

A CREATIVE PEDAGOGUE'S INQUIRY THROUGH IMAGES: DOES IT HAVE WINGS?

ANAR RAJABALI *University of British Columbia*

ABSTRACT. In this photo essay, I enact how a creative pedagogue engages with artistic practice and contemplative inquiry. As a poet, at home in words, photography represents a creative risk. This vulnerability is felt in the sharing of the work through the lens of (re)search. Hence, I ask: Does it have wings? By delving in expressive forms toward the service of understanding my personal and pedagogical self, creative risk is rewarded in profound ways. I have discovered that my art practice is driven by intention, intuition and imagination. Thus, here is my creative pedagogy in action illuminating how an inquiry through images provokes learning and teaching. Both poetry and photography provide keen vision—a way of sensing and seeing Light.

L'ENQUÊTE D'UNE PÉDAGOGUE CRÉATIVE PAR L'ÉVALUATION D'IMAGES : A-T-IL DES AILES ?

RÉSUMÉ. Dans cet essai photographique, j'explique comment qu'une pédagogue créative peut s'engager dans la pratique artistique et la recherche contemplative. En tant que poète, à l'aise avec son vocabulaire, la photographie représente un risque créatif. Cette vulnérabilité se ressent dans le partage du travail à travers la perspective de la (re)cherche. Par conséquent, je pose la question suivante: a-t-il des ailes? En puisant dans des formes expressives au service de la compréhension de soi aux points de vues personnels et pédagogiques, le risque créatif est récompensé de manière profonde. J'ai découvert que ma pratique artistique est guidée par l'intention, l'intuition et l'imagination. Ainsi, voici ma pédagogie créative en action qui éclaire la manière dont une enquête à travers l'évaluation d'images provoque l'apprentissage et l'enseignement. La poésie et la photographie offrent une vision perçante, une façon de ressentir et de percevoir la Lumière.

Carry your heart through the world like a life-giving sun.

(Hafez, as cited in Ladinsky, 1999, p. 73)

Let your teacher be love itself.

(Rumi, as cited in Barks, 1997, p. 142)

I identify as a poet. I see the world through line and form which colours my imagination bringing a moment or memory to lyrical light. Poetry has been a way of fully attending, “a significant epistemological and ontological way to engage... so we can be and become human” (Leggo, 2016, p. 364). In poetry I feel and know the material and spiritual worlds. These worlds in constant movement and mergence like the wings of a double crested cormorant in midflight rising toward the encompassing sun. Mystical poets, such as Hafez and Rumi, as quoted above, have given me hermeneutic in/sight into the vertical dimensions of my being, as an Ismaili woman becoming in the world, aspiring to live with/in my faith and never existing without this faith. I am an artist, researcher, and teacher – and there is a fluidity in these roles I inhabit – as I exist in the in-between as a reflective and reflexive practitioner living an embodied praxis of integration and wholeness. Here, there is growth and learning in all directions as I become by the doing of, where theory comes from process and processing. I am a conduit, open to creative possibility perpetually flickering like the interplay of dancing light and shadow on my page.

Poetry is the heart of my (re)search and a pathway to express my creative agency and purpose and thus, I bring forth this poetic posture to my pedagogy. As a creative pedagogue, there are three principles which inspire my teaching—as an English language educator – that are integrated and integral to transformative and, with hope, transcendent pedagogical outcomes for student and teacher. I state them here simply as a pathway to illustrate my own understanding of creativity in action, recognizing that my own creative ability and risk-taking is at the centre and core of my students’ own learning: Intention, intuition, and imagination. Firstly, the intention of the learning is what I aspire to impart or the task at hand that needs to be acquired and fulfilled, knowing that in the middle of doing, there are no straight lines, and the pedagogical pathway is rhizomatic, intertwining, messy yet integrated and generative. The rhizome and root metaphor of learning has not only depth but offshoots of inquiry allowing for the learning to take its own journey enabling “teachers to better respond to the everyday surprises that are part of their ever-changing world” (Wiebe et al., 2007, p. 263).

Rumi eloquently proclaims: “There are hundreds of ways of kneeling and kissing the ground” (as cited in Barks, 2003, p. 123) and this sentiment makes meaning to my teaching and the varied approaches and beautiful detours I may take to reach the same intention. This now requires my intuition and attending to the rhythms of the individual learner in a leaning in and a leaning out in a pedagogical dance. Intuition has been the most vital and foundational quality of my creative pedagogy in attuning to accessing various modalities – visual, kinesthetic, auditory, and conceptual – toward making sparks, connections and imparting the knowledge at hand. My poetic sensibility speaks in metaphors and believes in its visual and generative power as I conceptualize and simplify complicated writing tasks and create learning methodologies. A teacher’s imagination, too, must be large and hold not only creative routes and pathways but contain the possibility of what can be achieved through innovative, inventive, and immediate thinking where imagination is the life blood of learning, pulsing with a source and a force of becoming for the human mind, a force of transcendence (Bachelard, 1988).

As I am always in a place and space of seeking, I now simply contemplate more questions, not in providing an answer, but in holding what I value about pedagogical encountering and inspiring life learners who are critical-creative and ready to make a stand and a stance in the world. This world that is troubling and needs the pedagogical hopefulness (Freire, 1992) that creativity with a solid ethical and pluralistic mindset and heart will bring: How can learning reach an exalted level? How can teaching transcend boundaries and barriers, individually and as a community, with agentic ways of using our knowledge to be our higher selves?

I stated at the onset that I am a poet, and I am most at home in poetry. I have made meaning of my world(s) through words since I was nine-years old and there is an innate deep connection and familiarity with/in poetry where my heart/mind speaks in lyrical metaphors. There is light here and, in my scholarship, I have stated that poetry has led me toward a literacy of light (Rajabali, 2017). Thus, in this photo essay to follow, I take a creative risk. As my artistic self is being compelled and drawn to images, the risk comes not from the process of doing photography – I am learning to sense and see light in diverse ways – but in the sharing of the work and whether it has resonance. With this vulnerability I recognize that risk-taking is integral to expanding my own creative identity and extending my contribution to my arts-based research communities. Barone and Eisner (2012) write of arts-based research as having “legs,” this ability to move and be moved to someplace else, as the capacity of creative scholarship is that “it does not simply reside in its own backyard forever but rather possesses the capacity to invite you into an experience” (p. 152). Thus, I ask: Does it have wings?

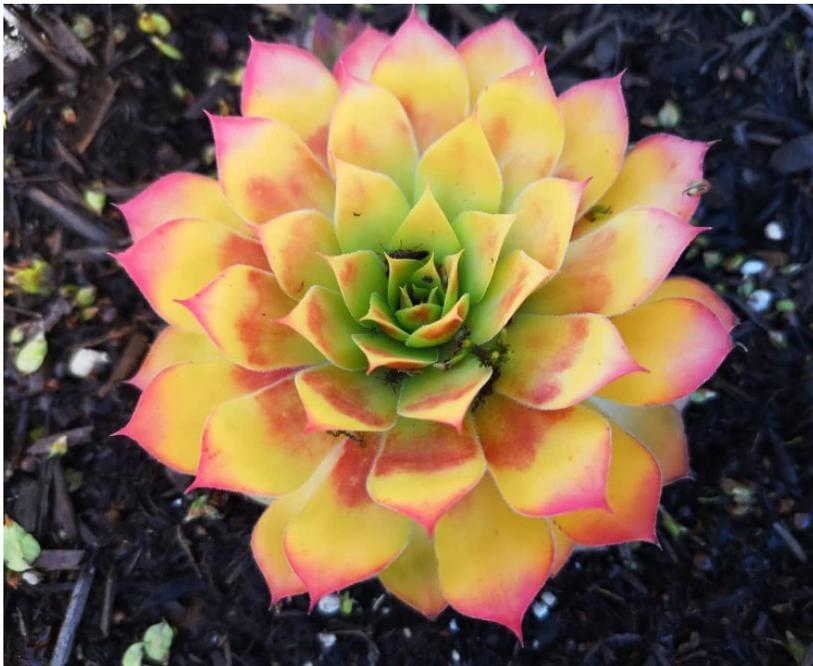
My discovery is that dwelling in the visual has strengthened my poetic eye/I and living lyrically in the world. Forming art, and art forms, continue to make my pedagogy creative. Herein, the three tenants that guide my praxis: intention, intuition and imagination are enacted in these photographs where I contemplate: How can an aesthetic lens through engagement with images strengthen pedagogical practices? I am open to possibility, and I present each photo with a rumination allowing a phenomenological process to occur where I follow my own rhizomatic journey with the crisscrossing lines of inquiry playing patterns on my soul knowing that “all natural objects make a kindred impression when the mind is open to their influence” (Emerson, 1982, p. 37).

I am opening the wings.



Line of Flight

A bird verges on the edge of flight on the threshold of verticality. I capture this moment as I am also in the in-between perching upon desire and action. Her line of flight inspires my own transformation multiplying into crisscrossing patterns of thought (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). What happens in the in-between of knowing and being, of thought and action, of learning and doing, of teacher and student? Where can we find our wings?



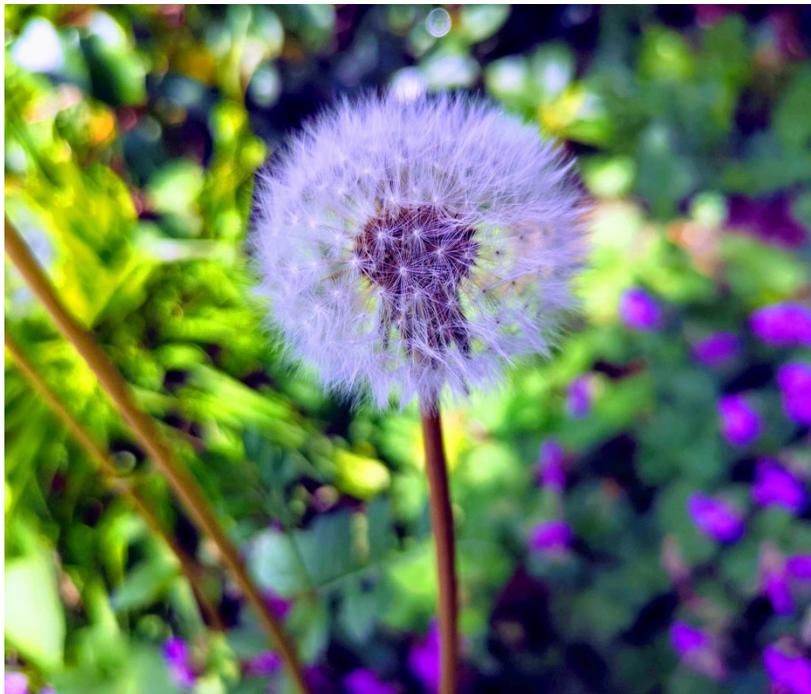
Luminescence

A flower rises from the dirt. I am beckoned by its exquisite beauty in the unexpected of places. I crouch down to witness canary hues and blush-tinted edges colouring my eyes with nature's perfection. In a moment in-between lens, light and shadow, I/eye capture this image. The photograph somehow holds its essence and luminescence. I am astonished at the outcome. Frost (1939/2007) writes of poetry that it "forever keeps its freshness as a petal keeps its fragrance" (p. 1156). This image (re)calls me to perennial sweetness, a moment when I witnessed Nature in her true vivid light. And I am inspired to ask: How can one truly see the light of others?



Hushing the Earth

In the soft silence of one snow-felted morning, I capture this image. I stand under nature's arches as the snow lightens and heightens these interlacing branches, intricate and seemingly infinite. Here, I am (re)minded of both my horizontal and vertical ways of being expanding my vision with light and beauty. In the aura of nature's poetry, I am humbled under the grace of this shared abode – hushing the earth and my street with unity and dignity.



Waiting for the Wind

The white tufts of the dandelion intertwine in nature's patterned perfection. I am tempted to blow and watch the delicate gossamer threads parachute into the spring air, But I wait for the wind to take the seeds wherever it carries. I snap the photograph, gingerly, not to disturb the dandelion form, now immortalized in impressionist hues. I am dwelling in impermanence and permanence. Fels (2013) writes of the act of waiting: "A stop, a moment of risk, a moment of opportunity, occurs when we come to witness or experience an event, an encounter, an action, a relationship that calls us to attention" (p. 39). I reflect on personal moments of tension that occur before seeds of knowledge scatter and implant wisdom. How is the act of teaching an epiphany in waiting?



Night Shadows the Light of Day

I am standing within the shadow of the earth while bold blue brushstrokes are becoming the night sky. Amid dusk is a dawning, some calming that comes over me who finds tranquility in twilight. Nature is flowing through me. And the sky is in I/eye. The poet Rumi writes: “Both light and shadow are the dance of love” (as cited in Chopra, 1995, p. 50) and I wait for a lyrical moment and take the photograph.



Opening Silent Wings

I am writing at a café — a word here, a word there, a sip of strong americano, leaning in, a leaning back, moments of tension, moments of freedom. I am tenderly attending to words revealing “rushing heaven like a soul” (Dillard, 1989, p. 20). I am a seeker of verticality; a poet is a lifter of things. I take that pure leap into thin air to know the galaxy of my own being. And I am learning to see the signs of the sacred, a keenness of seeing that gives me in/sight. I put my pen down and close the old blue notebook, momentarily, and then, I look up. Feathered cloud wings hover in the seamless sky. How is it that nature reflects my aspirations? Am I dwelling in the realm of imagination? I linger and then capture the winged clouds. I return to this image frequently; a force of transcendence for my soul who experiences wings opening on the inside. And in this buoyancy of words, this gravity that keeps me airborne, I call out: How can we give our students their wings?

I entitled this photo essay provoking a question: Does it have wings? And I relinquished to a phenomenological process of discovery uncovering meaning in the images — meaning that was hidden or perhaps at the surface — but evoked by the synergistic act of inquiry fuelled by a question that became generative. This meaning revealed in poetic ways where I experienced the verticality of a creative and contemplative undertaking. Poignantly, I begin and end with wings as I started my journey with the image “Line of Flight” coming homeward with “Opening Silent Wings.” I have enacted a rhizomatic patterning of thought and emotion into the open waiting sky of inquiry. The outcomes of this undertaking from a (re)search lens provide a way of seeing

where reflection and standing back gives the vision (Rajabali 2017). The integrity of the (art)work will lie in its ability to resonate with the human spirit and to be evocative as “evocation is therefore an epistemological means for the acquisition of meaning” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 153).

Perhaps, here is where art is a transaction of the heart and Frost (1939/2007) poignantly writes of poetry that “no tears in the writer, no tears in the reader. No surprise for the writer, no surprise in the reader” (p. 1156). I am learning creatively and creatively learning and risk becomes a part of this process. As a creative pedagogue, I am practicing attunement, a tuning in, a turning in. When is she ready (my student, my teacher-self) for a creative leap of faith? I have discovered that my art, be it in poetry or photography, is driven by intention, imagination, and intuition. Thus, represented here is my creative pedagogy in action illuminating how an aesthetic lens through engagement with images provokes teacher inquiry. And in this merger of visuals and lyrical prose is where I have found hope and wisdom – a way of sensing Light, a walking through toward the sun of some understanding.

I end in poetry with a poem to my beloved PhD supervisor, friend and mentor, Carl Leggo who lived and taught poetically, imaginatively, and spiritually. Sadly, he passed on March 7th, 2019, and his lessons will eternally linger. It is my pedagogical hope that I, too, can teach with the same love and spirit he had for his students. And in being with his spirit now, he is always teacher. Still teacher, teacher still. And I am still student, student still. He opened the mind window for me to fly into vertical spaces and places. I only have gratitude for the teacher who guided me to discover and learn the light of my own being. And here, there are wings.

Leggoian Light

One autumn afternoon we walked together
 among the marigolds, magnolias, and mountain ash
 breathing in
 the majesty of creation
 where you said in your lyrical way
 to think of research as lace
 resilient, aesthetic, strong and ornate

And I remember you
 bold speckled butterfly

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full open wings

a teacher, a student

(You were one wing and I was the other)

with a brightness that wisdom carried

like the song sparrow that crossed

our path calling to the world in her sweet nostalgic melody

leading toward the soft sun with her poetry

And I envision you now in front of me

(the wings all yours)

A slight brushing on our shoulders

circling once before heading upwards

swirling whirling whirling

flecks of fervent light showering from the open seamless waiting sky

And Leggoian Light like Van Goghian light

lines crafted with a tender hand that paints

movement and colour with countless brushstrokes.

Behold!

A steeple. A cypress. A crescent moon.

A starry starry night where light-years away

the north star appears

offering a compass for those who are lost

like your poems

glowing and growing with lasting luminescence

LACED WITH ETERNAL LOVE.

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ANAR RAJABALI is an educator, poet, and researcher. Her arts-based dissertation, *(Re)turning to the Poetic I/Eye: Towards a Literacy of Light* (2017), is a meditation on poetry, spirituality and the quest for knowledge and the recipient of ARTS Research Graduate Award at Canadian Society for the Study of Education. Her research engages poetry (textual and spoken), song, philosophy, autobiography, and curriculum theorizing. She is founder of Pearl Learning: English Language Education Centre and published works appear in: *Creative Approaches to Research*, *Poetic Inquiry: Enchantment of Place*, *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal* and *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*. A forthcoming chapter is in the book from Routledge: *Lingering with the Works of Ted. T. Aoki*. anarrajabali@gmail.com

ANAR RAJABALI est une éducatrice, poète et chercheuse. Sa thèse fondée sur les arts nommés: *(Re)turning to the Poetic I/Eye: Towards a Literacy of Light* (2017), est une méditation sur la poésie, la spiritualité et la quête du savoir et est récipiendaire du prix d'études supérieures en recherche ARTS Research Graduate Award at Canadian Society for the Study of Education. Ses recherches portent sur la poésie (textuelle et parlée), la chanson, la philosophie, l'autobiographie et la théorisation du curriculum. Elle est fondatrice de Pearl Learning: English Language Education Centre et ses œuvres publiées apparaissent dans: *Creative Approaches to Research*, *Poetic Inquiry: Enchantment of Place*, *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal* and *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*. Un chapitre à venir est dans le livre de Routledge intitulé: *Lingering with the Works of Ted. T. Aoki*. anarrajabali@gmail.com