
Book Review

Laura Colket, Tracy Penny Light, and M. Adam Carswell, eds. *Becoming: Transformative Storytelling for Education's Future*. New York: DIO Press, Inc., 2021. 367 pp. \$32.99 (paperback, ISBN: 978-1-64504-159-7)

INTRODUCTION

Storytelling is as ancient as human civilization and is embedded in every facet of our lives from product marketing to political rhetoric. Every individual has a story that comprises the past, the present, and the future. *Becoming: Transformative Storytelling for Education's Future* collects some of these stories from across a wide spectrum of diverse voices and lived experiences. The central focus of each narrative is education, and every author weaves a colorful tale that describes their relationship to education as learners, teachers, and human beings. The editors of *Becoming* attempt to illustrate the power of re-storying our lives by reflecting on past experiences and how they inform our present context. In addition, the future of education is redefined and reframed by the wisdom of every word shared within the pages of this book.

SUMMARY

Autoethnography

Traveling through time has been a popular theme among science fiction and fantasy writers over the last century or more. Is it possible? Perhaps the answer is in the question. While there may come a time when technology gives humanity the chance to travel through time physically, we do have the ability to travel through time psychologically. Human memory stored in the nervous system, brain, and body of everyone gives us the opportunity to reflect on our individual and collective past to inform the present and potentially change the future. Reflection is at the core of every autoethnographic writing.

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Understanding oneself through the lens of experience can radically alter the perception and worldview one has in relationship to self and society. *Becoming* uses autoethnographic narratives to view the past through individual lenses. Each autobiographical piece tells a unique story of the writer's relationship to education over time. This relationship informs the writer's educational philosophy as they approach and engage with new learners.

Autoethnography is a transformative experience that allows each author to recall and reflect on events from their past. What impacted their psychology, spirituality, and emotions? How did their relationships with others validate or invalidate their belief systems? In what ways did the authors use personal narrative as a therapeutic activity? How does each story change society? These are questions that a reader should ask themselves as they turn each page and immerse themselves in the lives of others.

EDUCATION

The editors of *Becoming* asked individual contributors to consider their relationship to education over time. They provided each author a list of questions to reflect upon, including defining moments that shaped them as a learner, the roles their social identities played in shaping their educational experience, the struggles they faced as students, educational moments that make them proud, their key beliefs about teaching/leadership, literature or theories they acclimate to, critical incidents that shaped their beliefs, and implications that their relationship to education may have on their current practice.¹

Becoming uses the art of storytelling to draw out themes and patterns across the domain of education and from a wide spectrum of demographics. Representation from female, BIPOC, LGBTQ, dis-abled, and other trauma-informed communities are given voice throughout each chapter.² In addition, each educator enables transformative experiences for their current students/learners and contribute to “topics such as anti-colonial praxis, social class and social policy, anti-racist pedagogy, de-humanizing curriculum, re-storying, and innovative pedagogical practices.”³

A rich tapestry of stories, emotions, ideas, perspectives, worldviews, and belief systems arise from this colorful mix of individuals. Each serves as a mirror to self and society for both the writer and the audience. *Becoming* is a matrix of themes divided into several sections, and each section evokes and evinces similarity and at the same time takes care to highlight unique experiences with severity.

TRAUMA

It may be hard for some to imagine how education could be anything but fun, exciting, adventurous, and mind-blowing, but this is a very limited and myopic point of view generally taken by dominant social groups (i.e., white, male, Euro/American). The voices that are not heard often tell a different tale of trauma in education. These types of stories are included in *Becoming* because they inform the complex relationship that each author has to education as a field and engages each of their learners as mirrors to their own experiences. Each timeless autoethnographic piece draws from the pain, oppression,

violence, and injustice that occurs within the walls of schools and colleges every day. They use this energy to light a path to a new tomorrow—a future of education that is more inclusive, just, and equitable for all participants.

It is important to note that the reflections shared by each author demonstrate the therapeutic nature of autoethnography in action. Each voice begins with an uncovering and reliving/retelling of events that could have led to a more negative view of education. Instead, each author used the energy of shame and trauma to fuel their resilience, to grow and develop beyond predefined boundaries, and to share that wisdom with many other individuals across the field of education, as well as with society in general. This power of performance reconfigures neurons in the brain to fire in different patterns, and allows individuals to view the past, present, and future with new perspective and insight. *Becoming* is a written testament to the transformative aspects of storytelling in action.

COMMUNITY

Autoethnography is an individual encounter with past, present, and future selves. It is a performative discovery of identity and uses reflexivity to contextualize events throughout time and space. In addition, autoethnography as a methodology goes beyond the individual once the stories are performed for an audience (writing, dancing, theater, art, etc.). The stories become part of the societal construct—the collective consciousness. They form bridges between disparate people, cultures, and nations by showing the common humanity we each share. Community is strengthened by the courageous act of sharing personal stories in an ethical manner and using those stories as a framework for understanding.

Becoming uses the power of storytelling and re-storying to encourage students and learners in educational ecosystems to let their voices be heard and to reshape the past, present, and future. This process is like a small stream that grows into a river. It starts as a small trickle coming forth from the bedrock of a mountain. As the water builds momentum and uses gravity to propel itself, it quickly becomes a small flow that weaves through rocks and around hills. Eventually, the little stream expands and joins other little streams to form a river that eventually leads to the mighty ocean. Individual storytellers in *Becoming* form a river that feeds the collective ocean of consciousness within the domain of education. They do this as a community across several thematic elements: identity, border crossing (double consciousness), anti-colonial ways of being, social class, politics, and education, and pedagogical practices. These communities are units that manifest within the larger society. They are also the fundamental elements that each author uses to bring their autoethnographic work to life for the reader.

CRITIQUE

Do the pages of *Becoming: Transformative Storytelling for Education's Future* fulfill the goal of affecting change in education and society? The resounding answer is yes. However, there needs to be an audience willing to engage with the stories and look in the mirror of

their own lives to find common ground and frames of reference. Will everyone who reads this book have a radical transformation? Probably not. That is expected. Each person is at a different point in their individual journey through life, and their experiences with education may not align with the myriad of authors presented in this book. Today may not be the day for realizing the transformation, but tomorrow may be.

Becoming does what it sets out to do—it provides a diverse chorus of voices to inform the present context, as well as to transform the future of education. It does have the opportunity to address the ethical concerns of autoethnography and storytelling as subjective methodologies. This is important when engaging students and using this book as a guide. Perhaps with a future edition, *Becoming* can expand its borders with additional stories and analysis of the dominant culture(s) and ethical challenges of autoethnographic writing.

RECOMMENDATION

I would recommend *Becoming: Transformative Storytelling for Education's Future* to anyone working or related to the field of education or ethnography. The stories are a written record of the power of autoethnography and storytelling to transform self and society. The book is a therapeutic methodology that shares diverse tales of shame and trauma in relatable and empathic ways. It uses the past, present, and future to inform and transform perspectives, long-held beliefs, and pedagogy. It invites the audience to interact with the community of individuals who have courageously told their stories in the hope that their experiences will elevate and promote a different way of being and knowing for future generations.

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NOTES

1. Laura Colket, Tracy Penny Light, and M. Adam Carswell eds., *Becoming: Transformative Storytelling for Education's Future* (New York: DIO Press, Inc.), 5.
2. Colket et al., *Becoming*, viii.
3. Colket et al., *Becoming*, 3.