An Art Educator's Journey of Becoming a Researcher: A Self-Reflective Auto-Ethnography of Identity Construction and Personal Growth

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Abstract
In this self-reflective auto-ethnographic research, the author shares her experiences of introspection, change and professional growth as an art educator in an international context. Auto-ethnography is an approach to qualitative inquiry in which the researcher employs self-reflection to explore her personal experiences and connect these auto-biographical experiences to wider socio-cultural and political issues in society. This study recollects stories of the author's personal journey as an Austrian art educator in the United States from a critical pedagogy perspective. Thereby, these stories present personalized narratives of moments of vulnerability, and the challenges of transforming traditional understandings of research and teaching into critical and participatory art pedagogies and practices. This self-reflective approach provides the author an opportunity to speak from the inside out as a researcher and educator having experienced a deeper understanding of "self" and to explore the changes that taken place in her activities along her journey of challenging the status quo in teaching and doing research.

Keywords: Auto-ethnography, identity construction, self-reflection, art education, critical pedagogy, participatory art

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Introduction: The Self as a Subject of Study

This auto-ethnographic research based on a self-reflective critical approach is concerned with my identities as teacher and researcher. Thereby, it shares various accounts that do not essentially result into a complete biography. It rather is a collection of narratives and significant stories that are one way of exploring the self through meta-narratives of community and historical context (Clandinin &Connelly, 2000). These short stories describe some of my processes of identity construction and personal growth of being and becoming an art educator and researcher. I use the term *identity* to refer to our understanding of who we are and what we want to become. Many aspects of our identity, our "selves," play an important role in developing our understanding of who we are: race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, profession, age, etc (Eryaman, 2007; 2008). Which part becomes a significant attribute of our identity depends on the historical and socio-cultural context (McNamara, 1997). In this particular study, I am concerned with parts of our identities that are related to art, education, research and culture. Drawing on poststructuralist theories, especially Weedon (1987) and Norton Peirce (1995) conceptualized "the individual as diverse, contradictory, and dynamic; multiple rather than unitary, decentered rather than centered" (p. 15). For Norton, socio-cultural identity is not something that belongs to a person but emerges out of the individual's interaction with the cultural context. In addition to the concept of identity in the field of art education, my understanding of identity is also informed by the perspective stemming from the fields of sociology and anthropology that have much to say about issues of identity: A self-reflective auto-ethnography. A key philosophical concept behind auto-ethnography is that individuals experience their lives and identities in narrative form (Bruner, 1987, 1990; MacIntyre, 1981; Polkinghorne,1988).

Two aspects of self-reflective auto-ethnography as a medium of identity are particularly important in the context of this study. What attracts me about a self-reflective view of identity above all is that it allows us to think of identity in flux: "Viewing the self as a narrative or story, rather than as a substance, brings to light the temporal and developmental dimension of human existence" (Polkinghorne, 1991, p. 135). The plot of one's life story is in constant change as new and unexpected events occur that transform our perception of past events in a new self understanding (Linde, 1993). Another important aspect of auto-ethnography is that it conveys the narrator's own voice. First-person narratives present learners' perspectives—their side of the story.

In summary, in this study I take the position that identities of educational researchers are multiple, hybrid, and changing. Although I expect educational researchers to be subject to ideologies and power relations that constrain the range of identities available to them, I believe that within these constraints, and sometimes against these constraints, the individuals exercise agency to choose where and how they position themselves among multiple cultures and languages. What I am looking for here are my self-identity narratives that reflect the ways in which I negotiate my agency to choose where and how I position themselves within various communities and reconcile my multiple interactions with languages and cultures. Next, I describe the methodological process in which I reconstructed my identity narratives.

Auto-ethnography as a Research Method

Auto-ethnography is an approach to qualitative inquiry in which the researcher is the subject of the inquiry and the narratives of her experiences are the data source (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The epistemological framework for this auto-ethnographic study centers around the literature on teacher-researcher identity construction as it relates to the identity theory. Diaries, reflective journals, and self-recordings serve as supplementary data sources to turn stories into thickly described research narratives.

Auto-ethnography aims to provide alternative perspectives to the reader and researcher in understanding the process of identity formation (Barone & Eisner, 1997; Bochner & Ellis, 2002). Ellis & Bochner (2000) further argue that "an autobiographical genre of writing and research displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to cultural" (p. 739). Auto-ethnography is a

way of self-understanding that encourages the researcher unpack her story in order to connect it to wider socio-cultural and political issues in society (Ellis, 2004). As the researcher looks backward, she expands her horizon to map a future direction.

This study recollects the stories of my personal journey as an Austrian art educator in the United States from a socio-cultural and critical perspective. These stories present my personalized narratives of moments of vulnerability, and the challenges that I faced to transform the traditional understandings of research and teaching into critical and participatory art pedagogies and practices. This self-reflective standpoint provides me with an opportunity to speak from the inside out as a researcher and educator having experienced a deeper understanding of "self".

From My-Self to Multiple Selves:
Leaving my Comfort Zone as an Educator in New York City

Over a decade ago, I left Vienna with a recently acquired master's degree as a secondary school art teacher from the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. During the last few weeks of anxiously writing my master's thesis, I spotted a job advertising in the *New York Times*, a compelling-sounding call to adventure: "Make a Difference," it said; "Teach New York." In addition to my fascination for New York City, I saw this American opportunity as a way to deepen my knowledge and understanding of social, political and cultural contexts that influence education in another country. Therefore, in 2001, I accepted a fine arts teaching position in a public high school in Brooklyn. I arrived in the United States with just two pieces of luggage, stuffed with the essentials to embark on my new life with. As a new university graduate, I also arrived with a somewhat naive concept of what I perceived as right and wrong in educational theory and practice. I had a vague idea of what my epistemology was, though I would soon realize that very little I had learned seemed to support my concepts of knowledge construction in my new surroundings.

My first disorienting experience of the United States' sense of identity enwrapped me almost immediately. Besides a sensation of relief as though I had shed my past and who I had been before by leaving all my material goods behind, this new situation quickly resulted in some bewilderment. The fragmentation of identity that I experienced, was determined by "the absence of navigational principles" (Rogoff, 2000, p. 3). Losing my sense of belonging, I found the wave of American patriotism following September 2001 overwhelming; never before had I seen a nationwide display of flags in every possible spot or encountered phrases like "united we stand" or "these colors don't run" as Americans expressed pride in being American. How had my sense of national identity developed as I grew to adulthood in Austria?

Simultaneously, the next entanglement occurred in the classroom. I started teaching (in a language not my own) at high school two weeks after my arrival. My students came from Russia, Poland, Ukraine, China, Brazil, Mexico, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Croatia, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and the Dominican Republic. There were also Italian American students from the school's immediate neighbourhood, and African Americans from other districts in Brooklyn. I had never taught students from such diverse racial, ethnic, and social class groups. Additionally, many emotional encounters within my classroom setting triggered by the tragic events of 9/11 and the tensions around my students' socio cultural differences became apparent.

Ignoring some students' biting remarks during class made me complicit with the seemingly everyday discriminating attitudes. However, at this point, I was not able to reasonably use my authority without silencing my students' voices. After all those years in art school, I began to doubt that teaching was the right profession for me. Disconnected from my students' reality, had I just had some romantic ideas about being a cultural ambassador from the old world? I felt an urgent need to learn how to remain ahead of my students, so I could be prepared enough to anticipate some of the disputes my students and I were facing.

Several times a week my assistant principal, a confident veteran teacher of over twenty years, and I reflected on my students' experiences and assessed the relationship between methods I used in the classroom and the preferred learning and interaction styles in my students' communities. These conversations soon revealed my self-protective split of personhood from practice. In an attempt to reduce my vulnerability and conceal my confusion, I wore my brave face and nicely play-acted my teacher's part. To move beyond some of those earlier paralyzing moments and as a way to clarify my thinking, my mentor also encouraged me to write a journal on this daunting journey, questioning my own practice and particularly paying attention "not only to what is included in a world view but also what is left out and silenced" (Giroux, 1984, p. 35). Re-reading my entries was painful, but at the same time let me gain self-knowledge which ultimately was crucial for developing my identity as teacher. Within the safe space of this trusting relationship, I increasingly examined my attitudes toward other ethno cultural groups. I was not looking for any immediate solutions, but my mentor carefully taught me the dynamics of prejudice and racism and model-taught through his everyday practice how to address them in the classroom. I knew my subject—although in a rather modernist way—but I did not know my students. Whose culture and knowledge was I conveying? As a young white female, who practiced a pedagogical model that was dismissed largely by my students, I gradually learned to renegotiate my understanding of power in everyday life in school. After an unsettling beginning, it first was frustrating to acknowledge that my Austrian, Eurocentric art curriculum revolved around me instead of making my students' multiple cultures central to the class and more importantly, and thereby legitimizing the knowledge and experiences these teenagers brought to school. I learned first hand what learning in collaboration meant as we—with my mentor and with my students—exchanged experiences and opinions that were essential to enrich our understanding of otherness and to embrace collective creativity. It was years later that I came to realize how formative these events were on my cultural and professional identity as educator and more importantly, as a person, accepting the otherness in myself.

Reflecting on my Early Austrian Self: Remembering and Forgetting

In 2006, the restitution of Gustav Klimt's portrait *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* (1907) caused a public outcry in Austria. By that time, I was living in Illinois and could only listen to my Austrian friends' sentimental telephone accounts of bidding farewell to the *Golden Adele* (as the painting is also known in Austria), baffled at the bonds that even people who rarely visit museums seemingly had developed with Klimt's artwork. On the Adele's last day of public display in Vienna, the Belvedere Museum faced an unexpected stampede of over 4,000 visitors ("Ansturm auf Klimt-Bilder," 2006). In general, art seemingly plays a somewhat marginal role in the lives of many. Like the countless monuments, multifaceted buildings, landscapes, streets, and artwork of Vienna is not always consciously looked at; it is simply there and taken for granted. However, as in this case, when an artwork disappears, it arouses greater interest. This incident raised an important question in my mind: What shapes the basis of Austrian cultural identity with its troubled past (Riedler, 2012)? The Austrian Wunderkind Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) figures prominently in international as well as national ideas about Austria. However, at no point in his life was "Mozart considered Austrian in a contemporary sense" (Wagner, 1991, p. 19): geographically, in Mozart's day, his birthplace, Salzburg, was part of Germany not Austria. Nonetheless, in an attempt to emphasize a continuous linear progression of national history, Austrians adopted him. In fact, it is remarkable how many Austrians of the past who are celebrated today, do not actually fit the profile of the typical Austrian, whether geographically or ideologically. For instance, Prince Eugene of Savoy (1663-1736), lauded in Austrian songs as 'the noble knight' and revered as an Austrian hero (who defeat the Muslim Ottomans, which ultimately turned him into a saviour and protector of Christianity), could hardly speak German let alone write it. And yet in one particular way he can be conceived of as typical of the capital's inhabitants: "with his 256 traceable ancestors (ranging from Spanish to Bulgarian and from Czech to Italian), he was the noble apotheosis" of an "intricately intertwined" European citizen (Brook-Shepherd, 1996, p. 22). Indeed, beyond Klimt and Mozart, Austria's past was so much richer than today's small republic seemingly reflects. As a result, it is difficult to agree on a "uniting Austrian myth" without any contradictions or suppressions (Bruckmüller, 2003, p. 11). In general, as a teenager, I considered myself lucky to be part of such a culture-rich country, an accolade with which most Austrians would

agree—and an attribute it has in common with many other nations. (Bruckmüller, 2003). I had never questioned my sense of cultural identity until I lived in New York City.

Opening New Doors

Through learning more about myself as a teacher, gaining insights about myself, and investigating these connections with my personal growth, I have also found an increasing interest in many additional activities outside my school context in Manhattan. I took advantage of every opportunity to learn more about contemporary art practices in New York City's innovative art scene, galleries, non-profit art organizations, and its fascinating museums. Following a brief internship, I became an associate educator with the adult interpretive programs at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in Manhattan. Acquainting myself with international museum education literature, I devoured John Falk and Lynn Dierking's (2000) explanations of the nature and process of learning within the museum context, George Hein's (1998) model of the constructivist museum, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill's (1999) collection of articles on the relationships of museums and galleries to their audiences, Lisa Roberts' (1997) descriptions of museum educators' activist role in effecting fundamental changes in exhibit planning and development, and Nicholas Serota's (2000) account of the changing attitudes regarding how works are presented in museums of modern art. Again, it was vigilant colleagues who shared their personal involvement and nurtured my development through questions and conversations on the re-evaluation of existing definitions of art, and thereby took me in the "right" directions of a more vital, interactive art context with its antispectatorial character.

At this point of my growth as an educator, the defining factor of cooperative art and participatory activism of creating a relationship with the public domain was most insightful, as the artistic, experiential process of that social art form serves "to engage at least a portion of its audience at the core of its own experience, and at the same time to extend that experience" (Lippard, 1984, p. 38). John Dewey's progressive education and understanding of art is likewise social: he rejects the notion of an artwork as isolated and existing outside the flow of social life and contemporary context (1934). "Neither should art be segregated in museums away from the everyday life, nor is the aesthetic sphere limited to fine art" (Finkelpearl, 2013, p. 345). In feminist writer's Suzanne Lacy's *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (1995), authors (among them Lucy Lippard, Arlene Raven, Suzi Gablik and Guillermo Gomez-Pena) espouse continuity and responsibility through community-based public art works, collaborative practices among artists and their audiences, and the engagement of multiple audiences through empathy and appreciation—also common traits of school settings (formal learning sites versus informal learning) that participate in social change endeavors, as I began to realize.

As part of the adult education program, I was involved in coordinating the Guggenheim internship program that is international in scope and known for offering a college-level museum studies seminar as one of its components. For these weekly daylong seminars interns met with museum staff to discuss current topics related to museums and with many other active actors of the New York art world. Most memorable were the studio visits with New York based artists.

In fall 2002, we visited Marina Abramović's truly transformative *House with the Ocean View* installation at a Chelsea Gallery (Kelly & Iles, 2004). For twelve days she lived in full view on a shelf in the gallery. Abramović showered, drank water, sat on a toilet, brushed her hair, but mostly sat and looked at the people who came to see her living installation. She was fasting for the duration and said later that this increased her sensitivity and connection to the audience (Anderson, 2003, ¶ 5). When we went to see her there I experienced a powerful wordless and spiritual encounter. Spirituality was not something I would have expected in a New York art gallery.

Through examples of his earlier performance work, Vito Acconci emphasized dismissing traditional art conventions and hierarchies, and how this process eventually led him to re-envision both interior and public spaces and collaboratively develop installations and architectural pieces (also as part of urban renewal projects), like the interactive sculpture *Murinsel* in Graz (Austria) which is a

floating platform for concerts, theatre performance and a Café in the middle of the Mur river. What stood out to me was, in examining the role of the artist, how fervently Acconci pointed out the interdisciplinary collaborative effort of his studio that works best with a mix of thinkers, gender, nationalities, and age groups.

Explaining the intriguing project and intervention *Volksboutique*, Christine Hill shared her understanding of art making to be more about closely paying attention to and realignment of existing things and related processes (www.volksboutique.org). *Volksboutique* began as a thrift store and sculptural installation in Berlin in the 1990s. Visitors would come to her underground shop, drank tea as they looked at cheap clothes. People basically congregated to discuss topics ranging from identity and self-presentation to the effect of tourism on the neighbourhood (Berger & Steiner, 2003). Christine Hill pointed viewers' attention to specific objects and events in life that risk being overlooked as being too quotidian or too common clothes. Therefore, in a larger frame *Volksboutique* is about examining concepts of value in our culture and re-investing discarded appurtenances with meaning and use (Interview with Christine Hill, 2007, ¶ 2).

Rick Lowe, founder of *Project Row Houses* (http://projectrowhouses.org), talked about his understanding of art, referring to participatory projects that display a strong sociological and political bent, often in an effort to draw attention to social ills and conditions and ultimately incite empowerment or change in a community (Miranda, 2014, ¶ 6). In 1993, Rick Lowe renovated a series of nearly two dozen shotgun houses in a depressed area of Houston, making them suitable for tenancy again (Finkelpearl, 2000). *Project Row Houses* can also be viewed through its cultural elements, without even encompassing it as a whole at first. It is a public art program, an artist residency program, a program for young, single women, an architectural restoration and preservation project, a community program, to just name a few (Maloney, 2015, ¶ 7). *Project Row Houses* is practical and symbolic at once: it offers affordable housing and a community centre but also a place of empowerment for and *from* the community. Rick Lowe frames his work within Joseph Beuys's notion of social sculpture and his idea that every person is an artist. Therefore, *Project Row Houses* could also be described as shaping and moulding community into a sculptural form, a social sculpture that lives and breathes through the people within its walls.

When thinking about the process of engaging audiences in various public sites or use public art as an instrument of change, the following guiding questions are vital: Who does it connect? How does it connect them? What makes this a unique experience for those involved? Moving along the blurred lines of art and education as exemplified in the cases above, I gradually connected similarities between the processes and emancipatory social relations of participatory art and education, and that in fact standard constructivist "educational practices, such as active engagement with audiences, inquiry-based methods, collaborative dialogues, and hands-on activities provide an ideal framework for process-based and collaborative art projects" and conceptual practices (Helguera, 2011, p. xi).

Moreover, in addition to the practical and theoretical experience collected during my Guggenheim employment, I also encountered parts of Austria's recent past. Quite a few times I visited the Neue Galerie New York, a museum devoted to German and Austrian art which opened in 2001 on Manhattan's museum mile. The second-floor galleries, dedicated to Viennese art from around 1900 display works by, among others, Gustav Klimt (1862–1918), Egon Schiele (1890–1918), Oskar Kokoschka (1886–1980), Richard Gerstl (1883–1908), and Alfred Kubin (1877–1959). Despite having seen these artists' works on display in Vienna, I was astonished by the deep sense of attachment so many New Yorkers had formed to the Viennese culture of the 1900s. The founders of the Neue Galerie, Ronald Lauder and Serge Sabarsky, have attempted to recover Jewish-owned art that was looted by the Nazi government. Through new acquaintances and their Jewish Austrian heritage, I faced aspects of Austria's past that have often been difficult for many contemporary Austrians to acknowledge; most particularly, the "golden days of Vienna that ended with World War I, that war and its aftermath, and the Hitler years" (Zweig, 1943).

Farther downtown, I witnessed yet another New York City venue that has rekindled interest in Austrian art—the Austrian Cultural Forum, which opened in 2002 and is run by the Austria's Foreign Ministry. Because Austrian artists like Mozart and Klimt are obviously well represented in mainstream American cultural institutions, the forum's mission is to focus on later twentieth and twenty-first century culture. Yet the distinctive steel and glass masterpiece of architect Raimund Abraham (1933-2010) became the subject of prolonged debate among Austrian government officials in what amounted to a referendum on national identity: "For a cultural showcase abroad, should Austria project an image of reassurance, an architectural equivalent of Old World charm, or ally itself with the astringent side of the Viennese soul?" (Muschamp, 2002, ¶ 2). Most certainly, the director of the Austrian Cultural Forum Christoph Thun-Hohenstein explained that one goal of this institution "was to expunge the 'Sound of Music,' dirndls, and Mozartkugeln image of Austria from the public mind, or at least to supplement that image with contemporary Austrian culture" (Midgette, 2007, ¶ 10). For my fellow native friends and me, this was a place to meet contemporary Austrian artists from the fields of literature, visual arts, music, architecture, and film. It was an attractive place where, as we liked to see it, the young Austrians of New York reconnected with "home." Associated with this notion of home, however, resurfaced the questions of "Who am I and where do I come from?" (Boylan, 1990, p. 29), for, as Crooke (2001) pointed out, "important to knowing yourself is knowing your history" (Crooke, 2001, p. 119). According to Boylan, institutions like museums play a culturally significant role in answering such fundamental psychological questions. Thus, through my encounters at the Neue Galerie and Austrian Cultural Forum, I came to see that the memorabilia and artefacts in museum collections comprise an essential starting point in the process of discovering identities.

A Practitioner's Transition to an Academic Researcher Becoming

As I realized over time, my deeply rewarding work experience both in the United States and in Europe, became the solid ground of my academic life, supporting it in concrete ways, shaping it in practical ways and grounding it in an essential way. At that point in my life in New York, however, I noticed the changes of thinking and came to recognize the need for a comprehensive understanding of research methods, curriculum theories, and philosophy in education. Therefore, my return to scholarly research facilitated by doctoral studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign as a Fulbright Fellow was motivated by my desire to become a better practitioner fuelled by a deep passion for learning and growth. These two selves, my practitioner self and my researcher self, evolved hand in hand, one informing the other.

During my studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, in-depth work on Critical Museum Theory and Practice led me to explore the evolution and cultural function of museums and challenged my understanding of museums and galleries. Through a series of detailed case studies, I investigated how nineteenth and twentieth century museums, fairs, and exhibitions organized both their collections and their visitors. Issues tackled in some of my papers ranged from the ideological underpinnings of collections and displays to the purposes of objects and exhibitions, from the types of people that visit museums to what these people expect. The most fundamental question I asked—what is the purpose of museums?—has become more pressing with changing museum contexts (Riedler, 2010). In 2006, this new knowledge of cultural institutions became of immediate value to me as I followed the debates about Klimt's *Golden Adele*, the once important centrepiece of the Belvedere collection.

In fall 2005, after a long and difficult court case, the Austrian government finally returned five paintings by Gustav Klimt, among them *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* (1907), to Maria Altmann (1916-2011), the heir of the Bloch-Bauer family who had originally owned them and which had lost them to the Nazis during the Holocaust. However, the Austrian government had the opportunity to buy them back from the rightful owner but cut off negotiations with Maria Altmann at an early stage and failed to purchase the five paintings. "Austria is not aware of what it loses," art historian Arthur Rosenauer warned the restitution committee ("Klimt: Bilder werden am Montag abgehängt," 2006), explaining in another interview that "these paintings are patrimony for our republic, just like Velazquez's Meninas for Spain and Rembrandt's Night Watch for the Netherlands" ("Adele, ade!" 2006). In early 2006, the

paintings were taken to Los Angeles, after which, in June 2006, *Adele Bloch-Bauer I* was sold for the record sum of 135 million U.S. dollars to Ronald Lauder's Neue Galerie in New York City, which is often referred to as a bridge between Europe and the United States. Austria's icon of cultural identity had been lost, Adele, "Austria's Mona Lisa," became the centrepiece of Lauder's collection ("Adele, ade!" 2006). The public debates about the repatriation of art confiscated by the Nazis that had found its way into state museums revived questions about Austria's national identity and cultural values. Given that Klimt and other contemporaries were supported by the Austrian Jewry who were forcefully expelled or eliminated, it is unclear "in what way, or even whether, this part of the Austrian heritage really belongs to the current Austrian nation" (Beller, 2006, p. 313). It also raises the question "What is Austrian about Austrian [art and] culture?" (Beller, 2002, p. 25), a query that has remained with me ever since. Recognizing the symbolic role of museums in expressing identity gave me insight into possibilities for my dissertation research on controversies over national heritage.

My endeavors were further encouraged through in-depth study of critical theory and critical pedagogy. I recognized how underrepresented cultures can be made visible in a museum that provides multiple contact points at which different histories, languages, experiences, and voices intermingle with diverse power relationships (Riedler, 2009). At the same time, another professor's perspective on the politics of knowledge and culture pushed me to think outside the box. As part of an Action Research project, I engaged in a collaborative inquiry group with local classroom teachers, and following Dr. Noffke's advice I also dug up my own journal notes which my mentor and critical friend in Brooklyn so fervently urged me to jot down that still provide me with opportunities to reconsider my own positions and ideas. Susan Noffke's exemplary commitment to challenging oppression, and through analyzing my own practice, my struggle as a classroom teacher as well as challenging my traditional art concepts in multicultural New York City, by borrowing her lenses I was slowly able to establish "real live connections" versus gaining knowledge from or producing knowledge for books only. I was able to make sense of my time in New York—both in Brooklyn and later as a museum educator with the Guggenheim—and understand power and privilege, its relation to social justice, and how access to societal resources impacts all of us in our lives and in our classrooms. Another issue here was of moving from consumer of knowledge to producer, and developing an identity and confidence as a writer (and not just a reader). In this transition phase, Sue was a good listener, a challenging conversation partner, and she was able to understand others by their own terms. I came to see that my overall guiding questions, both in my role as educator and researcher, can be described by what Jordan and Weedon (1995) term cultural politics:

> Whose culture shall be the official one and whose shall be subordinated? What cultures shall be regarded as worthy of display and which shall be hidden? Whose history shall be remembered and whose marginalized? What images of social life shall be projected and which shall be marginalized? What voices shall be heard on what basis? How can marginalized and oppressed people be empowered to change their social position? (Jordan & Weedon, p. 4)

Conclusion

A self-reflective autho-ethnographic inquiry has been the tool that has helped me understand my story in the broader context of identity formation, constructivist teaching and learning, and participatory art and activism. As I began writing this paper and therefore reliving my stories as an international educator and graduate student in the United States who more recently became a researcher and teacher educator in Turkey, I recognize the many strong and elusive threads of history, life stories and research that finally resulted in a sometimes loosely assembled and sometimes tightly woven fabric of where I find myself today: Questioning the official hegemonic agenda, I wrestle with my role in relation to others. Now the challenge is to untie the strands of this newly developed identity so that I can collaboratively, with my Turkish students, learn of what is involved in the process of becoming a good art teacher for constructing their identities and empowering their voices in and across social and cultural contexts.

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