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In praise of the vulnerable: A poetic and autobiographical response to Salvio's abundant Sexton.

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An editorial note:

In this sometimes autobiographical piece the threads of our personal and professional lives as individuals are closely interlaced. We identify two voices with our first names to indicate the dialogue around Sexton's work. But even when we identify part of the writing as one voice or the other, embedded in all that is written is that discursive and divergent quality of complicated conversation. This, we imagine, is appropriate to writing about Sexton (and to the interaction of Salvio's illuminating work on Sexton), for the blurring of identity is part of all of who we are, so that even within the one there are many multiple voices.

*Taught to believe that the mind, not the heart, is the seat of learning, many of us believe that to speak of love with any emotional intensity means we will be perceived as weak and irrational
(hooks, 2000, xxviii)*

Much public dialogue around pedagogy is now propelled by a dwindling number of best practices, a kind of corporate gate-keeping which insures an ongoing instrumental quality to classroom teaching. By contrast, and to contest such educational tsuris, our voices offer a poetics of understanding one's own pedagogies, and those of others, through a multiplicity and complexity of ways of being in the world.

By shifting attention to the multiplicity, we have come in differing and always complicated ways to our readings and subsequent conversations of Anne Sexton's pedagogy, which Paulio Salvio (2007)

represents favorably as having potential for questioning the strictures we as teachers hold about keeping our personal lives outside the door of the classroom. Our reflections have become more vulnerable, more fluid, teasing out the tensions of what we have lived everyday as teachers and how we have woven the everyday into our practice. By becoming publicly aware of how much our personal lives are already inside the classroom door, we imagine and write through our pedagogical assumptions and break some of the defined codes which make teaching strictly a professional engagement.

Like Sexton, we have found that honest reflection about teaching has been generally unwelcome. Not retreating to the security of our public roles (that of academic and artist, poet and dancer, parent and educator), our voices live in the warp and weft, finding indirectly those in-between places and spaces of being from which we can profess a gathered experience of educational practice. While difficult, because we continue—and insist on—living out a poetry from the many threads of our lives, our pedagogy has become embedded in the poetics of our wor(l)ds. And we continue because our pedagogy is about connection and teaching with vitality, rather than obsessing over how we are meeting the accountability goals of the latest educational reform. More importantly, woven within this public professing are our inner confessings, as they are understood in relations of difference, and we respond to both Salvio's words and Sexton's work through poetry, which after all is a deep love for all involved in this project of breaking open to new hues.

Sean:

In the literature on autobiographical research there are the common complications of display, voyeurism, confession, and often excessive self dramatization, all of which cause Salvio (2007) to ask early in her text why Sexton merits consideration. She proposes that Sexton's framing of the personal, "I am often being personal, but not being personal about myself" (p. 4), uniquely offers an approach to teaching and learning where "the autobiographical I" when considered "as a literary rather than literal identity" (p. 4) exposes how language can construct our interactions, holding the same power dynamics of our relationships with others. And further, in her poetry's literary "I," Salvio explores how Sexton situates herself in the tensions of language, attempting to write and live with integrity, attentive to the multiple identities competing for her public "I" and for the public "eye." Such attention exposes the thin veneer of postwar World War II idealism that was thrust upon her: an idealism which appeared wholesome but lacked integrity, which appeared professional but was dependent on technicalities, which appeared moral but was compelled by public approval.

Such literary and simultaneously personal provocation

offers new questions and openings for today's teachers to reflect on how they might be continuously co-creating with their students new public dependencies and perpetuating old ones. Attending to Sexton's poetry as a way of knowing and unknowing, recognizing the relationship between the literary and the literal, between what is original and what is shifting, we hope to keep complexity and diversity alive, to suggest ways for teachers to resist answers and to find conversation by which they might draw near again to the deeply personal processes in pedagogy, and to find there the energy to traverse and transgress all that possibly distances them from their lived experience.

Celeste:

Paula Salvio's insights into Anne Sexton's pedagogy address the question to us as educators to live into and through our vulnerabilities within the teaching process. I wonder how much harm really has been done by all the ways we have tried to cover up our own shadow, losses, or un/dis/ease of living in the world. Yesterday one of my teenage twins remarked out of the blue the quality that would make a good teacher, being if he/she were a bit human, and could realize that we are all not perfect. What is it about this place of deep humanness we all crave, either as adults, kids or teenagers? We yearn for another to reveal, disclose that they too are human, are struggling with the many details of life, which might hinder being totally present to the moment, or we could possibly not be completely "on."

I have never been one of those educators who could hide what was going on, so as the years have taken me through many journeys and losses, including death of loved ones, divorce, and changes in health, I have found myself teaching through tiredness, tears, and even times of despair. Lament has had its place in my classroom. My own availability to my own grief has allowed others to honor their own life passages that include loss and the significance to them in terms of opening up both their personal and teaching lives.

hollowed beauty

it was the summer
of being hollowed out
by grief
for beauty

Our attention to what is working within us opens us up to the paradox that beauty, growth, and wonder are inextricably connected to living from and through the depths. This too is the lived curriculum. It is never one straight line, but a weaving of many places of what it means to engage in all our humanness. Anne Sexton certainly plumbed the depths in all ways, but she was courageous enough to address all the incongruencies of life, and poetically she did. Salvio offers us the gift to see the connections and possibilities between vulnerability and pedagogy which transforms.

Sean:

Three reasons why Margaret won't anthologize this poem

*[I]n this country you can say what you like
because no one will listen to you anyway
~ M. Atwood, 1981*

*[T]here is no reason why equality should be present
in poetry when it is absent everywhere else
~ M. Atwood, 1982*

First, I lack the knack of variation
when I'm given the silver branch
I fall asleep when I should be walking
up the long staircase

Second, a Gemini who writes in bubblegum
I have not begun with the moon, lost
memory of the land and my hands,
perhaps enough cunning

to conceal my obsessions, altogether too
understandable, for those not in on the ground
floor, and not enough tears to see
the world clearly

Third, I have yet to quote Kierkegaard
it takes a while to develop some good strong nuts
that don't easily crack under time
or an editor's scrutiny

I have, however, made at least once suicide attempt
not because of rejection letters but certainly
over rejection, when my eyes close,
language is still there

Reading Salvio's work on Sexton (2007), I've been thinking about what it means to write poetry and live personally within a community of others who in their roles as university scholars and writers often claim a literary expertise. Following Gilmore (2001, 1994), Salvio reminds us that autobiography is theory, that every theory is a fragment of autobiography. My journey of being myself in the classroom reflects this theory; it has been a continuous struggle with the *whys* and *hows* of living, learning, loving, and leaving. All simultaneous, all being acted out externally for the public eye, and assembled internally for the autobiographical eye. There are many possibilities and complexities of longing within autobiographical exploration. To name only a few, there is longing for self transformation with, through, and by others (see Taylor, 1992); there is—as Salvio suggests (pp. 60-67)—a desire to be other to one's self; there is further a desire to imagine one's self through another's eyes (see Sameshima, 2007); there is longing to be as another (see Gilmore, 2001). In all these instances, the autobiographical project assembles the self from relations to family, culture, religion, place always as politics with those we love and do not love, always as a

Perhaps because of the poetic context, because this context suggests a particular kind of creative and imaginative classroom and autobiographical pursuit, Sexton's literary identity was constructed to provide opportunity to be exposed to her students and with her students. Salvio (2007) looks closely at Sexton's participation in writing workshops and her lectures at Colgate University and imagines what Sexton might say in response to why she holds secrets in order to disclose:

"I can write from a personal position because the personal has been sanctioned by post-World War II culture and society—specifically by male poets such as George Starbuck and Robert Lowell. However, what I can express as a female poet remains limited. Thus, to write about the anguish of failing to care for my children, the depth of my psychic struggles and loneliness, requires that I hide behind a mask, a personae. I know that the price exacted in representing such anguish may very well result in exclusion from the very community that has offered me intellectual and emotional strength. To protect myself I intermingle fiction with autobiography—in short, I invent as much as I represent" (p. 63).

Autobiographical writing, and more so the long-engaged autobiographical project, cannot help but expose the *ways*, *hows*, and *whys* of our ongoing attention, our compulsion really, to what is restrained and permitted—sometimes from within but more often by the long-held-dear external conventions writing imposes on us. Salvio (2007) writes that "the most obvious theme ... is about writing and the ways in which writing can be used to illuminate those aspects of self-deception that we rely on to sustain our sense of pedagogical authority" (p. 62).

Sexton kept secrets in her work to resist and expose her critics. Salvio (2007) says that secrets were a rhetorical strategy Sexton used often to call "attention to the social and political constraints" on her writing (p. 63). Such constraints, unsurprisingly, were always unsympathetic and designed to provoke shame. In reply, Sexton put on a mask that disparaged her rather than gained her social acceptance. Salvio (2007) likens this to boys putting on the aged clown mask (p. 63). Such a mask allows us to play at what might be real, to expose deep truths because those truths can be presented as something other than ourselves. In short, Sexton intermingled invented fictions with her

autobiography to represent what was true about herself.

Such deliberate invention leads me to question my (in)tension in this writing? Pedagogically, I witness my own strategies for staying open to multiple and shifting points of view in order to connect with students. In order to create a more authentic classroom space, I imagine a living, breathing curriculum that needs our attention in order to stay alive. Writing about such a shared process is full of concealed and revealed tensions. Words, both invented and represented, are as much ourselves as the social masks which protect and reveal us. But rather than being a distraction to teaching, such invention can actually enliven it. Within the safety of a rhetorical strategy that lies in order to be most open, students can find their own voice, trust the importance of themselves and their own words, and believe in their own contribution to a larger symphony. Grumet (1978) suggests that: "In order to reap the disclosure that lies dormant within our curricular forms, we must claim them in our familiar, daily experience and then estrange ourselves from them" (p. 288) .

Thus, rather than pathologizing Sexton, Salvio (2007) looks to find what is healthy in Sexton's pedagogy. Perhaps, says, Salvio "[I]n my studies of Anne Sexton's teaching life, I sought out lessons in entrustment, lessons in the difficult work of mutual recognition, lessons that I found in the relationship Sexton shared with Kumin" (p. 65). With Kumin, Sexton found a genuine vulnerability upheld by mutual recognition.

Celeste:

Perhaps there could be a pedagogy of the vulnerable, the pedagogy of the fragile, or how Salvio (2007) puts it so well for educators "to work toward developing an interstitial intimacy" (p. 50). There is so much we want or think we can control: the right curricula, the best practices –there is mounds of literature, examples, mentors to guide us on our way to teacher education. But where does the internal life that slips, stagnates, soars, and ultimately surrenders come into teaching, if not living and being? Much of our lives and our teaching lives are like weather, the mist on the trees, and the wind on the skin, the rain suddenly drenching the tired flesh. We cannot control every moment. I cannot plan that I will go through a profound loss just when I take on a new class. I can attend to the landscape of the inner life and let it inform the places that can break open my living and teaching.

when all is said and done
when all is said and done
and the affection of another
is gone, this remains:
the brilliance of love

for sage and wind,
water swept in blue light,
hummingbirds teeming
with a rhythm of the universe
and summer on the skin
the sensate world woes
me once again to her
cup of beauty, rhythms
which unfurl my heart
to a new day.

I can once again be summoned to fragility and sudden sweeps of changes in emotional terrain. I am on the vulnerable plane – the plane where a mere greeting of a student brings tears, not because I'm sad, but because there is so much beauty in one life. Two human beings co-creating and making meaning of what it truly means to research a life, a field, an exchange – a mutual mentoring. For all life is research and inquiry, and not just when we teach.

What is beautiful and profound about Anne Sexton's life, and Paula Salvio's attention to this, is that Sexton's life seeks to stop separating all the compartments of a life. One aspect of life flows into the other, not different than one day in the weather of where I live, outside Vancouver, B.C. where the sky and wetness have a symphony every day, but the changes of weather in one day are an ongoing score, one filled with music for the soul, as long as you don't stay in your expectations, of what you think nice weather is. To teach from our vulnerability is to teach with a sense of being absolutely present to the shifts and patterns of our own interior lives. This alone changes the curriculum. This alone makes room for the living curriculum rather than what is prescribed. It goes from prescribed to alive.

I would not endorse the breaking of sexual boundaries that Sexton went to in terms of her teaching practices, and connections in certain relationships, but this is not the point. What is to be gathered here if for us to consider, and I believe Salvio begins this conversation is to hear what the tender heart, ripped heart, fragile, broken, awake, luscious intimacy with one self and world has to teach us about teaching. What if the curriculum was the inner life, letting the emotions inform the lived curriculum. As Bachelard says, "Poetry is one of the destinies of speech" (1971, p. 3). What does the poetic have to teach us about living and teaching in all of our vulnerabilities?

Perhaps our accessibility to being vulnerable through teaching could be the "underbelly" of teaching. How can we bring the underbelly to the belly of teaching, writing and living? I read Sexton's accounts of teaching, and particularly through Salvio's perceptive eyes, I realize my own classes have at the heart of them a fragrance of vulnerability. Since the majority of my

classes have the theme of embodiment at the core, I intentionally invite the body to what it means to teach, write, research and ultimately dwell in the world as human beings. I am not interested in only talking of the body, unpeeling the discourses of the body, which are situated politically, philosophically and so forth, but I am after what it means to truly “be” in our bodies, rather than “have bodies” (Snowber, 2002). Human beings are lives, are art-works, ones in an ever changing mode of being and becoming (Snowber, 2005).

This is a messy endeavor, a visceral imagination if you will, and is embedded with the surprises, twists and turns that leads to unexpected ways of living in the curriculum and our full selves. It is an invitation to both disturbance and wonder at the same time. Residing in our bodies are the texts of our souls and emotions. This is not the place to document or prove the connection between the inner and outer, it has been done countless times. When one honors the body, one honors the heart. It is a beckoning to the inner life. The weird abundance beckons us back to the body, to an embodied way of teaching. But this is all abstract, how does this become real?

Sean:

With this look into the personal body comes hope, an ongoing hope that the body’s creativity will continue to rupture all that has been stratified and commercialized in education (see Wright, 1997).

The I and the body

it is without regret
that I remember cotton
sheets pulled up over your back
a cozy veneer for love:

without promise but hope
without tragedy but rope
without courage but longevity
without love but only love.

it is with regret
that I leave you now
distorted on the table
an appetite of knife and fork:

without wings but still
without desire but full
without taste but cooked
without love but only love.

In chapter three, Salvio looks closely at Sexton’s relationship with Holmes. Holmes represented a kind of poetic and teaching authority. Whether protecting his public image or his rigid boundaries of confessional poetry, he withdrew himself from Sexton’s poetry, her visceral imagination, from a poetry which could not be separated from the body. The tension between Sexton and Holmes plays out a tension in the poetic form. Says

Salvio (2007), “[Holmes] accuse[d] Sexton of getting too close to that specifically feminine danger of exposure-of losing boundaries, and of failing to be attentive enough to the reserved timing and formal repartee that he valued at the workshop table” (p. 51). Holmes preference for distance and reserve shows a disconnect from the bodies’ deep connection to the self.

This academic distaste of the body is equally prevalent in education. Johnson (2003) writes of her discomfort whenever “autobiographical writing [was] being shared in an educational arena” (p. 232). She explains that much of this discomfort was because she “couldn’t locate any relationship between [her] ego and the content of the course” (p. 233). In her paper Johnson does not blame the body, as Holmes did, the academic male authority rejecting anything too close to home, anything about “abortion, menopause, adultery, female sexuality, and the anguish of a suicidal mother’s love for her daughters” (p. 52). Johnson (2003), in contrast, locates her discomfort with her lack of familiarity with the literature on (p. 231).

The narrow-minded male rejection may seem obvious now, but it has not always been so. In *World Spectators*, Silverman (2000) explicates the so-called love ethic of leaving the body, that Platonic ruse which has had too much influence on poetic and philosophical traditions. Taking us to Plato’s cave, she discusses the upward mobility of the spiritual journey being leaving of the lower body. The parallel to education is uncanny. Class mobility, economic influence, status, even spiritual gain all seem to grow out of a willingness to leave the body:

On the lowest rung, [is] the beauty of an individual body. Then comes the beauty of all bodies; the beauty of the soul; the beauty of activities and laws; the beauty of every kind of knowledge; and finally that universal beauty which is synonymous with the Good (Silverman, 2000, p. 8).

Separating beauty from the body, locating it in a realm only accessible via intellectual pursuit debases the body, the personal, the vulnerable in us. When beauty “no longer consists of..anything that is of the flesh” (Silverman, 2000, p. 8), according to Plato, there is a fullness of love. How easily power relations are constructed in the dichotomy of body and spirit, in the acts of word preservation, or performance, or production. Like Toews (2004), I’m shocked when this is called love: She says that there is no room to breathe, or grieve, or believe when “everything that happens is God’s will” (p. 173).

The human living curriculum is a world of complexity, holding tensions but doing so in poetic ways, creating

disparate but connected and inter/intraderpendent relationships. This is ecological and holistic, integral to student and teacher wholeness; such a union of heart-mind-spirit-body moves beyond a focus on the singular to reveal an explanation for the whole, where organization and planning is the everyday life processes of living who we are. It means teaching without authority, revealing what I have called elsewhere *un/authorized pedagogy* (see Wiebe, 2007; 2008). To be un/authored is letting go of creative permanence; it is leaving aside any authorial claim in teaching or in living.

Acknowledging the fragility of our creative beings resists age-old Platonic dichotomies. This is why Sexton's work still lives in deeply in my body. Her story acknowledges the magic of poetry, and because the fictional poetic voice promises to reveal what cannot be told otherwise, the un/authorized, the curriculum of the inner life makes its heartfelt/soulful contribution to education. Poetry is a language of reflexivity, rather than reflection.

Unlike so many other texts that join the one privileged narrative and become sacred for prescribing as they tell, Sexton's work offers poetic narratives which unravel discourse, which pull yarn from the loom—that is, she tells stories to ravel its yarn, and importantly she does not tell *the* story, but the understory of what is conflicted and conflicting in the very process of telling. Returning to Sexton's body of poetry often, it is her vulnerable telling which offers engagement with complex classroom experiences. I am drawn in by her refusal of ironic distance, that heartless telling of the insulated voice (so common in response journals educators reflect on their learning). Sexton offers subtle and conflicting nuances to how I might be understanding the lived moments practiced/performed in my classroom. I want to teach with this openness, not only to the intellect, but to inspire the heart to create—to give a fuller, richer experience pervaded by meaning. Isn't this what is so sumptuous and dangerous about hearts, about teaching? To revel and ravel and reveal in an interstitial intimacy.

Celeste:

Anne Sexton made it real, in her vulnerability to all of who she was in the classroom, each tide of her emotional and often distraught life. Yet, at the same, time she opened up the permission for others to access their own emotional terrain. To be led into other emotional terrain of the heart, one often needs a guide. Both Sexton and Salvio are guides for us to welcome all of the parts of our selves to the fabric and work of teaching and writing. Guides are not always ones who we would perceive to have it together, but ones who allow for places of permission and vulnerability. I have taught over the years, as many of you have, through many life changes, and the ups and downs of pure survival in a complex world. I do not see the classroom

as a therapy group, but I do see that it continues to be therapeutic, an important distinction. Many times students and I have found the prayers of tears and laughter as central to the classroom. If we teach who we are, as Parker Palmer says, I also believe we re/search who we are. All of who we are and are becoming can be brought to the possibilities for transformation.

The gift of Anne Sexton's work to teaching and writing is her ability to bridge the private and public worlds. No doubt, how she enacted this has some problematic areas, but her work does support feminist epistemologies which provide a foundation to merge many worlds. She breaks down the artificial boundaries between private and public, emotion and cognition, theory and life, ecstatic and rational, spiritual and erotic, and body and mind. Sexton's work supports what May Sarton (1973), well-known poet and write terms learning by "being in relation to" and illuminates the importance of the embodied self in teaching.

By writing her own life Sexton opens up the space for the reader and student to attend to their own rumblings within. Sexton wrote in a place where much of her content was not spoken of, particularly as it connected to sexuality and mental illness in the heart of New England. Growing up in New England and by an artist/mother close to Sexton's age, I can rightfully declare that to be outspoken in your art was indeed controversial if not fraught with the kind of transgressive act that bell hooks would call emancipatory. Or as Muriel Rukeyser has said, "What would happen if one woman told the truth about herself? The world would split open (in Winterson, 1995, p. 117).

Sean:

The poetic turn of our lives turned into verse is always another iteration; it is a progressive and transgressive translation of what we understand for the moment, both in discourse and in thought. Our literary identity which professes to confess can thus be be a fictive movement and a truthful moment (moving moments, ongoing moments moving), and poetry is a kind of translation of those moments, particularly the inner, often unseen ones. Often poetry offers a flow of inner thoughts, a dialogical communion of soul and heart with the outward and intentional world.

Careful attention to Sexton's way of knowing and living through poetry creates understandings that are uniquely different to individuals, and yet simultaneously collaborative, for when shared, poetry relates individuals to one another intimately. We must linger here in poetry for a moment, for intimacy in education (see De Castell, 1999), because of its dangerous possibilities, such as abuse, exhibitionism,

and exposure, have been generally shunned in favour of professional distance. But professional distance, if sought out because of fear, leaves us as hollow bodies without hearts (Wiebe & Daley, 2006). With Sexton, intimacy is just as often fictional, and because of its efforts to *not* imitate truth, to avoid falling in love with one's reflected self in another, Sexton's *literary* intimacy is a powerful pedagogy.

Salvio (2007), in returning to Sexton's story, unveils simultaneously an inner, personal pedagogy and a collaboration with others. Such an approach, which is slow, meditative, and infinitely discursive, generates mutual understanding. hooks (2000) says that "when we choose to love we choose to move against fear—against alienation and separation" (p. 94). Salvio (2007) reminds us that when we as teachers create "a place for students to struggle with the teacher's subjectivities as well as their own, writing can ... achieve deeper level of interchange" (p. 102). When we share in our students' journeys, and let students' hopes and fears and dreams touch our hearts, then we are more likely to be present in our student's lives just when needed.

As the personal becomes a way of exploring the curriculum with others, the curriculum of the inner life, it becomes necessary for poets, as those who live in/ with/ by/ and through language, to write poetry so that a poet's understanding of the world can celebrate its *différence* rather than sameness. Salvio (2007), referring to Sexton's teaching and writing identity, says that Sexton "tests our tolerance for certain kinds of understanding—she tests our capacity to hold certain difficult and uncertain ideas about ourselves as teachers and to think about what our professional identities are organized to exclude" (p. 103). Such reflection on identity, for me, is hopeful, as receptivity in teaching depends on our unearthing that within us which is complicit in exclusion. Transformed pedagogies arise from a strong inner urge to hope for change, which is ongoing *différence*. For Salvio (2007) this means moving past notions of teachers being "good enough" and moving to necessary reparative work (p. 102). A difficult call for teachers to respond to. Rachel Remen (2000) writes that it is our fear of losing control which keep us satisfied with our false certainty in the present (p. 168).

As a teacher, I often turn to poetry for poetry with theory is perhaps more in tune with the lived experience in classrooms and out of classrooms and everything in between. Searching for ways to be authentic, so many poets address fear with love, address the threat of sameness with difference, and "can inspire us and give us the courage to make necessary changes" (hooks, 2000, p. 91). Thus, "[t]he choice to love is a choice to connect—to find ourselves in the other" (hooks, 2000, p. 93) and living are particularly heartfelt and hopeful, and can thus face

society's collective fear of intimacy (hooks, 2000, p. 91), that "extreme isolation" of love's discourse that Barthes speaks of (1978, p. 2). hooks believes that "fear is the primary force upholding structures of domination [because] it promotes the desire for separation, the desire not to be known" (2000, p. 93).

As poets become connected to communities, they take on new responsibility for staying inwardly whole, which includes the need to work with students as human beings with needs, hopes, disappointments, desires, and dreams. By looking poetically for overlap with others' complicated stories, in the sense of *poesis*, that is to create, there is the possibility of renewing the political with the personal (see Bruner, 1996). "Look at / what passes for the new," Williams wrote. "You will not find it there but in / despised poems. / It is difficult / to get the news from poems / yet men die miserably every day / for lack / of what is found there" (in Litz & MacGowan, 1988, p. 318).

Love Holds On

You said you didn't love me that much
it's not for lack of trying
like prayers to midnight gods
we cannot see past the beliefs we hold

I wonder about the nature of love
though it's pretty, love is not a prettiness
it's not a lust that floats and pops
love is pure (not in that old way)

but in a way that we cannot pollute
or put limitation on its intention
love seems to creep right up
and surprise like that

and then you say I love you
those words coming with more promise
than we know in the uttering
of something sacred

creates a new land with us in it
pushes us out the door in bare feet
walks in the snow takes us in heart
moves on keeps on holds on

we will find our place there surely
as the wind blows and cannot be held
the love that hurts without its presence
changes direction as it leaves

Celeste:

When we go into the tender places within ourselves, we break open to the page, where blood is transformed to ink. Here the sinews, tendons, flesh of our flesh are formed in language, which is resonant with bone reality. It is not the text which is distant, or the body that is distant, but the embodied self which has the capacity to heave, breathe, sigh, contract and release

into all the magnificent and painful ways of being human in this world. We break open our humanness into each other. And in the breaking we invite in the space for transformation. And as educators, this is what we are after: the transformative possibilities of growth. It takes courage and daring, risk that calls one to jump off the page, jump out of our hearts and tell the authentic stories of our lives.

Here lies the gift of narrative and the poetic, or one could say it is narrative inquiry and poetic inquiry, solid avenues of research methodology within arts-based research which connect artistic ways of knowing and rendering with lived reality. Of course Anne Sexton could have been doing this years ago, it just wasn't named that. Thank goodness her career didn't require she go for tenure, but rather she found a way to endure by the saving act of writing. If only all of the academy could find writing to be the lifeblood of discourse rather than a draining of the blood. Salvio (2007) so elegantly brings her work to the table of pedagogical possibility. The gift of the poetic within Sexton's work is her confessional stance as it has been called, but even more her ability to articulate the personal which is truly embedded in the universal. Nancy Mairs (1989), essayist, says the gift of autobiography and narrative "invites you into the house of my past, and the threshold you cross leads you into your own" (p. 11). I may not find my story within Anne Sexton's, or I may, but the reality is that her telling of her life, within poetic form opens up the space for me to do the same. And not just me, but certainly her own students and students for years to come. It is in our own vulnerabilities that we open the space for others to meet their own vulnerabilities and truly do the work of the soul, and more accurately the bodysoul. For the beauty of Sexton's work is the body and soul are inseparable, one gives way to the other. As Cixous as said about writing, "one must go on foot with the body," and Sexton has gone on foot with the body. Transgressive in her time, and still it is alarming to some, yet it is the opening, the opening where the "wound becomes the sky" as Luce Irigaray says (1994, p. 84-85).

Our capacity to be vulnerable is the "underbelly" of teaching. This is not to say that we wear our hearts on our sleeves, as the saying goes, or disclose inappropriate information, but it is to say that we let our humanness out. What if we just let our humanness out more in all of the ways we entered higher education? What would happen to how we engaged in Faculty meetings, or administration, or just conversing with each other, not to say students. What this world needs is not more policies, or tests, or plans, but spaces which embrace and allow for our humanness in all of its paradox. I have often thought that truly to grow, which we speak of in education so many times, is the capacity to grow inward, grow down, into the moss of

our soul and let it become the soil for our blossoming. And Salvio's rendering of Sexton's teaching and writing life allow for the ingredients of melancholy and the uncanny to be part of the fertilization for the creative process and product.

I am reminded in the etymology of the word vulnerable is *vulnere*, which literally means "to tear." We are torn in our own vulnerability because our abilities tear – we cannot even engage as proficiently in our duties. This morning, I broke down while making sandwiches for lunches, perhaps it doesn't matter the reason, but more the fact that I just broke. It of course has shaped my whole day, and yet in the midst of breaking I have also been broken into deeper insight and even in my walking the path I regularly walk been broken open to the blood red leaves entering the swallows of my heart.

What also is in the literal meaning of *vulnere*, "to t(ear)" is ear. In our tearing or in our tears, we come to a listening. This is the listening that turns us towards the inner life, and in turn towards the outer life. If one cannot hear the interior quakes of a life, it is very difficult to hear the quakes and questions of our students. We are beckoned to listening, to ourselves, the world and to each other in our capacity to tear and have tears. We write with our tears, both of joy and sadness, and here is the incarnation of word. Word becoming flesh. Flesh becoming word. An embodied writing, and embodied practice of teaching. Anne Sexton did both and I believe it is Salvio's understanding, which brings this work along for the reader to mine the contribution to the field of curriculum studies. Di Brandt (1996) has said it another way –

Once you get through the sound barrier,
the black hole of our collective amnesia,
you begin to see that the words, if they're
spoken from the body, to the stomach,
the heart, are not lies or weapons but
rather contracts, promises we make to
ourselves and the universe, to remember,
to pay attention, to listen (p. 46).

The gift of Anne Sexton's work to teaching and writing is her ability to bridge the private and public worlds. No doubt, how she enacted this has some problematic areas, but her work does support feminist epistemology, which provides a foundation to merge many worlds. She breaks down the artificial boundaries between private and public, emotion and cognition, theory and life, ecstatic and rational, spiritual and erotic, and body and mind. Sexton's work supports what May Sarton (1973), well known poet and writer terms learning by "being in relation to" and illuminates the importance of the embodied self in teaching.

Poetry becomes a site for uncovering the self and in some ways recovering the self. Sexton wrote for her life, and the artist knows this deep in the bone. It is not an option to “not write” or “not paint” or “not dance” for the artist. The artist burns with the flame to create, attending to the birth of the visceral imagination much like when a child is ready to come out of the womb. Sexton’s connection of poetry and pedagogy serves as a spacious place for men and women to excavate the complexities of the human heart, soul and body. Or as Adrienne Rich so poignantly said in her essay on poetry and politics:

We go to poetry because we believe it has something to do with us.

We also go to poetry to receive the experience of the *not me*, enter a field of vision we could not otherwise apprehend (1993, p. 85).

By writing her own life Sexton opens up the space for the reader and student to attend to their own rumblings within. Sexton wrote in a place where much of her content was not spoken of, particularly as it connected to sexuality and mental illness in the heart of New England. Growing up in New England and by an artist/mother close to Sexton’s age, I can rightfully declare that to be outspoken in your art was indeed controversial. Or as Muriel Rukeyser has said, “What would happen if one woman told the truth about herself? The world would split open (in Winterson, 1995, p. 117).

Sexton did not only split the reader open to the difficulties and incongruencies in a life, but split one open to beauty. The poet sensitizes one to the nuances of texture, smell, sound, gestures, and tightens our capacity to be “awake” to the world. It is the aspect of being awake to all, which is how her work and teaching expose one to the random beauty in life. Some of that random beauty is in the context of articulating taboo content and emotions which explore dissatisfaction, wrestling, grief, shame, yet the paradox of it all is there is beauty embedded in the moments of difficulty. Even the ability to “see” with such depth and sensitivity calls one to wonder, even if that wonder is painful. So much that touches us as human beings, we still don’t talk of, not to mention in the 1950’s. We are given a transfusion of courage when the subject of poems can be breasts and uterus, isolation and confusion – the hunger of what it means to be human in this world. All is a subject for listening, all is a subject for the curriculum. As an educator who is passionate about lifewriting, autobiography, narrative, poetry and embodiment, I am thrilled that there are poets in the world who find ways for the mundane and extraordinary to be vocalized and articulated on the written page. The very things that one thought were in ruin could be, but there is a way to make and find meaning through the rubble, the rubble of a life. Weird

abundance, yes, perhaps one needs more of it, not less. We need to be awakened in a time of slumber, and unfortunately it is often the poet who is both prophet and prodger into the discovery of coming home to the self. The self that teaches. The self that lives. The self that writes.

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