

## I Am Smitten by Her Smile

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### ABSTRACT

In this personal call-and-response piece, inspired by a poem made through a dialogue with a poet at the Pop-Up Poetry session at the symposium in Banff, I explore the transformative power of Pop-Up Poetry and new encounters made. By taking the reader through the poem, I illuminate how human qualities are essential for personal growth and “Bildung.” The Pop-Up Poetry broke the confines of academic discourse, fostering vulnerability and introspection. Integrating personal poetry into conferences might empower individuals to transcend the academic race. Through this journey of self-discovery, I found that Pop-Up Poetry and new friendships are one possible key to unlocking new paths of personal and professional enlightenment, nurturing our humanity, and fostering collective growth in the academic world.

*Keywords:* Pop-Up Poetry, *Bildung*, personal development, friendship

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*I'm smitten by her smile<sup>1</sup>* as I arrive at the conference—a conference on the scholarship of teaching and learning. The format is familiar—presentations and posters with appealing topics and workshops that aim to engage the participants. My customary presentation is prepared, delivering knowledge and experiences of my work on student learning in higher education. Life as an academic is constraining. It makes me stay on the scholarly path, obeying the boundaries and regularities, and I long for a revolution in how things are done—or at least an invitation for a discussion on how we perceive higher education. For what are universities for? I follow Koster (2019) and argue in favour of old but sometimes forgotten aspects such as “Bildung,”<sup>2</sup> “ethical awareness,” “identity formation,” and “academic freedom.”

*Lips thin into stretch* as we continue our conversation. I yearn for something to come into being at the conference that will enlighten and inspire me to explore the possibilities and the unknown in this black typographic world of knowledge transmission. *The sun in her eyes crinkles* as we get to know each other. The exploration of new relations is, for me, a captivating part of conferences where a sudden and unexpected encounter with another being in the academic world who shares the passion for teaching and learning and my interest in human being and “becoming”—beyond academic merits in the length of words or the number of papers—is an enrichment.

*I am home here with you*, home in a shared community of interest in a professional and personal way, *didn't know I was away*. *The river I've already crossed* leads me to beautiful encounters that inspire me and enhance my knowledge; *the bubble from the effervescent friendship* brings me closer to experiences I would not have known about. Still, *this is not the right word, does not explain crossing the river*.

Today's education may be said to nourish the intellect (Mills, 2002). An instrumentalist view on education is far from leading the students to Plato's theory of paideia, though, which favors the process of nourishing the soul, *ocean so like emotion*. “Becoming” emphasizes the cultivation and integration of intellectual, psychological, and social development that transcends the focus on knowledge and skill acquisition (Mills, 2002). The formation and nourishing of being concentrate on certain human qualities that make authenticity possible, such as carefulness, thoughtfulness, humility, openness, authenticity, criticality, receptiveness, resilience, courage, and stillness (Stalheim, 2021).

Pop-Up Poetry as an offering during the conference was a refreshing surprise, an answer to my yearning for a revolution and a chance to nourish the soul and cross rivers. With her old-fashioned typewriter, the poet invited me into a creative world of exploring the human sides of academic life. I was given a moment to explore “Bildung” and “becoming” through dialogue on a personal topic, resulting

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<sup>1</sup> The lines that appear in italics throughout this article emerged from my experience with the poet at the conference.

<sup>2</sup> *Bildung* is seen as a process wherein an individual's spiritual and cultural sensibilities as well as life, personal, and social skills are in process of continual expansion and growth.

in words tapped onto actual paper, a poem mirroring a glimpse of my personality beyond my academic work. The session with the poet allowed me to explore and develop my voice, sense of self, and being (Bengtson, 2018). Humboldt explicates “Bildung” as the ultimate task of our existence to achieve as much substance as possible for a many-sided development of our human capacities (Bohlin, 2013), which can be fulfilled only by linking the self to the world to achieve the most general, animated, and unrestrained interplay (Koster, 2019). My dialogue with the poet made me reflect on my innermost self, an essential feature of the concept of “Bildung.” As a researcher, I believe who we are and who we become on our academic journey influences our work. Therefore, I consider it essential to make room for identity formation and explore human qualities other than the intellectual, such as authenticity, openness, and humility, especially in the most academic of settings. Pop-Up Poetry heartened my exploration of the world and added value to the conference both personally and professionally.

*So solid soul*, with new friendships explored, the work trip was ending, which unexpectedly turned into an adventure that nourished my becoming, leaving me *full of embrace*.

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