

Life Writing and Literary Métissage as an Ethos for Our Times,

Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Cynthia M. Chambers,
and Carl Leggo (2009),
New York, Peter Lang Publishers.

Judith McBride.

Canada

Working collectively, the authors of *Life Writing and Literary Métissage as an Ethos for Our Times* ask and answer big questions about the importance of story in the growth of professional educators. Why is it important to write and share stories, essential that others hear them, and that each hear the story of the other? In addressing these questions, Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, and Leggo engage the reader in a sharing of stories of life, of self – alone and in relationship – and ultimately, of empathy, awakening the life writings of the reader and inviting the weaving of these into intricate *métissages*.

Life writing is an autobiographical, interdisciplinary, practice-oriented inquiry stance. Genres include essay, journal- and letter-writing, memoir, poetry, prose, story, visual and performing arts. *Literary métissage* is a process of recreating experience by braiding such narratives, thus developing interpretations, representations and reports of individual and consolidated inquiries. The result is:

... a counter-narrative to the grand narratives of our times, a site for writing and surviving in the interval between different cultures and languages, particularly in colonial contexts; a way of merging and blurring genres, texts and identities; (it is) an active literary stance, political strategy, and pedagogical praxis. (p. 9)

With a background in interdisciplinary, literature, and cultural studies, co-author Erika Hasebe-Ludt researches and teaches language, literacy and culture, and curriculum studies. Her research interests include developing teacher education programs that respond to global and local realities with responsive pedagogies. (See <http://www.uleth.ca/education/resources/research/research-centers/literacy-research/ongoing-research/erika->

Copyright: © 2016 McBride.

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License, which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

[hasebe-ludt](#) for details.) Cynthia Chambers' expertise lies in indigenous knowledge and literacies of Northern Canada and Southern Alberta, and in cultural, social and political influences. The foci of her interpretive inquiries include learning from place, and indigenous perspectives of curriculum. (See <http://directory.uleth.ca/users/chambers> for details.) Carl Leggo is a poet and professor committed to life-writing as a post-modern and collaborative process focusing on the now, with a special interest in how we tell stories, and in being and becoming poetically. (See <http://www.lifewriting.ca/lifewriters/carl-leggo/> for details.) In this book the authors braid individual, autobiographical strands of life writing on identity and experience into rich and inviting literary *métissages* (chapters), thus illustrating the transformative possibility of such inquiries.

As we read, we are asked to consider how we might be at once different from, and related to, one another. Through seven *métissages*, each constructed of three braids comprising one contribution from each author, possibilities are explored with an honest exchange of stories – some convergent, others poles apart. Empathy is invited. In *Métissage 3 Sojourners Sojourning*, for example, the reader is welcomed to contemplate how the past may be implicated in the creation of the self in the present, and to exert the imaginative, creative, collaborative energy to reinvent the self in a future through small, intensely personal remembrances. 'Life writers are sojourners engaged in a life-time pilgrimage of seeking and searching, researching the past, present, and future; writing autobiographically (sic.), we remember where we have been, attend to where we are, imagine where we might go' (p. 97). In the three braids that follow the Introduction, the authors excavate parts of their past in stories at once familiar and strange. Details resonate, inform, offer discomfort, and ultimately, empathy.

Life writing and literary *métissage* offer one the possibility for change and, like the pebble in the proverbial pond, as one changes, concentric ripples bring change to others, and others still. Those committed to Living Theory Research (Whitehead, 1999), to the importance of living one's values, to concern for one's influence, may wish to consider this image. The work is collaborative and transformative, entangling authors and readers. Each storyteller contributes a thread to the braid and I, the reader, engage with them. I think about, frame, and share my story, my value-tale, if you will. My thread is woven into the fabric of the piece because I have been influenced by stories shared with me. Something new is created. Still more stories are recalled, reported and incorporated into the *métissage*, which grows more interesting, more engaging, more influential, as one develops a spirit of wisdom, learns to live in a caring, ethically responsible and responsive way as an educator in relationship with others.

Life Writing and Literary Métissage as an Ethos for Our Times is a tender-hearted sharing of spirit, learning, and the spirit-of-learning, with a strong undercurrent of hope for the future of humanity. Individual writings and braids propel the reader across personal, epistemological, cultural, and political borders, into vicariously imaginative engagement with the authors. It would be difficult to ignore thoughts on the potential of such inquiry to impact oneself, teachers, learners, and researchers, hard to resist the temptation of trying on *métissage* for goodness-of-fit with one's personal and professional endeavours. And,

once experienced, there will likely be no going back to earlier understandings of who and how we are as we relate to others in our worlds, no denying what new, unexpected, and more complex texts mean for education.

References

Whitehead, J. (1999) *The Growth of Educational Knowledge: Creating your own living theories*. Bournemouth, U.K.: Hyde.