with a storytelling frame and took turns reading our pieces in a live performance via Zoom due to COVID-19 restrictions. Until the performance, we had not read each others' stories nor had we discussed our approach to answering the initial question. This allowed for a more organic flow of ideas and a more authentic voice to emerge. The goal of this initial performance was to share our stories without interruptions or comments. After the performance, we discussed emerging themes, differences, and commonalities.

We compiled our stories in a collaborative visual and text document comprising the *strands* from our initial performance. We added a second column for responses to *tuck in loose ends* as a response to each other's initial pieces. We added this second column because our stories in the initial strands inspired responses and the sharing of similar experiences. This structure of the document is similar to a dialectical notebook which encouraged us to revisit and reflect on our previous thoughts (Berthoff, 1987). We invite the reader to either read all the initial strands in the left column, top to bottom, and then the responses in the right or to read each initial strand and then the response horizontally. We encourage the reader to engage with us in the process by considering how their own stories would respond to the strands and the loose ends.

By listening to each other as researcher-participants during our initial performance and responses to one another after the subsequent readings and sense-making, we were able to gain a better understanding of the significance of our own stories and how they resonate in concert with each other. And what happens when they do not? Donald (2012) reminds us that when "researchers come to view themselves as storytellers, they become conscious of how their autobiography influences how they make sense of their lives and experiences" (p. 548). Thus, our stories are not merely a representation of our past but the complex interweaving of our relationship with other individuals and the contexts that we are situated in at different periods of time (Vieira, 2014).

Stories

The stories that emerged through the *métissage*, therefore, reflect our personal lives, the subjectivity of our experiences, and our socio-cultural contexts.

These individual stories could potentially create stereotypes that would not be untrue but could be an incomplete representation of the whole story and/or our context (Woroniak & Tarulli, 2014). Tschida et al., (2014) however point out that single stories can be disrupted with "narratives told from other perspectives that form a more nuanced picture of the people, issues, or ideas at hand" (p. 24). As we tuck in the loose ends of our *métissage* strands, we offer varying perspectives to each other's experiences by reflecting and responding to them.

The power of stories moves beyond offering a platform for presenting differing perspectives into viscerally engaging the readers. As we delve into each other's stories through *métissage*, our responses occasionally evoke verisimilitude - the instinctual feeling of "being there" (Sparks & Smith, 2013, p. 33) while at times also being rooted in reflexivity. This deep connection that stories evoke makes them circular as they keep evolving. This phenomenon is reflected through our response to each other's initial strands. We realised that each of our strands evoked certain emotions for us as it travelled from one person to another, thus growing and carrying within itself all

the places it has been. Kim (2016) reinforces this notion that we always walk in the midst of a story, and hence they are always incomplete. Our métissage along with the individual responses to our stories that are braided together can be found in Appendix A.

Knotting the Braid: Analysing Our Métissage

The ongoing pressure from outside to be someone who fits the patriarchal ideal of womanhood is a theme that appeared throughout the métissage. The pieces also talk about the spaces that are created to escape the ordeals of oppression that patriarchy imposes. Sunny talks about “the more we sow, the more safe space will grow”, becoming places where one can escape these dictates of men. This is a space to breathe between self and society. This is a space where we as women can rest from the fight for external validation. We need to name the space outside this refuge as one that continues to be *sexist*. Without naming it as sexism, we cannot start to move forward as feminists. It is in naming it that we can tell the world that we will not accept current patriarchal and colonial narratives (Ahmed, 2017).

The strands of our métissage speak of feminine ideals and the endless boxes we try to check to meet the expectations of a white male world. Are we thin enough? Are we pretty enough? Are we a good daughter and a good mother? Are we being a good immigrant? Ahmed (2017) describes this phenomenon as *girling*: the act of not only being called a girl but also taught that your body is an object to not only be discussed but also mistreated if you do not follow the rules (p. 579). Misrepresentations of women have had a profound effect on women’s body image and further the narrative of fragility and objectivization (Clover, 2020). This institutionalized violence, both psychological and physical, is one of the reasons *why we bother*. “The bothering of my experiences and stories give me courage to bother the systems that keep people suppressed and invisible.” (Sunny)

The strands of our métissage also call into question what is valued in society and in education. What skills and knowledge are privileged? As Loveless (2019) points out that science is held up as ‘smart’ and art shunned from the halls of academia or the idea that being “smart enough” in schools means getting A’s. . Education continues to privilege certain knowledge and modes of learning that are entrenched in sexism, racism, and colonialism (Loveless, 2019). What qualifies as learning? The strands of our métissage call into question the idea of “hierarchies of learning” (Jackson & Burke, 2007). Allison learned in school that the auto shop is not for attractive girls and visual representations are cute but not academic. Allison’s experience in the métissage reflects that art limits our entry to retain its mystique by telling us that we are not good enough to be artists sometimes through the elitist views of what constitutes “good” art. The walls of museums and art galleries are covered in the art of the same white men whose friends fill the history textbooks (Ahmed, 2017; Clover et al. 2020). How is it possible as women to redefine ourselves when our only examples of greatness do not resemble us? These are the *lines* that Nabila refers to in her pieces through her relentless pursuit to not fit into them. Sunny refers to it as wanting “other misfits to matter.” Ahmed (2017) asks us to think about feminism as a building project that needs to be created out of feminist materials (p. 345). We, as feminists, need to draw new lines. Lines that honour women’s lived experiences and allow us the freedom to be ourselves outside of the space between the kitchen and the stoop. Nabila speaks for us all when she says that her “pencil, now more than ever, refuses to colour between the lines.”

Below is a found poetry which used the words of the participants to create poetic rendition of a phenomenon (Richardson, 1994). This is my (Nabila’s) interpretation of the ways that all three participants in the group have addressed the question of “*Why Bother?*”

Kindergarten box endless
Caged
Create. Build. Think critically
 Immigrant
 A girl
Untamable
Hands that are not quite right
Misfits
 Build castles
Unknown variable
Silence
Head down
Theater Share Stories
Common thread
Bother
Refuse to colour between the lines
 Disrupted
 the system
Yet
Unfinished

Conclusion

hooks (1994) suggests that learning happens “from spaces of silence as well as spaces of speech” (p.174). To her the act of speaking and listening are equally valuable and stand against oppression. Through this métissage we were able to create a safe space of listening and being heard. Following hooks’ (1999) assertion, our words offered a counter-hegemonic and liberatory language to years of patriarchy and oppression. As Vintges (2017) asserts, feminism has been contested on the grounds that it speaks the language of white-privileged women and offers little to no refuge to women of colour or those from marginalized spaces. However, a conversation such as above that takes place at the intersections of multiple diverse voices could necessitate the much-needed decolonization of feminism (Vintges, 2017). Our stories inform how we identify as feminists and our different shades of feminism. It talks about why we bother to continue having this conversation that is deeply rooted in vulnerability and personal stories. The métissage also lays down the foundation for what it means to craft our “narratives of resistance” (Etmanski et.al., 2019, p. 76) and our ongoing journey of braiding our stories together to collectively disrupt the power structures.

As Darlene Clover (2019) points out, feminism embraces a praxis of becoming and learning to stay in constructive confrontation, even with our identity as feminists. Hooks’ (1999) suggests that being a feminist is a constant process of ontological disruption; one as we have described through this métissage is a deeply personal journey. Feminist Audre Lorde’s (1984) iconic speech *The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House* encourages us to pay attention to the spaces that we would like to leave behind. Yet, our stories inform us on why we are feminists and how to act for a more just world. Lorde’s words at the end of the speech are often neglected, where Lorde insists, we must “reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside [my]self and touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives here. See whose face it wears. Then the personal as the political can begin to illuminate all our choices” (p. 114). Lorde asks us to remain steadfast to the hard, embodied work of liberating ourselves from the internalized violence of patriarchy.

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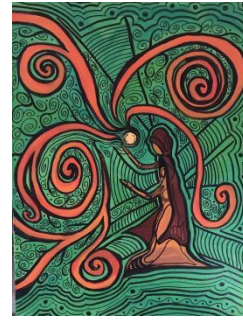
Sunny Jun is a PhD student at the University of Victoria, actively researching the experiences of racialized youth in education. Currently a school administrator, her focus extends to leadership practices and addressing the underrepresentation of BIPOC leaders. As an immigrant, Sunny's identity profoundly shapes her commitment to inclusivity and advocating for racialized youth in education, aiming to enhance BIPOC leadership representation. She holds a Master's in STEM education, and is also a recipient of the Climate Education Fellowship, engaging in collaborative inquiry to address climate and nature emergencies, furthering her commitment to a sustainable and inclusive educational environment.

Appendix A

The braid

<p>First strand</p> <p>Allison Why bother?</p> <p>Once upon a time, I wanted to build castles to the stars. I wanted to paint them in rich rainbows and cover them in damascus silks.</p> <p>Before I went to school, my parents decided to build a house. Not just build a house... but 'build a house'. They went into the forest and cut down the trees, stripped them by hand, and slowly built a log cabin. They built a home. All their friends would take me aside and explain what they were doing... and why.</p> <p>Why? Because they all knew that the knowledge they had to share was valuable. That I could be useful even if I was small. It was real. No one found it a waste of their time to explain it to me. And I learned. I had my own drywall saw and my own hammer.</p> <p>When I was 4 years old, I finally drew two feet the same. It was a breakthrough. I was so very proud. I decided that I wanted to be an artist. I didn't focus on the hands that were not quite right. I wanted to paint. I wanted to create. My parents taught me to build and to make art.</p>  <p>Then I started school.</p> <p>I was a smart girl and a good girl and I did well in school. I fit myself into the system and I jumped through hoops.</p>	<p>Tucking in loose ends</p> <p>Sunny</p> <p>Stories were not shared in my family. It was hushed and looked away. We did not speak about family secrets. We lock them away and throw away the key. Why does the first uncle have a different last name than everyone else? What's the story behind that? How does halmoni know Japanese? And why won't she talk about it? Why does haraboji not speak? Adults around me didn't teach me. I learned by observing and being silent. I watched the adults hustle and bustle. I listened to their whispers and commands. I observed their faces, bodies and how they moved. This is how I learned to survive in a world filled with stories but untold. Not shared. The stories are the map to our navigation of the world. Without shared stories, I was navigating the vast ocean in the dark, through the storms, all alone. Stories in my family were hidden- death, suicide, cancer diagnosis, and love. I so longed to know the stories of my ancestors, my traditions, my family and where I came from. I don't even know how to trace my family tree beyond my grandmother. I just want to know where I come from. Maybe then, maybe then, I'll understand who I am. I am forever searching for who I am without a story map to guide me.</p>
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<p>I excelled.</p> <p>A plus.</p> <p>Gold star.</p> <p>School taught me to value school. School taught me to devalue art. There were no artist hats in the kindergarten box. You could be a fireman, a policeman, or a nurse. But an artist? That wasn't what smart girls did.</p> <p>Her mother continued to teach me. How to draw. How to sew. How to build the most extraordinary things out of paper and string. I wanted to make doll clothes and my mother introduced me to a sewing machine. I made my first dress at the age of 8. I wanted to be a fashion designer. I picked out fabrics and I learned to draw my own patterns.</p> <p>But there was no hat in the kindergarten box for a fashion designer. That wasn't practical. I should have designed one.</p> <p>My grade 4 teacher taught us how to make butter. I still remember the sensation of shaking the jar and turning to pass it to the student behind me. Waiting for my turn to come around again. She was the exception to school.</p>	
<p>Nabila Brown, black, white, pink, pale, red Thin, fat, curvey, obese, anorexic, petite Strong, weak, rational, emotional, chirpy, confident, strong-headed Bold & beautiful, Young & gorgeous, Fair & Lovely, Dark & daring The boxes are endless And the temptation to curl up in one of them, infinite They could not tame me, hence they name me Yet, I realized that I have the power to be everything and the strength to be nothing To fit in or relentlessly stand out These are the shades of me And that is why I have no choice but to bother...</p>	<p>Allison I painted these panels when I was turning 30. My self-confidence of younger years had been eroded by ongoing messages that only the correct boxes would bring love and happiness.</p>  <p>How I felt.</p>



How I wanted to feel.

Why does it take so much work to recognize the value of the shades of beauty we hold within?

Sunny

I didn't feel different than others. I didn't know how to pay attention to how I looked and how others looked. We were all just kids. The only thing that differentiated me from others was my given name. English speakers couldn't pronounce it. I hated it. So they named me Sunny instead. I accepted because I was tired of correcting others. Where I grew up in Canada, I wasn't the minority. I was the majority. It wasn't until I moved to Victoria that I felt like a minority. I accepted but searched for my people. There were few. When I did find them, I was excited to speak in my native tongue.

Sunny

Why do I bother?

I bother many. Many are bothered by me. Perhaps it's my inability to tow the party line. Or is it my refusal that bothers them? I bother myself too. With anxiety, depression, ADHD and I'm certain I am on the spectrum of autism. I am certain because I Googled it. Who needs a medical degree these days?

I am an immigrant. Not a first generation immigrant but an immigrant. It is the first statement I say when asked, "where are you from?"

"I'm from Korea. We immigrated here when I was 10 years old."

"But you don't sound like an immigrant."

This bothers me. But it doesn't bother others. Do I bother to continue the conversation? Or shut it down? I am a part of the patriarchal system that makes me be polite and quiet. I cannot escape it. Each time I try, they are bothered by my attempts to disrupt the system that cages my freedom of expression.

Second strand

Allison

My father continued to teach me. How to drive the bobcat. How to drive the boat. He taught me to build my own desk in the woodshop. He would patiently explain how the math worked. How to measure twice and cut once. I built my own desk at 11 years old. I used it to memorize my facts and study for my math tests. No one cared in math class at school if I had built my own desk. My grade 5 teacher valued the quiz and so I studied.

My grade 6 teacher got tired of finding me extra worksheets to do. I talked a lot when I was bored. I suggested that I could write a play in French to put on for the school. He said yes. Perhaps to get me out of his hair or perhaps he understood that I needed more. I discovered theatre. I wrote plays and performed them for the school.

I decided that I wanted to be an actor. But there was no hat in the kindergarten box.

I collected my awards like playing cards and I became a young woman. Plaques, grants, trophies... and gold stars from the teachers. Gold stars for good tests and always handwriting my work neatly.

In blue or black pen.

Underlined in red.

With a ruler.

At home I painted. I sewed. I fished and I built elaborate worlds in the forest. I cut planks and built castles to the stars.

At school, I memorized and I performed. I didn't mind. I knew that it was better to tell everyone I wanted to be a lawyer than an artist.

In grade 12, I ventured into the abyss of cross-curricular learning and made a series of watercolours that went with Canterbury Tales that I was reading in English Literature. My art teacher thought they were brilliant. My literature teacher told me they were cute.

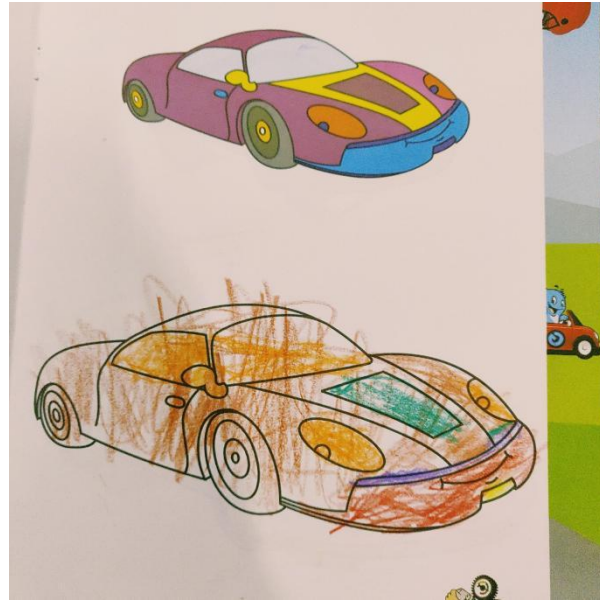
I wanted to take auto shop class in grade 12. I wanted to learn to fix cars. I was told that I couldn't. I was a girl. Did I have a boyfriend in the class? I would just be a distraction to those that really needed to be there. Those who weren't going to be lawyers or doctors. Those boys needed a place too.

I went to university to become a lawyer. There was no hat in the kindergarten box but I knew it was a real job. It was worthy of all the scholarships and awards. But I still loved art. I decided to try art in second year while still taking proper courses like Political Science and Economics but the voices of academia called me out. Not a. Real. thing.

Sunny

I am not good at most things. I can certainly do them. But I am not talented or excellent at it. I have the capacity to learn and practice but not to master. No one praised me for my excellence. I was praised for my quietness, politeness, and ability to blend into any situation. I suppose another way to look at it is that I was given lots of freedom to spend time with myself. Maybe that's why I have lots of curiosities and creative ideas... I grew up in a cave.

Nabila



The wrist that is slapped
The hand that is grabbed
My pencil refused to color between the lines

They scream
They teach
even try and preach
My pencil still refused to color between the lines

"Paint the roof brown," they say
But is it supposed to be this way?
In my dreams, it's yellow, Bright!
Enough to blur your eyesight
The sun shines on it, I reason
They mock me saying, it depends on the season
Science aside, my pencil, now more than ever, refuses to
color between the lines

Allison

I have always wanted to learn to fiddle.

Maybe part of my celtic blood calls to the instrument.

My grandmother passed me her fiddle one day and
said, "Well, then play."

"I don't know how."

She looked at me with that stare that only a red-
haired Irish woman can perfect and asserted that it
wasn't something you learned "You can either fiddle
or not."

I managed to puzzle out the refrain for *When Irish
Eyes are Smiling*.

It sounded a bit like a wailing woman but it was still
recognizable.

She just nodded and smiled.

"Yes. I told you. You can fiddle."

Twenty years later, I dated a man who could play the
violin. And he could fiddle.

I asked him if he would teach me how to play.

He told me it was really difficult.

I never mentioned it again.

I never did manage to get him to give me a lesson.

His fiddle stayed safe in the cupboard.

I drew a fiddle instead.



Who to believe?

My grandma or the man?

I still don't have a fiddle.

Maybe I should do something about that...

	<p>Sunny I wish I could draw. I wish I could be an artist and be eclectic I wish I was a musician I wish I was a singer I wish I was a potter I wish I was stand up comic I wish I could play the violin I wish I was a film director I wish I was an actor I wish I was a quilter I wish I was Nat Geo photographer I wish I was an opera singer Maybe it's not too late?</p>
<p>Sunny It was expected of me to do the dishes when we went over to someone else's house for dinner. I was 12 years old.</p> <p>It was expected of me to be a good Christian and play the piano for Jesus and all the little children of God. I was 13 years old.</p> <p>It was expected of me to translate in English to the social worker that my father wanted to put me up for adoption. I was 14 years old.</p> <p>It was expected of me to forget gym class, art class, but get A's in science, maths, and English. I was 15 years old. I didn't meet this expectation.</p> <p>It was expected of me to keep my head down, and not challenge the teachers who didn't know how to teach those with different abilities. I was 16 years old. I didn't meet this expectation. After 2 failed attempts, I began to see the cracks and a chance to escape from the expectations. I told the chemistry teacher that he was a "fucking terrible teacher". I told the social studies teacher "you are being racist". I skipped Japanese class and went to the park with my first boyfriend.</p> <p>It was expected of me to go to University. I was 17 years old. I didn't make it.</p> <p>It was expected of me to be a doctor or a lawyer. I wasn't smart enough to be a lawyer or a doctor.</p>	

So I became a teacher.
Then a vice-principal.
Only because I saw the possibility through the reflection
of someone who looked like me.
She was a woman.
Like me.
She was small.
Like me.
She was fierce.
Like me.
She was a principal.
This is possible for me?
The thought had never occurred to me. Now the seed was
planted.
She paved the way for me to climb the hill.
The hill became a mountain.
She is too young.
She is too green.
She is untamable.
They weren't sure.
It was a risk.
She lived in a van.
It was unconventional.

I finally made it to the top.
You are an excellent educator, leader and a person.

Then I shared my stories with them on the top of the
mountain.
They weren't comfortable with my stories, my struggles,
my pain.
I showed them all the emotions I held so tightly.
They didn't know how to feel them with me.
They didn't want to see the ugliness and the scars that
made me resilient and fierce.
They were scared of not being able to contain, control
me.
I was a risk to their system. An unknown variable that
cannot be managed.
They began to take my oxygen away, slowly,
deceivingly.
I began to choke.
They watched.
I suffocated.
They watched.
I passed out.
They pushed me down the mountain.
My body limp, rolled and rolled down the rocky surface
of the mountain that I worked so hard to climb. The fall
crushed my bones. Ripped my muscles to shred, tore
open my dark brown skin until all the blood in my veins
dried up. I was left with nothing but a crusty scab of a
body. I wanted to be left alone on the bottom of the
mountain and be left to die alone. Just as I was accepting

<p>defeat and believing that I didn't belong in this system, a friend reached out and showed me a ladder that led to another path. Another possibility which would lead to more possibilities.</p> <p>Now here I am. On the road to PhD Who would have thought?</p>	
<p>Third strand</p> <p>Allison</p> <p>During my International Relations degree I taught English. I took my teaching degree after my first proper degree... because I learned that I loved teaching. But the voices continued to haunt me. It wasn't good enough. Wasn't smart enough for such a smart girl. Excellent students like me didn't become teachers. Funny isn't it that the world of school teaches you that being a teacher is inferior. Inferior to being a fireman, a policeman, or a nurse. But it's still better than being an artist or an actor.</p> <p>Layers of traditional school values and traditional western teachings had pushed the worth of my parents' teachings and my passions into the category of a nice hobby. Tests and essays and 12 point font Times New Roman had value. But my ability to write and paint and transform had no place in school.</p> <p>Except maybe art class.</p> <p>As a young teacher, I taught as I had been taught. I gave spelling tests and assigned textbook readings and questions but it began to dawn on me that many of the students didn't care... couldn't jump through the hoops... didn't want to. I began to question the value of everything we were doing. Was it more valuable to do something else? How could I properly assess a student on their Canterbury Tales watercolours rather than a quiz. How could I encourage my students to create and to transform and still jam it all back into the report card?</p> <p>I closed the door to the world outside my classroom and began to teach my students as I had been taught... at home. Create. Build. Think critically. Ask yourself what you love and follow your passions. And then I opened the door back to the real world and translated their work into the claustrophobic boxes of separate subjects on a report card. But I saw that it was working. They were engaged and passionate and they were also reading and writing and calculating so I knew that I was on the right track.</p> <p>Measure twice... cut once.</p> <p>I took them out of the classroom. I took them to the</p>	<p>Sunny</p> <p>I always knew I wanted to be a teacher. I knew I was good at it. There was no doubt in my mind. To me, teaching wasn't a skill you learned from university. To me, teaching was just using your common sense to explain to others how the world works, and how to explore your interests. I didn't need to learn how to teach, I already knew how in my heart. And I was right. I didn't learn anything new in my PDP program. I was just jumping through the hoops. I didn't understand why I had to read articles on teaching methodologies when everything I read was just common sense to me. Doesn't everyone just know this? I assumed everyone had the same amount of curiosity, desire to learn new things, exploring different ways of seeing and being. I guess I was wrong. Does this make me pretentious and cocky? I don't care what you think. You don't even know me. And those who know me know who I am.</p>

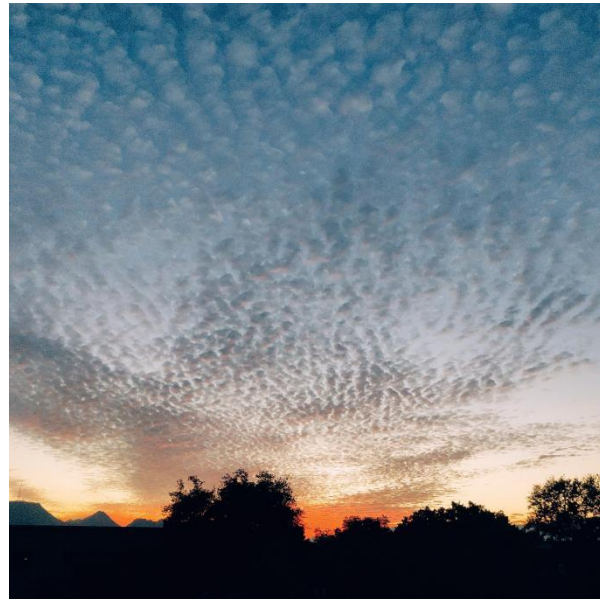
nature houses on Vancouver Island. I took them to the theatre and they transformed their ideas and passions into French plays. I took them overnight to the far off beach on the Juan de Fuca trail to try out their theories of what shelter looks like. To feel why we need to understand culture and the connection to the land. I taught them math by building and painting. I teach them that girls can take auto shop.

I learned finally how to be the great teacher my parents had been... within the system. There are now infinite hats in my students' dress-up box... because I put them there. I have disrupted the system that devalued my art and my building. That devalued my dreams of acting and sewing. That told me what a girl could and couldn't do. That devalued the fact that I worked on a fishing boat at the age of 12 and learned science on the ocean not in a textbook. I grew up in a system that taught racism, colonialism, and sexism. It's not enough to disrupt the system with my door shut. It is time to take it down. To dismantle it and say goodbye.

But the question was, why bother?

I bother because when my students are engaged in making paper and experimenting with paint, they are engaged. They are learning skills, knowledge and perseverance. They are learning that they can do whatever they want. They are learning that they are not bound by their gender or race or the size of their parents' house. They are learning math by building castles to the stars.

Nabila



I recently met ART outside my window

Sunny

Art is you, art is me, art is the world. Art is accessible to those with privilege. How can you pay for dance, gymnastics, music lessons, art lessons, drama classes when you are on welfare, making minimum wage, unemployed, or a single parent on low income? How can we help our children to explore their identity through art when our schools don't value art and music? Fine arts... yes, it's fine to do them once a week. Yes, it's fine to cut funding if we are short of money. Yes, it's fine to only have a limited number of children having access to a band because we can't be giving out musical instruments to all the students who want to learn. Yes, it's fine not to hire more art, and music teachers. The children only get tested on English, and math, so who cares? There's no room or capacity in their little brains to hold more thoughts about art. Art will not make them successful. It will only lead to poverty, disillusionment and chaos.

<p>In the beauty and ugliness of the world Within the colours of the graffiti on the wall In the unfinished poems scribbled at the end of the torn diary</p> <p>I recently met ART In the invisible strength that comes from childbirth In the silence of the night Rising with the sun at the dawn of the day</p> <p>I recently met ART In the crawling thoughts making its way to the eyes At the corners of the streets, shouting slogans into the microphones Hidden in the songs of resistance that brings one to tears</p> <p>I recently met ART Smiling through the paint-stained hands of a child In the mud dripping from the tools of a sculpture Lingering in the corners of the gallery filled with portraits</p> <p>I recently met ART In the voices of the muted In the shaking hands of strong leaders Floating through the smoke that fills empty spaces of the room and the mind Mending our broken cracks</p> <p>Only to realise that I already knew ART!</p>	
<p>Sunny Why bother? I want to matter. I want other misfits to matter. I want to increase kindness and joy in the world. I want to stop fighting uphill battles and slide down the mountain as fast I can and jump into the ocean.</p> <p>It's difficult to share the stories that make me who I am. These stories, as small and insignificant as they may seem, are the foundation of why I bother. Without these stories, I don't bother. The bothering of my experiences and stories give me courage to bother the systems that keep people suppressed and invisible. My stories and those of others give me fuel to light fire to what keeps us quiet and polite.</p> <p>The more we challenge the system through sharing of our stories, the more we add to the small plot of land we preserve for safety and nourishment of those made invisible and silent. Protection of this land is vital for our survival. Our lived experiences and stories help to cultivate the sacred land that protects us and keeps us safe from discrimination, persecution, extinction,</p>	

exclusion, separation, and retribution.

I now understand the meaning behind the land acknowledgement of our indigenous people's lands. For me, this acknowledgement of land isn't just about whom the land belongs to and how lucky we are to live on it now. Or to give credit to the indigenous peoples whom we killed for the ownership of the lands. To me, the land represents a sacred space in which all of us can belong and share in through creating a safe space that fosters community well being over the wellbeing of the individual.

I don't belong to anyone. Not to you or my mother, father, spouse, or my children. I belong to the land. This is our connection. Connection through the land which protects us and provides for us. My story alone cannot protect the land. We all must share our stories together, listen together and sow the seeds of the stories to heal the land that is broken by oppression, extraction, manipulation, and destruction. The land is where we begin to cultivate a culturally responsive environment for all beings. We don't all share the same stories, but our common thread is the fact that we all have stories to share. Each story comes with a seed. A seed which we can plant only if we listen carefully to what others are sharing. I cannot sow the seed for you. Only you can sow the seed. Or not. The more we sow, the more safe space will grow. This is the path which leads to the path of cultivating a culturally responsive environment in everything that we do.

I am not the smartest and I have never been an A' student. But I know what I excel in. I excel in my adaptability to blanket my lack of academic knowledge with curiosity and overflowing self-confidence. It has been my survival skill to continue to be seen in a world where I am expected to remain quiet and small. I bother because I want my children to live in a world where all voices are equally heard, and all are seen without judgement and prejudice.

In the words of Emmy Meli:

I am woman, I am fearless
I am sexy, I'm divine
I'm unbeatable, I'm creative
Honey, you can get in line
I am feminine, I am masculine
I am anything I want
I can teach you, I can love you
If you got it goin' on

