

Storytelling in Art Education

–Direct Experience and Sharing of Personal Images According to C. G. Jung’s Individuation.

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Summary:

As an artist, I am compelled by the need to reinvestigate the role of storytelling — especially in terms of the exploration of subjective meanings and interpretations. Storytelling can be a great tool to discover, transmit and share personal images — it focuses on the immaterial, the ephemeral and the vernacular. Moreover I would like to call it *the art of life*. We need narrations to make sense of our lives, to give meaning to life. Telling stories is only part of the equation. There is also the role of the listener. Both are as important as each other in the art of storytelling.

In this essay I discuss my storytelling classes conducted at Hokkaido University of Education since 2006 when I began working as a part-time lecturer. It is my invention that one student must develop one’s own story by plots shared in groups of three. The act of storytelling becomes about collaboration, interpretation, and misinterpretation. This exercise challenges the ways in which individuals make stories and narratives by making it part of a collaborative process. Story making then becomes more improvisational and contingent. It requires participants to be open to other’s subjectivities and interpretations. The situation of the groups of three stories means that stories become more vulnerable — like real-life. The students have to be open with each other as the exercise involves trust and collaboration.

In practicing storytelling in my art class, I rely heavily on C. G. Jung’s notion of Individuation. For Jung, individuation is fundamental how an image and story is part of a person’s growth. In Jungian psychology Individuation is the process of transforming one’s psyche by bringing the personal and collective unconscious into conscious. Individuation has a holistic healing effect on the person, both mentally and physically.

This essay also provides a comprehensive discussion of the meaning of individual dignity in society — especially in the field of art. For the class I take a new alternative model of the individual from Japanese Jungian, Hayao Kawai. Hayao focuses upon women’s individuation that is the state of being independent and able to relate to others when necessarily. In comparison to this notion, men’s self-realization is based on the myth of hero whose character is rivalry, struggle and solitary. It is this latter concept that still plagues today’s problematic society.

Students are asked to analyze their own experiences following the story making and storytelling exercise. Self analysis, which is more important than the quality of story, forms three main points according to the students: commitment with partners in group work, being an active listener in the storytelling process, and the experience of inner images as the other (we call it “living images” in the class).

The storytelling class can relate identity and otherness both internal and external, and it ensures students have a personal connection to the stories of theirs and fellow students’ stories as well as being further attuned to the principles of storytelling that underline art practice.