Co/autoethnography: Exploring Our Teaching Selves Collaboratively

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Last night Monica recounted her interactions earlier that day with a teacher education candidate who behaved disrespectfully toward her and toward the students with whom he was working. We talked, telling stories from our past experience, sometimes connecting directly with the current situation and sometimes not. We discussed our reactions to this type of student behavior. We talked about what we thought we were doing as teacher educators, what our vision of a good teacher is, and we discussed our and the student's role in his development as a teacher. In essence, we responded to the scenario as teacher educators, teachers, and women, as people with multiple identities who bring their whole selves to the situation at hand.

This conversation about professional matters is not unusual. It is the kind of conversation that frequently occurs between colleagues and is most valuable when occurring with other teacher educators. It is the kind of conversation necessary to continue to develop as professionals. These conversations should occur more often as a natural part of our professional development, but we struggle to find time and space for them. In our self-study research we take seemingly normal everyday conversations such as this seriously. We take them as revelatory, with the appropriate work, of important themes and structures in our work.

In this chapter we discuss the collaborative analysis of our teaching experience using a method we have come to call co/autoethnography. We start, in the first section, with the assumptions we make in order for thinking, talking, and writing about our everyday experience of teaching to be significant. In the second section we show, through detailed explanation and the use of examples from on-going co/autoethnographies, how this type of research is conducted.

We are teacher educators, but no matter how it might feel at times this is not all that we are. None of us is solely defined by our identity as teachers, and our identity as teachers is not solely defined by us. This conceptualization of identity as complex and culturally informed motivates our development and use of co/autoethnography. A corollary, central to our methodology, is that identity is dialogical. We maintain our identity in relation to others (Taylor & Coia, in press).

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D.L. Tidwell et al. (eds.), *Research Methods for the Self-study of Practice*,
Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices 9,
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4020-9514-6_1,

Identity is a central concern in self-study of teaching practices (Loughran, Hamilton, LaBoskey, & Russell, 2004), and more specifically co/autoethnography. Because researching ourselves assumes a certain understanding of the relation of self to self and self to others, it is important to be explicit about the theory of self underlying our approach, but that is not sufficient. It is also important to discuss epistemological perspectives of self. The purpose of self-study, after all, is to improve or at least better understand our practice (LaBoskey, 2004). We do this, in co/autoethnography, through the narrative process (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002) when we make sense or interpret our experience by telling stories. We tell stories about ourselves and others in order to understand what we are doing or what we have just done. Below we look briefly at each of these underlying rationales for the use of co/autoethnography. We start with the importance of 'auto,' connect it with 'ethno,' move on to the 'co' and complete the section with a short discussion of 'graphy.'

Auto

Recently, Griffin (Monica's youngest child) saw his teacher in the supermarket. He could not believe it. He laughed and laughed. He could not believe that she shops or eats. We are all aware of this construction of the teacher as one who lives and breathes school, a person who is barely a person, someone with few personal attributes or emotions. Although we find this understanding of the teacher frustrating and baffling, we also play into it with our own lack of acknowledgment that we do, in fact, bring our whole selves to the classroom.

We started this chapter with the story of a professional conversation, making the point that this type of interaction provides a vantage point to enter a discussion of co/autoethnography. We are accustomed to thinking of conversations about our practice as professional if they are essentially an impersonal account of teaching and meet certain ethical and confidentiality standards. We make the stronger claim that when two teachers are talking about their practice it is not and never can be a purely professional conversation in that sense. There is no such thing as a discussion of the disembodied or impersonal practice of teaching. All discussions of practice involve the personal whether or not this is explicitly acknowledged. All practice is undertaken by persons: our questions are about our teaching, our dilemmas, our joys, and our triumphs. We cannot divorce our lives from our teaching. We can learn, for example, about discussion methods and theories behind active learning, but the issues we face when we are teaching are those generated by the intersection of us as fully fledged people, the text (theoretical or actual), and the students.

In order to understand our practice, the role of ourselves as persons has to be in the forefront where persons are seen as temporal beings with complex identities (Palmer, 1998). The auto of co/autoethnography refers to the self, and most particularly to the self as agent. We can never understand our own practice until we have some measure of understanding of our place in the execution of that practice. All

practice is personal in this sense. Our pedagogical choices, our perceptions of the challenges we face, all involve our values, beliefs, and prior experience. But clearly this is not all that is involved. It is not that we are all there is in the world, but that we are in the world (Donnelly, 1999). Our subjectivity can not be excised from our practice (Levering, 2006). As we study our own practice, we grapple with how to capture our experience of teaching in a way that acknowledges its personal nature. In so doing, it is important to acknowledge the impact of the world on constructing the personal.

Our identity as teacher educators and our identification with this role is important if we accept that understanding our practice as teachers, the decisions we make and the actions we perform, involves looking at the values and reasons underlying our actions. In other words, our actions cannot be understood in a purely impersonal way. A recognized way to uncover our values, beliefs, and motivations is through autobiographical inquiry (Zeichner & Liston, 1996).

In its most general and simplistic terms, the idea behind the usefulness of autobiographical reflection is in the process of reflecting on the past from the perspective of the present where one achieves understanding that will hopefully lead to a better future (Abbs, 1974). This is possible because of the central identification of the author and protagonist in autobiography: the person being written about and the person writing are one and the same. This identification is the root of the epistemic privilege of autobiography (Bruss, 1976). Rarely in education is this identity relation made problematic. Yet, the intractable and common problems associated with the use of autobiography come from this defining feature. We are all aware of the problems of responding to autobiographies, or even more problematic, grading an autobiography. If, on the other hand, we recognize that the conception of the self underlying autobiography is culturally constructed and informed, then we open a space between the I writing and the I being written about. In the space opened up, we can see a looser relation that privileges the interpretative self, the author, and the present over the past (Coia & Taylor, 2002).

The value of autobiography in researching our own practice lies in our ability to understand how our past impacts our present. This is really a manifestation of agency. Teaching is an act which involves choices. The questions which trouble us on the way home and the joys of making a connection with a student are a result of seeing ourselves as agents. The conversation with which we started this chapter could be characterized as addressing the question, What do I do in this situation? None the less, we have to be aware that our sense of ourselves as actors, as agents, is constrained. We almost have to act as if we are agents. The idea of teacher which forms the basis of our work is a cultural construction. Our dilemmas and questions come from the specific and inescapable cultural context within which we live and breathe. We start from our experience of acting in the world as individuals. This is the ideal and what we strive for, but it is very complicated. Co/autoethnography provides us with a vehicle to make explicit the complexity of self-construction, self-identity, and agency.

Just as ‘professional’ has certain connotations, so does ‘personal.’ It can imply private, it can imply ownership, and it can imply the epistemological isolation we

associate with solipsism, ample reasons why work on one's self is sometimes considered suspect in the world of educational research. We enter a classroom not just clothed in our teacher identity, but inhabiting all the identities we have formed over time. In any attempt to understand our experience of teaching, of being teacher educators, we must capture the tension between being an agent, being the author of our actions, and being constructed by the cultural norms and expectations within which we act. In co/autoethnography this tension is always apparent and allows for a more complex understanding of practice. It is apparent because the cultural aspect of experience plays along side the personal interpretation of that experience. This takes us to the 'ethno' of co/autoethnography.

Ethno

Co/autoethnography starts from the view that our identity and identification as teacher educators is not only important, it is culturally informed. A teacher educator is a complex of socially constructed individual enactments that form part of a person's identity. Our understanding of ourselves as teacher educators draws on and adds to its social and cultural meaning. There are aspects of this role with which we identify and aspects with which we struggle. While the role itself operates under social and cultural norms and expectations (Britzman, 1986), and to that extent is more or less clearly defined and thus constraining, it is a role we have accepted and made our own. Each teacher educator is constructed by others in that the role has meaning in a society, a meaning that is enacted in every experience we have as teacher educators. Each teacher educator, in so far as she exercises her agency within that role, makes it her own.

Just as with other social meanings of roles taken by persons, the meaning of teacher educator is malleable. There is space for new meanings as we each make it our own. This is a vital part of co/autoethnography. While autobiography is always at least implicitly interpretative, co/autoethnography insists on pulling the interpretative aspect to the surface. Co/autoethnography forces us to look at our lives through a cultural lens. Teaching is a social practice with cultural norms. Teacher educators are part of this practice and are not outside these norms. Co/autoethnography provides a means of making sense of this complexity from the inside, for ourselves.

Co

We bring the personal into the teaching whether we want to or not because teaching is about interpersonal connections between teacher and student. There are some teachers who strive to be impersonal, who give or accept advice such as, "Do not smile until December." And while we do not judge this view of the teacher or the view of teaching and learning on which these impersonal admonitions are based,

we want to stress that for us this flies in the face of the idea that teaching is a relationship. If teaching is a relationship, we have no choice but to bring some of ourselves to our students. In fact, we must.

We start with the idea that teaching is interpersonal, because self-study research builds on an important idea: all self-study research is collaborative (Loughran & Northfield, 1998). As teacher educators who conduct research together, it would seem obvious that we meet this criterion. However, we want to make a stronger claim: We can research ourselves only within the context of others. Our notion of self is formed along a dynamic continuum. When we look at self, we move from the self that is constructed individually to the self in relation to others. This framework for self construction easily fits our selves as teacher educators. Although we believe that this framework can be applied to all teacher educators, we realize that part of our self-conceptualization stems from our foundational beliefs about teaching and learning. We value relationships in our teaching. We strive to build caring relationships with our students that support, guide, and nurture their own development as caring teachers. We are explicit about relationship building and model the process for our students with the hopes that they will do the same with their own students. Because relationships take center-stage in our teaching, it is only logical that they would also take center-stage in the research that we do on our teaching. We have also found, however, that the very process of undertaking autoethnographic research has helped us develop a collaborative method that allows us to weave our narratives together in a way that opens new opportunities for understanding our practice. This takes us to the narrative, the writing of our stories, the 'graphy' of co/autoethnography.

Graphy

So far, we have established that teaching is a relationship between teacher and student, each of whom does not and cannot leave their lives at the classroom door. We have also claimed that the identity of the teacher, of the teacher educator, is complex and is to some extent socially constructed. The question now becomes, How do we analyze and understand the personal experience of teaching? If we are to improve our practice, it is necessary that we have a way of reflecting on and making sense of our own teaching acts. We make sense of our work as teacher educators, as we make sense elsewhere, by narrative. We tell stories of our teaching in order to understand and improve it. Co/autoethnography involves writing about one's self, exploring the past in the effort to understand the present and prepare for the future. In drawing attention to the cultural and narrative aspect of experience we draw on Bruner's (1990, 2002) argument that narrative is not only a primary mode of thought but one that must be situated within a cultural context. It is via culture, our shared symbolic systems, that meaning is "rendered public and shared" (Bruner, 2002, pp. 12–13). Thus, as Bruner argues, experience is only intelligible if it is in narrative mode.

Stories are interpretations but they also need continual interpreting. In co/autoethnography, our stories become texts of experiences that are interpreted.

These interpretations change as our identity changes. The experience may be past, but the meaning or interpretation of the experience is from the present, and this is what is significant. The sense we make of the past is through the stories we tell today.

Drawing on the power of Bruner's (1990) argument that mind and experience are cultural narratives, our perceptions of experience (and the processes of remembering them) are ordered by narratives and narrative schemas. No conversation we have is solely in the present. We draw on our memories of past experiences in order to make sense of the present, but the very act of remembering and making sense is according to cultural stories and conventions. We strive to make sense of our experience, but we can only do this through the cultural symbols and systems we live in through the narratives we construct and by which we are constructed. As Ellis (2004) states, "[t]here's nothing more theoretical than a good story" (p. 23).

Co/Autoethnography

There are three central ideas behind co/autoethnography. In this section we have argued for co/autoethnography as an important method for researching our own teaching practices on the following grounds.

1. We are more than teachers. Our self-characterization always involves more than one facet of our identity, though it privileges certain parts of our identity depending on context. Identity is complex.
2. We are defined by others. Our identities as teacher educators are socially constructed. To be a teacher educator at this time in this culture has a specific cultural meaning. People react to us, and we respond based on this cultural understanding of what it means to be a teacher educator. This is not totally determined of course. There are multiple meanings and we have room within these meanings to change them, but they are there and they are constraining. Identity is cultural.
3. We are defined by our relationships with others. A fundamental tenet of our approach to self-study is that it is collaborative in a deep sense. Dialogue and conversation are vital to us in understanding ourselves and our practice. This is based on several positions concerning the nature of the self, knowledge, and the role of language in constructing knowledge. Identity is dialogical.

With this background in place, we now turn to consider how we carry out our co/autoethnographic research.

Co/Autoethnography Is Rooted in Collaboration

As we mention above, co/autoethnography relies on collaboration between at least two people. In our experience, this relationship must develop over time. We had been working together for 2 years before we began to develop our research methodology. We realized early on in our work that we had much in common. We both were

influenced by feminist pedagogy and had studied and taught issues of language and literacy. We shared commitments to urban education and social justice teaching and had both been urban teachers in London and New York, respectively. We were both interested in the use of autobiography and personal narrative as vehicles to explore beliefs about teaching and learning. While this commitment to autobiography could probably be attributed to our interests in feminist teaching, language and literacy, we would also contend that it was an instinctual pedagogical choice as much as it was deliberate. Working together, we also acknowledged that we were quite different: Lesley is a philosopher of education, and Monica formally studied language, reading and culture, and qualitative research. We grew up in different parts of the world, during different decades, immersed in different cultures and experiences. On the other hand, our collaboration also seems to work because we share a similar work ethic. We are doers. We tend to volunteer and are not afraid to get our hands dirty. We would guess that this is the case for many teacher educators. We knew some of this before we began our work together, but truthfully we learned a tremendous amount about each other once we began our research together.

Our writing styles, however, were quite different, stemming from our different disciplines, although that has changed some over the past 8 years. Through insisting on writing together, rather than allocating sections of each piece we write, we have developed a collaborative voice. This was not an easy, smooth, or quick process but our trust seemed to navigate us through the rough spots. We have combined a variety of stances, including personal narratives, philosophical argument, theoretical discussion, research review, and qualitative research to form our collaborative voice. This voice is not a fully blended voice nor is it made up of our two voices alongside one another. More specifically, we each write pieces for every section of a text. We write them alone at our own computers and then talk about what we have written and we write together either face to face or over the telephone with a shared text in front of us. In some ways, writing collaboratively has liberated us from some of the stress and anxiety that we feel when we are writing solo. This process of writing collaboratively is essential to our analysis and explanation. We will talk in more detail about the actual writing process below.

The Social Contexts for Co/Autoethnography

Over the past 8 years, we have been conducting co/autoethnographic research. Our methodology has morphed and changed to accommodate changes in our pedagogical contexts and has been facilitated by emerging technologies. This malleability is one of the more important characteristics of co/autoethnography. We began developing this methodology as we worked together in an education department at a small liberal arts college on Staten Island. Most of the narrative sharing and analysis took place face to face, in our offices, classrooms, public schools, and homes, at lunch, and in the parking lots. These conversations continued over the phone but we had the luxury of relying on time together to participate in the research. Our encounters were taken for granted, however. We knew we would see each other each day. There was no need for scheduling.

Unfortunately, the end of that year brought change. Monica moved to a larger state university, in a curriculum and teaching department. Because of the proximity of the schools, we were able to continue to meet face to face. This time, however, we scheduled bi-weekly meetings that spilled over beyond the allotted time. We also relied more heavily on the telephone between our meetings. After all, we were teaching every day and had much to share and analyze.

A new year brought another new situation. This time Lesley moved down to Georgia to begin teaching at a small women's college. We fretted over whether or not we would be able to find a way to continue our collaborative research. But we found ways to support ourselves and ways to continue working with other. We realized we relied on each other just as much in our efforts to understand and improve our practice. We began to depend more heavily on the telephone, as well as email narratives and drafts of collaborative writing. Although we are not in constant communication, our pedagogical work drove the frequency of our discussions. We laugh now at our primitive use of email, shared files with italicized responses, and extended phone calls. (We had some mishaps with email where only one of us could receive files from the other.) We were always on the look out for ways to make our communication more effective.

Of late we have discovered and experimented with two important tools. We used and rejected *track changes* (a word processing function that allows the writer to track any comments and changes made in the paper). At first we saw it as an excellent way for us to respond to narratives and add text to a shared piece. But we became frustrated with the tool since it was antithetical to our method. The imposing style and color felt judgmental as if we were editing one another's writing rather than building it together. We have been working with *google.docs,* a shared writing program on Google that allows access by invitation only. This Internet format for writing complements our research style in that it lends itself well to collaborative writing. As a shared work processor, we each open the same file and either write individually or write together while on the phone. If both people have the file open, you can watch each other add and edit text. As we become more fluent with this technology, we use it to both share our individual narratives and write collaboratively.

But even with this interactive and engaging technology, we continue to have long, extensive phone conversations. The beginnings of these conversations are maintenance of our personal and professional relationships. We share personal updates as well as reports or frustrations about our teaching. We rely on each other to process through our personal and professional lives. We do not know if we could do co/autoethnography without talk. It is really an essential piece of our process.

Recognizing Emerging Co/Autoethnographic Questions

Our co/autoethnographic questions can address a variety of different scenarios and content. Sometimes, our questions emerge "from a frustration, a practice puzzle or a contradiction in a setting" (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007, p. 125). These questions tend to feel like typical action research, practitioner research, or self-study.

In this case, we are looking for ways to explicitly improve our practice or our understanding of our teaching. Other times, we find ourselves grappling with more abstract concepts or situations that are not necessarily solution directed. We may discover new perspectives, or view a narrative from a different light, be led to a whole slew of new questions, or feel more confused and uncertain. Co/autoethnographic questions do not necessarily lead to linear investigations. They are at times messy and complicated and take extensive time to articulate and contextualize. Often we write about a particular topic and then feel as if we have come to a dead end and need a new direction to follow. We abandon strands of narratives that are examining a particular question that does not seem to take us anywhere. Our questions are generated from our dynamic situations as teacher educators and as people. As messy people, we can at times have messy questions.

For example, we are currently conducting a co/autoethnography examining the roots of our methodology. We are examining our history of researching language and literacy to better understand where we currently stand on co/autoethnography. This particular co/autoethnography emerged not so much from a problem or challenge in the classroom but from an appreciation that for each of us our particular understanding of literacy and language has profoundly affected our approaches to teaching and self-study. This has been a background to our work since we began our collaboration 8 years ago, yet, until now we have not explicitly addressed it. A co/autoethnographic project is an investigation into the teaching relationship, and in line with other qualitative methods, need not start with a fully and carefully defined research question. It can start with a general interest in an issue and curiosity about its relevance to our practice. Thus, while we have sometimes started with a problem in our past or present, we do not think of teaching as solely concerned with problem solving. We start with the idea that teaching is a relationship that occurs in a social, historical, and cultural context.

Consistent Qualities of Co/Autoethnographic Method

Throughout our different co/autoethnographic research studies, several consistent characteristics have emerged. Co/autoethnographic research is generated from the lived experiences, past and present, of teacher educators. We explore these lived experiences collaboratively with at least two researchers through the cyclical sequence of a variety of literacy practices including (a) writing, re-writing, and sharing personal narratives; (b) talk and discussion before and after the narratives are shared; (c) reflective writing and response; (d) reading theory, research, and other narratives; (e) more discussion and talk; (f) collaborative analysis through talk and writing; and finally, (g) writing up research through individually writing, talk, collaborative writing, talk, and collaborative editing. Our process does not necessarily follow this sequential order. It ebbs and flows depending on upon our particular context and topic of exploration. These literacy practices generate our data for analysis. We now describe these seven practices in a holistic fashion which mirrors the

actual process. To describe each of these seven practices discretely would falsely represent our method. To illustrate our method we shall use our on-going self-study on language and literacy.

We started this self-study as a result of thinking about how we came to co/autoethnography and realized that while we 'knew' each other's background in language and literacy, we had never explored the impact of this shared lens on our work together in self-study. In short, the topic initially came up in conversation about self-study. We talked about it several times before deciding to explore it more systematically. We began to write, keeping in mind that for us, as co/autoethnographers, there is no such thing as writing autobiographically in the sense of purely personal writing. Our autobiographies are autoethnographies because social and political interpretations are built into the autobiographical narrative. We ground ourselves in the belief that our thinking and writing are deeply informed by the idea that the self is socially and culturally constructed. In this self-study we started with the question/idea of exploring how our current practice in language and literacy is informed by the social and intellectual context of our early experiences of teaching. So, for example, as we started writing we not only reflected on our past readings but more importantly on our lived experiences in urban communities. As we unpacked our particular understanding of the role of language and literacy in our practice, these past experiences naturally emerged as significant.

We respond to each other's initial writing by writing into each other's work. This stage is exploratory and affirmative and looks like a conversation. We respond in a variety of ways. Sometimes we are direct when we ask questions for clarification. Sometimes we give a personal response when we react in a true aesthetic fashion by sharing emotional connections. Sometimes a response is triggered by links with our own experience. Sometimes we give a response that shows how the writing is opening new perspectives for us. Sometimes the response is associative and helps us explore alternative avenues. These written responses lead us into many phone conversations. It is not enough for us just to write, we need to talk in real time throughout the process.

Then we start to write together. We post our combined document on *google.docs* and then, as we are now, we write while cradling phones on our necks, talking to each other. We take turns writing while we are talking. We read aloud and conduct the rest of the self-study, including data analysis and reporting, collaboratively. This way of working has evolved to meet our particular needs. For others, different modes of collaboration may well work better.

Our process is messy. Sometimes the writing flows and other times it is labored. Our conversations often help us to get through tensions. Below is an excerpt of our most recent co/autoethnography on language and literacy. We provide this snapshot of the initial writing and response stage of a co/autoethnography.

Lesley: *I have been reading Harold Rosen again and it reminded me of my first and foremost stance to language – that is a personal/political form of expression. Kids in London, at least then in the early '80 s, had the right to tell their stories in their language and to be heard. It is integral to*

the anti-racist and anti-sexist education which is at the core of what I do although I see my approach has changed over the years.We really worked with the students not only on helping them tell their stories but understanding the structures of society and working with them. A lot of that work had to do with showing students the political nature of language (who gets to speak; who gets to tell you who is right and who is wrong; who gets to tell you that your story is not worth telling). A lot of the work we did was on self-respect as an individual and as member of a class, and appreciating that you have to tell your story in order to understand other people's stories.

Monica: *My life has revolved around language. I know that sounds clichéd – well of course, language is all around us – but for me it is true. I have spent much of my life trying to figure out the language of others whether it was other children my age from different cultures, grown-ups, my own middle schoolers at the alternative school who came from a very different New York, or the gang girls in my dissertation, or even people I encounter socially. Deciphering language and communicating with others allows me in. I am always trying to break the code and be able to communicate as an outsider/insider and an insider/outsider. I am talking about the all encompassing Language: i.e. body, visual symbols and signs, words, music, art, dance, dialect, expressions, jargon, etc... I am talking about the language of the streets, of the market, of the club, of the world.*

These excerpts from our first narratives on language and literacy may look polished and smooth but in actuality we struggled to write them and they took several weeks of phone conversations to emerge. We each had difficulty thinking back to our beginning interests in language and literacy. It felt like so long ago. We had trouble separating our current beliefs from our past beliefs and yet we had faith that something about language and literacy began early on for us. We knew that our collaborative narrative method had roots from the past; we just could not find the proper way to express them. Our conversations over the course of those weeks helped us to plod through our discomfort. We realized that our language awareness was heightened when we starting teaching kids in urban communities. Ironically there was quite a bit of overlap in the themes of our pieces. As we wrote earlier, the more we write narratives about the past, the more we identify common experiences and perspectives. We have begun to trace our intellectual histories and find there are multiple intersections.

Tailoring the Data Collection Methods to Meet the Needs of the Co/Autoethnographic Study

As we illustrate above, our data collection methods are tailored to meet our contextual and pedagogical needs. We have adapted our data collection methods to our location as well as the scope of our studies. When we taught and lived in the same

location, we relied more heavily on face-to-face meetings, sharing narratives, discussing ideas, examining and analyzing data together, and organizing and writing research reports. In those days, we were also able to audio-record our discussions as another source of data. We used many of these data collection methods informally, as part of our day-to-day teaching and living. We view this as an extension of our daily lives as teachers where sharing narratives and discussing ideas were the primary means of support and community. These methods developed organically from our needs as teacher educators to find ways to learn about our teaching.

Over the past 6 years, during which we have lived and taught in different contexts within the United States, we have devised ways to continue these narrative sharings and conversations. Our data collection methods are more formalized, deliberate, and scheduled. No longer do we find ourselves in the restroom sharing stories. Rather we schedule deadlines for personal narrative sharings via email and *google.docs,* we organize times to have phone conversations to discuss narratives, share ideas, readings, theories, analysis, and writing format, and we schedule time to work on our studies. The vehicle of google.docs has been an enormous benefit as we now can work on the same piece together or individually. Also for scheduling, we use email, cell phones, text messaging, and land phone lines to communicate our plans. Barring a power outage, which we both experienced recently, our method is relatively smooth. Although we would prefer a more informal stance to our method, the value of our collaboration greatly exceeds the inconvenience of constantly scheduling. We are committed to this work and therefore make the time and effort to be productive together.

Although our written communication plays a vital role in our process, our talk and discussions are the most important methods of co/autoethnography. Without our discussions, there would be little deep analysis. It is often during our conversations that we discover or rethink our understandings of our teaching. This can take one conversation or often multiple conversations and some writing time around the same topic. We both take field notes either during the phone conversations or directly afterward so that we can record the essential points and the process of getting to those ideas. Our talk serves two purposes: it is a way that we generate data but it is also a method of data analysis.

Co/Autoethnographic Data Analysis

The goal of our analysis is to peel back the layers of our teaching and teaching identities to reveal new insights into how our past informs our present and future. We strive to deconstruct, as Anderson et al. (2007) write, “the dualisms of theory and practice, subject and object, and research and teaching” (p. 25). Our analysis is collaborative, reflective, and participatory where we both are involved in the analysis of the data. Our data collection method is recursive; as we collect the data we also attempt to analyze them. We analyze the data inductively by means of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As we search for

common patterns and themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), we also check to make sure that they are identified as emerging by both of us. We triangulate the data, looking for patterns in multiple data sources and across both of our narratives and discussions, to ensure validity (Gordon, 1980). Once we have identified the patterns, we return to the literature to see if there is consistency with other research. Our goal is to develop a theory from which to continue teaching.

We look at the data from multiple lenses: researcher/researched, subject/object, and insider/outsider. We believe these varying perspectives lead to trustworthiness. Much of this analysis occurs through examining the data, theorizing by writing collaboratively, and talking, whether it is face to face or on the telephone. The value of our analytical talk again reminds us of why we do this type of research together. Without one another, we might not be able to find the same types of insights. Specifically, we move backwards, forwards, and sideways from reading individual narratives and the responses that have been written into them, talking, and theorizing and analyzing the narratives through writing collaboratively. The direction of this spiral movement is determined by where we are in our findings. For example, after analyzing some of the narratives we may decide that we need to revisit the literature and/or the first narratives written on a particular topic. Narratives by their nature are open to multiple interpretations and fixing on one interpretation is superficial. We do this because we need to report on our research for the moment, but we are aware that an interpretation can change with time. Knowing this encourages us to reflect on the data over long periods of time so that multiple interpretations can emerge. The interpretation serves the purpose for which it was constructed. There is an important sense in which no co/autoethnography is ever complete, although the findings of each co/autoethnography can be valid.

Conclusion

The use of co/autoethnography acknowledges the personal while recognizing the social construction of our identity and practices. This leads to a stronger learning experience for us and our students by making explicit the relational and cultural aspects of teaching. This has led to concrete changes in our practice such as an increased focus on trust-building and a willingness to honestly grapple with the complexity of teaching identity with our students.

There are challenges with this approach to our own practice. By working with the personal, by bringing it into our teaching, we risk opening ourselves to our students by admitting into the classroom a more expansive understanding of professional identity. While this can be uncomfortable for us and our students, it is necessary in order to embrace the complex human dynamic that is teaching and learning.

As all self-study researchers know, researching one's own practice is never straight forward or easy. Investigating one's self in relation to one's teaching where one focuses on one's past, one's relation to others, and one's relation to cultural norms, as one does in co/autoethnography, can seem daunting. One thing it is not,

however, is self-indulgent. The focus while apparently on the teacher self, is always on the student and how to create a meaningful learning environment. When this hard work is undertaken with others it can help us make sense of our experience, and lace our conversations with even more significance.

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