

Culture, a narrative from within

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(David Trainor, artist/art educator, husband and father, from Port Kirwan on the Southern Shore of the Avalon Peninsula, the youngest of fourteen children, now residing in Spaniard's Bay, Conception Bay North)

The birthplace of an identity gemminates from the belief and connection that people identify with their sense of place and of themselves across personal stories of culture. Such a belief is not based on a blind adherence to a way of life but through lived experiences that create meaning and fulfillment in one's life. Such experiences are connectors that endow a personality within the narratives. The meanings associated with the stories are transferrable expressions that carve out an understanding and appreciation to the narratives, whereby, the presenter's experiences are allowed to become living knowledge for the inheritor. Because we all want to belong, feel value in ourselves, enliven efficacy and hold onto that truth of emancipation, then education holds that power of development.

It is through the instructional debate about our awareness of the present that we need to reflect upon where it all began. The cartography for the life in teaching and learning is embedded within the history of its people. The narratives of people in places are pedagogical tools that empower the meaningful relationship in the curricula. When the melding of that process occurs, an experience revitalizes the character of the class because the subject comes alive in the relived practices of the students and now the teacher becomes the student. This personal adherence to a place is the setting upon which to build the perspective model for learning and teaching within a visual arts classroom. And, like all curriculum studies, the true reflection of a subject is through the thought and expression for an area of personal connection. The teacher draws upon the narrative of experiences in reverberating a meaning in the lesson and, in this way, the students can absorb the experiences as part of their own. This induces an appreciation in the development and support of their self-worth through a connection to place. The embodiment of sharing is a commensal relationship that forges a joining of lived experiences both past and present.

My educational project, "From Stagehead to Saltbox House: A Cultural Connection through Art," became a self-expressive enigma that envisaged a microscopic vision of my own lived metaphoric vision of a closed cultural paradigm. I drew upon the isolated cultural jigsaw of the self-reliant fishing community where I grew up. Yet, through research I was able to reflect back upon the genesis of this project as being the first rock skipped across the salty bay on the Southern Shore. Metaphorically speaking, that single rock joined all the other rocks that sank to the sea floor and the conduit in reaching that new haven was possible because of the fluidity of that salty water, much like the connection in the *Essence of Self (a pastel painting)*.



(Preliminary sketch)



("Essence of Self" . . . pastel painting)

(Through a free flowing mode of expression this was the internalized view I envisaged as the substance of my existence. Symbolically, the surrealistic purview of this piece of work also reflects the surge, both high and low, of the tidal flood of constructive critical thinking that ebbed through my journey in the MED program.)

Through my ED 6192 with Heather McLeod, at MUN, I was encouraged to look at myself and develop a *Conceptual Self-Portrait*. I first envisaged all of the parts that made me and this entailed a barrage of cultural components that have, had and still do influence whom I believe myself to be. I presented a slide show that was a visual interpretation of my place with others through personal interactions and other sense motivated stimuli; I composed a song that I performed but through all of this sensory-filled data I was looking at myself as seen through the eyes of others. There were words from another professor, Clar Doyle, who advised me to continue what I was doing, which was in reference to my style of allegorical writing, which struck home that last spike on the cross, namely to be myself. Who am I?

If anyone is to awaken within a conscious deluge, then you become enamored with a desire to escape or become immersed within the essence of your developing muck, that is, face resignation to the fatalistic mire or rise to emancipation on the new blank canvas. It was the latter that I struggled with because much like the creation of an artwork, when it is fixed, it is a tenuous battle to undo, as are the life experiences over half a century. Also, your history has a pre-birth that awaits your arrival which is already fully born through a cultural identity and within that finely drawn sketch you may only represent a scratch in its design, but you are forever belonging to that tangible iconic domain. How to experience growth, so as to learn, as you look back upon yourself is the trek I undertook at MUN in doing my masters.

The education faculty at MUN helped remove the bandages from my eyes where I experienced a new vision about myself and my sense of place from where I had come and to where I am now. That journey was an internal and external battle amidst acquiescence and protagonist ideals from me and others. Barriers always exist in the artist's mind over discerning the outcome of the work before it is finished and so too is the development of oneself on the outside looking in, beyond and letting it reflect back to you. That conscious awakening arose on the crest of the wave that carried me along the educational dig site that uncovered who I am. The Master's program presented me with new tools that allowed me to create and find my bearings and sea legs for the journey that lay ahead.

This journey through education was a re-education, re-affirmation and renewal of my vows for a cultural identity that I had squeezed into a tiny pill bottle with a dosage that was running out. My research empowered a new spirit of revival from whence I came and from where I was going as a Newfoundlander who grew up in a small outport fishing community. I was able to see myself as being a part of an evolving essence that I ingested through my multiple senses. I absorbed my surroundings, ingested my experiences and expanded my sense of place as I continue to forge my existence. I accredit this development to the fine minds at MUN's Education Faculty. They helped purge the complacency of thought that festered inside me to an interpretative, creative and critical outlook on the indelible strength that lay in the awareness and ownership of a cultural identity where I came to believe in Gerald Pocius' book, A Place to Belong.