

UNFOLDING THE UNEXPECTEDNESS OF UNCERTAINTY

## **Social Fictions Series**

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The *Social Fictions* series emerges out of the arts-based research movement. The series includes full-length fiction books that are informed by social research but written in a literary/artistic form (novels, plays, and short story collections). Believing there is much to learn through fiction, the series only includes works written entirely in the literary medium adapted. Each book includes an academic introduction that explains the research and teaching that informs the book as well as how the book can be used in college courses. The books are underscored with social science or other scholarly perspectives and intended to be relevant to the lives of college students—to tap into important issues in the unique ways that artistic or literary forms can.

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# Unfolding the Unexpectedness of Uncertainty

*Creative Nonfiction and the Lives of Becoming Teachers*

*By*

Anita Sinner  
*Concordia University, Montreal, Canada*



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## **DEDICATION**

This book is dedicated to the storytellers in my life:

To Mike, for all the years of laughter;  
To Renate and Joseph, for making the past real;  
To Chris, for always crafting a good tale;  
To Sylvia, for the imaginative possibilities.

Thank you for inspiring my journey.



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Sinner, A. (2010). Arts research as a triptych installation: A framework for interpreting and rendering enquiry. *International Journal of Education through Art*, 6(2), 125-142.



## FOREWORD

### WONDERING ALOUD & WANDERING ALLOWED

*Ten Gestures Toward a Foreword*

Carl Leggo  
University of British Columbia

1

While reading Anita Sinner's *Unfolding the Unexpectedness of Uncertainty*, I often felt like I was viewing a documentary of beginning teachers' stories that were familiar, even haunting. I have been in school all my life. At fifty-nine years old, I definitely feel old (practically worn out), but with age I also feel a measure of sagacity. My wife Lana (who has loved me a very long time) gladly notes my sage age. Perhaps I am like an aged whiskey or a leather jacket that has worn into a supple, sturdy comfort. The stories of Ruth, Ann and Nathalie remind me that I was once young, once at the beginning of a teaching career. Reading their stories, I resonate with each of them, with their joys, hopes, fears, and frustrations. And, above all, I remember my stories. When we tell stories, we learn to lean on one another, learn to lean into the lines that support, even suspend us like braided ropes that help us walk in the heart's light.

2

Like all her artistic and scholarly and pedagogical convictions, Anita is committed to creative nonfiction as a way of inquiring and knowing because creative nonfiction is located in the stories of daily experience, rendered with thoughtful care for aesthetics and ethics. I have known Anita a long time. She is a constant blessing in my life, a companion who has walked with me in many journeys. The lovely word *companion* is etymologically connected to the Latin *cum pane*

## FOREWORD

or *with bread*. We have enjoyed bread together (never more than in Montreal with a legendary smoked meat sandwich). Actually, we have worked so closely together, it is like we have made bread together, kneaded the dough, sprinkled in the yeast, waited for it to bake. And how appropriate it is to reflect on the action of *making* and *kneading*. The word *fiction* is derived from a Latin word  *fingere, to make or to form*, even like kneading and shaping clay or dough to create something new. Anita is an extraordinary artist and researcher and teacher who calls together stories and renders them with careful creativity so others can hear the lyrical rhythms of the heart in all our stories.

3

In some ways creative nonfiction might seem like an oxymoron or a redundant phrase. Isn't all writing creative? Isn't all writing fiction? Isn't nonfiction really another fiction clinging to contested claims of reality? These are questions I have lingered with a long time, and I anticipate that I will continue to linger much longer. Anita promotes creative nonfiction because she loves people. Integral to all Anita's research is inviting, encouraging, and sustaining the voices of others, especially the voices of others who can be too easily forgotten or ignored, others who have been silenced. So, while I can argue about the etymology and experience of fiction, I happily acknowledge how Anita uses creative nonfiction in order to promote research and writing that are rooted in the earth, the humus that connects all of us in an inextricable tangle of stories that know no beginning and ending. Our stories begin with etcetera, and they end with etcetera.

4

Anita lives in the fecund possibilities of prefixes. She does not attempt to fix anything. In *Unfolding the Unexpectedness of Uncertainty*, Anita lingers with the prefix *un*, the most prolific prefix in English, because *un* does not only denote negation—it also connotes otherness and difference. To add *un* to a word is to turn the

original word with a sharp twist that compels us to see the original word anew, with startled eyes, with possibilities for wonder.

5

Anita, Nathalie, Ann, and Ruth remind us that story is a way (if I were bolder, I might write *the way*, but I am always concerned about fundamentalist claims that leave no room for fun) for understanding our world, for standing in words in the world, for standing in relationship to one another with prepositional possibilities beyond counting. As human beings we are human be-com-ings. By wondering and wandering in stories, we *become*, uniquely and idiosyncratically, communally and corporately.

6

What I enjoy most in the stories of Ann, Ruth, and Nathalie is how they acknowledge, even embrace, uncertainty. So much curriculum and pedagogy has been constructed and constrained in a relentlessly rigorous march to the place of certainty where discernment is no longer needed because everything we need to know is already known. If we can just determine how the brain functions and how learners learn, then we can determine how to organize effective and efficient education. If we can determine how to manage both rule-constrained and unruly students and how to evaluate their learning and how to decide what is important to know and what is less important, then we can organize schooling and teacher education and art education. Of course, in the course of all that efficient organization, we will have missed how education is wandering and wondering in uncertainty, in mystery, in the volcanic and vorticular heart of the whirling world we hardly know.

7

As Ruth, Ann and Nathalie unfold their experiences, they compose other folds. Like a North Atlantic wind in January will shape snow in an always mutable chaos with only a tentative cosmos, Ann, Ruth,

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and Nathalie know their stories are always changing, always wandering full of wonder. Nathalie, Ann, and Ruth are negotiating emergent identities as teachers, holding fast to the past identities of artists, wondering if these identities, named separately, will find interstices of dynamic connection or will find the chasm that renders chaos so chronically fearful. And, happily, by navigating the twists and turns, the detours and diversions, of their year in teacher education, they find their stories constructed in the crosswise arrangement of chiasmus where every step forward is repeated in reverse order, so teacher education is about teaching teachers as well as teachers teaching, always becoming.

8

Art is prophetic and passionate. Art infuses the art educator's spirit with a precarious poise and a capacious conviction for living into the pedagogy of (im)possibility. Art educators learn to live their curriculum. They learn to become their curriculum.

9

*Unfolding the Unexpectedness of Uncertainty* folds and unfolds the unexpectedness of uncertainty, the expectedness of uncertainty, the unexpectedness of certainty, and the expectedness of certainty, so the only certainty is uncertainty, and the only expectedness is unexpectedness. In the end, as in the beginning, the teacher wanders and wonders, creating stories with attention and intention. And with those stories, teacher initiation, teacher identity, and teacher inquiry are all expanded and transformed as experiences are narrated from inside the classrooms, the imaginations, the hearts of artists who are becoming teachers, fired by the arts to create new possibilities for teaching and learning.

10

As a poet I like to leave poems, seldom sure anyone will want to attend to them. I offer the poems in a kind of silent benediction, an offering that expects no reciprocity, an offering of hope for words

and creativity and stories and communication, invitations for communion, love notes because the heart is called to the art of pedagogy, filled with love. So, I conclude these gestures toward a foreword with a poem about growing old, recognizing joy, and becoming ....

Smiley

at fifty-nine  
I have finally  
    caught up  
with the smiling face  
of the 70s iconic,  
    perhaps ironic,  
certainly ubiquitous  
wide-eyed Greek  
comic mask, once  
long ago, pinned  
to my bedroom wall

the mask first born  
in 1953, my year too

*I am happy*  
    *I am having a nice day*

when young,  
Lana asked me  
    often  
if I would ever  
be happy

    after years  
of grumpy responses  
she stopped asking

FOREWORD

now I am old  
with enough aches  
& brokenness  
to remind me  
    constantly  
my biological  
& chronological  
    sixty is just  
around the corner

& knowing so  
many who had  
    no chance  
to turn the corner

*I am happy*  
    *I am having a nice day*

like a tightrope walk  
on the braided threads  
of the heart's light  
I walk the curriculum  
    of delight  
with a precarious poise  
between emotions  
    & emoticons  
Forrest Gump's muddy face  
& Wal-Mart's sales job

conscious  
    conscientious  
even conscientized

still unfolding  
    the unexpectedness  
    of uncertainty  
in stories shaped



in the lines of lives  
becoming teachers

Thank you, Ruth, Ann and Nathalie, for your stories, full of hope and conviction, and thank you, Anita, for your commitment to hearing the heart of others' stories and rendering the stories with artful care so we know ourselves in relationship and in process.

