Academic Autoethnographies

Inside Teaching in Higher Education

Daisy Pillay, Inbanathan Naicker and
Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan (Eds.)

SensePublishers

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SENSE PUBLISHERS
ROTTERDAM/BOSTON/TAIPEI

A C.I.P. record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN: 978-94-6300-397-1 (paperback)
ISBN: 978-94-6300-398-8 (hardback)
ISBN: 978-94-6300-399-5 (e-book)

Published by: Sense Publishers,
P.O. Box 21858,
3001 AW Rotterdam,
The Netherlands
https://www.sensepublishers.com/

All chapters in this book have undergone peer review.

Cover image by Chris de Beer

Printed on acid-free paper

We dedicate this book to the memory of our dear friend and colleague, Liz Harrison, who sowed the seeds of *Academic Autoethnographies: Inside Teaching in Higher Education*.

We also dedicate the book to our inspiring mentor, Claudia Mitchell, who spread the seeds.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As editors of *Academic Autoethnographies: Inside Teaching in Higher Education*, we are grateful for the assistance of many people. We would like to acknowledge support and grant funding from the University of KwaZulu-Natal's University Teaching and Learning Office (UTLO). We especially thank the UTLO director, Rubby Dhunpath, for his encouragement and confidence in us. We also thank Moira Richards for her meticulous and knowledgeable editorial assistance. We are appreciative of our postgraduate student assistant, Teboho Hlao, who helped to coordinate the book project activities. We are also grateful to the chapter authors for their innovative and courageous autoethnographic research and for their constructive peer review contributions. Furthermore, we would like to thank Theresa Chisanga and Michael Samuel for their expertise as peer reviewers. We also acknowledge Nithi Muthukrishna and Hyleen Mariaye for their willingness to serve as critical readers of the book. Special recognition goes to Claudia Mitchell, Naydene de Lange, and Rose Richards for sharing their insights and experiences at our *Academic Autoethnographies* workshop for book contributors. We are indebted to Michel Lokhorst and his team from Sense Publishers for enthusiastic support of this book. Lastly, we are particularly appreciative of Chris de Beer for the distinctive cover image, which shows a group of objects arranged as a conversation, with each object evoking a string of memories. This image reminds us of the imagination, serendipity, and creative interactions that nourish autoethnographic writing and research.

Daisy Pillay, Inbanathan Naicker and Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan

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DAISY PILLAY, INBANATHAN NAICKER AND
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The self becomes a crystal

INTRODUCING *ACADEMIC AUTOETHNOGRAPHIES*

Academic Autoethnographies: Inside Teaching in Higher Education advances scholarship on autoethnography as a demanding, often unsettling, and necessarily imaginative research methodology that can produce personally, professionally, and socially useful understandings of teaching and researching in higher education. The book invites readers into the private and public realms of higher education academics who teach and research across diverse disciplines and university contexts. *Academic Autoethnographies* is distinctive within the existing body of autoethnographic scholarship in that most of the research presented in this book has been done in relation to South African university settings. This research is complemented by contributions from Canadian and Swedish scholars who have brought their autoethnographies into dialogue with the South African voices that take the lead in the book.

Each chapter offers a unique, perspicacious, and invitational exploration of interrelationships between personal autobiographies, lived educational experiences, and wider social and cultural concerns (Chang, 2008; Grant, Short, & Turner, 2013). The book brings together seasoned and emerging scholars who have researched their own intellectual and emotional experiences and insights to generate textured, entangled portrayals of teaching in higher education. As a collective, these original autoethnographic research texts serve as an accessible and innovative methodological toolkit for critical inquiry into university educators' selves, experiences, and practices. They also illuminate recent and not so recent political, social, economic,

D. Pillay et al. (Eds.), Academic Autoethnographies, 1–17.

and technological developments in a rapidly changing university world (Edwards & Usher, 2008).

The editors of this book (Daisy, Inbanathan, and Kathleen) are based in a School of Education at a South African university where we teach and research in the academic specialisations of Teacher Development Studies (Daisy and Kathleen) and Educational Leadership and Management (Inbanathan). We are drawn together by a shared interest in self-reflexive research methodologies that necessitate examining, questioning, and theorising the lived experiences and selves of researchers (Pithouse-Morgan, Mitchell, & Pillay, 2014). Such self-reflexive methodologies include, but are not limited to, self-study of practice (Loughran, Hamilton, LaBoskey, & Russell, 2004; Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2015), narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and autoethnography (Chang, 2008; Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013). We also share a view that the use of literary and visual arts-based research methods, such as poetry and drawing, can assist us to gain insights into the texture, depth, and intricacy of lived educational experiences (see, for example, Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2014; van Laren et al., 2014).

Over the past few years, we have worked with colleagues on funded research projects that have resulted in co-publications (for instance, Naicker, Morojele, Pithouse-Morgan, Pillay, & Chikoko, 2014; Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2012; van Laren et al., 2014). We also co-supervise the research of a number of postgraduate students who are employing methodologies that require self-reflexivity. Our collaborative scholarship is strengthened by mutually supportive working relationships that have developed over time and have become central to the processes and outcomes of our research (Naicker et al., 2014). The sense of mutual trust and understanding that we share gives us confidence to take risks by trying out new ideas and creative research practices. The idea for *Academic Autoethnographies* came into being one day when we sat together and talked about what it was that we most wanted to learn more about as researchers and higher education teachers. What emerged from our conversation was that each of us felt the need for a deeper, more nuanced understanding of autoethnography and, in particular, its potential as a self-reflexive research methodology for higher education academics such as ourselves.

In this chapter, we begin by describing the peer review process that played a critical part in the development of *Academic Autoethnographies: Inside Teaching in Higher Education*. We go on to make visible our process of using the literary arts-based method of collective poetic inquiry to better understand our own learning from the chapters in this book. We explain how our individual learning was guided by particular research interests: academic identities (Daisy), academic leadership (Inbanathan), and methodological inventiveness (Kathleen). Next, we show how we brought our learnings into dialogue through a process of co-creating poetic portrayals of the diverse book chapters and of the book as whole. To conclude, we look beyond our own learning to offer a conceptual synthesis of the scholarly contributions and implications of the original research that is brought together in *Academic Autoethnographies*.

THE PEER REVIEW PROCESS

Fundamental to the development of this book was ensuring that quality standards for scholarly publication were observed. The peer review process began with a 1-day workshop for prospective book contributors to share aspects of their autoethnographic research for constructive advice from peers and to learn from expert guest presenters, Claudia Mitchell, Rose Richards, and Naydene de Lange. These three scholars shared insights gained from undertaking and supervising or mentoring autoethnographic research. They also engaged with contributors' questions on critical issues in autoethnography as research methodology, such as ethical complexities and responsibilities (see Ellis, 2007).

In the second stage of the peer review process we asked contributing authors or pairs of coauthors to read and respond to other chapter drafts that seemed to resonate with their own, but were written in relation to different university contexts. Our intention was to offer contributors alternative critical perspectives to help strengthen their final chapters. The review process was enhanced by participation from some academics who did not contribute chapters to the book but who had relevant expertise to review particular chapter drafts. The peer reviewers are acknowledged as "chapter consultants" at the end of each chapter in this book.

Drawing on the peer response guidelines that were used in Pithouse, Mitchell, and Moletsane (2009), the prompts for the peer review feedback were as follows:

- What do you find most interesting or significant about this draft? Why?
- Do you have any questions about this draft? (For example, any points that are unclear to you or that you think could be explained more fully.) Why?
- Do you have any particular suggestions for how the authors could enhance their discussion of issues such as:
    - the positioning of the autoethnography in terms of professional, disciplinary, socio-cultural, national, etcetera, contexts;
    - how self-reflexive learning and development happens through autoethnography;
    - using diverse approaches to autoethnography (for example, memory work, arts-based methods, poetic inquiry, narrative, dialogue as method, and so forth);
    - ethical concerns in engaging in autoethnography;
    - methodological challenges and complexities in engaging in autoethnography;
    - what difference the autoethnography might make—the "so-what?" question?

The peer review comments on each chapter were sent to us. As needed, we added editorial remarks for the purposes of additional guidance or clarification. We then sent the composite review feedback to each author or pair of coauthors, who adapted the chapters accordingly. To provide support and assistance where necessary, we were involved in ongoing communication with the authors as they revised their contributions.

A COLLECTIVE POETIC INQUIRY INTO THE AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC CHAPTERS

One of the arts-based research methods that we have been exploring together in our work with like-minded colleagues is collective poetic inquiry (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2014; Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2015). We have found that engaging in a process of co-composing poems can enhance and nuance our meaning making as a research team and can facilitate the growth of collective reflexivity, which we have termed "co-flexivity" (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2015). Thus, as an editorial team, we chose to use a collective poetic process to inquire into our learning from the original autoethnographic research that is communicated in the 11 other chapters in this book.

We began by individually composing a series of found poems through "finding" key words and phrases in the chapters and rearranging these words and phrases into poetic form (Butler-Kisber, 2005). We each composed 11 found poems, one poem per chapter. In accordance with the conventions of found poetry, when creating the poems we only used words or phrases from the chapters and did not add any of our own (Butler-Kisber, 2005). In looking for key words and phrases in the chapters, each of us was guided by a particular research interest. Daisy focused on issues of academic identities, Inbanathan looked for aspects of the chapters related to academic leadership, and Kathleen considered the methodological contributions of the chapters.

For consistency of form across the poems, we decided to use the format of a pantoum poem as an organisational device for each poem. We anticipated that the French Malaysian pantoum format with "its repetitive lines [that allow] for the repetition of salient or emotionally evocative themes" (Furman, Lietz, & Langer, 2006, p. 28) would assist us to identify and communicate what we saw as most striking and significant about each poem. We created pantoums using the following 3-stanza format:

Stanza 1:
Line 1
Line 2
Line 3
Line 4

Stanza 2:
Line 5 (repeat of line 2)
Line 6
Line 7 (repeat of line 4)
Line 8

Stanza 3:
Line 9 (repeat of line 6)
Line 10 (repeat of line 3)
Line 11 (repeat of line 8)
Line 12 (repeat of line 1)

Using this 3-stanza format meant that we were limited to six lines for each poem. We therefore had to be very discriminating about what we selected from each chapter. This process of deciding on the most revealing and enlightening words and phrases forced us to think deeply about what we were learning from the chapters in relation to our particular research interests (Furman & Dill, 2015). The painstaking process of combing each chapter for the most apt words and phrases made us conscious that, although the material for our found poems came from the chapters, our selection and arrangement of that material revealed as much, if not more, about our reading of the chapters as they did about the chapters themselves (Furman, 2004).

After we each crafted 11 pantoums, we then selected words and phrases from our own poems to create a summative poem. Our intention was to distil and convey the essence of our learning from the 11 chapters in relation to our research interests. For this purpose, we used the traditional Japanese poetic format of a tanka poem (Furman & Dill, 2015). In composing our tanka, we used a version of the tanka format that has five lines, with a 5/7/5/7/7 syllable count in the lines (Poets.org, 2004). We followed the traditional configuration of the tanka, which reflects a transition from examining an image in the first two lines to examining a personal response in the final two lines, with the third line marking the beginning of that shift in perspective (Poets.org, 2004). As Furman and Dill (2015) described, by using the tanka format, "in a few words, [we were able to] convey with emotional impact ideas or patterns present" in our 11 pantoums (p. 46). Each of us then used our own tanka to guide us in writing an explanation of our overall learning from the autoethnographic research portrayed in the diverse book chapters. In the section that follows, we present the tanka and our accompanying discussion of the book chapters in relation to our research interests as well as to the transitions and shifting perspectives that characterise the chapters.

Academic Identities

Putting Ourselves into Other Positions
– Daisy Pillay

Embrace the crystal
Scenic, meandering ascent
Ordinary becomes art
I become aware anew
Activist for social change

The chapters in this book reflect the different ways the authors make sense of academic identities through nonlinear, fragmentary selves they make visible in relation to others. The individual chapters offer emerging portrayals of self as complex, meandering, situational, and open to ongoing elucidations. In creative and serendipitous autoethnographic ways, the authors trace sources of their academic becomings—opening up the private–public to vulnerability and risk-taking. Embracing the multifacetedness of the academic self becomes an aesthetic

experience—a work of art, creating versions of self through writing, photographs, cellphilms,[1] and drawings. Each author composes "a life"—ambiguously moving in and out of self, blurring personal–social boundaries, blurring personal–cultural selves while navigating various academic positions at any one time, inside–outside of university settings.

The chapters are evocative and emotionally laden with experiences of negotiating changing academic positionings. As academic activists, questioning, challenging, and opening up beliefs, priorities, and knowledge, the authors engage in new opportunities and navigate various methodological routes with others in research relationships and communities (Hernandez & Ngunjiri, 2013). It is within those relationships and communities that power is reconfigured in productive ways, blurring personal–cultural experiences and personal–social meanings. This spatial-relational understanding of negotiation and positioning is helpful in making sense of the complexity of teaching experiences in higher education. The idea that the private–public of our academic selves is not a static construct, and that this bond is continually challenged, is difficult to understand. But as academics, we need to be able see through our fragmentary selves in transition and embrace the in-betweenness of change, fluidity, and instability (Usher & Edwards, 1994).

Academic Leadership

A Cosmopolitan Vision
– Inbanathan Naicker

Influence thinking
I had to be strategic
Transgress boundaries
Re-imagining transformation
I aspired to lead

Leadership, a term in vogue over the past 20 years (as opposed to management), is about change, development, and movement (Townsend & MacBeath, 2011). It incorporates vision setting and influence. Within educational institutions (e.g., schools, colleges, and universities), the practical activity of leadership takes place on a daily basis (Bush, 2010) where leadership as practice becomes part of the social fabric of organisations. It is about the daily collaborations and exchanges that occur between leaders, followers, and the situations within which they are located. Leadership practice is about the repertoire of behaviours that leaders harness and deploy in their "moment-by-moment interactions in a particular place and time" (Harris, Moos, Moller, Robertson, & Spillane, 2007, p. 3). It encompasses the lived actions of leaders and the manoeuvres they engage in order to accomplish the vision, mission, and goals for their organisation (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). In order to understand and make meaning of leadership practice, researching practice is an imperative. To research practice, Kempster and Stewart (2010) called

for innovative methodologies to be employed in order to deepen our understanding of leadership practice. To this end, Starr (2014) advocated autoethnography as an effective means to study the practice of leadership.

The different chapters in the book foreground through autoethnography the complex, contextual, and contested nature of leadership and leadership practice. From leadership being viewed as a constricted heteronomous space where there is marginalisation and a struggle for inclusion, to embracing leadership that is invitational and authentic in order to transform thinking, autoethnography has provided leaders (the authors) with "a self-narrative that critiques the situations of the self with others in [diverse] social contexts" (Spry, 2001, p. 710) which, for Chang (2008, p. 52), were "keys to self-understanding" and "self-transformation." It has allowed leaders (the authors) to be reflexive about what they do and the moves they make by "complexifying" their thinking about their leadership to "deliberately expose contradictions, doubts, dilemmas and possibilities" (Vickers, 2010, p. 275). The practice of leadership is not confined to formally appointed leaders such as deans, research leaders, and heads of schools. Rather, leadership can be stretched across institutions to include informal leaders (persons who are not formally appointed to leadership positions) such as teachers (lecturers) in higher education (Spillane, 2006). Several of the chapters highlight how the authors are playing a teacher leadership role in their lecture rooms and halls by engaging in creative pedagogies, transforming pedagogic spaces, inculcating collaborative values, becoming agents of social change, mentoring students and fellow colleagues, and more importantly becoming self-reflexive practitioners.

Methodological Inventiveness

> *To Produce Something Valuable*
> – Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan
>
> Imagination
> Creative interactions
> Serendipity
> My self becomes an art space
> Inviting you to enter

The diverse chapters in this book are characterised by the authors' imaginative engagement to awaken creative—often arts-based, collaborative, and transdisciplinary—modes of researching that push the boundaries of what counts as new knowing within and beyond the realm of autoethnography. The chapters illustrate "methodological inventiveness" by making visible how the authors "[have taken] an unconventional, innovative direction in their research [through employing] their powers of creativity in surprising ways" (Dadds & Hart, 2001, p. 169). Significantly, as Claudia Mitchell cautions in her chapter in this book, such methodological inventiveness is not "innovation for the sake of innovation."

Rather, it is innovation for the sake of enhancing and nuancing interplay between inner and outer dialogues, personal, cultural, and educational implications, self-understanding and social change. Through creative means, the chapters offer rich, embodied portraits of educational experiences that are interwoven in dense tapestries of relationships with people, places, and histories and yet are also shifting, fluid, and alive with transformative possibility. These vibrant portrayals invite readers to become involved in the researchers' lived dilemmas and discoveries in embodied and empathic ways. They also reveal how methodological inventiveness can sometimes enter into research experience in surprising ways, and that it might vanish just as suddenly if the researcher is not paying attention or is not open to the unexpected. This openness to spontaneity and serendipity is offset by a mindfulness of methodological guideposts that have been established by the autoethnographic scholarly community (see, for example, Chang, 2008; Ellis & Adams, 2014). It is such balance between structure and openness that provides the necessary orientation and momentum for an autoethnographic inquiry.

Dadds and Hart (2001) highlighted how imaginative engagement to stimulate alternative methodological modes could contribute to generative ways of knowing, with wider implications for social change. A generative research stance is inspired by "a calling to contribute to the well-being of others, particularly younger people" (Pithouse-Morgan & van Laren, 2012, p. 417). Of course, in autoethnography the central research participant is the researcher herself but as the chapters demonstrate, autoethnographic researchers look through the multifaceted lens of the self to consider issues of wider sociocultural significance beyond the self. And, as Ball (2012) pointed out, the development of such a generative research stance is often accompanied by a concomitant growth in methodological inventiveness: "As researchers move toward generativity, their internal changes are reflected externally in their changing research practices—as it becomes more inventive, more responsive" (p. 289). Each chapter in this book demonstrates a movement towards generativity as the authors look inward and outward to question how they are moved to act as researchers and educators, and what the possible educational consequences and legacies of those actions may be. The chapters also show how such generative insights develop through the process of autoethnographic writing itself. It is in finding imaginative ways to communicate our insights with other people that these insights deepen and broaden, while simultaneously inviting responses from others. Taken as a whole, the autoethnographic chapters in this book exemplify a methodological stance that was aptly described by Elliot Eisner (2004):

> It is an educational [research] culture that has a greater focus on becoming than on being, places more value on the imaginative than on the factual, assigns greater priority to valuing than to measuring, and regards the quality of the journey as more educationally significant than the speed at which the destination is reached. (p. 10)

A COLLECTIVE POETIC PORTRAYAL OF THE AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC CHAPTERS

Once each member of the editorial team had crafted her or his individual poems, we met to bring our varied readings of the chapters into dialogue by creating one composite pantoum for each chapter. We worked chapter by chapter, looking across the three pantoums for each chapter. We projected these poems onto a screen and selected two lines from each poem. We then used the six chosen lines to co-compose a new pantoum for the chapter. In co-creating these poems, we typed in a Word document that was projected onto the screen. This helped us to see the emergence of every composite poem. We worked carefully with the six chosen lines to find the most visually and rhythmically pleasing configuration for each poem. This involved removing words that seemed less important, adding punctuation for emphasis, reconstructing lines by reordering words, as well as rearranging the order of lines. This collective poetry-making process took a day of intense, collective focus and resulted in the 11 co-composed pantoums that follow.

I Speak to the Moment
– Inspired by the words of Liz Harrison

A stranger in a strange land
Miss Harrison, not Ms or Liz?
Networks of collegial support
Visions of a brighter future

Miss Harrison, not Ms or Liz?
I go back in my history
Visions of a brighter future
I speak to the moment

I go back in my history
Networks of collegial support
I speak to the moment
A stranger in a strange land

Moving my Gaze
– Inspired by the words of Thelma Rosenberg

Uncomfortable vulnerability
Conversations …
Stages of uncertainty
A meandering ascent

Conversations …
Moving my gaze
A meandering ascent
Restoring my vision

Moving my gaze
Stages of uncertainty
Restoring my vision
Uncomfortable vulnerability

A Rich Tapestry
– Inspired by the words of Chris de Beer

Impromptu interactions, creative impulses
A rich tapestry, a dense conversation
Aspects of my creative self
Subtle, inexpressible and layered

A rich tapestry, a dense conversation
Stage managing collaborations
Subtle, inexpressible and layered
Realisations about creative selves

Stage managing collaborations
Aspects of my creative self
Realisations about creative selves
Impromptu interactions, creative impulses

Private becomes Public
– Inspired by the words of Lasse Reinikainen and Heléne Zetterström Dahlqvist

Studying inwards
Thinking differently
Ordinary becomes art
Private becomes public

Thinking differently
We found new spaces
Private becomes public
To inspire social change

We found new spaces
Ordinary becomes art
To inspire social change
Studying inwards

To Discover Connections
– Inspired by the words of Sizakele Makhanya

Values give me direction
Creativity, trust and freedom

One person guides the other
To produce something valuable

Creativity, trust and freedom
I value these …
To produce something valuable
To discover connections

I value these …
One person guides the other
To discover connections
Values give me direction

I Took a Risk
– Inspired by the words of Delysia Norelle Timm

I took a risk
I observed my self
Retracing pain and brokenness
Felt in my whole being

I observed my self
Uncovering deep reserves of intuition
Felt in my whole being
I had to be resilient

Uncovering deep reserves of intuition
Retracing pain and brokenness
I had to be resilient
I took a risk

The Picture Looks Different
– Inspired by the words of Lesley Wood

An advocate of new ideas
An activist for change
Join me in stepping out
Becoming other-centred

An activist for change
The picture looks different
Becoming other-centred
Inviting you to enter

The picture looks different
Join me in stepping out

Inviting you to enter
An advocate of new ideas

Transforming the Text
– Inspired by the words of Robert J. Balfour

Identity constricted
Disclosure?
Safe spaces?
Tenuous … ambiguous …

Disclosure?
Transforming the text
Tenuous … ambiguous …
Nuancing difference

Transforming the text
Safe spaces?
Nuancing difference
Identity constricted

Creative Enactment
– Inspired by the words of Bert Olivier

To become whole again
I chose storytelling
Creative enactment
Made possible by the novel

I chose storytelling
With unpredictable results
Made possible by the novel
Enjoyment!

With unpredictable results
Creative enactment
Enjoyment!
To become whole again

I Can Never Walk Away
– Inspired by the words of Rose Richards

I am a long-term survivor
Voices of my experience dialogue
A fragmentary, raggedy story
Challenging the status quo

Voices of my experience dialogue
We should live what we teach
Challenging the status quo
I can never walk away

We should live what we teach
A fragmentary, raggedy story
I can never walk away
I am a long-term survivor

I Become Aware Anew
– Inspired by the words of Claudia Mitchell

Doing something different
Serendipity and making-do
I see spaces transformed
A footpath becomes an art space

Serendipity and making-do
Building collaborative relationships
A footpath becomes an art space
I become aware anew

Building collaborative relationships
I see spaces transformed
I become aware anew
Doing something different

After we had created a composite pantoum for each chapter, we decided to fashion a collective tanka from our three individual tanka. We used words from our three tanka to craft one poem to communicate the heart of our mutual learning as an editorial team. We titled the poem, "Creative Meanderings."

Creative Meanderings

Imagination
Ordinary becomes art
Serendipity
Inviting you to enter
The self becomes a crystal

The "Creative Meanderings" poem expresses our understanding that academic autoethnographies show us the fluidity, ambiguity, and complexity of who we are and what we do as academics, teachers, and researchers. As we use creative means to look through the multidimensional lens of the academic self to better understand human

culture in relation to lived educational experience, the self becomes translucent. Like a prism or crystal, when light moves through the multifaceted self it separates into a spectrum of colours that illuminate and transform seemingly ordinary aspects of human experience, allowing researchers and audience to see anew. As the 13th-century Zen master, Dogen, explained, "We study the self to forget the self. When you forget the self you become one with the ten thousand things" (as cited in Snyder, 2004, p. 30).

LOOKING FORWARD AND OUTWARD THROUGH AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC LENS

In this chapter, we, as an editorial team, have made visible our learning about academic autoethnographies. We have seen how the methodological inventiveness that is required by autoethnography can evoke creative research practices that stimulate the imagination and deepen the insights of both the researcher or author and the audience or reader. These creative research practices become catalysts for, and are invigorated by, intuition and spontaneity while methodological guideposts offered by the autoethnographic scholarly community provide indispensable orientation as researchers move into the unknown. Despite the foregrounding of the self or "auto," autoethnography is not solipsistic or narcissistic. The contingent, fragmentary selves that are made visible become multifaceted, translucent lenses through which to make new and generative meanings of complex cultural phenomena, with wider implications for social change.

Overall, *Academic Autoethnographies: Inside Teaching in Higher Education* invites readers to experience autoethnographic research as a challenging, complex, and potentially transformative methodology for facilitating sociocultural understandings of academic selves and of teaching in higher education. The book will be useful to specialists in the field of higher education and to those in other academic domains who are interested in self-reflexive and creative research methodologies and methods. The sociocultural, educational, and methodological insights communicated by this book will be valuable for scholars both within and beyond South African university contexts.

The processes of discovery that are demonstrated in each chapter also point to the potential of autoethnography as a generative mode of what Webster-Wright (2009) called "authentic professional learning . . . [that encourages] a spirit of critical inquiry where professionals can gain insight into their own learning and the assumptions they hold about their practice" (p. 272). To this we would add that autoethnography as a mode of authentic professional learning in higher education can facilitate critical insights into the beliefs and assumptions we hold about our academic selves and about the selves of the others with whom we interact. Autoethnography has potential to deepen and extend our understandings of lived educational experiences through the articulation and acknowledgment of how selves are sociocultural, political, and historical. As C. Wright Mills reminds us, "Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both" (1959, p. 3).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Chapter consultants: Bert Olivier, Rose Richards and Thelma Rosenberg.

NOTE

[1] For an explanation of cellphilms, see Claudia Mitchell's chapter in this book, "Autoethnography as a Wide-Angle Lens on Looking (Inward and Outward): What Difference Can This Make to Our Teaching?"

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LIZ HARRISON

2. A TINKER'S QUEST

Embarking on an Autoethnographic Journey in Learning "Doctoralness"

> As we see our face, figure, and dress in the glass, and are interested in them because they are ours, and pleased or otherwise with them according as they do or do not answer to what we should like them to be, so in imagination we perceive in another's mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on, and are variously affected by it.
>
> (Cooley, 1902, p. 184)

INTRODUCTION

I think of myself as a tinker. Specifically, as an educator, I think of myself as a tinker-thinker. The word *tinker* refers to an itinerant, a gypsy, or one who enjoys experimenting with things or a travelling repairer of useful items. The word also refers to random unplanned work or activities. In my work and teaching, the more I engage with what makes learning possible, the further away from a well-defined occupational identity I seem to travel. In my forties, I discovered the possibility of "being an academic" after completing a master's degree and beginning to toy with the idea of doctoral study. I am asking what it means to be "academic," a doctoral candidate or student or graduate in territories opened by critical postmodernists where a central question is, "What is knowledge and whose knowledge counts?" This chapter is a tale of identity construction and finding a sense of purpose in South African higher education. It explores the contribution of knowledge construction to the potential selves that are available to me, and vice versa. Knowledge construction is considered in several senses: in the way being knowledgeable, as a characteristic, is put together and meaning made by an individual, a family, a social group, and institution, and a country, over time and space, in order to make sense of a lived world. In another sense, I am attempting to look at what processes occur as the valuing, judicial-political-economic-academic eye reconsiders and reconstructs the knowledge creation process. What does it mean and what value does it hold for humanity?

D. Pillay et al. (Eds.), Academic Autoethnographies, 19–32.

LEARNING "DOCTORALNESS"

> The temporal paradox of the subject is such that, of necessity, we must lose the perspective of a subject already formed in order to account for our own becoming. That 'becoming' is not simple or a continuous affair, but an uneasy practice of repetition and its risks, compelled yet incomplete, wavering on the horizon of social being. (Butler, 1997, p. 30)

A good teacher, I have come to believe, is the ultimate salesperson: She sells notions, aspirations, and ideas. She uncovers the need, sources a solution—maximising the benefits and minimising the costs. She negotiates. She persuades her customers to believe that she knows and is right about what is right for them. And they leave without any physical artefact to show for the transaction. Thinking about a teacher as a salesperson seems appropriate in the current context of globalisation and the increasingly managerialist policy discourses around governance in higher education.

Today I, as a tinker-thinker, am selling mirrors. Yesterday I sold cosmetics and tomorrow, perhaps, I will sell snake oil again. The mirrors I sell today represent ideas of self—stock that I have acquired on my thought-journey towards completing my doctorate: an autoethnography (Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2004; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Tedlock, 2005) about acquiring a doctoral identity. Does such a thing as a doctoral identity exist? Is gaining a doctorate simply about the next rung on the career ladder or does it represent more? If so what is that thing? Is it only a thing or many?

A doctorate gives an individual a "right of way" in most social contexts and "such people assume their privileged position, not realising that other identities might be silenced in their presence" (Burkitt, 2008, p. 4). When I started thinking about my doctorate, I had to deal with the question of why it would be a valuable and worthy thing to do. I was already wrestling with the notion of the value of being an academic in South Africa and, in the process, confronting ideas that had not even crossed my mind at the simplest level in 10 years of teaching in a higher education institution: Why is it important to read, critique, evaluate, and persuade in academic forms? Why is it important to teach others to do this and in this particular form? Who cares? And, more suspiciously, why do they care?

I have chosen autoethnography as the methodology through which I will try to answer my own questions about how a doctoral identity is constructed and why I have constructed it in the ways I have. Through this methodology, I will raise questions about what having a doctorate might mean in South Africa in the 21st century. I see autoethnography as a subset of self-study, in the same way that autobiography might be. Both self-study and autoethnography make lived experience central to analysis and require the researcher to be reflexively oriented towards social change. Whereas much of the current work on self-study has come out of the field of education and is "related to the idea of studying the 'self' of teaching as a specific activity of teachers focusing on their own teaching practices" (Mitchell, Weber, & O'Reilly-Scanlon, 2005, p. 2), autoethnography has its roots in sociology and social anthropology. Tedlock (2005, p. 467) suggested that autoethnography emerged

as researchers attempted to "reflect on and engage with their own participation within an ethnographic frame" in an "attempt to heal the split between the public and private realms by connecting the autobiographical impulse (the gaze inward) with the ethnographic impulse (the gaze outward)." In this chapter, I reflect on the process and the meaning of doctoral learning from my own insider perspective as a learner in the doctoral process. This chapter also serves as a preliminary part of the autoethnography that I am undertaking for my doctoral study.

Simply put, "autoethnography refers to writing about the personal and its relationship to the culture" (Ellis, 2004, p. 37). As Heewon Chang (2008) pointed out, autoethnography has been defined in multiple ways by many practitioners, ranging from those favouring an attempt at objective analysis of culture (for example, Anderson, 2006), to those embracing more descriptive or performative storytelling. Bochner and Ellis (2002) showed how autoethnographies can vary in emphasis around three axes: the self (auto), culture (ethno), and the research process (graphy). My aim is to write an autoethnography "that is ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation" (Chang, 2008, p. 48). I am questioning the role of my culture in education and vice versa through my own narrative (the primary data), using ethnographic texts such as journals (which I started keeping in 2002 when I felt that I could possibly start exploring the idea of a "doing a doctorate"), photographs, the accounts of others, and e-mails. These texts are used as triggers to enable me to story my educational experiences and the context in which they occurred and are occurring. Methodologically, it is in my writing and self-analysis that I am able to see culture at work and to question implicit assumptions. My storying of the texts and artefacts of daily life gives expression to the discourses at play in doctoral education and insight into the cultural structures that sustain and are sustained by these discourses.

My account of learning to be a doctoral graduate, and therefore, of learning "doctoralness," or that level of knowledge work currently accepted as worthy of a doctorate, will enable the "back and forth gaze" inward towards the personal and outward to the social, marrying the private and the public realms (Tedlock, 2005, p. 467). My exploration is of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space of interaction (personal/social), continuity (past, present, future), and situation (place) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50) in my experience of doctoral learning. The auto part of autoethnography, my story of becoming, provides access to a view of a culture (English and white) which, at face value, continues to dominate the operation of education in South Africa. This investigation includes an interrogation of linguistic and discursive agency (Butler, 1990) and also highlights class barriers to epistemological access to graduate status that may be compounded by other challenges (see Conolly et al., 2009). I believe my social position as linguistically and economically privileged whilst being part of a political minority in South Africa places me in a liminal space that makes it possible for me to make overt some implicit assumptions about doctoral education and to explore possible implications for African ways of knowing in higher education.

A TINKER-THINKER'S TALE

I am a member of a doctoral (PhD) support group called PaperHeaDs, established in 2001. The group has no direct institutional affiliation and its members range in age from early 30s to early 60s, and all are women academics. All of us could be considered "insiders" to the academic discourses (Gee, 1996) of higher education in South Africa because our work experience is so closely related to our doctoral studies. Our unique positions as both learners and educators within higher education offer a lens through which to look at how academic learning might be constructed.

Through my conversations with my fellow PaperHeaDs, I have come to see that the title of "Doctor" is valuable to me as providing weight to my voice and the opportunity to speak for change. In order to do that, to see myself as one who deserves the public acknowledgement of my ability to know; I have to tell a different story about myself. My discovery of my tinker-thinker self has come in the process of re-storying myself (Bochner, 1997; Richardson, 1997). The trigger for this chapter was a phenomenological interview, in which I was interviewed by one of my fellow PaperHeaDs. A phenomenological interview is a conversation that explores the meaning of a phenomenon by continually asking questions about its meaning as experienced. Claire[1] started by asking me what I thought a doctoral identity should mean:

> Liz: … I would think that, for me, part of it is an idea of wisdom, which is not the same as knowing. Um, and for me that seems to be more aligned with kind of Afrocentric ways of looking at the world. That people are honoured for their experience and their …
>
> Claire: Okay.
>
> Liz: … wisdom and hearing—I mean the latest stuff about Mandela's birthday and the reflection on his life and the sort of interrogation of that is almost making—highlighting that for me and I'm wondering why, given Africa and its problems and its brilliances, why our notion of a doctorate is not more aligned with that notion of a wise person, somebody who knows and who can mediate and arbitrate and strategise and do what's necessary for the common good, whereas the sort of stuff that I'm really quite comfortable with is an almost Eurocentric view of 'look after the individual,' 'go for yourself,' it's all about achievement, it's a status, it's the next rung on the ladder, that kind of discourse, so I'm wondering why we don't go there … and part of that is also then why—if I reject the Eurocentric view of what a doctorate represents as somebody who knows a lot … pretty much, an expert and therefore has the voice from what's known and their ability to apply a critical—particular critical frame to things—why—if—how I can take that notion and say it's valid in Africa, given the cultural basis of leadership and wisdom and so on and, in that case where does identity focus because identity is about individuality—one would

> think—in some interpretations of identity, so … does that answer the question? [giggles]—yadda, yadda yadda [self-deprecating].
>
> Claire: It's about what you're beginning to construct as what a doctoral identity should be about, or the purpose of a doctorate and maybe what a doctoral identity should look like and the purpose of a doctorate—are they two different things?

The conversation continued. Having had this 2-hour-long exploration with Claire, I needed to go back in my history to find out how, where, and why I had come to the positions I articulated in our deconstruction of the meaning of doctoral identity and what a doctorate might represent.

What Counts as Knowing?

My mistrust of "the academic" is genealogical. My family roots itself in the Cockneys of East End London—butchers and bakers, and the stolid artisans of Yorkshire. My mother was the first of her family to get a post-secondary education and to enter a profession, as a nurse. My father had 7 years of schooling before joining the army with the ambition of being a truck driver. He became one of the first computer systems engineers with IBM. When I went to university, an option that would not have existed without a bursary from IBM, I was the first-ever academic student in my family. To this, my grandfather, a recently retired CEO ("by the sweat of his brow") of a heavy engineering company, rolled his eyes, leaned back in his La-Z-Boy armchair, and made the gesture of pulling a toilet chain. "Students," he pronounced, "ticks on the public ox."

Doing well at school was praised in my family but individual initiative, hard work, and practical results drew the rewards of true regard and earshotted boasting. The mistrust of scholarly things and scholars haunts my work today. "What practical value lies in this idea?" I ask myself as I scrabble to find a cognitive tool to justify the hours of reading and writing. "Call a spade a spade, Liz," the voice of my family says, "you just have to look to see that such and such is true." (The *such and such* category contains politics, the nature of human beings, gender roles, capacities, recipes, and health advice to live by). I miss the blissful ignorance of the matrices of power and knowledge that governs their view of normality and what is real (Foucault, 1980).

My family understands teaching. "A teacher, eh?" they said as I announced my intention to study for a teaching diploma. "Nice job if you can get it—no heavy lifting." (For me this was an illustration of an unawareness of the physicality of teaching: of carrying stacks of books, of the irritation of chalk dust under one's contact lenses, of rearranging furniture for group work.) Something is done, activity takes place, products are created, and the "truth" of things is passed along. A recent e-mail from a close female relative, in response to my attempt to explain my

excitement about Judith Butler's theorising of gender performativity (Butler, 1990), testified to this:

> I suspect I'm being blinded by science, there is no way I would even attempt to read those books; I can barely manage three pages of a bodice ripper before drifting into the arms of Morpheus. However, my English teacher would be spinning in her grave; you are reading stuff of the Y generation, where due to their poor English grammar and vocabulary they make stuff up. Not that I'm so great, but you got a degree and are supposed to know these things! Expertness—try expertise. Performability—try performance, i.e. acting! Way back in the mists of time when I attempted to learn some psychology we had a lecture about integrity and congruence and getting them to blend into a whole that resulted in better mental health. Which I understood to mean that if you try to put on performances that are not how you really are you will go bonkers! After all the study and working in academia you have done, I can't see that you need to 'perform' anything, you just are. (Private communication with permission, name withheld, 2008)

The ironic tone of the communication makes me laugh now: "blinded by science," "teacher spinning in her grave" (the voice of a long-dead authority, one who knew the truth?). And how about the notion that I am "supposed to know" on the strength of a degree (or several) or even on the basis of my experience in academia? It seems that the more that I am supposed to know, the less I can claim "knowingness." What is interesting is that there is no questioning of the idea that people who *know* do exist. My relative's easy access to the world of words and text, albeit bodice rippers, to the idea of people who think for a living (however mysterious the work might be), to the ability to play with genres in English—the colloquial to the analytic, are symptomatic of middle-class access to the printed word.

Why Know?

Along the way, family cynicism has turned to the content of what I teach. When I was teaching in a programme that trained child and youth care workers, my family felt it ironic, that I, who had chosen not to have children, was educating youngsters in how to take care of children at risk. My own sense of the irony, or possibly a sense of fraud, led me to move into academic development work, specifically, inducting new lecturers into their teaching roles in a higher education institution. These were bright young people, successful in their studies, who to a person claimed that their biggest achievement to that date was being selected to teach at our institution. My job was to introduce them to the often arcane ways in which higher education operates, to flag the path through the micropolitical dynamics to the place of satisfaction in teaching well. I was selling snake oil: "Do it this way and you will thrive in the system. Set up your networks of collegial support, give to each other in order to get back and you will not regret the emotional credit you will derive."

It was comfortable for me to be giving practical support to new staff members, experienced and skilled in their occupations, in how to teach in a technikon. Technikons were South African institutions oriented to occupationally-directed higher education. The intention was to teach high-level skills and knowledge to add on to the more practical training offered in technical colleges. As such, we technikon educators did not engage or feel the need to engage with the philosophical frameworks that shape the way university disciplines construct themselves. As a young academic (in career terms if not years—I was in my late 20s) I rarely if ever encountered questions about the nature of knowledge and what it means to know.

The unvoiced justification for the technikon approach was the demand for the training of highly practically skilled "technologists." Indeed this discourse persists in the field of engineering where graduates of the 3-year diploma, the 4-year degree, and university BSc Engineering are registered with the Engineering Council of South Africa as technicians, technologists, and engineers, respectively. We boasted that technikon graduates would "hit the ground running" while university graduates would have to do a lot of site work to catch up. Science and technology obviously, then—despite Thomas Kuhn's (1970) work on the philosophy of science—had no space for perspectives or anything beyond facts and proven theory.

In South Africa, the descriptors that talk to the quality of knowledge required for a doctorate are:

> the candidate is required to *demonstrate high-level research capability* and make a *significant and original academic contribution at the frontiers of a discipline* or field. The work must be of a *quality to satisfy peer review and merit publication*. A graduate should be able to supervise and evaluate *the research of others in the area of specialization* concerned. (emphases added; Department of Education, 2004)

Looking back at the time when I first started thinking about doctoral study, I see how my adoption of my family belief in "knowers" and the technikon orientation to indisputable facts and practices led me to believe that a doctorate—the proof of having created an "original academic contribution at the frontiers" meant discovering a single truth that would potentially change the way people thought about a phenomenon. I constructed "high level research capability" as related to complex machinery like photon canons and mysterious glassware in pristine laboratories—in terms of expense and responsibility, rather than in terms of complexity and clarity of thought. I did not understand how these criteria related to what I knew about, teaching: devising learning activities, questioning techniques, building and sustaining relationships with learners, advising, counselling, and transmitting facts.

I was then looking at doing a PhD—the next step on the job ladder. I thrashed around looking for a topic that would meet these criteria, having read several handbooks on how to get a PhD (for example, Mouton, 2002; Phillips & Pugh, 2000). These recommended a subject that would sustain my interest in the long term and suggested that my environment was the source of a suitable research question.

I believed in facts and "the right way to do things as a teacher" and so, what was left to research? What questions might I ask, the answers to which would change the way the world thought about teaching? The technikon I taught at was historically advantaged, having been constructed for white students by the apartheid[2] government. As part of the transformation of higher education in South Africa (Department of Education, 2001) this formerly "white institution" was merging with the historically disadvantaged Indian technikon next door (physically separated by a wire mesh fence but psychologically by decades of apartness). I thought a case study of the processes of this first merger of higher education institutions would be the first of its kind in South Africa, and therefore, a useful topic to study. I abandoned this topic after a year of watching, reading, and thinking—it was too painful to write about the way my assumptions were clashing hourly with those of my future colleagues.

Rummaging through the Baggage

It is not possible to think about my potential doctoralness now without thinking of who I was as a teacher then. Thus, I think back to what it was like in my first teaching job. It was the 1980s in South Africa, when, under apartheid laws, teaching in a government school meant signing an oath of allegiance to the South African Teachers Council for Whites. For a woman, getting married meant losing one's permanent appointment and becoming "temporary." And if you were a married woman, you needed your husband's signature on every application and bank withdrawal form. Becoming pregnant while unmarried was a dismissible offence. White, Christian, and heterosexual were the default identities in the segment of the South African school system in which I worked; other races, religions, and sexualities did not exist. The same sorts of attitudes ruled the technikon structures when I started working there in 1990. The wearing of trousers by women was frowned upon. Closed shoes and ties were a requirement for males, while skirts (preferably floral prints), blouses, and pantyhose were the requisite "respectful" dress for women. I attributed these rules to the activity of the National Party government of the time, which I believe to this day (possibly erroneously) set up technikons in opposition to the liberal universities that were questioning and resisting apartheid on every level. Perhaps my paranoia attributes more strategic thought to that circumstance than is necessary; I wonder now whether the institutions we had were more a product of philosophical blindness and deafness.

As institutions of higher education, technikons were understood as being hierarchically above community or technical colleges (as they are known in South Africa and which offered the academic elements of trade apprenticeships) but below the universities. (I think we South Africans are strongly historically and culturally driven by hierarchies and taxonomies. Watching myself write, I recognise my predisposition to engage every subject with assumptions about status and power. I often wonder whose hierarchies I have embraced). Utilitarian rationales were the justification for everything enacted in apartheid South Africa; the practical ends

(for whites) justified the means. I watch some of the developments in post-9/11 education systems in the global west (Giroux, 2006), with horror, screaming silently, "Don't do that! Don't you remember what you protested about in the 80s? The laager mentality[3] serves no one! Remember who taught whom?"

I started at the technikon as a locum in the Department of Education, teaching future teachers of "practical subjects" (an inferior class of study as compared to science or mathematics). I found that the curriculum had not changed very much since I had spent 2 brief years teaching English in the high school from which I had matriculated. The young people who were allowed to study to be teachers of technical drawing, home economics, typing, and business studies were predominantly white, although I think I had three students of colour in my first tutorial group. A quota system existed which allowed a certain percentage of "non-white" students to be admitted to historically white higher education institutions.

What's in a Name?

Labels were important. I struggled mightily with the notion that at the technikon I had to be known as Miss Harrison, not Ms or Liz as I would have preferred (never Dr Harrison in the future). I could not understand why we (the technikon's Department of Education) did not treat aspiring teachers as young adults and potential colleagues but as if they were the children they were going to be teaching. Even more puzzling to me was why we never reflected on issues like this as part of the curriculum. My department head and dean battled to control his amusement at the first (and only) reflective report I submitted about the teaching I had done in my first year—everyone else submitted a list of courses and topics "covered." Apparently, this was not the space to reflect on learner development and what might be needed in future offerings. I was puzzled: Why should reflexive practice not be encouraged in teacher education? The large stationery retailer with which I had worked as a training manager in the interim years between teaching in high school and joining the technikon used first names. I knew the chairman of the group, one of the largest listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, as Doug. Unlike at the technikon, part of the routine business in our training programme at the retailer was reflecting on our practice, and trying to improve in it (Argyris, 1976). How could "good" ways of knowing not be common practice, particularly in an academic' institution?

My title as Miss was problematic in other ways. When the time for the Education Ball[4] came around, I was required to attend. The department would find me a date, they said with understanding and pity for my obviously single status. I could not tell them that I was in a perfectly satisfactory relationship with a lovely woman. Her gorgeous brother offered to attend with me, as I agonised about blowing my chances at a permanent post. In the end, I contracted a convenient "blue flu" to get out of going. Being seen to be the right person doing the right things was important, more important than dealing with the issues of diversity, privilege, disinheritance,

and the legacy of 40 years of apartheid in South African schools. I call this my time of selling cosmetics.

Mapping New Territory

I have gladly watched conservativism become subverted as university-trained academics have more recently moved into the technikons (now known as universities of technology) with their questioning minds and refusal to accept the status quo as good enough, with their visions of a better and brighter democratic future. The flip side of the coin of university-trained educators coming into the technikon zone is that now I worry that qualifications are becoming more important than skills gained from practice. As an academic developer, I am actively involved in providing curriculum development support. Part of my job has been to help staff come to terms with the new national policy of outcomes-based education. My clients, the people I serve, are no longer students and yet perhaps they learn from our relationship. As groups of educators and I examine curricula to identify the "exit level outcomes" and assessment criteria that are the goal of each diploma, I stand in the position of a "professional ignoramus," my task, I think, is to ask the stupid and naïve questions about what occupationally-directed higher educators are doing. I do this to help them articulate what it is that they value about the work they do. I am a stranger in a strange land, but I can speak enough of each language to translate and get by. In real life, it pays to be a tinker, yet, how does this mesh with the doctoral identity I am trying to acquire? How do I testify to the reality of my work and the contribution of thought I might make?

What to Sell in This New Territory?

The curricula of technikons were traditionally non-discipline specific in the sense of the disciplines acknowledged in more traditional universities. The social science that I taught to environmental health, residential child care, public relations, homoeopathy, and food service management diploma students was an eclectic mix of what is known as applied psychology, sociology, and anthropology in more Oxbridge style universities (see, for example, Becher, 1989). My choice of what to include depended on my assessment of what would be useful for the students. The only guidance was a list of phrases that constituted the syllabus, for example: introduction, types of personalities, motivation, cognition, groups. I aimed at theories and stories that I thought would help students understand people better with no thought that the theory that worked for me might not make any sense to my students and their lives.

The most enchanting time I have spent in academia was the 3 months leave I was able to spend reading into the subject of graduate education internationally as part of doing my doctorate. For the first time in my life since I was 12 years

old, I could legitimately spend days reading and being charmed by ideas. I wonder how many South African students ever have the luxury of access to libraries and time for reading for fun. During my study leave, I fought panic continually: What was I producing? How would I remember all this? Knowledge surely is a product, something you own and share. I concluded that the disciplinary frame provides a bounded area of operation, a safe space where the routine structures of thought allow for certain assumptions to be accepted. I realised that I would not be arguing for The Truth, but I would be taking a position and trying to convince others of its validity. Yet I find myself again on another boundary in my position on knowing—another irresolvable dilemma—that between thinking and practice.

As I sit with programme teams to fill in the required forms to meet policy requirements, I am aware of the tension between the young, enthusiastic university-trained scientists and engineers, and the experienced practitioners. The voices of the youth ring with confidence in the theory of their fields and excitement of sharing it. The voices of the experienced practitioners—the environmental health inspectors with their tough tanned faces and crude stories of rat infestations and salmonella; the crinkle-eyed land surveyors who can remember how to survey land using a ball of string and pegs, and the grey-haired street photographer with his stories of celebration and pain in the townships—are defensive.

This tension is playing out at policy level in South Africa with the recent formation of universities of technology as contrasted with the established universities. Someone noticed that technikon graduates did indeed start their working careers with confidence but seemed to hit a ceiling after about 10 years and that, in the end, university graduates held all the top jobs. Thus, technikons have recently taken on the name, university of technology, and my institution now battles with constructing this new identity. I too battle with this new identity. The easy solution to the problem would be for my institution to take on, wholesale, the conventions of successful universities (in terms of world rankings) in South Africa specifically related to science and technology. This would erase the craft and contribution of those who work with words and cultural symbols, in subject areas such as journalism, jewellery, and graphic design, and those who work with relationships, for example, in community nursing, environmental health and child and youth care—people like me. I prefer Chris Winberg's (2005) notion that the core of the work of South African universities of technology is technological criticality—understanding the epistemologies and assumptions that underpin the mechanisms we invent and use to solve problems in our society.

I see my role in this is to become critical of my own assumptions about knowledge and knowing, to think deeply about the potential consequences of how I construct and sell knowledge, and to gain an empathic understanding of the work that has gone into creating the knowings that I will critique as a paid thinker. Through questioning and answering myself, I can apply the same standard with integrity to the complex work of others.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

> I am so good a proficient in one quarter of an hour, that I can drink with any tinker in his own language during my life.
>
> — King Henry IV, part I. Act II, scene IV (Shakespeare)

Is a spade a spade or is it earth-moving equipment? I can sell both. The work in progress remains: What is this doctoral knowledge that is so prized that the lack of it can silence some and privilege others? My joy in autoethnography as a method of inquiry lies in the realisation that my reality is not the only reality. I can look at my life, as the discipline I know best, and in theorising my judgments and positions, I am able to inquire into the knowledges that I accept and those that I resist. In doing so I can make overt both the rationale and the story behind them, opening up spaces for a sharing of experience that will make possible the joint construction of knowledge that is both clearheaded and useful. The tension in academia between knowing for the moment (the economic imperative) and education for the future (social transformation) that Boughey (2007) described on a macro level, is enacted daily in my construction of something original. I am coming to value the ability to move between borders and to speak to the moment, to sell something different.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Chapter consultant: Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan.

This chapter was originally published as Harrison, L. (2009). A tinker's quest: Embarking on an autoethnographic journey in learning "doctoralness." In K. Pithouse, C. Mitchell, & R. Moletsane (Eds.), *Making connections: Self-study & social action* (pp. 253–268). New York, NY: Peter Lang. The chapter has been reprinted with the kind permission of Peter Lang publishers, USA.

The editors would also like to thank Pat Smith for her kind permission to reprint the chapter.

NOTES

1. Names have been changed or disguised.
2. Apartheid was an official policy of racial segregation enforced by the National Party government in South Africa from 1948 until the early 1990s.
3. *Laager* is the Afrikaans word for the defensive circle created when settlers drew their ox wagons around, forming a barrier against attacks. By *laager mentality*, I mean the withdrawal from creative problem solving that occurs when fear becomes the overwhelming collective emotion and anger its concomitant expression.
4. The Education Ball was an annual dance for all education students. It had the same kind of importance attached to it as South African Matric dances—equivalent to the prom in North America.

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THELMA ROSENBERG

3. CONVERSATIONS AND THE CULTIVATION OF SELF-UNDERSTANDING

INTRODUCTION

Many researchers would, I imagine, be tussling with the question of whether the personal experience they are having as they progress through their study should be spoken of when they craft their final research product. It is a question we must resolve in a way that aligns best with our intentions, our aspirations, and our consciences. My own experience in the doctoral research I am undertaking is that I am on a journey of learning that has, thus far, been humbling, progressively restorative, and bumpy—very bumpy at places. I have come to fully appreciate what a colleague said to me when I first joined a doctoral study cohort group in 2005. I vividly recall my sense of urgency to find a focus for my doctoral research when I joined the group. I wanted to get settled on a research topic so that I could finalise a research proposal to meet the requirements for progression to the next year. At the time, the colleague leading our group said to me: "Thelma you have to learn to be a learner. It's very humbling to be a learner." I remember that I was taken aback by her comment but, now, 10 years later, I understand much better what she meant. I have felt very humbled as I have learned more about my personal history as a learner in various phases of my learning journey as a mathematics teacher educator and—as I have seen more poignantly through my engagement with memory work—the faces and the intentions of the enablers who have been pivotal at various places along my learning journey. I have come to appreciate how humbling "not knowing" can be, and my experiences of being an adult learner who is struggling and feeling stupid during this process have, at many times, made me think more carefully about what it is that is enabling my learning along the research journey.

It has been restorative for me to learn more about the contexts that have shaped me as I learned to be a mathematics teacher educator, and it has been particularly restorative for me to begin to find my authentic voice as a practitioner and as a researcher. The emotions I have experienced in the times of not knowing have made me talk more honestly to the classes I teach in this time while I am writing my research story of learning. I encourage students to trust that, with a learning attitude, they will come to a place of "more knowing," and I encourage them to keep close to companions who are keen learners too. I say this to my students because I know that what enabled this progressive restoring of my teaching vision and my researcher voice has mainly been the communities that I have been part of during

D. Pillay et al. (Eds.), Academic Autoethnographies, 33–47.

this research journey—it is in the conversations, incidental or intentional, friendly or scholarly, I have had along this journey that I see my progression towards deeper self-understanding, and the emergence of where this research study could take me. But it has been a bumpy ride at places.

BEGINNING WITH PERSONAL HISTORY NARRATIVE WRITING

At the outset of considering a doctoral study, I was clear that I would take a self-study research approach (Samaras, 2011). I wanted to focus on myself as I tried to improve my practice as a mathematics teacher educator by including more opportunities for students to engage with reflection. Both the focus on reflective practice and on myself as the main research participant, were hard sells in the research climate I started out in at my institution in 2005. While I was hooked onto self-study from the first time I heard about the methodology from a colleague, my own conception of self-study as relating only to research that leads to improvement of practice proved to be a stumbling block to my progress. I have always shared the teaching responsibilities of each mathematics education module with several colleagues and I found it difficult to place what I saw as my personal interest over the communal teaching focus. In the busyness of teaching with colleagues, I could not settle my research focus on my own teaching. I had met a bump in the road and I struggled to find a way around it.

It was a suggestion, in 2011, from a critical friend[1] that enabled me to shift my gaze from a concern about improvement in teaching, to my own teacher educator learning. After I had presented my ideas for a doctoral study that would explore my teaching of a specific module to in-service mathematics teachers, she said: "I would be much more interested in reading about your learning." This was a perspective I had honestly never considered as the focus of the research study. As we left this meeting, my doctoral supervisor, Kathleen,[2] suggested that I undertake a personal history self-study of my learning as a mathematics teacher educator in a changing teacher education landscape in South Africa. I recall that she said: "I have always thought that this will make a fascinating PhD study." This suggestion spoke directly to the question I was wrestling with at the time: I was asking myself, "Am I doing a better job now as a university mathematics teacher educator than I was when I was a college lecturer?"[3] The larger question I was asking was where initial teacher education was better placed: in the former colleges of education, or in the universities where it presently is? Kathleen's suggestion excited me because I had always wanted to tell the story of my experiences of moving from the college sector of teacher education into the university (higher education) sector of teacher education. At the time, I thought I would be undertaking a critical analysis of my experiences as a college lecturer and as a university lecturer, focussing specifically on the history of these institutions, and how this had shaped my teacher education practices. But, as I soon discovered in conversations with my supervisor, this was only part of my story of learning. I would need to go much further back in my learning in order to more deeply understand my lived experiences of mathematics

teacher educator learning. While I initially followed this path out of respect for Kathleen's trust in me and my story, I have had many occasions to tell her how grateful I am for the starting point that she steered me towards. While gratitude was not uppermost in my mind when I experienced the initial avalanche of sadness that remembering brought upon me, I now more fully understand what Kathleen meant when she said that the research I was engaged in was "emergent." Heeding her advice to "just keep writing your personal history narrative and we will see what emerges," was not always easy for me—I wanted to be on firm ground. Almost from the start of my research study, I wanted to know what the structure of the thesis would look like; Kathleen calmly steered me back to doing the writing about my lived experiences of learning as a mathematics teacher educator, continually reminding me that the form of the thesis would emerge from my writing.

In the next section of this chapter, I present an extract from my personal history narrative writing. This particular piece of writing was done at the initial phase of my data generation and it captures some of my struggles in experiencing the "disrobing" that is inherent in the use of personal history self-study method (Samaras, Hicks, & Berger, 2004, p. 910), and my own struggles of using the method of memory work. It is through the writing I was doing for my personal history narrative, that Kathleen perceived the "autoethnographicness" of my study and suggested that I read more about autoethnography. I followed her advice, again mostly out of respect, knowing that she sees what I do not yet see. In the third part of this chapter, I look more closely at my writing (and at what is not captured in this writing) in the light of the literature on autoethnography and the conversations I have had with Kathleen and other critical friends. Through this closer examination, I hope to improve my "autoethnographic sense" so that I can get a better understanding of my own research process in this study. I present this chapter as a work in progress of my emerging understanding of autoethnography, and I end the chapter with a brief discussion of the potential I see for autoethnography as a methodology to address the authentic experiences I am having on my research journey.

AN EXTRACT FROM MY PERSONAL HISTORY NARRATIVE

In creating a narrative portrayal of my lived experiences of learning, I am mindful that personal history narratives must be "honest and specific to the context and time in which they are placed" (Samaras et al., 2004, p. 912), and that I need to be cautious that the stories I tell could be what Bolton (2006) termed "censoring tools" (p. 204) where, in self-protectiveness, my stories will not explore sensitive issues but be expressions of what I feel comfortable with. In working with a personal history self-study methodology, I have come to more fully appreciate why my mathematics education colleague commended me for being "brave" (personal communication, August 23, 2013) in using this methodology. I do not consider myself a brave person in most situations and while writing my personal story I have often felt, as hooks (1995) did, that it is "frightening" to write about one's life experiences, because

writing is "to leave a trace" about the "personal private realities" (p. 4) one has experienced— and that is uncomfortable.

It was particularly the use of memory work (O'Reilly-Scanlon, 2000), my main method of inquiry in my doctoral study, which caused me anxiety. "Kathleen, I've had trauma," was one of my first reactions to Kathleen (my supervisor) when we discussed the personal history self-study I would embark on in this study. She reassured me: "You don't have to write about that." But, as I have discovered, one cannot bracket memory; my own experiential learning journey of using memory work has been difficult in its initial stages, but progressively restorative. As I have progressed in this study, I have experienced an increasing "settledness" as I learned more of, and came to appreciate, the people and places (contexts) that have influenced (enabled) me on my life-long learning journey.

Samaras, Hicks, and Berger (2004) stated that one of the major reasons researchers engage in personal history self-study is "for self-knowing and for the development of their professional identity," and they suggest that, to progress towards this self-understanding, a central area to focus on is "understanding their home culture and its influence on who they have become as teachers" (p. 913). I think of "home culture" as how we lived as a family in our home, which includes the family relationships we shared in our home and what we learnt in our home, much like hooks' (2009) description of culture as "habits of being" (p. 30). My understanding of our home culture came mainly from extended "memory sharing conversations" (Jarvis, 2014, p. 140) with my siblings and close relatives, but I had concerns about whether this exploration was not taking me on a path off the focus of my study. Being very conscious of the time frames that were ever present when thinking of my study, I was very anxious to not get distracted in the study. This is captured in the following extract from a discussion[4] I had with Kathleen on 29 November, 2013:

Thelma:	That's the thing I want to talk to you about this morning—is that I worry about if I'm not going to get distracted in the study. I'm going to go on this trajectory of my family and how I grew up and all that and I'm going to stay a long time there and I'm not going to get to my learning. And this is about my learning, you know.
Kathleen:	But your learning, does your learning only happen in school?
Thelma:	[laughing] No, it doesn't.
Kathleen:	So, I wouldn't worry about that. For the time being, go, go where you need to go.
Thelma:	My heart needs to go there.
Kathleen:	Go where your heart needs to go.
Thelma:	My heart needs to go there before my head can follow, I feel, like, you know.

Kathleen: And I think you're right.

Thelma: Ja, I think my heart just has to go a little bit down there first, you know, and spend some time, you know, and then I think, I think I'll launch, you know, but I think I sort of have to…

Kathleen: I think you have launched [Thelma laughs]. You've started and it's a good start.

Thelma: Ja.

Kathleen: So just do more of this [Thelma: Ja] and then at some point next year we'll start looking at what you've got and see what's emerging from it. [Thelma: OK]. But what's important is to keep writing, keep collecting and putting things together [Thelma: Hmm], building on this.

Through telephone conversations with my older siblings and my aunt, my father's only living sister, I gathered information about the back story of my parents' lives and of how we came to live as a family in the place called Mkomazana, which is located at the foot of the Drakensberg mountains where the Sani Pass, linking South Africa to Lesotho, starts its scenic, meandering ascent. In these conversations with my relatives I heard, for the first time, how my parents met, married, and started their life together in Maclear, the small town in the Eastern Cape where my father's family lived. I heard also of my parents' struggles through the changes brought into their lives by the Second World War, apartheid, and the challenges they endured as a result of my father's work conditions in Mkomazana. While Kuhn (1995) wrote that "memory work requires the most minimal resources and the very simplest procedures" (as cited in Mitchell & Weber, 1998, p. 55), my own experience has been that it can also exact a heavy emotional toll. Early in the data generation phase, I was often overwhelmed with sadness as I imagined the difficult life my parents must have had as they held us together as a family in the basic dwellings that my dad built as our home.

My struggles with the emotions evoked by the memory work I was engaging with were obvious to a close colleague I work with in primary mathematics education. She expressed her concern to me by saying, "I'm worried about you Thelma; this memory work is maybe not good for your progress." After she momentarily dissolved in tears, I told her with conviction that I believed that remembering was going to be restorative for me. Like Mitchell and Weber (1998), I am interested in my memories "both as phenomena and as method" (p. 46). As phenomena, I am interested in what my memory accounts can tell me about the influence of my early experiences of learning on my professional identity (who I have become over time) and as method, "how can recalling a specific event or set of events … become part of the usable past?" (p. 46). Many writers point to the usefulness of remembering as a means to a more productive future. Allnutt (2013) explained that remembering

can be "productive" when it is thought of as "reading the past to inform the future" (p. 156), and Pithouse-Morgan, Mitchell, and Pillay (2012) stated that

> the fundamental purpose of memory-work is to facilitate a heightened consciousness of how social forces and practices …affect human experiences and understandings and how individuals …can take action in response to these social forces and practices in ways that can make a qualitative difference to the present and the future. (pp. 1–2)

Like hooks (1995), I feel that "the longing to tell one's story and the process of telling is symbolically a gesture of longing to recover the past in such a way that one experiences both a sense of reunion and a sense of release" (p. 5). I am also encouraged by Bolton (2006) who reminds those engaged in narrative research that

> for experiences to be developmental—socially, psychologically, spiritually—our world must be made to appear strange. We, and our students, must be encouraged to examine our storymaking process critically, to create and re-create fresh accounts of our lives from different perspectives and in different modes, and to elicit and listen to the responses of peers. (pp. 204–205)

In this regard, Bolton (2006) encouraged narrative inquirers to be adventurous and reminded us that

> bringing our everyday stories into question is an adventure. No one adventures securely in their backyard. Professionals need to face the uncertainty of not knowing what's around the corner, where they're going, how they will travel, when they'll meet dragons or angels, and who the comrades are. They even have to trust why they're going. (p. 210)

The advice to be adventurous in my research had already been given to me by my husband, Malcolm, as he was witnessing my struggles with dealing with the memories that were surfacing through my remembering. He suggested I view my research study in the way our daughter, Lauren, conceived for her doctoral study and I shared this in an e-mail to Kathleen:

> Malcolm (my husband) asked, 'Why don't you approach your research like Lauren: to her it's an adventure?' Well, I am trying, Kathleen, to be less afraid of what I may find in this memory work, but it still flattens me sometimes (but not for long times now). Now, I have this immense sense of gratitude for the enabling I have received and a growing respect for my mother, in particular, and lots of sympathy for my dad. I really wish I could have told them in the living years, but that's what this thesis is in my mind—a long letter to my children. (Personal communication, February 10, 2014)

Kathleen gave me more encouragement as I considered the unfamiliar idea of this research study being an adventure:

> I like the adventure metaphor for research—especially narrative research. Certainly, I think that the kind of emergent research process that you are undertaking is like an adventure. It can be exciting but also perplexing at times. And you really don't know exactly where you will end up until you get there, but you have to keep following the clues and have faith in yourself. It is risky, but also potentially very rewarding. (Personal communication, February 11, 2014)

A key moment in my research process, when I felt my thinking shift from self-consciousness about telling my story to a sense of responsibility towards my children, happened during a telephone conversation I had with Lauren when she said:

> You must remind us where we came from. We live in this middle-class fantasy where money is readily available; we have these cards that we can buy on credit, etcetera. Stories are so important because they let us know our history and for placing us, because there wasn't always all this money and there can be a time again when there is no money. We would not be having this conversation if it had not been for that intervention—wow, the Frost family, hey. Stories of where you come from are so important and also acknowledging God's intervention or providence in our stories. (Personal communication, October 12, 2013)

In a group activity during a Transformative Education/al Studies (TES)[5] research workshop held on 21 November 2013, we explored the use of poetry as a powerful means of data generation and representation (see Chisanga, Rawlinson, Madi, & Sotshangane, 2014). We were given the prompt: "Write (in a tweet) what has surprised you about your self-study research." These individual tweets were then synthesised into a found poem by the group, and shared during the workshop session. I wrote the following tweet: "I was self-conscious of telling my story until my daughter said stories keep the testimonies alive. I was very surprised at how her interest in my story liberated me."

LOOKING FOR THE AUTOETHNOGRAPHICNESS IN MY WRITING

As Chang (2008) pointed out, autoethnography has been defined in multiple ways by many practitioners, ranging from those favouring an analytical, theoretical, and objective approach to autoethnography (for example, Anderson, 2006), to those who work towards carving out a "special place for emotional and personal scholarship" (Ellis & Adams, 2014, p. 256). Chang contended that the "war between objectivity and subjectivity is likely to continue, shaping the discourse of autoethnography" (2008, p. 46). As a novice in autoethnography, it is not a reassuring thought that this seems to be a methodology that is fraught with tension. Nevertheless, it does also indicate to me that it is a methodology that is open to dialogue because its proponents and critics seem to be continually dialoguing to discern more clearly what the

methodology is, and what it is that inspires and troubles them about this methodology. From the literature I have explored thus far, I understand that autoethnography (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 273) is "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" and that autoethnography can vary in emphasis around three axes: the self (auto), culture (ethno), and (graphy) the research process (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, as cited in Chang, 2008, p. 48). I do discern an explicit effort by writers to clarify the type of autoethnographic research that they favour. Henning (2004), for example, stated that she prefers a definition (explanation) of autoethnography where the autobiographical and ethnographic aspects are clearly visible to that of authors (referring specifically to Bochner & Ellis, 2000) "who write deeply personal experiences and phenomenological text without hinting at the culture the study is trying to explore" (p. 43), while Wall (2006), after her exploration of the epistemological and ontological assumptions and the methodological approaches to autoethnography, declared that she believes she is "forever called to be a moderate" (p. 9). In her later writing, Wall (2008) admitted that even when attempting to include herself overtly in her work, she is drawn back to the "comfortable familiarity" (p. 48) of the conventions of her scientific nursing background and that, over time, she has modified the purposes and character of her autoethnographic writing "to conform to academic convention" (p. 48)—a move she has made to make her work more acceptable for future publication, but one that has resulted in a theoretical version that she suspects will much less likely evoke the feelings that her initial writing had.

Throughout my personal history narrative writing process, I have experienced doubt about whether my writing is maybe too personal for the mathematics education community I am part of, and my approach to research too systematic for the emergent nature of the personal history methodology. For example, after I had presented a piece of my personal history writing to the TES group and a colleague had commented that she found my writing inspiring and gave her a renewed sense of why we do self-study, I realised that during the presentation I had been worried that I might be making some of the audience uncomfortable by the vulnerability I was struggling to keep in check as I spoke. After the presentation, I sent the piece of writing via e-mail to the mathematics education colleague who had expressed concern that memory work was impeding my research progress. In the e-mail I wrote, "I just want you to know more about where I come from." In reply, she thanked me, commending me for the "erudite writing," and I felt pleased. Since I have been introduced to autoethnography, I have become much more aware of how I interact with colleagues in the different communities I am part of in my work as a mathematics teacher educator and my conversations as a self-study researcher. I have felt the move in myself to a place of greater settledness in accepting that there are firm choices to be made in how one intends to do research—it is about developing one's own agency as a researcher and it is about entering a critical conversation space about the choices one makes. It has been my recent reading about autoethnography and my own personal questioning about my intentions with my doctoral study that have steered me towards a more

wholehearted acceptance of seeing how I can learn more about myself through what I write when I am at emotional low points along the research journey.

A challenge for me in using an autoethnographic approach is to keep a balance along the three axes that Ellis and Bochner (2000) identified. From the outset of considering autoethnography as a methodology, I have been drawn to Chang's (2008) explanation: drawing on the triadic balance proposed by Ellis and Bochner (2000), she stated that "autoethnography should be ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation" (p. 48). While I understood this to mean that culture would emerge from my analysis of my personal narrative, I was often worrying about what the culture was that my supervisor was seeing in my writing, and wondering why I could not see it. Since the time when I first considered that my study might take an autoethnographic turn, I have been struggling with the concept of culture. I recognise that this seems to be the way I generally approach learning: I need to know something well before I can work with it with more confidence. This approach to learning through "concept knowing" has, however, not been helpful in furthering my writing process, in that my worrying about working from a firm base of knowing the crucial concepts to use in my discussion seems to be the worst fit for a process where culture will emerge from the writing. I was stuck on thinking about the writing process the other way around, in that I thought the story I write must explicitly connect to culture from the outset. Now, after more careful examination, I am better able to see how I could have got distracted in the message I received or, rather, selectively received from the literature I was engaging with. For example, the authors of completed autoethnographic doctoral theses I have read (Grossi, 2006; Jarvis, 2014; Naidoo, 2013; Richards, 2012) seem to have started out with a clear focus on the culture they were exploring in their studies. Reading about the process of doing autoethnography and the writing of an autoethnographic product as described by Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) also had me in a quandary about whether I should know which cultural standpoint I was writing from. Their separation of autoethnography as a process where researchers "write about the epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or possessing a particular cultural identity" (p. 276) and writing autoethnography as a product that is accomplished by writers "first discerning patterns of cultural experience evidenced by [various data generation sources] and then describing these patterns using facets of storytelling" (p. 277) seemed an unnatural separation of process and product. It also got me stuck on worrying about how I could proceed if I could not discern the culture I was focussing on. I really was confused about autoethnography for some time and my confusion seemed to be all about this particularly slippery concept of culture. Naidoo (2013) too seems to have struggled with this concept because she stated that "culture is arguably the most elusive term in the generally rather fluid vocabulary of the social sciences" (p. 23). After an exploration of how culture is described by various writers, she settled on the explanation that "culture is a socially learned way of living" (p. 24)—an explanation I found helpful in imagining the way

forward with autoethnography. Then I read Harrison's (2009) clarification of her use of autoethnography as a research methodology and, with this, the proverbial penny dropped for me. She wrote:

> I am questioning the role of my culture in education and vice versa through my own narrative (the primary data), using ethnographic 'texts' such as journals …photographs, the accounts of others and e-mails. The texts are used as 'triggers' to enable me to story my educational experiences in the context in which they occurred and are occurring. *Methodologically, it is in my writing and self-analysis that I am able to see culture at work and to question implicit assumptions* [emphasis added]. (p. 255)

In Harrison's description of the seeing of culture in her writing and in her self-analysis, I understood better that culture is implied in what I write about and, very likely, in how I write about my lived experiences! In my writing of my personal story, Kathleen is likely seeing the connectedness of self to culture that Ellis and Adams (2014) asserted is implicit to autoethnography. She guides me to consider autoethnography as a process, one that I have moved towards. In this time of moving from self-study towards autoethnography, it is to my own writing that Kathleen suggested that I look as I make sense of why I seem, through my writing, to have taken an autoethnographic turn. In one conversation, she guided me by asking:

> Why do you think, maybe, this is now more autoethnographic than self-study? What is it here, where is it here, that you see autoethnography and what do you think is autoethnographic about it? [Thelma: Ja, ok, I think…] Or, in another sense, how does autoethnography help you to make sense of this? [Thelma: Hmm] Because I think that self-study, although personal history narrative started, you know it was a starting place for you, but I'm not sure that there's enough to help you make sense of what you're doing here. (Transcript of supervision meeting April 24, 2015)

Later in this conversation, Kathleen encouraged me to consider what I have taken from self-study on the move to autoethnography:

> So maybe then, have you taken anything from self-study into autoethnography that has been helpful for you? You know, what are you blending from the two? (Transcript of supervision meeting April 24, 2015)

In the next section of this chapter, I discuss the way forward as I consider what I have learned in my use of self-study that will accompany me into my autoethnographic journey of learning.

LOOKING FORWARD

From my reading on autoethnography, I can see why Harrison (2009) considered autoethnography "as a subset of self-study in the same way that autobiography

might be" because, as she stated, both these methodologies "make lived experiences central to analysis and require the researcher to be reflexively oriented towards social change" (p. 255). The "intersecting sets" representation given by Hamilton, Smith, and Worthington (2008) is mathematically more accurate in my opinion, because it attempts to more clearly show the differences and similarities of the autoethnography, self-study, and narrative inquiry. The similarities between the three methodologies are, in regard to their demand that researchers "engage in elements of good research," their use of narrative or story and for each of the three methodologies, "the position of the 'I' is critical" (Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2008, p. 25). These authors pointed to focus, and approach to the research design of a study as being the main difference between the three methodologies, explaining that in autoethnography,

> the researcher uses an ethnographic wide-angle lens with a focus on the social and cultural aspects of the personal. This work reveals multiple layers of consciousness to understand self or some aspect of life lived in context. But there is always a look inward at the vulnerable self that is moved, refracted, and resisted during the process. (Hamilton et al., 2008, p. 24)

In moving my gaze from self-study to autoethnography, I have found references to autoethnography in the self-study literature (e.g., Coia & Taylor, 2009, 2013; Hamilton et al., 2008), but in the autoethnographic literature I have read thus far, while I see clear links to autobiography (e.g., Chang, 2008; Ellis & Bochner, 2000), I perceive a silence about self-study. It is as though these methodologies, which are both emergent and faced with similar challenges of acceptance as valid research, are developing along parallel lines with little intersection. Possibly, it will only be through the experiences of researchers like myself, who move from the one methodological path over to the other, that such points of intersection will be more explicitly sought and clarified. That is an interesting possibility to me in my further exploration of autoethnography as a research methodology because I am already beginning to see how my personal history narratives could be used as "cultural texts through which the cultural self-understanding of self and others can be gained" (Chang, 2008, p. 13). And this understanding will be deepened through my interaction with critical friends, particularly those within the TES community. I have experienced the engagement with others as a particular strength of using a self-study methodology. As Samaras et al. (2004) explained, personal history self-study provides the self-study researcher opportunities to "disrobe, unveil, and engage in soul-searching truth about the self *while also* engaging in critical conversations, and most importantly, continuing to discover the alternative viewpoints of others" because it is "about the self *in relation to others* in historical and social contexts that facilitate the educative experience" (pp. 910–911). Taking an autoethnographic stance, however, would focus me on analysing and interpreting how the personal history narratives I write about my learning as a mathematics teacher educator connect me and my particular lived experiences to wider cultural, social, and political contexts. In their comprehensive

discussion of the purposes, practices, and principles of autoethnographic research, Ellis and Adams (2014) explained that autoethnography refers to "research, writing, stories, and methods that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political" (p. 254). These authors stressed that implicit in autoethnography is the idea of connection, and that this connectedness is evident in the research process that autoethnographers follow and in the research products they create. So in an autoethnographic study, this connection will be seen in the way the research is conducted and the story that is written of that research.

The extract from my personal history narrative writing that I have presented in this chapter shows how my personal history narrative has been co-constructed with enablers on my research journey, such as colleagues, family members, and my supervisor. I did not consciously set out to use narrative co-construction as a writing technique. For me, co-construction evolved naturally as a reflection of my experiences of writing a personal history narrative that was emotional and, on occasion, difficult to write because it filled me with vulnerability. Writing my enablers' contributions into my personal history narrative was my way of striving for authenticity in the story I tell.

After the fact, I see more clearly what my supervisor might have seen in my writing; and I understand more about what Richardson (2000) meant when she described writing as a process of inquiry. Through my writing of my personal experiences, some of which are very painful to this day, I have been experiencing autoethnography as process as I grapple with understanding the contexts that shaped these experiences. I imagine that the use of autoethnography holds great potential for me on my journey of learning towards deeper self-understanding and particularly an understanding and acceptance of what fuels me as a mathematics teacher educator. As aware as I am of the challenges attached to methodologies that have to do with writing about oneself while dealing with issues that can make one feel vulnerable and exposed, I tend to agree with Ngunjiri, Hernandez, and Chang (2010) when they stated that "vulnerability is part of what makes reading autoethnographic works so compelling" (p. 8). While these authors focussed on the actual aspects that the autoethnographic writers expose about themselves, I would focus too on the intention of opting to write oneself vulnerable. I am of the opinion that it is just honest and more complete to acknowledge the vulnerabilities that engaging in research must bring forth in each of us. I consider that the "emotions of research" as I think of them, are aspects of the research process that are often suppressed into silence in the final public research products.

In my own writing, I am aware of a voice that is being suppressed in the co-constructed narrative I have so far presented. It is the voice of the researcher who experiences moments of deep pensiveness as she wrestles with what it means to be a self-study researcher in a mathematics education community that has preconceived ideas of what constitutes good research. Moving to autoethnography would give me more freedom to incorporate my own voice in my polyvocal personal story, including my sense making of how I am experiencing learning in this research study. I am particularly drawn to how Mizzi (2010) used vignettes of nodal moments to

incorporate his voice into the dynamics of his lived experience. I am excited about exploring autoethnography further because it is a methodology that is evolving in its own understanding of the principles that guide it, and this indicates that it is a methodology that is open to being crafted further by those who experience it. For example, Ellis (2007) admitted that, while autoethnography has an overt focus on relational ethics, there are no definitive rules or principles to tell autoethnographic researchers precisely what to do in researching with others, but that autoethnography is "accumulating more and more stories of research experience that can help us think through our options" (p. 5). This is a conversation I could contribute to as I negotiate the relational ethics issues I confront in my intentional and incidental interactions with others during my research study.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Chang's (2008) suggestions for collecting self-observational and self-reflective data in autoethnography have been particularly useful in deepening my understanding of the self I brought into this study, and the self that is learning through this study. I am developing a deepening understanding of the slippery concept of culture and am beginning to see how my "habits of being" (hooks, 2009, p. 30) have been shaped through my lived experiences in the various phases of learning in my mathematics teacher educator journey, starting with the family I grew up in. Kathleen has consistently encouraged me to keep a data trail during my research study, and I find some of this data in the conversations I have had with her during our supervisory meetings and the conversations I have had with critical friends in the TES group. As I transcribe the audio-recordings of these conversations, I am amazed (and often alarmed!) at how tentative my voice sounds at places, and how I seem to ventriloquise all that my supervisor is saying. I appreciate these stages of uncertainty as particular places where I was muddling around and needed others to help me with words to enhance my self-understanding and my understanding of crucial concepts in my study. I wept at places as I transcribed the audio-recording of the session where I shared the personal history extract I have written in this chapter with my critical friends in the TES group. I know the vulnerability I experienced then, will be with me forever: it is an integral part of me, shaped by my lived experiences. If I were to write a tweet now about what surprises me about my research process, I would write: "I am continually surprised how much I learn about myself and the concepts in my study through the conversations I have along this research journey." Autoethnography encourages, no, compels me I would say, to write honestly, emotionally, and ethically about this journey of learning in my efforts to write "a story that is hopeful" (Ellis & Adams, 2014, p. 271). Self-study, with its attention to the integral role of critical friends in the research study, reminds me to stay close to the fellow travellers on the various methodological routes that are all focussed on gaining a deepened understanding of the self. Drawing on the strengths of self-study and autoethnography is a very promising direction for my research study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Chapter consultant: Claudia Mitchell.

NOTES

[1] The Transformative Education/al Studies group, comprising supervisors and doctoral students of self-reflexive methodologies, hosts meetings where students present their work in progress. In this group I have experienced the role of critical friends as described by Schuck and Russell (2005), where the researchers in the group are a sounding board for my emerging research ideas through the challenging questions they ask and the supportive environment they provide as they join in my learning experience in my doctoral study.

[2] I have permission from Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan, my doctoral supervisor, to use extracts from the transcripts of our discussions during our supervisory meetings.

[3] Colleges of education and universities were distinctly different sectors of education, with the college sector being responsible for teacher training and the universities being the higher education sector, awarding degrees. When the national government of South Africa decided to close teacher training colleges in the early 1990s, several were incorporated into universities. In my study, I examine the changing teacher education landscape that shaped my learning as a mathematics teacher educator through the various mergers of institutions that I have experienced.

[4] In my efforts to keep a data trail as I progressed through the study, I kept detailed notes of all my conversations, including full transcripts of audio-recorded conversations. This was helpful in capturing not only the words, but also the emotions I felt at the time of these conversations.

[5] The Transformative Education/al Studies project (TES) is a funded research project led by researchers from three South African universities. The project participants are academic staff members who are pursuing master's and doctoral studies, and their supervisors. The participants are all engaged in the self-study of practice in higher education.

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CHRIS DE BEER

4. CREATIVE SELF-AWARENESS

Conversations, Reflections and Realisations

INTRODUCTION

Socrates's idea that the unexamined life is not worth living, holds particular meaning when choosing the lens of autoethnographic research. The narrative presented in this chapter deals with my growing self-awareness as creative designer, lecturer, and artist that manifested during two collaborations. During the first collaboration at a local art gallery, I juxtaposed my creative work with that of Marlene de Beer, my partner and colleague in the jewellery design programme at a university of technology. Attempting to understand my creative self, I had several reflective conversations with her regarding the exhibition. The subsequent collaboration was with Marí Peté, a poet. I wanted her to use poetry to uncover, what I thought were, the hidden meanings embedded in the works on display.

When these collaborations took place initially, the intention was to stage a meaningful collaborative exhibition and, secondly, to see if poetry could elicit perceived subtleties that were embedded in the exhibits. Subsequently, this self-exploration has taken a more deliberate route with specific conversations and reflections to uncover inherent meanings. The purpose of uncovering these meanings would be to harness this self-awareness in becoming a better lecturer and artist, to integrate it with the other aspects of self.

In this chapter I will show how my self-awareness has developed and grown. I will begin by outlining the collaborative exhibition with Marlene. Next, I will reflect on the various stages of the collaboration, discuss some of the works that were produced, and highlight a further collaboration with Marí. Then follow further reflections on the initial reflections and a focus on the realisations that occurred. The reflections will be interspersed with these realisations. To conclude I will identify the various assumptions and realisations I had during this autoethnographic journey.

CONTEXT

As a lecturer in the jewellery design programme, I lecture design and am responsible for the creative development of my students. Not big-C creativity, but small-C creativity, or second order creativity, as discussed by McWilliam and Dawson

D. Pillay et al. (Eds.), Academic Autoethnographies, 49–68.

(2008). I do not expect my students to create ranges of avant-garde jewellery, but I am trying to get them to design ranges of, what they would consider, reasonably original and innovative jewellery. The students I teach are culturally diverse, coming from Indian, African, European, and a mix of these backgrounds, but the jewellery they design does not often reflect their cultural heritages. In fact, the Western idiom seems to dominate. I feel that one way to address this hegemony is to enable the students to draw on their own experiences and points of view, their selves, as reference. It is difficult though to become aware of this self amid the bombardment of what constitutes life in the 21st century. I feel that I need to gain this self-knowledge first in order to facilitate the development of such self-awareness in my students.

I have become aware of the many aspects that intersect and constitute what is considered one's identity, and now I am exploring the many junctions in my life to determine which might be suitably harnessed in the quest for developing and sustaining creativity. Because the topic is small-C creativity, I am situating my exploration in the everyday experiences and realisations that I have within this crystallising intersect—in my professional life as lecturer, gemmologist, and goldsmith, as well as in my private, everyday life as father, husband, lower league squash player, amateur birdwatcher, Sunday gardener, and part-time bread baker.

METHODOLOGY

It was when I tried to identify aspects of my creative self that manifested during the collaborative exhibition and was attempting to understand the feelings subsequently aroused within me, that I decided to employ autoethnography. I was going to examine aspects of myself with the assistance of specific others, exploring my creative design side by having conversations with another designer (Marlene) and collaborating with a poet (Marí) to explore the more subtle emotionally inexpressible and layered side. It wasn't a specific problem with an answer that had to be uncovered, but a problem that needed to be explored—typical of qualitative research (Cresswell, 2006, p. 47).

Data Sources

I was not clear on what would constitute the data; initially I thought the objects on display would be the data, and discovered that "artefacts become data through the questions posed about them and the meanings assigned to them by the researcher" (Norum, 2008, p. 23). I therefore obtained my data from reflective discussions with Marlene, conversations with Marí, reflections in my journal,[1] blog posts[2] about the exhibition, and personal recollections. All these reflective interactions produce data by making explicit the meanings and significances ascribed to the objects and the circumstances that led to their creation.

Nature of the Collaborations

This was a partial collaboration with two people and at different stages of the exploration. It took the form of conversations and impromptu interactions based on creative impulses. This causes the report to be more evocative than analytic because most of the collaboration was done in order to arrive at new ground rather than examine what had been done before. My collaboration with Marlene can be referred to as a concurrent collaboration (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2013) because we did most of the collaboration at the same time and in the same space.

My interaction with Marí was twofold. Firstly, it was an artistic collaboration that resulted in a number of short poems, one of which provoked an emotional response from me—an uneasiness, a sense of foreboding, of expectancy. There has not been a discussion regarding these poems yet. This type of collaboration is sequential (Chang et al., 2013) because I handed images of the art works to Marí so that she could respond to them in her own time. I only saw the poems when she posted them onto the blog. Secondly, Marí was a critical friend who prompted several discussions after an initial draft of this chapter had been compiled. These critical conversations brought about several insights regarding the significance of this research. Some of these insights are discussed in the Realisations section at the end of the chapter.

Relational Ethics

Regarding the relational ethics (Ellis, 2007), both Marlene and Marí had opportunity to read this chapter to decide whether they were comfortable with what was written. Marlene is busy with postgraduate studies that examine notions of feminine subjectivity, and approached our collaboration as an opportunity for her to give voice to her own growing awareness regarding such issues. Originally, this chapter was part of an article Marí and I had cowritten for submission to a journal, so she is comfortable with what has been said.

Trustworthiness and Validity

Trustworthiness in qualitative research can be established by using crystallisation rather than triangulation to validate findings (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). I have applied this notion by seeing the various aspects of self that are identified, as facets of the same crystal. As a gemmologist, it is easy for me to see the external facets as manifestations of an internal structure that determines the configuration of these crystal faces. In crystallography, it is the regular molecular structure of the crystal that determines how light is interfered with, how it is refracted and reflected to result in the splendour one associates with gemstones.

The conclusions and positions I arrived at are valid because it was through input from others that I was able to make the leap from being self-absorbed to being

exposed. Marlene pointed out that I had made choices without consultation, and Marí made me aware of my inner turmoil**.**

ENGAGEMENT

A Conversation Begins

During the course of setting up the *Phenomenal Engagement* exhibition of our combined work at the KwaZulu-Natal Society of Arts Gallery in Durban, my conversation with Marlene changed to a dialogue amongst facets within me. I hope to portray this shift by compiling a narrative that outlines what happened, and then interspersing this narrative with reflections. When I considered the reflections, further insights occurred to me. For ease of reading, and to emphasise the fact that the reflections happened at a later stage and the insights at an even later stage, the reflections and insights are presented in text boxes, and in italics in text boxes within the text boxes, respectively. The nested text boxes illustrate the way that insights happen "on top of" reflections.

Setting up the exhibition became a way of making sense, conversing within, except instead of words, I was using objects to ponder and explain. While setting up the exhibition, I realised that underlying concepts were emerging, concepts that, for me, had very definite male–female connotations. These concepts were represented by objects that had multiple meanings, which became more lucid the moment they were placed in the vicinity of other objects, for example, when a bird shape faces an object it might be pecking it; if it faces away, it might be fleeing.

> The conversation that Marlene and I were having, I now realise, is known as a relationship. So many things are unsaid and surmised within a relationship and things that are said are often ambiguous. I thought that objects would have uncontested meanings and have now discovered the ambiguity of meaning and that it is a matter of interpretation. (Looking for easy answers and certainty.)
>
> > *—and that I need to have more deliberate conversations about my creative work.*

Blogging

Later I began to transfer the physical exhibition onto a blog—because I have been trying to convince my students to blog. In the jewellery design programme the emphasis is on the creative process, as opposed to the product. It is therefore imperative to keep a journal of sorts through which to show the way the process unfolds. In my view, my students do not keep adequate design diaries and I feel

blogging is an effective alternative way to reflect on the creative process. It is relatively easy to incorporate images and has a built in mechanism for indexing the writing that one does, that is, using tags for each post. I realised I could use the process of my blogging as a way of showing my students how to use a blog to make sense of their own creative activities.

> My own creative work and my employment become blurred quite often. I am fortunate to have such a close connection between the two. It enables me to model creative design activities to my students, but it also introduces an edge to my teaching. I often traverse learning spaces where I think I should know more, better. (Doubting myself?)

I use blogging in various ways: as an archive or filing cabinet, as a journal, as a portfolio exhibition, and as a teaching tool. I realise that reflection is necessary for development as a designer and this is why I encourage my students to keep a blog. One of the issues here is that they need guidance in how to use the blog for reflection. The main feature that I have found useful for reflection is the label or tag feature. It allows one to add tags to a post. A tag is a user-defined keyword that is attached to the post, which helps with the classification of all the posts and the information contained therein. A blog can be configured to show a list of the tags that have been allocated, and also the number of times a certain tag has been assigned (a tag cloud is similar, but it shows the frequency of a tag by the size of the word). This would then indicate an area of possible interest when a student is not sure what their focus is.

I used my own blog to demonstrate the use of tags and tag clouds to facilitate reflection. I was able to track the development and application of a motif by using labels in Blogger (see the Kiepersol post at http://phenomenalengagement.blogspot.com/2011/08/kiepersol.html).

> This post, and the tag cloud, can now be used as an exemplar for my students.
>
> > *At this stage I was looking for practical ways of making use of reflections. I was not concerned with the actual content, I was in standard lecturing mode, not aware, yet, of the importance of nuances and unspoken or unwritten meanings that are embedded here. I only became aware of these after my recent conversation with Marlene.*

I thought it would be quite simple to translate the exhibition into a number of photo posts on the blog, and started doing just that. Soon I realised there was more to an exhibit than could be portrayed in a photo. Because there were a number of subtleties

(such as the textures of the paper, and the white vinyl letters on a white wall) that were deliberately used, I felt I had to find a way to convey them. I started looking for ways to convey the spaciousness, the layout, the detail, the reflections, and the juxtapositions.

I did find some mechanisms for conveying such subtleties, but it would need a more deliberate effort to create a virtual exhibition that succeeds in getting all these nuances across. Two of the mechanisms are:

- Animated gifs, for showing multiple views of objects. (http://phenomenalengagement.blogspot.com/2011/09/sonder-winsbejag.html)
- Photosynths™ to show panoramic and close-up views. (http://phenomenalengagement.blogspot.com/2011/09/panorama.html)

It feels as if being aware of such mechanisms has now planted a seed for a future virtual exhibition that might even include sound.

It actually feels as if I need to spend more time with fewer objects. I feel like it would be more beneficial for me to find out what other participants and viewers experience when encountering our objects.

Why the Exhibition?

Marlene and I have separate studios at home and continuously produce creative work. She produces ranges of jewellery that have a very deliberate focus, whereas I experiment with a range of techniques and materials without necessarily having an end product in mind. One of Marlene's foci, the notion of female subjectivity, leads her to work with established and recognisable imagery that has deliberate feminine connotations, such as female profiles (cameos), cutlery (spoons and forks), and sewing equipment such as tape measures and safety pins. I work with titanium, aluminium anodising, bookbinding, and whitewall tyres. The imagery I work with often has a feminine or female shape or form such as curvaceous leaves or budding–bulging forms.

I wonder if this lack of focus is not possibly a symptom of the times, where men and women are searching for a fairer distribution of roles, but women are rooted more solidly than men because they bear the children and men look on (my words), unaware that women fear men's wrath (Marlene's words).

I am very aware of me trying to find my role, my function, and thinking that other people have more clarity than I do regarding one's place and role in life—so much generalisation! (Doubting myself as having less clarity.)

Living in the same space, and being in a relationship, has made me very aware of the tensions, the dialogue, and the complexities of interpretations of the same phenomenon by two different people. I have also become aware of the influence that two creative people in the same space have on each other. Imagine two musicians living in the same house each playing different instruments. I am quite sure that their music would be influenced by the other's. (To what extent … maybe they would also avoid each other?) They could not play different music at the same time, ignoring each other. In this way, it is inevitable that our jewellery would start "talking" to each other, and our practice rub off on the other. I sometimes explore techniques using Marlene's imagery. We are in constant dialogue in this way. (Are we, or is it just me?) I wandered into Marlene's studio and saw an arrangement of prototypes and pieces of jewellery she was making and realised that all my bits and pieces put next to her bits and pieces would create a rich tapestry, a dense conversation.

We reached a stage where we wanted to have a conversation with the world outside and this led to the decision to stage an exhibition where we would show our individual complete works, but also combine our bits and pieces to show the conversation we were having. It was an opportunity to extend the conversation.

> *—or rather I thought it was—when I spoke to Marlene at a later stage she told me that her participation was reluctant, she did not feel she wanted to do this, but only did it because she wanted to please me. So … it became evident that it was me who wanted to have this conversation with the world. … The bits and pieces would show the world what I was thinking and would be an opportunity for Marlene to show me what she was thinking, except I was not aware of this silent conversation. It only became apparent at a later stage when I had a conversation with her to confirm what the meanings of the art works were, or so I thought.*

Preparing for the Exhibition

Preparing to exhibit was a whole new conversation with its own dynamics. It consisted of seeing what we had, putting it all on a big table, and starting to sort and negotiate (see Figure 4.1). We also had to decide how to display, what I've come to call the "conversations" (see Figure 4.2)—how to place the objects so that the grouping would be perceived as an entity where the various components elicit a tension and invite closer scrutiny. Based on our experience of displaying at previous exhibitions, we decided to place each group of objects on its own piece of paper. I have lots of bits of paper in my studio and I realised that some of these sheets of

paper have male–female connotations, such as tissue paper being more feminine and cardboard being more male. This notion of juxtaposing male and female was implemented later.

The act of arranging and sorting is part of the creative process. In the jewellery department my students often feel that they have completed a project when they've made a piece of jewellery. I wonder if I should not change our project briefs so that they have two components, where the second part includes an aspect of sorting and negotiating.

Relating my creative work back to my teaching.

Figure 4.1. Compiling the conversations on a table tennis table at home

Figure 4.2 shows a group of objects arranged as a conversation. Each of these objects has a string of memories that resonated with me when I handled them. It consists of an opened safety pin above a folded paper medal made from handmade

Figure 4.2. A typical conversation

cotton paper with embossed gold-coloured aluminium foil from a champagne bottle. The embossed image is that of a classical cameo profile. Just below the medal is a little sterling silver pendant in the shape of a bud with a strand of red cotton attached to it. Below the pendant is an unset ceramic cameo that has been glazed with red earthenware glaze. These objects all lie on top of a piece of paper from an old book (hence the off-white colour); it is the fly leaf, which is the first page of a book—used to adhere the block of pages to the cover. These all lie on top of an upside down dressmaking pattern (note the dotted lines).

- The safety pin reminds me of Grey Street,[3] and the shop where I buy beads for the bead work that I teach my students. It also makes me question the biases I have regarding what it looks like compared to how well it works.

  > Similar to glossing over a pretty face, an example of superficial engagement—see later on.

- The handmade paper was made by a colleague, and it has evoked a desire to make my own. It exposes the hegemony of the bought over the handmade.

- I peeled the gold foil from a bottle of champagne.
- The cameo impression was made using a found piece of metal. It was meant for something else when I appropriated it.
- The red cotton string has all sorts of spiritual and bloody connotations. I started paying attention to it after one my students gave me a Lakshmi string.[4]
- The unset cameo pendant was made by Marlene. To me it signifies the stereotypical beauty of women. The type of beauty that causes me to gloss over a pretty face and project, thoughtlessly, all sorts of values that might not be present.

> Another case of superficial engagement.

The Exhibition

Figure 4.3. The exhibition at the gallery

Both of us had complete pieces and several prototypes and test pieces. The exhibition consisted of my work (the silvery framed prints hung against the wall) opposite Marlene's work (on small shelves against the wall), and the meeting ground in the middle was tables where the two bodies of work met in the form of conversations (see Figures 4.2 and 4.5). These conversations consisted of selected test pieces that complement each other or have the sort of tension that exists between the genders. That is the underlying theme of the exhibition: a conversation that is the result of tensions that are present, but not always evident. We were using our work to make some of the underlying tensions evident.

> I'm not sure that there is much tension evident. It all seems too gentle and pleasing to the eye. I wonder if we were not using the exhibition to relieve tensions instead.
>
> > *It now transpires that I DID balance the tensions rather evenly. I made things look nice and acceptable, giving everything a label and a place to be. (A superficial sorting out of a problem, typically male?)*

Advantages and Limitations of the Physical Exhibition

Being able to spread out our work in a large gallery space was a wonderful opportunity. It enabled us to see the discrete parts of our bodies of work. Each aspect could be isolated and studied more carefully. In our studios, the pieces tend to be on top of each other or out of sight in drawers. It also made it possible to see the deliberate similarities in our work. This enabled us to start the conversation on the walls of the art gallery in terms of how we juxtaposed the finished works. Having a central space for the conversations was ideal. It made it seem like an area where the thoughts were worked out (Is that not what happens in a conversation? You try to find out how you feel by saying different things and negotiating with the other person what sounds right—unless they are trying to fathom what it is that you want them to say—while crystallising what you think) before they manifested on the walls, which is kind-of how it happened.

The obvious limitation of a physical exhibition is that it has to be dismantled after a limited period. This is where the blog as archive and as continued exhibition comes in. However, the juxtaposition of the work on the blog is not as subtle as in a physical gallery space.

The Glossary

The interpretations of the motifs used in the artworks were not necessarily self-evident so we compiled a glossary to explain how we interpreted these motifs. Some of the terms that were included are: couple—relating to the union of opposites; decoration—an award; sanguine—bloody or optimistic; sine—Latin for curve, hollow or fold; tangent—touching but not intersecting; sinister—left-facing or ominous. These themes only became evident when we were preparing for the exhibition.

It was not as if these concepts came out of nowhere. I had explored heraldry as part of printing the medals and was amazed at the depth of meaning, which was not obvious, particularly in a non-feudal culture. We are both Afrikaans-speaking in an English-speaking city, known as the Last British Outpost, and have rediscovered the beauty of our mother tongue. This fascination with words has sparked an interest in the etymological roots of words.

> *It seems that the fascination was mostly mine and that Marlene's participation was more superficial. She was busy engaging with the notion that writing is a male thing, a tool that the patriarchy uses to maintain the status quo.*

We felt the glossary was very important but that it would probably not be read by everyone who attended the exhibition, even though it was placed at the entrance

to the show. We therefore had the words cut out of vinyl so we could stick them on the wall next to or near works that addressed the glossary terms. The words were cut from white vinyl to be stuck on a white wall. This was done deliberately so the words would not be very noticeable but that one would notice them when moving closer to the works, which were placed on narrow shelves on the wall (see Figure 4.4). The intention was to create a subtle texture as a background to the exhibition, similar to the subtle, textured backgrounds of the different papers used for the conversations.

I think we were trying to insert "background noise" into the conversation and I felt that we were the only ones who noticed it. Maybe the whole exhibition was itself background noise to the lives of the spectators? (A questioning of self value? Doubting the value of what we (I) were doing?)

> *It seems now that the exhibition was background noise to our relationship. What I mean is that there were other undercurrents happening all this time and I thought the exhibition was a focus we shared, but it was MY focus, not OURS. (Being very unaware of wider impacts, of the whole picture within which the exhibition or creative work is happening—superficial engagement?)*

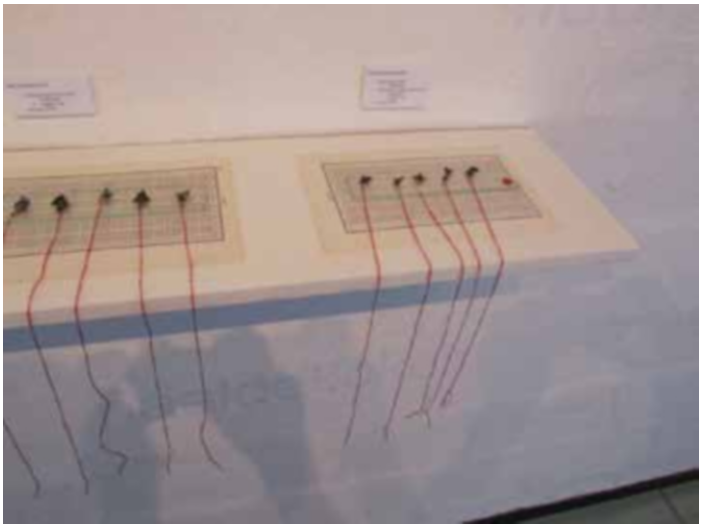

Figure 4.4. Shelf with birds, lettering naaldekoker *[dragonfly] on the wall underneath*

The Work

Marlene's work revolves around how women need to establish a feminine symbolic order or genre in response to the Western dominant masculine–patriarchal order, where women have historically served as a sacrificial substratum and mirror for masculine projections. She feels the need to contribute to the creation of a symbolic feminine order, which should be based on the recognition of ontological difference, while at the same time recognising coexistence. This does not signal the replacement of patriarchy with matriarchy. A mimetic strategy, as put forth by Luce Irigaray (1993), through subversion and parody, would be a method with which to disrupt the culturally dominant patriarchal symbolic. As Marlene said: "My choice of subject matter, techniques, and materials deliberately works to subvert and mimic the stereotypical normative construct of women as objects" (de Beer, 2013).

> This artist statement sounds so academic because Marlene has just had her proposal for her doctoral studies accepted, and the ideas here are from that document.

My work is more of a playful investigation into materials and techniques. I use everyday motifs that catch my eye, such as a leaf from the cabbage tree or the cross on the Portuguese soccer shirt, and then combine these with found materials, such as printed circuit (PC) board and chocolate wrappers, to create what I consider to be interesting objects. This allows my preoccupations to float to the top for closer inspection and introspection.

> I, on the other hand, am struggling to compile a pre-proposal literature review, which is why my writing seems so unacademic.
>
> > *Looking at it now, I recognise several terms that show a superficial engagement with my environment (including my family): playful … everyday motifs that catch my eye … interesting objects … preoccupations … float to the top.*

The Conversations

I will use Conversation #14 (Figure 4.5) as example. It shows a titanium dragonfly on its back above a square piece of PC board that has a cross-shaped hole in it. In the hole is a dark bird shape made from blackened sterling silver. Below the PC board is a greenish cameo of a classical woman's face that looks to the left (sinister). This arrangement of objects, the conversation, lies on top of a sheath of old bookkeeping

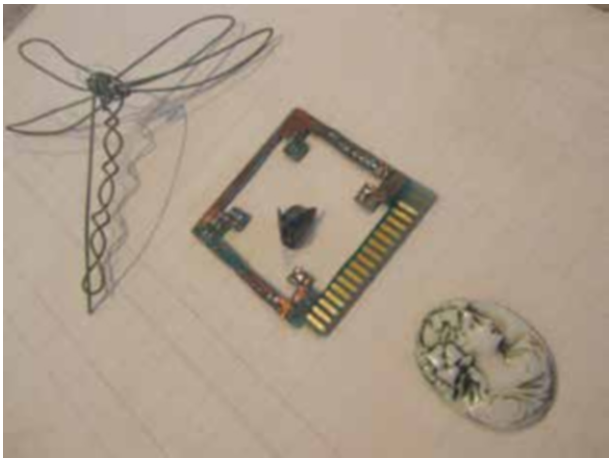

Figure 4.5. Conversation #14

paper, which in turn is on top of an old dressmaking pattern. Besides the obvious male–female connotations of the various objects, there are a few other concepts I would like to identify: presence–absence, chaos–control, contained–drifting, hard–soft, and connection–disconnection, displacement– …

Presence–absence is shown by the cross-shaped hole with the bird inside; the presence of the bird emphasises the absence of the cross. The cross is a Crusader cross, which was awarded by the Pope to the Crusaders for their (futile) campaign against (perceived) injustice. The cross that was cut from this piece of PC board can be found in another conversation—where it was "awarded." What is left here is an intention, an allusion to an award.

Seeing how dense this description is, I feel that there were too many conversations for the viewers to engage with meaningfully. We should have been more selective and shown fewer conversations if we wanted to say something specifically. Maybe that was the point though: there are so many conversations in a relationship. Which ones are the important ones, and who decides?

I'd decided, without consultation, which conversation to use as an example of our interactions. The problem with making this unilateral decision was brought home when I had a conversation with Marlene about the meanings inherent in, what I blithely called our conversations. She pointed out that it was actually a conversation that I was having with myself because she would have chosen a different example to focus on.

When I wanted to know which example she would have used, she browsed the archive of images and selected Conversation #20 (Figure 4.6).

Figure 4.6. Conversation #20

This conversation, to describe it using Marlene's words, consists of two groupings: at the top is a female figure, which is linked to a red umbilical-like cord that connects to something that is off the page, and at the bottom are two motifs that look sharp, like weapons or stings.

I would have described it differently, focusing on the materials used and the actual motifs.

> *I think I have uncovered a method for future autoethnographic explorations with Marlene: we can describe what we see separately and then compare notes.*

Why Haiga?

In compiling the conversations, I recognised that there were quite elaborate and potentially dense concepts that were being summed up with careful placement of

three or four little objects. Having read and heard Marí's poem, "Umgeni Road" (a poem where she captured street and shop signs while driving down Umgeni Road, Durban; Peté, 2008) and bumping into her at the exhibition, I realised that a poet like her could probably capture the essence of the various conversations.

> I was still under the impression that there is a single essence or meaning resident in phenomena.

At the outset, our collaboration took an unexpected direction. Marí contributed independent artistic responses to the blog, rather than teasing out meanings in the way I imagined. Her approach to the collaboration was rooted in the principles of haiga—an ancient Japanese tradition of combining an artwork and a poem, each work carrying its own meaning while leaving space for combined meanings between the art and poetry to be brought to the haiga by the viewer–reader who then becomes an active participant in the creative process. Such creative power led to a key moment in our collaboration, when one poem (see Figure 4.7) struck a deep chord with me:

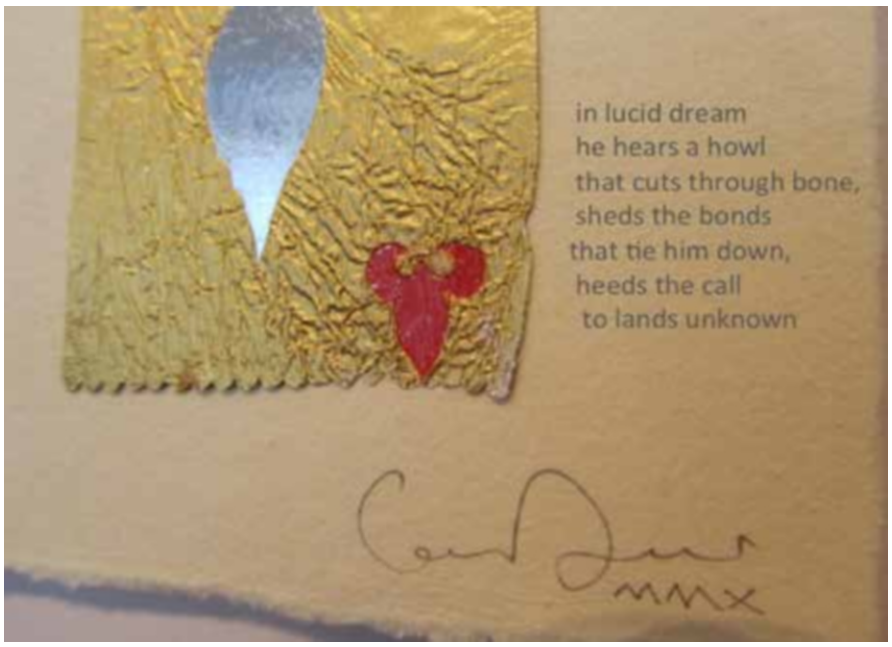

Figure 4.7. This haiga tapped into a subconscious conversation within me

in lucid dream
he hears a howl
that cuts through bone …
sheds the bonds that tie him down,
heeds the call to lands unknown

This poem spoke to me directly—almost unnerved me—it seemed as if the poem was, unbeknown to Marí or me, tapping into a deeper, subconscious conversation within me. Was I busy talking to aspects of myself through the work I was making—aspects like my anima or other archetypes?

I'm still coming to terms with this realisation.

I'm still coming to terms with this realisation.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Reed-Danahay (1997, p. 2) felt that autoethnography can be seen in two ways: as an "ethnography of one's own group" or, what I feel applies to what I'm doing, as "autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interest." This autobiographical writing was done in a postmodern sense because it questioned the idea of a coherent, individual self. I straddle a few ethnographic groups: lecturer, designer, artist, mentor, jeweller, curriculum coordinator, husband, father, and son, and I found that the demands and expectations of each of these roles made me feel very incoherent and un-individual.

Assumptions

According to Muncey (2010, p. xi) "the unexamined assumptions that govern everyday life, behaviour and decision making are as strong as any overt beliefs." If these unexamined assumptions are going to exert that much influence on my life, I feel I ought to start examining them to determine the extent of their influence. Originally, I assumed there was a simple question to which I was seeking an answer: "What are the meanings embedded in my creative activities, and how does I make these explicit in an understandable way?" It has now transpired that the issue is far more complex, and I find myself complying with Cresswell's point of view regarding qualitative research. He suggested that qualitative researchers are trying to identify "the complex interaction of factors" rather than "tight cause-and-effect relationships" (Cresswell, 2006, p. 47).

There is not one question that I am trying to answer here. Instead, I am on a search for an approach that I can take when dealing with my students as creative designers. I want to find out how to expose the underlying motivations, the relationship between everyday activities and creative practice. I assumed it would be a simple matter of identifying specific solutions that could be implemented. However, this autoethnographic exploration and analysis has made me aware of the complex nature of the issue at hand. Creswell (2006, p. 47) suggested that qualitative research involves the reporting of many perspectives, identifying the many factors involved, and generally sketching the larger picture that emerges. This correlates with my understanding of what Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) meant when they referred to crystallisation as an outcome of autoethnography.

I think that the role of a good lecturer in the creative field is to encourage playfulness and to recognise when it becomes relevant in terms of the creative process.

Realisations

When Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011, para. 3) proclaim: "autoethnography is one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist," I realise that although I'm not trying to hide, I need to seek ways of drawing on my subjectivity and emotionality more overtly to determine my own influence on my research and how to use it in my pedagogical and creative practices. Collaborative autoethnography, in this instance, facilitated a greater awareness of myself, and prevented me from arriving at glib and ready-made answers.

My conversations with Marlene helped me to see how self-absorbed and prescriptive I was regarding intentions and interpretations of the art works, specifically the conversations. It became a matter of negotiating the interpretations rather than writing up the meanings that I assumed were there and using a conversation solely to confirm what I was thinking. I realised that conversations are an opportunity to be made aware of other points of view regarding the same object. Marlene helped me realise that there are multiple interpretations that can be elicited if one wants to develop the whole complex picture (Cresswell, 2006). I might even have stumbled on a methodology that consists of eliciting many points of view about the same phenomenon before arranging them into a configuration around a central concern. Like the facets that embrace the crystal, I now have an opportunity to discover what my creative self looks like.

I realised there is no meaning resident in objects. These artefacts turned out to be prompts for conversations that provided the data that I could then interpret. Looking at my reflections, I realised I was trying to develop a simple picture, which probably contributed to the sense of uncertainty that also emerged in my reflections.

Marí's one poem in particular and my response to it was invaluable; it opened another avenue to explore, or, to use the crystal analogy (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), it showed another facet of myself, one where unknowns lurk. Marí's poetic responses made me aware of other aspects of self that could be ascribed to the artefacts that had been created and displayed. I could not have arrived at such self-awareness without her contributions because I'd assumed that all the conversations had taken place and just needed to be organised and written up. She showed that there are unknowns beneath the surface and that creative collaborations might be useful to elicit these—so one can inspect them and see which facets of the crystal they are.

Jolt

I agreed with what Marlene and Marí said about my inadvertent one-sided approach to the exhibition collaboration and the unknowns lurking within because it struck a chord within me. Other things were said and other haigas written that did not evoke or provoke a response from me. It is as if I have an inner compass that gets stuck and needs to be jolted from time to time so I can reorientate myself.

Implications

The realisations I've had are applicable to two areas: my pedagogical practice, and my own creative practice. I could enhance my teaching by stage managing collaborations with or between my students, similar to what I did with Marlene. We, the students and I, would have to bring our own creative artefacts to the collaboration. Until now, I have asked my students to reflect on what they have made. I will now ask them to arrange or display their work in conjunction with one another, and then to comment on the tensions or harmonies that are made evident. It would be as if they were having a conversation via their objects, and the conversation would have to be decoded for the viewers. This decoding would be their reflections and would, hopefully, lead to realisations about their creative work and their selves.

I have many more objects that I could use to stage a collaboration with someone else. The exhibition with Marlene focused on our relationship and issues of gender. If I were to choose someone who I have a different type of relationship with, like a colleague who is more technically orientated, to juxtapose my creative work with hers or his, it would probably reveal a different kind of aesthetic concern and show another facet of the crystal.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Chapter consultant: Sizakele Makhanya.

Marlene, for sharing so selflessly, but still being critical, and Marí for spontaneously taking off by herself.

NOTES

[1] I use an online journal that I can access from my work computer, my home computer, and my tablet. It is OneNote, one of the applications in Microsoft. It takes the form of a notebook, with sections and pages that can be added as I need them. Whatever changes I make are synchronised to the other computers so I have all my reflections in one place. Using my tablet allows me to insert photos into the journal, where required. I often take a photo of whatever creative work I have produced, upload it to my journal, and only write about it at a later stage.

[2] *Blog* is an abbreviation of *Web log*. A blog is an online journal that can be public or private, much like a diary that allows one to post text and images. Each entry is dated and can be indexed with labels (also known as *tags*) that allows one to access specific entries or groups of entries at a later stage. One can also post to one's blog using a cell phone (mobile blogging). I often post photos from my cell phone camera directly to my blog so that I can add descriptions and reflections to these photos at a later stage.

[3] Grey Street is a nearby Indian business district, which is also a tourist attraction because it is a colourful and vibrant trading area. I often take my students there to purchase beads for a Zulu beadwork project.

[4] A Lakshmi string is the red cotton string Hindu people wear around the wrist of their right hand to signify their devotion to the goddess Lakshmi who is the goddess of spiritual and material wealth and prosperity.

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LASSE REINIKAINEN AND
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5. CURATING AN EXHIBITION IN A UNIVERSITY SETTING

An Autoethnographic Study of an Autoethnographic Work

INTRODUCTION

> Autoethnography can be a way of doing something different with theory and its relation to experience. (Stewart, 2013)

Sometimes, as an academic, you find yourself in workshops on methods or research areas that are new to you. When these workshops are interdisciplinary they may make you think a little bit differently about your own work, and perhaps a new seed is planted and you find a new way to approach an old problem you have been working on. It may also inform the way you teach and interact with students.

In this chapter, we draw on experiences of curating an exhibition of curated photo albums as result of a workshop that was to become so much more than just planting a seed. The workshop was about participatory visual methods, and was organised by Forum for Gender Studies at Mid Sweden University in the city of Sundsvall, Sweden, and led by guest professor Claudia Mitchell from McGill University, Montreal, Canada. In this workshop, we were an interdisciplinary group of six researchers and teachers in higher education. All were connected to the Forum for Gender Studies at Mid Sweden University, which is an interdisciplinary unit within the university, and the participants came from different disciplines of social sciences: public health,[1] sociology, and gender studies. The group ranged from professors to doctoral candidates and the task at hand was to learn the method of personal, curated photo albums[2] on a specific theme (Mitchell & Allnutt, 2008; Mitchell & Pithouse-Morgan, 2014; Mitchell, Weber, & Pithouse, 2009; Smith, 2012). Little did we know that the workshop would grow into a project including the albums themselves, an exhibition of the albums, and the writing of this very chapter in the book you are now holding in your hand.

The prompt for our curated albums was to find and work with pictures in our personal photo albums that somehow mirrored social change; these albums became the focus of the exhibition we describe in this chapter. At the end of the album workshop, the opportunity to curate an exhibition was given to us

D. Pillay et al. (Eds.), Academic Autoethnographies, 69–83.

(Lasse Reinikainen and Heléne Zetterström Dahlqvist). While we discovered that the act of curating our individual albums could be regarded as an autoethnographic activity in itself, here we focus on the experiences of curating the exhibition of the photo albums. In so doing, we describe and highlight the autoethnographic nature of this work.

For teachers, it can sometimes be challenging to find ways to teach about issues connected to complex and abstract societal structures to new students, especially if we want them to understand the connection to their own individual experiences. The curated albums were a way for us to learn how to visualise situated social change in our own lives. The concept of situated social change will be further discussed later in this chapter. The challenge for us as teachers and researchers was to create an exhibition and visualise the insights and the learning we did when curating the albums, and at the same time be reflexive on how we can use this new understanding in the classroom when meeting students.

As researchers, we usually study groups that are somehow disadvantaged—we are "studying down." In the last decades, social researchers have begun to embark on a "studying up" approach, that is, studying privileged groups (Colyar, 2013; Nader, 1972; Pelias, 2013; Priyadharshini, 2003; Stich & Colyar, 2013; Walsh, 2007; Williams, 2012). As academics, we may be considered to be a privileged group, but we were not studied by someone else but by ourselves. So, rather than studying down or up, the curated albums project became an example of "studying inwards" and hence, a self-reflexive autoethnographic work. The approach of studying inwards and looking at personal experiences became one of the central themes in the exhibition and something we wanted to encourage others to do as well.

THE AIM AND ORGANISATION OF THE CHAPTER

One of the main questions we discuss in this chapter is how autoethnographic data on different levels may be addressed and managed. As curators of the exhibition, we were also a part of the group curating the albums on social change. This put us in a position where we had to be self-reflexive on multiple levels as well as in different temporal dimensions. The specific aim of the present chapter is to describe the processes of the planning, producing, and reflecting of the exhibition itself, while at the same time collecting autoethnographic data in order to write about curating an exhibition. In connection with this, we discuss different dimensions of self-reflexivity related to these processes. We also discuss ethical issues regarding curating an exhibition throughout the chapter.

In the following section, we position ourselves methodologically and socio-culturally as well as in relation to our professional and disciplinary work. Next, we will present the actual practical curation of the exhibition as well as a more elaborate and critical reflection on the same curation process. Finally, we will provide some conclusions and implications of these experiences.

METHODS AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Our understanding of autoethnography draws on the work of, among others, Chang (2008), Ellis and Bochner (1996), and Chang, Ngunjiri, and Hernandez (2012). Chang et al. defined autoethnography as "study of self, writing about individual experiences of life within the context of family, work, schooling, and society and interpreting the meanings of the experiences" (2012, p. 11). Autoethnography can be viewed as a method of introspection in order to investigate everyday life and by doing so, connecting culture and the individual. In recent years two different genres of autoethnography have been developed. One is the evocative or emotional genre, which emphasises the individual personal experience, and the other is the analytical genre, which instead emphasises the social world outside the researcher (Pace, 2012). In this study, we lean more towards the evocative genre because we focus more on our own experiences on an individual level.

Autoethnographic studies are often done as individual or group work, but this specific study is an example of collaboration between two people (more about different forms of collaborative autoethnography in Chang et al., 2012). It means that we were two individuals who reflected individually as well as jointly, which involved constant negotiation and discussion. This also implies that the selves were in focus in a very personal and intimate way. This called for a high level of reflexivity on behalf of the researchers and a will to use the subjective to analyse the objective. In other words, we used the situated and embodied experiences of our subjective selves to analyse the more objective social context. After all, as in most autoethnographic work, we were using very specific personal and individual experiences and perceptions in order to say something about the general (i.e., objective) culture (Chang, 2008). This also calls for yet another level of reflexivity where we had to reflect on our own reflections of the other person's reflections. Sometimes they cohered and sometimes they diverged but most often, our reflections were concordant. This was a result of us having the same theoretical and methodological framework regarding autoethnography and visual methodology. We did not work with duoethnography or traditional two-person autoethnography, which often involves presenting data in dialogue style as described by, for example, Chang et al. (2012) and Hernandez, Ngunjiri, and Chang, (2014). Instead, we were two individuals who were co-reflexive, that is, we did self-reflexive work regarding an "us" or "we." Drawing on Mead's (1967) concept of "I" and "me" in his theory of the self—where the me is the socialised dimension of a person, and the I is the reflecting and active dimension of a person—the two of us discussed, thought, and acted together while, at the same time, actively reflecting on the acting, thinking, and talking.

Our collected data consists of field notes (Figure 5.1), photos, and short videos captured by our cell phones. In our field notes, there was text as well as drawings. We continuously sketched our ideas about the content and form of the exhibition, and we also drew mind maps regarding theoretical concepts as well as timelines.

We took pictures and shot short videos while searching for suitable spaces for the exhibition, during meetings, and during the actual mounting of the exhibition.

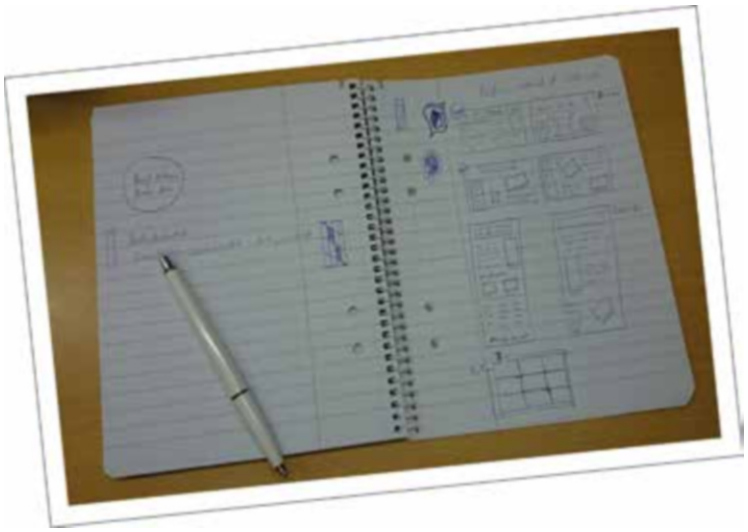

Figure 5.1. Field notes

PRACTICALITIES AND SELF-REFLEXIONS

The Curation of the Exhibition

Studies on curating an exhibition may be new to researchers outside of fine arts and art history although, as Mitchell (2011) highlighted, as more researchers engage in visual research (and especially photovoice), the curating of an exhibition (either by the participants or by the research team) becomes more common. Therefore it has become increasingly important to share experiences about the process of curating an exhibition, including planning, practical issues, and doings.

The following description of the practical process of curating the exhibition may seem to be a linear description of the order of how different things were done. However, some of these were parallel processes, which we will try to be explicit about. Apart from the practicalities of creating an exhibition, we were continuously thinking of how to transform the experiences of our own learning process in the album project into a visual expression.

Our curation of the exhibition started somewhat spontaneously from the group session where all the curated albums had been presented. The workshop facilitator proposed the idea of creating an exhibition of the albums in order to share the

experiences with others and to encourage other people to curate their own albums. The group jointly decided that we (the two authors of this chapter) would take on this project and everyone gave us permission to use their albums. After this decision the group was dissolved and the work continued as collaboration between the two of us—one researcher from the social science department and one from the health science department. We immediately began to talk about what an exhibition of these albums could look like. We then decided to collect all the albums and go through them to make sure we both had the same general understanding of them. At this point, we also decided that we would use the curatorial statements of each album and not change or interpret them in any way. It was not possible to display all photos from every album; therefore, we had to go through a process of selecting appropriate photos. Next, we started a brainstorming process on how to display the albums and their content in an exhibition. Simultaneously, we had thorough discussions about the aims of the exhibition—who would be our audience, where should we have the exhibition, and how do we present ourselves as the authors or producers of the exhibition itself and as individual contributors to the content of the exhibition?

We concluded that our aim was to inspire others to answer the thought-provoking question—"Is there social change in you?"—by pursuing the process of curating albums of their own. These others were primarily students at campus but also other faculty members, as well as campus visitors. We had several discussions regarding how we would formulate a phrase or a question that would catch the viewers' attention. We finally decided to use "Is there social change in you?" because this question captured the central theme of the title of the exhibition. Based on classical theories of social psychology (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Mead, 1967) as well as more modern social theories like Connell's (2002) theories on gender, we see an intertwined relationship between society and individuals. Just as individuals are integrated within society, so society is integrated within individuals. Hence, we all carry society and societal structures within ourselves; society is embodied in individuals. From this perspective, society can be seen as situated within individuals and as society changes, so do individuals. The way we understand society and ourselves as individuals, can be altered as societal structures, language, and cultures change. This is our main point in formulating the question "Is there social change in you?" and using *Situated Social Change* as title for the exhibition.

Thus far in the process, we started walking through the campus halls trying to find a space that would be appropriate for the exhibition. Simultaneously, because we were not sure about the size of our financial resources at that point, we were discussing whether to make the exhibition out of roll-up panels or posters or perhaps photographs? What would the different types of media cost? Also, the different spaces we found worked more, or less, effectively depending on the choice of media. We also discussed mobility issues: should this exhibition be mobile and able to move

from one space to the next? Another issue to consider was how long the exhibition should be on display. Curating an exhibition can be done in most settings and is not restricted to indoor spaces. Our choice of space was the university campus but could, for example, have been a community centre or something similar.

Figure 5.2. Finding and discarding a space

Once we decided on media (posters, 70 × 100 cm) and space (a space through which many people pass on their way to the cafeteria), the next step was to go back to our office and start sorting out themes and in what order to present the different albums. Some of the albums had a more explicit notion of social change where the connection between obvious societal changes, like technological changes, has affected peoples' everyday lives, while others had a more personal focus where the social aspect was embedded in a personal story. Also, an important decision that had to be made at this point in the process was which pictures from each album were to be displayed in the exhibition. Our first criterion was that the photos should be connected to the curatorial statement. Our second criterion was the visual and aesthetic aspects of the images in each poster as well as in the exhibition as a whole. Another issue to consider was the quality of the photos, some of which were digital and some of which were more than 20-years-old paper copies. We also considered ethical issues because some of the photos had very personal and intimate content.

First, as we as curators were deciding which pictures would work best in the exhibition, we had to go back to each participant for approval to use the chosen images. However, that approval was dependent on whether there were other people in the picture, who would have to give approval to being visible in an exhibition. In the end, we had to blur one person's face because she did not want to be recognised in connection with what she was doing in one of the pictures.

We produced our posters in PowerPoint and when the first draft was finished, we sent it to the other album curators in the group so that they could approve "their" poster—we had decided to go with one poster per album. As we were not experienced in producing posters in PowerPoint, one challenge was to predict how different colours, fonts, and paper quality would look in a big format. Therefore, we decided to ask the university graphic designer to help us with these issues. Once decisions on colour and fonts were made, we also started to produce advertisement materials for the exhibition itself and for its opening.

Self-Reflecting and Producing the Exhibition: Past, Present, Future

As various researchers working in the area of autoethnography have observed, the very act of writing (and preparing to write) is key (Colyar, 2013; Pelias, 2013). During the preparation of the exhibition, as we took field notes and produced photographs and videos of the process, we reflected on how we would actually write about the production of the exhibition. This means that there have been, basically, three different temporal dimensions of self-reflexivity related to these processes. One temporal dimension related to the past, that is, the actual curating of the albums as an emotional journey to be considered in the curation of the exhibition process. Another time dimension related to the present—the curation (or the doing) of the exhibition and, finally, the third related to the future—how will we write about it? However, our point of departure was in the present, that is, in the actual process of producing the exhibition while, at the same time, reflecting back to the past and into the future.

Walking through the Halls

As we walked through the campus halls to find the right space for our exhibition, there was a point where we stopped and reflected on how we suddenly saw the familiar in a new way. Starting to be very sensitive about the size of a wall or how light a wall was and how many people might be passing by a particular space, we also found totally "new" spaces that obviously had always been there but that we had never really observed before. Walking around campus, we rediscovered how different spaces infused different feelings, and that the same place could feel different depending on what time of day it was. The same space can have different functions depending on who is occupying the space. We found places that were perfect considering lightning and aesthetics, but realised that it would be technically

difficult (and probably expensive) to hang posters in those spaces. For example, a huge brick wall, part of the campus cafeteria and the library, would have been perfect for the exhibition. We found other places that were better from a technical point of view but they were places where few people passed on a daily basis.

As we began to really see our familiar everyday campus halls, we also started to become more aware of the fact that once the exhibition was up, the curated albums project group would be visible to others at campus in a way that none of us in the group had been before. Showing pictures from our personal photo albums and displaying our curatorial statement connected to the album for the first time, we would actually expose ourselves in a way we were not used to. This issue would be important for anyone who exposes their personal photos in a public space, but became even more pronounced because we all, as teachers and researchers, are public persons at the university. As this insight grew in us as curators of the exhibition, so grew our awareness of the relational ethics (Ellis, 2007a) regarding the other people in the group who were also to be exposed. According to Ellis, relational ethics "recognizes and values mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched, and the researchers and the communities in which they live and work" (2007a, p. 4). Thus, there were several dimensions of relational ethics that needed to be addressed in this project. To begin with, every person in the group needed to consider relational ethics with respect to those represented in their curated album. Secondly, we as curators needed to consider our relation to the individuals whose albums we were to publically re-present, and the third dimension was the delicate matter of showing these re-presentations to an audience. This became especially important because the exhibition was on display in the same space where we spent most of our everyday working lives. What are our ethical responsibilities towards the audience and to our coworkers (Ellis, 2007a) in a setting that is our professional community? What happens when the students we meet in the classrooms suddenly get a different or new insight into our personal lives? These questions became central to us as we curated the exhibition and worked with the others' albums as well as our own.

"It's an Artwork, Not Public Relations"

When deciding to ask the university graphic designer for help with how to make pictures and texts on the posters readable, we were very pleased and grateful that he agreed to help us out. In the meeting with him, however, we realised that he viewed our work as part of an official public relations piece, and that he had very firm ideas about how things should look. In trying to make him understand that the project of ours was an artwork rather than official information from the university, we became very aware of how we as curators of the exhibition served as gatekeepers of the ethical considerations we had made when curating each of the participants' posters. For example, the integrity of the way we wanted to present the work with the curated albums became very important to protect. In the end, very few suggestions that the graphic designer gave us were actually implemented.

Invading a Space

While hanging our posters (Figure 5.3) on the chosen wall in the passage between the social sciences building and the health sciences building, a few people stopped to look at what we were doing. Even though they never struck up a conversation with us, we understood they were probably undergraduate students on their way to or from the cafeteria. Some people did not stop to look but they definitely became aware that some sort of change was under way on the walls they were used to see empty; we could see how they slowed their pace and glanced at the walls. We realised that the presence of these images changed the space considerably. In many ways, we were not only invading a physical space in one of the campus buildings, but also invading the students' everyday familiar spaces.

Figure 5.3. Lasse making sure the posters are hanging right

Planning Ahead, Reflecting Back

When we got the posters from the printing department, we were surprised at what they looked like. Even though we had worked a lot with the posters in PowerPoint, and imagined how they would look as finished products, we were not really prepared for the visual experience of the images in the bigger format. It was a very different

thing to see and touch a big poster compared with seeing an image on a computer screen. Just handling the posters gave a sense of joy and fulfilment. It was an emotional aspect we did not think of beforehand. Also, these emotional and practical issues gave us new ideas of how to present the posters. For one thing, our initial ideas of the narrative logic between the individual posters that we outlined digitally, was changed and rearranged.

While hanging the exhibition we reflected both on how this exhibition would be received by the audience who would see the images in this particular space, as well as how we could show it in other places (both at physical places as well as on digital platforms). We also reflected on how this way of hanging differed from our initial plans and the sketches we made in the beginning of the process. This meant that we, at that specific moment, were reflecting on the three different temporal dimensions at the same time (past, present, and future), while also thinking of our own simultaneous positions as private and professional people at the university.

Taking notes during the whole process made it possible to be more self-reflexive, both at the time when things happened but also afterwards. When we went back and looked at our field notes from the beginning of the process, we saw that there were a lot of notes but fewer and fewer as we got closer to the opening of the exhibition. The more practical work we did and the more the ideas became physical objects, the less likely we were to take notes. We could also see that we were very creative and had lots of ideas in the early phase, while closer to the end the notes tended to be more like memos. On the other hand, we took more and more photographs as the process progressed. When a project starts there are many uncertainties, which can both promote creative ideas but also be limiting because it is not really possible to plan ahead because you do not know what resources you have.

Ethics in Autoethnographic Data Collection

Besides the ethical considerations we have discussed above regarding the creation of the exhibition, there were also ethical issues in relation to the actual collecting of autoethnographic data. At the time we collected the data and worked with the exhibition, we did not know if the data would be presented in a journal article or in a book, and asking people if they were okay with being in a picture that may or may not turn up in an article or book was a little awkward. This is an example of how ethical considerations become an issue in autoethnographic work when other people are involved. Autoethnographic work almost always includes other people, either as a part of a narrative or as a backdrop (Chang, 2008). Taking pictures of ourselves and of spaces, field notes, and other artefacts was much easier to handle ethically. We knew we were going to write about the process of curating an exhibition in the near future, starting right after the opening of it, but a week before the opening we did not know in what form it would appear. Collecting data became influenced by an attitude of "just in case," because we were not sure how we would end up using the data. The future was still uncertain.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

When images that we usually keep at home in an album or computer are transferred to a public space (and to another format), the meaning or reading of the images alters in different ways. Zuromskis (2013) wrote about the "contentious relationship between photography's vernacular culture [the snapshot] and the aestheticizing function of the museum." (p. 119). By creating our exhibition, albeit not in a museum but in a public area in a university where display is possible, were we too engaging in aestheticising the vernacular? Here we focus on two aspects. Firstly, there is the idea of aestheticising the vernacular, which means that the ordinary becomes art and is thereby laden with another symbolic meaning. When the value of a picture changes in this way, it will lead to a different viewing and understanding by the beholder. This also affects the judgment of the picture in the sense that the higher it is being valued, the harder it may be criticised. An everyday snapshot usually does not have an aesthetic value of its own, but may be valued as an aesthetic photograph if it is displayed as such. Emotional issues thus become built into this process. Secondly, emotional issues also become involved when the private becomes public, which could put us in a vulnerable position, especially as the images are on display in the same place where we are public persons as teachers. Suddenly students can see parts of our private lives as well as the introspection we did as researchers. On one hand, we are exposing our personal lives; on the other hand, we are showing them an academic research project. In this sense, we were simultaneously private and professional. This fact did inform us as we worked with the exhibition because certain photos were left out in the process because we considered them to be too personal. Central to our learning in this particular part of the exhibition process was that while we as teachers and researchers may use our personal situated embodied experiences in teaching and research, the boundaries to the private were elucidated very clearly. If we had chosen an off-campus site for our exhibition these issues would probably have been very different. The emotional aspects as well as the possibility of being in a vulnerable position are closely linked to the relational ethics (Ellis, 2007b) discussed above. We had several discussions with all workshop participants before the opening of the exhibition, but there was no way of discussing with the audience beforehand. This left us with a feeling of uncertainty in two major aspects. One was that we did not know how the exhibition and the question, "Is there social change in you?" would affect the audience. The other was the effect of students seeing very personal aspects of their teachers' lives, and whether that could affect interactions in classrooms.

As proposed by Pithouse, Mitchell, and Weber (2009), "self-reflexivity in teaching and teacher development can illuminate social and educational challenges that have resonance beyond the self" (p. 1). Clearly our own autoethnographic and self-reflective work has helped us to see the value of this kind of work in our teaching in the areas of public health, sociology, and gender studies. Understanding social change as a concept or term (or any other academic term) may sometimes

Figure 5.4. Heléne stands back: How will this be received?

become abstract to students, basically, because teachers find it to be a merely abstract concept as well. When curating the albums on the theme of social change, we found possible new ways to teach about social change and to make social change visible in individual lives. This theme also opens up the possibilities for a discussion about the role of individuals in social change. Hence, we believe our teaching skills increased in the process of curating the albums, and were even further enhanced when curating the exhibition. The process of trying to visualise a theoretical concept like situated social change incited us to start thinking of how we mediate and communicate knowledge to students when teaching. Furthermore, we had a rare opportunity to have interdisciplinary discussions about how to deploy this new knowledge. The autoethnographic work of both the albums and the exhibition became a new way of doing something different with theory and its relation to experience as put forward by Stewart (2013). However, only the future can tell how this actually affects our teaching skills in practice because no time has passed since the curation of the exhibition and the writing of this chapter.

The process itself also made us feel self-conscious about ourselves as individuals and as professionals, and the process of self-reflexivity was enhanced by actually conducting both the album and the exhibition projects instead of just reading, writing, talking, and teaching as we usually do as teachers in higher education. The fact that we were two teachers and researchers from different but close fields collaborating in this process also meant a great deal because teaching can be a very lonely trade. When giving students this kind of reflexive assignment it is important to think about their perspective, which might include that they want to "do it right"

and be prepared for the assignment because they know they will be graded on it. How can we make them do reflexive work without these constraints? The emotional aspects of reflexive work, as well as ethics, time consumption, and effort must be considered thoroughly in a teaching situation. Not all students are willing to invest emotionally in a course in this way. Despite these potential obstacles, the possibly joyous and surprising results of such a learning process are important to highlight.

In the emerging literature on visual methods and autoethnography, to our knowledge, there is no previous work done on self-reflective work when curating an exhibition of visual research. While the body of literature on curated albums is growing (Mitchell & Allnutt, 2008; Mitchell & Pithouse-Morgan, 2014; Mitchell et al., 2009; Smith, 2012) there is a need to bring self-reflection into the process of representing visual work in an exhibition.

Finally, we reflect on the relevance of this work in other university contexts and even in other country contexts. Universities in Sweden, South Africa, and globally are more and more affected by neoliberalist discourses and practices through the implementation of New Public Management (NPM; Dahl, 2012). Neoliberalism is a transnational discourse that also prevails in the South African context (Narsiah, 2002). In face of this it seems critical that we do not lose sight of the mission of universities to support teaching, research, and community outreach. Many universities in Sweden have undergone reorganisations and centralisations, which have led to the moving of many administrative tasks and assignments from administrators to teachers and researchers. Together with financial cut backs, which decrease the hours spent teaching in each class, this has put an increased pressure on the teaching and researching staff, which can seriously hamper the creative work we were originally assigned to do.

Coming to know ourselves better through this autoethnographic work in higher education in the way presented here, we realise that there is much more to our everyday life at universities than just teaching and research. We deal with a lot of creative work and with building and maintaining relationships as well as friendships, but this might get lost if the university becomes a more competitive environment. Doing this kind of self-reflexive work can help us find opportunities to promote interdisciplinary collaborative creativity as well, as in this case, to give a deepened understanding of social change.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Chapter consultant: Lesley Wood.

We would like to thank all participants in the Curated Albums project, whose albums we used in order to create the exhibition described in this chapter. Apart from us, the authors, the participants were Heidi Carleby, Katja Gillander-Gådin, Katarina Giritli-Nygren, and Karin Jarnkvist. We also want to extend our gratitude to Claudia Mitchell who led us into this project, encouraged us to contribute to this book, and supported us through an intensive period of writing.

NOTES

[1] The Department of Public Health at Mid Sweden University is closer to social sciences than medicine, which means that they share much of the theoretical and methodological perspectives that are found in social sciences and humanities (or sociology, gender studies, and education).

[2] The prompt for the curated albums was: Find 6–8 photos in your photo collection or album that reflect a theme of social change. Social change may be a change in social order, behaviours, or social relations. For each photo, create a caption that links the photo to the theme. Write a short curatorial statement (150–300 words) about your album in relation to social change. Give a title to your curated album.

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6. MY MOTHER, MY MENTOR

Valuing My Mother's Educational Influence

INTRODUCTION

I currently teach clothing, nutrition, health, and hygiene at a university of technology where I have been working for 19 years. In this chapter, I demonstrate how I have come to understand my mother's educational influence on me as a university educator. I draw on my ongoing doctoral research into my lived experience of becoming an educator at a university of technology, as well as my master's thesis (Makhanya, 2012), which investigated whether I was living my values in my educational practice (Whitehead, 1989).

Leh (2005) described mentors as influencers who inspire people to become what they want to be. My mother was a teacher, believer, and an influential person in my life. I consider her a personal mentor because she is the candle guiding the road to my success (Chang, 2008). The question I am responding to in this chapter is: What was my mother's educational influence on me as a university of technology educator? This question is influenced by Whitehead's (2008) proposition:

> Educational research is distinguished as the creation and legitimating of valid forms of educational theory and knowledge that can explain the educational influences of individuals in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which we live and work. (p. 7)

Whitehead (2005) explained how practitioner researchers analyse the educational influence in their own learning in terms of the values and understandings that carry their hope for themselves and for the future of humanity. In this chapter, I show how, through exploring my mother's educational influence, I have clarified the embodied values to which I hold myself accountable in my practice as a university educator (Whitehead, 2005).

I begin the chapter by describing my educational context. Next, I explain my methodology. I then consider the educational influence of my mother as a personal mentor. I go on to offer some methodological reflections. In conclusion, I reflect on what I have learned about mentoring as a university educator through writing an autoethnographic narrative.

D. Pillay et al. (Eds.), Academic Autoethnographies, 85–94.

My Educational Context

I was born in Durban, South Africa, and lived in KwaMashu Township, KwaZulu-Natal where I completed my primary and secondary school education. I continued my studies at a technikon in Durban. Technikons offered training in vocational and training skills, and students were given the chance to visit potential employers while studying for their chosen careers. I then went to university in the Western Cape. After graduating, I was employed, in February 1996, as a teacher in a high school in Ntuzuma, teaching home economics, Grade 9 to Grade 12. I taught at the high school for 3 months before being offered a job by a university of technology.

My journey as educator at a university of technology started in 1996 when I was employed as contract educator for basic skills (clothing) in a department of the Faculty of Natural Sciences. The department teaches students sewing, clothing, nutrition, and agriculture. Its aim is to empower students with skills they can teach to the community after they finish their studies. The university has its origin in the apartheid-era, semi-independent KwaZulu homeland. It was built after a former chief minister of KwaZulu advocated the importance of establishing a tertiary institution specialising in technical subjects. He observed the need for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to be trained beyond secondary education. In 1974, the idea was accepted by some major companies that donated funds to build the technikon, which opened its doors to the first 15 African students in 1979.

Since 2002, many South African higher education institutions have merged. During the merger process, technikons changed their names to universities of technology. The technikon where I was working was renamed in 2007, however, it did not merge with any other higher education institution.

When I was first employed as an educator, I expected it would be a pleasant experience because I had always held university educators in great esteem. I thought they stayed in their offices and went to lecture halls. I did not know they also experienced career challenges. I expected to teach clothing as per the newspaper advertisement I had replied to. Things changed when I was told there was a shortage of educators and I had to teach food and nutrition as well as clothing. Fortunately, food and nutrition were part of the course I had studied at university. I had no option but to accept the offer because I was desperately looking for a permanent post, especially at a tertiary institution. I did not know the challenges I would face as a novice educator and the effort that would be required to deal with these challenges. I later realised that teaching three courses was not suitable for a novice educator. Two of the courses I was teaching required time, and practical experience in how to deal with large numbers of students. I spent more time concentrating on teaching the two subjects that needed practical lessons, which led to me not being involved in research or community work.

According to Knowles and Cole (1994), novice university educators often find very little time for personal or professional development, including shared interaction and participation in professional organisations. Similarly, Ewing (2001)

reported that 40% of beginning university educators leave the profession because of heavy workloads and lack of guidance and support. The challenges I encountered as a novice university educator included controlling large numbers of students, being firm with students, dealing with colleagues and the university community, coping with strikes and different management styles, furthering my studies, and doing research and community engagement. Challenges I have encountered over the past years, as detailed in my master's study (Makhanya, 2012), have raised the questions of whether I am living my values in my practice and of whether my values are responsive to those of others in my university context. Therefore, in this chapter, I adopt a sociocultural theoretical perspective (Kelly, 2006) in recalling information about myself, my background, and my family cultural heritage to shed light on how my values and behaviours were formed in the context of communities with which I have interacted (Whitehead & Fitzgerald, 2007). In particular, I focus on the educational influence of my mother.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter is an autoethnographic self-narrative in which I write about the past to search deeply in order to understand the connections between culture and educational influence (Chang, 2008). According to Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011), autoethnography is diverse because the researcher decides on what needs to be investigated according to personal experience and research interest. I generated data for the chapter from memories of personal experiences that I shared with my mother. I used my memory because it restores the past—to be more valuable, and to increase hope for the future (Chang, 2008). My memories were prompted by the use of a visual artefact and metaphor drawing.

In this chapter, I have used a visual artefact in the form of a photograph of my mother when she was young (see Figure 6.1). Because my mother has passed on, I obtained permission from my siblings to use the photograph. According to Chang (2008), visual data complements textual data in eliciting personal memories and understanding of culture in autoethnographic writing. I also used a metaphor drawing to complement the visual artefact.

When using the photograph of my mother as a visual artefact, I realised it had become more valuable to me and now held a new meaning for me. For years I had been looking at the photograph and saying to myself, "It's beautiful." However, when using it as a visual artefact, I asked myself many questions, such as: "How old is the picture?" "What was the occasion?" "Who was the photographer?" "What type of camera was used?" "What was the fashion style?" I learned from Chang (2008) that visual artefacts are not only about the person photographed; they also represent the era, what people at the time looked like, and the fashion style. When I look at my mother's photograph now, I notice the use of curtain fabric in the background and the design of her dress. I agree with Chang (2008) that autoethnography is a tool that can help researchers understand themselves better. I have learned that mentoring can

occur at work, home, churches, and everywhere where people interact. I think I was fortunate to learn sewing at home and receive the mentoring from my mother.

To enhance my writing and data generation, I also drew on metaphor drawing to express how I feel about mentoring from my mother. I drew a sewing machine to represent this mentoring (see Figure 6.2). Van Laren (2014) agreed that creating metaphor drawings can improve our understanding of situations we have experienced.

EDUCATIONAL INFLUENCE OF MY MOTHER AS A MENTOR

I consider my mother as an influential person in my life because, even now, I use what she taught me in order to survive. According to Chang (2008), *mentor* can refer to anyone, whether young or old, who placed something significant in one's life. Although I now consider my mother as a mentor, when her mentoring occurred I was not aware of it.

My mother was born in Ndaleni, Richmond in KwaZulu-Natal, one of 11 siblings. Most of her siblings were educators because there was a teacher training college at Ndaleni. My mother told us that they knew that when they finished school they would be required to attend the teacher training college. There was also a Methodist church near the training college and my mother's family were strong members of the church. When they were growing up they developed a passion for the Methodist teachings. I think the foundation they received led to my mother becoming an evangelist for the Methodist church later in her life. My mother as a young woman is depicted in the photograph below (Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1. A photograph of my mother when she was young

This photograph reminds me how my mother worked hard to help me and my siblings succeed in our studies. I consider her strong and hardworking because she used to sew garments to earn money for our education and food. I learned many skills from her: cleaning, washing, sharing, caring for my siblings, praying, sewing, and many other activities related to being a woman. When I gaze at the photograph, I see my mother as a woman who was part of what was happening at that time—because of the style of her dress.

The photograph represents my mentor who was able to raise her children even after her husband died, leaving her with four children. The role the photograph plays in my cultural understanding is that mentoring is important for parents to transfer the values they have to their children. The values transferred to me by my mother include respect, sharing, caring and trust, diligence, and faith. Parents transfer values to their children; it is the children's decision whether or not to continue with the gift of their parents.

The emotions evoked by the picture are both good and bad. The positive emotions are those that are created by remembering how my mother mentored me in sewing, which is a skill I am now teaching at the university of technology. The negative emotions are evoked by realising that, at the time, I did not understand how serious her mentoring was and that she is not around now to observe the outcomes of her mentoring. I feel blessed for having had mother like her.

According to Ellis et al. (2011), in autoethnographic writing the author selects and reflects on past experiences in order to understand culture, and to share her values and beliefs in order to improve understanding by outsiders. Something I remember about the past is cleaning the house, which was not easy because sometimes we had to clean when our friends were playing in the street. We were not allowed to play in the street and when we did, we received punishment. When reflecting now, I realise that mentoring is a relationship between two people where the one person guides the other in life and work (Eley, Wellington, Pitts, & Biggs, 2012). At the time, I did not understand the reason why we were not allowed to play when everybody in our street was playing in the street. When I reflect now, I understand that my mother was trying to protect us from many things that were happening around us.

As I grow older, I realise I was fortunate to grow up with my siblings and my niece who lived with us because we shared food, school uniforms, and clothes. Sharing is a skill I also learned from my cousins and friends because even when we were going out with friends, if there was someone who needed clothes we would share with one another. I was also fortunate to study at a university that was far from my home because I learned to share with my friends if somebody did not have money or was waiting for parents to receive a salary at the end of the month. I cherish the value of sharing because if you share with other people you receive help everywhere you travel.

I learned to care for young children at an early age because when my mother was not around I would look after my sister. I also had a neighbour who would bring her children when her assistant was not around so that we could look after them.

I learned at an early age that before I went to sleep, and when I woke up, I had to pray. Every Wednesday there was a prayer meeting that we attended. It was for people who stayed in the area where I was living, and who attended the same church. On Sundays, I attended Sunday school where we also learned how to pray. We were divided into groups where we studied, wrote examinations, and received a certificate if we passed an examination.

I used to enjoy cooking with my mother when I was young. We were taught how to knead the dough for *ujeqe* [steamed cake], and when we visited our relatives, they would ask me and my sisters to prepare the dough for them. I have taught my daughter how to prepare the dough in the style that we were taught at home. Doing that opened my eyes to how skills are transferred from one generation to the next generation. My nieces are also skilful in cooking and preparing the steamed cake.

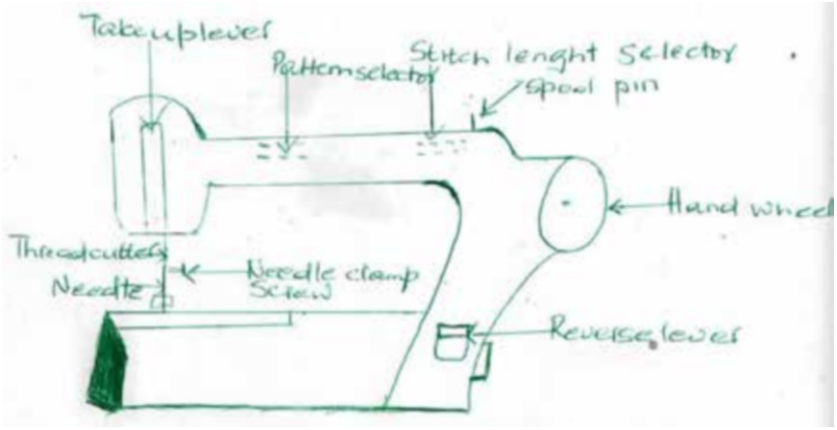

Figure 6.2. The sewing machine metaphor drawing

A metaphor I can use to represent the mentoring I received from my mother is the sewing machine. This sewing machine metaphor drawing (Figure 6.2) is important to me in understanding my mother's educational influence because when I reflected on my life I realised the contribution of the sewing machine to us as a family. I value the mentoring I received from my mother on how to use the sewing machine. I learned that if you have a sewing machine you are able to do impossible things, such as educating children and feeding the family. I did not know that having the sewing machine at home was preparing me for my future career. I always share with my students that if you have a sewing machine you will never go to bed hungry. When writing this chapter I realised that, although I was not aware of it, the mentoring I received from my mother was preparing me for the future.

Every time my mother used the sewing machine, I would stand and watch what she was doing. At the beginning, I thought that sewing was very easy. I would wait for my mother to finish using the machine so that I could use it. She used to refuse

and said I would break the sewing machine. When she was not around I would use the machine, but because I did not have the skill of sewing, I would break the needle. The question that my mother used to ask is: "Who was using my machine?" As I grew older, she taught me how to cut fabric and use the sewing machine.

The values represented by the sewing machine metaphor drawing include creativity, trust, and freedom. These values give me direction about what is important in life. I now see that some of the values I brought to teaching were a result of my own lived experiences. I cherish the freedom that is the reward of the sewing skill I was taught at home because I am able to share my knowledge with other people. My niece who stayed at our home is now working as a fashion designer for a clothing company, which indicates that sewing is part of the skills that were transferred to us. We were mentored on how to use the sewing machine, and developed a love for the sewing machine.

The mentoring I received when I was young helps me even now when I am conducting practical lessons because I do not wait for the technician to assist with repairing the sewing machine. I can repair the machine on my own, and this is a kind of freedom. I also learned how to cut fabric without waiting for another person to assist me. I just cut a small piece and continue dividing the fabric without using the scissors.

Creativity is the ability to produce something new through imaginative flair. From my mother, I learned that when you sew anything you must be able to show your creativity so that it looks different from what other people are doing. My mother's educational influence is also embedded in what I perceive to be the vision of my practice as an educator. My vision includes empowering students with skills so that they can uplift their own lives and those of their communities. Creativity is an important part of my teaching in the clothing course because students can show their individuality when designing clothes. I value these creative activities as part of the course in which students can demonstrate their talent in designing their own clothes. During my research for my master's study, I noticed that creativity happens particularly when I give students a chance to choose their own fabrics and designs for the class fashion show. I have also noted that a number of students are talented enough to submit work that is of a high quality. Other students can develop skill over time because they have a passion for the course. From my own experience, I believe that giving students projects to express themselves provides them with a chance to develop and display creativity. I have seen students, over time, develop hidden talents in sewing.

The value of trust was transferred to me by my mother because with a sewing machine, it is guaranteed that you will have clients who will come to you every day. I saw that when I was a student and had a sewing machine to finish tasks at the hostels. Every day, people asked me to do alterations for them. I also remember that when I was studying at technikon, I was able to pay my student fees by selling three pinafores sewn by my mother. When my younger sister was studying at the teacher training college she came home with a pattern for a *sishweshwe* pinafore. *Shweshwe*

is a fabric that, in the words of Lucille Davie (2013), is the "denim of South Africa." The fabric has been in the market for a long time, and is used to sew traditional attire. The *shweshwe* fabric was used by my mother to sew pinafores, which were in demand at a particular time—I think it was in 1995. The *shweshwe* pinafores were so popular that we would sell more than 20 a week because it was easy to sew the pinafore.

Currall and Inkpen (2006) defined trust as the decision to rely on another party (i.e. person, group, or organisation) under a condition of risk. In my master's study, I learned that in order to improve my practice I had to develop a trusting relationship with my students, for example, to be present in the lecture theatre every day at the right time, and informing them if I was not going to be present. If setting a test for a certain date, or arranging an outing, I was obliged to hold to the arrangement and not change it on the appointed day. I also learned the importance of preparing for the presentation of the course and understanding the content of the course. This helps to develop trust in that students feel a sense of security. Trust is important because students also need to believe that what they achieve will open doors for them in the future.

While drawing the sewing machine, I began to interpret each part of the machine differently. For example, in a metaphorical sense, the spool pins, which hold the cotton, mean that if you have a sewing machine you have something that you can trust to support the family. The needles are used to sew different stitches. The needle can be interpreted as the part that allows the owner of the sewing machine to create whatever she wants to do in order to express her individuality. I also realised that the machine cannot be used on its own—there is a need for the mentor because, as Eley et al. (2012) explained, mentoring helps develop skill at both professional and personal levels in a structured way. The bobbin and bobbin case are used to form the stitches. To me, they mean that you cannot to do anything without knowledge of the sewing machine. The skill provides freedom by promoting self-reliance. I also realised that one of my values is to share the knowledge I gained from my mother, and that I had an important task to teach other people sewing.

Using autoethnography as a research method has helped me understand my cultural heritage by reflecting on what was happening when I was growing up. There were things I did not understand about my own family. For example, my daughter wanted to study fashion design at a university of technology. At the time, I did not understand why she wanted to study fashion design. I did not support her at that moment; then, when I was writing this chapter, I discovered it was an extension of something that was started by my mother.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I discussed the educational influence of my mother, using an autoethnographic approach. When writing the chapter I learned the importance of

having mentors for guidance, whether at a personal or professional level. I learned that it is the responsibility of the person being mentored, to learn everything given to him or her by the mentor. I also realised how blessed I am to have had my mother as a mentor who still plays a significant role in my life.

Using an autoethnographic approach to better understand the educational influence of my mother as my mentor has opened my eyes to things that were taken for granted when they happened. My aim is to grow as a mentor myself so I can teach people who are interested in sewing, and encourage the young people who want to follow a career in clothing. According to van Laren (2014), people must understand themselves before change happens. Writing this autoethnographic narrative has reawakened in me a sense of my role not just as a university educator, but as a mentor for young people. Being a mentor is not just about supporting students academically, but about inculcating and shaping values.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Chapter consultant: Chris de Beer.

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7. FROM EXCLUSION THROUGH INCLUSION TO BEING IN MY ELEMENT

Becoming a Higher Education Teacher across the Apartheid–Democratic Interface

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of South Africa and I were born in the same year. Apartheid was 13 years old. It was 5 years since more than 20,000 women marched to the Union Buildings in protest of pass laws[1] with a cry of, "*Wathint' abafazi, wathint' imbokodo*" [You strike a woman, you strike a rock[2]]. The apartheid legislation of the Nationalist government was effective not only in excluding the majority of South Africans from a wide range of human rights, but also in precluding all South Africans from having normal social relationships with one another. One of the areas from which apartheid legislation most effectively excluded the majority of its citizens, was quality education. As a result of such inequalities, I was forced to leave my family and my hometown to complete my secondary education a year after the 1976 student uprisings in Soweto.[3]

This chapter draws on an autoethnographic exploration that is recorded more fully in my doctoral thesis (Timm, 2013). In this chapter, I answer the research question: "How has my lived experience of exclusion (in)formed my becoming a teacher in higher education in South Africa?" I explain how I felt excluded because racist legislation impacted on my self-worth and self-esteem, on my preparedness for higher education, and on my study of science. I include evidence of my legislated exclusion from fair access to quality education on the grounds of race and socioeconomic status. I demonstrate how this lived experience of exclusion has (in) formed me as a higher education teacher who values inclusion, equality, and social justice. I recount my journey from legislated racial exclusion, through legislated democratising inclusion, to being in my "Element," as Robinson and Aronica (2009) explained:

> Being in their Element takes [people] beyond the ordinary experiences of enjoyment or happiness…they connect with something fundamental to their sense of identity, purpose and well-being. Being there provides a sense of self-revelation, of defining who they really are and what they're really meant to be doing with their lives. (p. 21)

D. Pillay et al. (Eds.), Academic Autoethnographies, 95–115.

METHODOLOGY

Through self-reflexive relational autoethnography, I make meaning of my personal lived experiences as a learner and teacher as I explore approaches that enable me to know myself (Simon, 2013). I use autoethnography as I share detailed descriptions of both my inner and outer dialogues in the process and content of writing about my journey of becoming a teacher in higher education (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Marcel Jousse, a multidisciplinary scholar, reminds me in his book, *Be Yourself* (2008), that because I know and value my own true origins, I am in a position to have authority in my work and to identify who I am in relation to others. In order to know myself both as a learner and as a teacher, I observe myself. I observe what is real before me and within me in an analytical and rigorous manner: my experiences as a student, a young professional chemist, a chemistry teacher in higher education, and an academic development professional. I engage in relational autoethnography as an approach to research that "embraces reflexivity, responsivity, transparency of the researcher, relational awareness and dialogical coherence between [my practice that is being researched] and how [I share] research material … with others" (Simon, 2013, p. 11).

In this chapter, I reflect critically on photographs (Mitchell & Weber, 1999), documents, poetry (Taylor & Afonso, 2009) and inner dialogues (Chang, 2008; Ellis & Bochner, 2000) to provide an account of my lived experience (Whitehead 2008). I share my inner dialogues through posing questions for the reader to engage with a "shifting and responsive conversation" (Simon, 2013, p. 10) with self, others, and practice as part of the reflexivity.

"Relational ethics is important to me because it requires researchers to act from hearts and minds, to acknowledge our interpersonal bonds to others, and initiate and maintain conversations" (Ellis, 2007, p. 4). In terms of relational ethics, I obtained ethical clearance from my family to use the photographs I included in the study. My family were in their Element to be part of my research as they were given copies of my writing to read and comment on before it was made public in my thesis. They told me it helped them to further their own studies and their children's studies in higher education. I have also removed the names of the signatories on the letters that are shown in this chapter because I act with care and awareness of the impact identification of the signatories may have on other people mentioned, and those who read this research.

WHAT HAS BEEN MY JOURNEY OF AWARENESS?

A narrative of my own learning journey is presented here because I believe Parker Palmer when he said:

> the story of my journey is no more or less important than anyone else's. It is simply the best source of data I have on a subject where generalisations often fail but truth may be found in the details. (2000, p. 19)

My narrative reveals how, during my doctoral research journey, I became aware that I believed that I was "Just Not Good Enough" (JNGE; pronounced, *ginger*) as a postgraduate student. Where did this belief come from? Why was I JNGE? Was this about something deep within me that had been awoken? Was this, just not good enough, something deep within me waiting to be expressed (Jousse, 2000)? I record my story here exactly as I wrote it in July 2011 (Timm, 2013). In the interests of authenticity, I have not corrected the grammar, the spelling, or the style because it is in effect writing in a stream of consciousness, and constitutes evidence of my journey.

So Delysia, Are You Really Just Not Good Enough—JNGE?

> JNGE—*Ginger* was just an ordinary little girl from the dusty roads and rolling hills of Umzimkulwana. She believed she was Just Not Good Enough, JNGE. Just not good enough to be born of a married couple. She was only good enough for her grandfather to love her and believe in her until the age of 8 years. Well, that is what she believed until that Sunday morning when all she could do was cry. Cry because it was 4 days before Christmas. Who would buy her a Christmas present? Would she get a Christmas present? She thought, as they carried her grandfather's body away, all wrapped in a bag, from the homestead. Everyone else around her was crying. She was not sure if they were sad because of no present or because his voice was no longer to be heard! His Friday nite sweet treats would be missed! Well maybe he was no more because she was just not good enough! She should have listened more and asked less questions. She should have sat still more and not been so fidgety! She was Just Not Good Enough, JNGE, Just Not Good enough!
>
> So she had to go and stay with her Mom and stepdad! She was Just Not Good Enough to stay with her grandmother and all the other lovely kids in the homestead! So JNGE set out on a path to be good enough! She worked hard at school. No time to play too much. JNGE had to be Good enough! She would not disappoint anyone again! She really was, as one of her school teachers said, "a diligent, hardworking little girl who gave of her best at all times." She was happy. She was excited about being good enough! She would be Good enough one day to become a doctor. Her mother and family said she would become a doctor 'cos she was good enough. After all she was Good enough in school. She was no longer Just Not Good enough!
>
> Alas, soon her mother realised that she may Just Not Be Good Enough to become a doctor! She was sad! She did not have the required subjects at school to become a doctor. Oh my! The family dream was not going to be! JNGE, JNGE, JNGE!

> The Big Little school in the dusty roads of the rolling hills of Umzimkulwana could not offer the right subjects. The Big Little school could not help JNGE to become a doctor! It was Just Not Good Enough for JNGE. So soon her bags were packed. She was off to the Big, Big, school in the Queen's City.
>
> At that Big, Big school, she could do the required subjects. At that Big, Big school in the Queen's City, there were so many children. So many strange faces. A different language was heard at school. JNGE was not good enough for this Big, Big School, was she? JNGE could just about speak and understand the language that was spoken. JNGE had a strange accent when she spoke at school. It was going to be hard for JNGE. JNGE was yet again just not good enough at the Big, Big school. But JNGE soon realised that she had to be Good enough! Many sacrifices were made for her to be there. She had to become a doctor someday. JNGE missed her family. JNGE missed her friends. She missed all the wonderful birthday celebrations at home. She missed all the fun family outings. She was determined to be good enough so that her family would be proud of her. She would be good enough to be able to move back closer to home. The Queen's City was more than 9 hours' drive from the dusty roads and rolling hills of Umzimkulwana.
>
> JNGE worked hard. She was serious about her schooling. She would be good enough. JNGE was going to be good enough. She would get the right pass to become a doctor. She became the family pride and joy. Alas, JNGE soon realised that she could not become a medical doctor. She could not bear to work with blood. She could not be a medical doctor, she could not see such hurt and physically broken people. She was just not good enough. JNGE, Just Not Good Enough!
>
> She worked hard at the Big, Big School. She was rewarded with an excellent pass in mathematics in her matric year. She received an A symbol. She was good enough to get a good pass. She even passed the subject that she had missed all the foundation years of study. It was not offered at the Big, Little school so she had to come to the Big, Big school to start it and complete within 2 years. She was good enough, JNGE was good enough to achieve.
>
> JNGE applied to study pharmacy instead of medicine. JNGE was just not good enough to study pharmacy at the selected university—she was not the right skin colour, they said—JUST NOT GOOD ENOUGH! When will she ever be Just Good Enough, well actually Absolutely Good Enough, AGE— *Aggy.*[4] Maybe that is who she should have been—then her life may have been better. Would it?

The poem "Now I Become Myself" by Sarton (1993) reflects how I felt after I had written the JNGE—Ginger story.

I began to realise that I had "become myself" after 50 years of wearing "other people's faces," (Sarton, 1993, p. 156) and realised that I was absolutely good

enough. When I said the letters AGE out aloud, I heard another name for myself: AGE (pronounced, *aggy*). I identified two facets of my life: JNGE and AGE—Ginger and Aggy. When I was JNGE—Ginger, then I did not believe in myself and felt paralysed with fear and anxiety. When I was AGE—Aggy, then I believed in myself because I felt included, or was in my Element. When I was AGE I was able to achieve success and engage with the subject matter easily and successfully. I discovered that each of these personal facets played a driving force in my life at different times, sending me on a rollercoaster ride of emotional and productive highs and lows. I had discovered a pattern in my life. I was reminded of Claude Bernard who said, "It is what we know already that often prevents us from learning" (Bernard, n.d.). I had convinced myself that I was just not good enough! Each time I felt just not good enough, I would work hard and persist. After that, I would be absolutely good enough. Something in me knew I had to be resilient, to be AGE.

I also realised that there was a game at play in my life here. The chemist in me understands how my molecules of emotion were operating, namely, my neuropeptides and protein molecules such as endorphins and opiate receptors are constantly being triggered throughout my body-mind—my psychosomatic network. When we feel fear and anger, chemicals are secreted that cause "memory fatigue, confusion, lack of concentration and memory loss" (Leaf, 2005, p. 92). When positive emotions of fun and pleasure are experienced, there is a biochemical flow of information and we become "unstuck, and [heal] our feelings" (Pert, 1999, p. 277). I realised that part of my life learning was to consistently find a way to become absolutely good enough. Being absolutely good enough came from deep within me at a molecular level, and from my interaction with the environment around me, each time I managed to excel at what I was doing. As a student, I was able to learn a new way to be successful in my life. I was able to balance out the negativity with a positive energy. I found that there was a rhythm to my life. As the universe acted upon me, I was able to interact with it and thereby improve myself (Jousse, 2000). I was able to be in my Element.

What Experiences of Exclusion Did I Face during My Undergraduate Years? What Did I Learn from These Experiences?

Under the apartheid system of education in South Africa, the Extension of University Education Act (1959) barred non-white (coloured, Indian and black) people from entrance to "white" universities and allowed for the setting up of separate university colleges on an ethnic-linguistic basis. I was classified coloured, and as such would then have open access to the University of Western Cape in Cape Town, which was for reserved for coloured students. The University of Durban-Westville was reserved for people of Indian descent. The then University of Natal in Durban was reserved for whites only. My heart was set on pharmacy, with chemistry as a second option, but I did not want to study in Cape Town, which was too far from home. Therefore, I applied to University of Durban-Westville (UD-W) to study pharmacy, and also

applied to study a science degree at University of Natal. By 1978, I had observed that in spite of the apartheid legislation there were coloured people attending white universities and Indian universities. I was thus not prepared for the responses I received from the universities and state organs. I felt angry. I was rejected. I was excluded. I was horrified and deeply hurt. I was just not good enough!

Below, I have included some of the correspondence. The letter from the University of Durban-Westville (Figure 7.1) reminds me that I am actually not allowed to attend that university unless I can furnish details of why I, as a coloured person, could not attend the University of Western Cape. Figure 7.2 is the attachment, referred to in Figure 7.1, from the Department of Indian Affairs. They actually requested information about my family in terms of my father's income, and how many other siblings would possibly also be seeking permission to attend the university. Figure 7.3 is a copy of the letter I received from University of Natal, highlighting the need for special permission to be obtained from the Department of Coloured affairs. I duly completed the forms and submitted them for approval from the Department of Coloured affairs. The reason I gave for wanting to study at University of Natal was that I wanted to study subjects that were not offered at University of Western Cape.

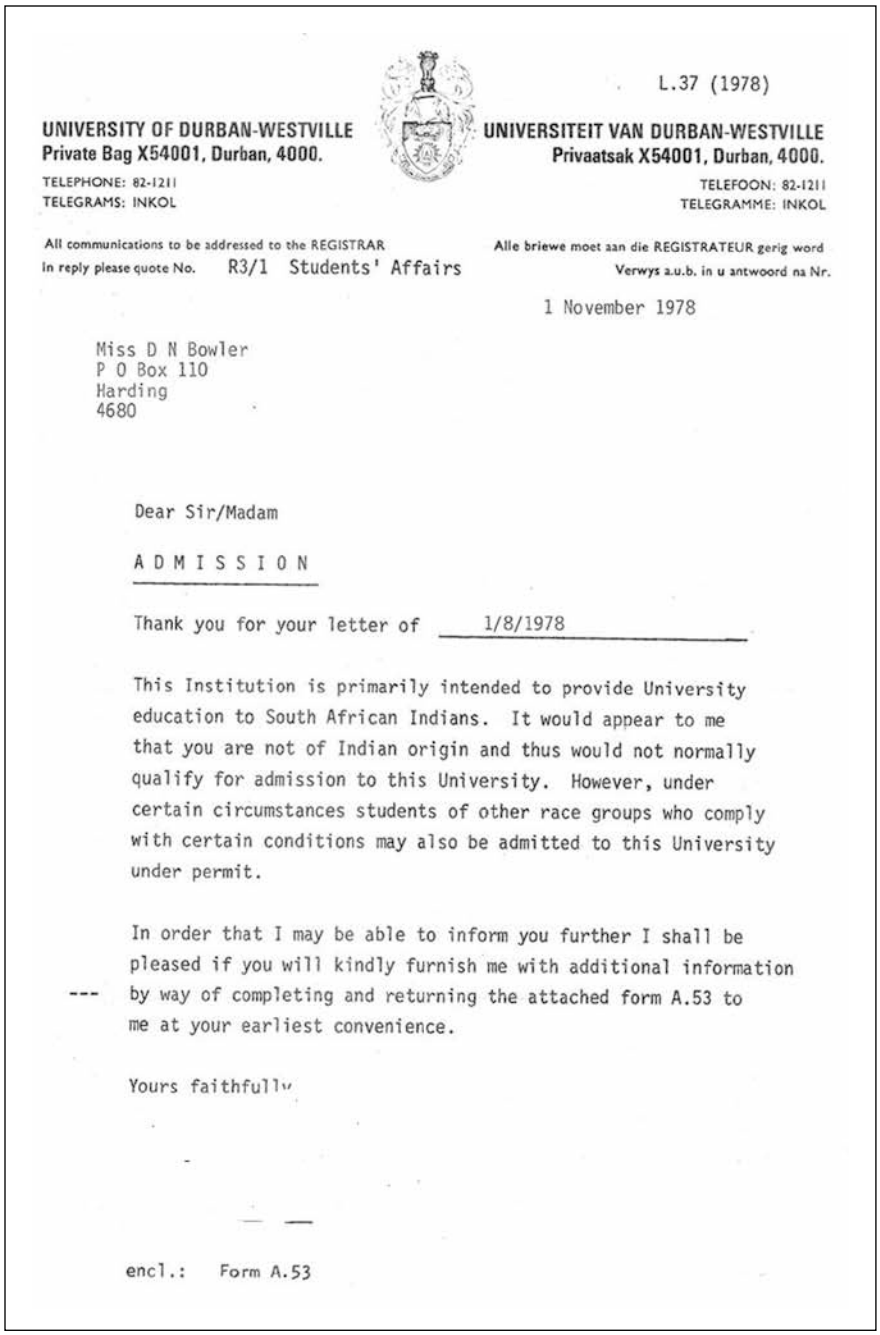
In the end, I had to make a choice. If I wanted to study pharmacy, I had to go to Cape Town. If I wanted to be near my family, I had to study a course that was not offered in Cape Town.

I had to follow a course of study that was my second choice, not my heart's desire. I was going to be a chemist, not a pharmacist. I was going to work with chemicals and not necessarily with people. Was I just not good enough to be a pharmacist? My experience of rejection and exclusion from the undergraduate studies of my choice demonstrates how government legislation excluded me and many others during that era from being in our Element. These setbacks were temporary because I persevered and understood my purpose as a student at university. I had to pass in the minimum period of time and demonstrate that I was absolutely good enough as an undergraduate student.

What Did I Learn Whilst Working in the Chemical Industry?

After completing my undergraduate studies, I worked as a chemist for about two years in a multinational company and did not have much interaction with people. My life focus was on chemicals and chemical products. I realised I needed to interact with people to feel relational dynamic energy (Whitehead, 2009). Chemicals and chemical equipment were too reactive for me—not interactive enough. I love technology and technical things, but I also value engaging with people. The laboratory environment I worked in as a chemist did not inspire or motivate me; I became bored. Even though I felt included in the lab environment, I still felt just not good enough!

I then applied for a job as a technical trainer in the same company, and really enjoyed training employees in the production environment. I began to feel more



L.37 (1978)

UNIVERSITY OF DURBAN-WESTVILLE
Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000.
TELEPHONE: 82-1211
TELEGRAMS: INKOL

UNIVERSITEIT VAN DURBAN-WESTVILLE
Privaatsak X54001, Durban, 4000.
TELEFOON: 82-1211
TELEGRAMME: INKOL

All communications to be addressed to the REGISTRAR
In reply please quote No. R3/1 Students' Affairs

Alle briewe moet aan die REGISTRATEUR gerig word
Verwys a.u.b. in u antwoord na Nr.

1 November 1978

Miss D N Bowler
P O Box 110
Harding
4680

Dear Sir/Madam

ADMISSION

Thank you for your letter of 1/8/1978

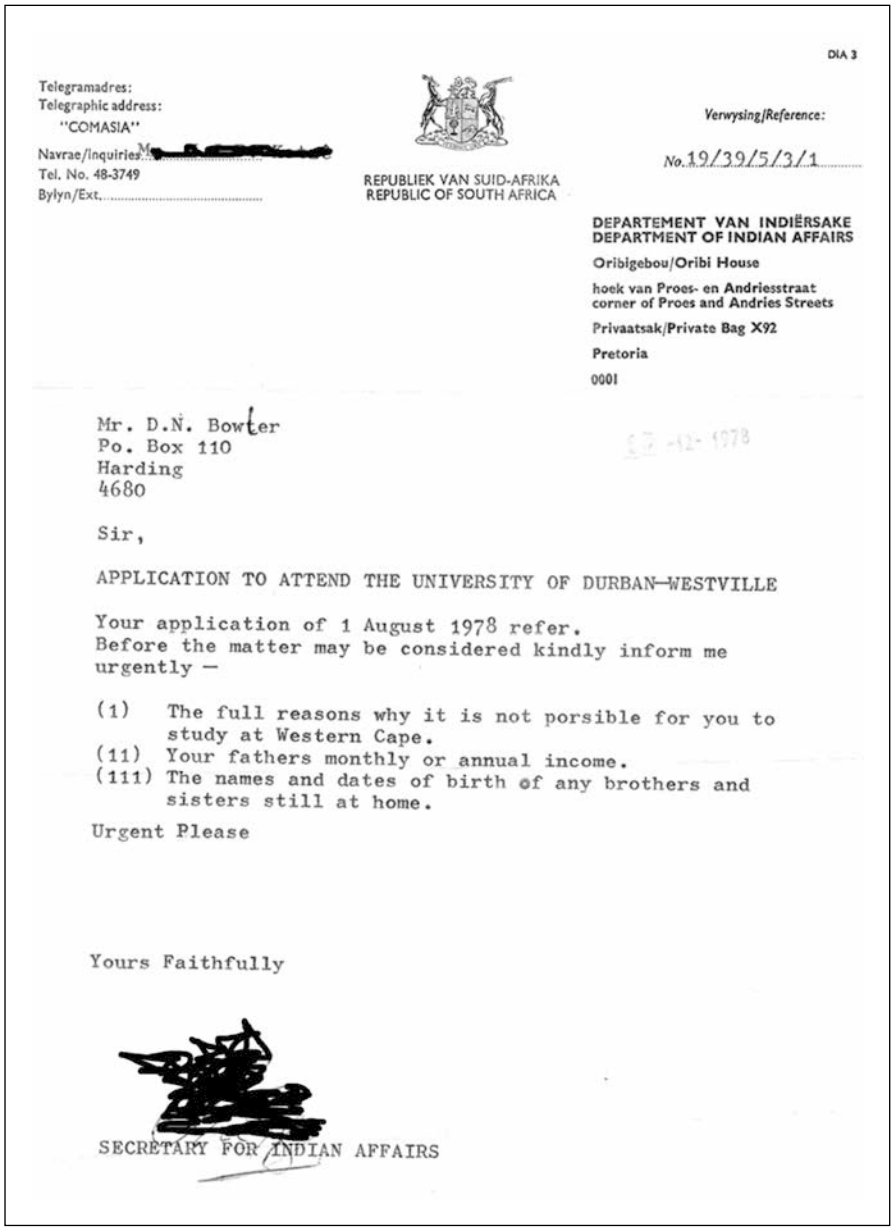
This Institution is primarily intended to provide University education to South African Indians. It would appear to me that you are not of Indian origin and thus would not normally qualify for admission to this University. However, under certain circumstances students of other race groups who comply with certain conditions may also be admitted to this University under permit.

In order that I may be able to inform you further I shall be pleased if you will kindly furnish me with additional information by way of completing and returning the attached form A.53 to me at your earliest convenience.

Yours faithfully

encl.: Form A.53

Figure 7.1. UD-W response to initial application



DIA 3

Telegramadres:
Telegraphic address:
"COMASIA"
Navrae/Inquiries [redacted]
Tel. No. 48-3749
Bylyn/Ext.

REPUBLIEK VAN SUID-AFRIKA
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Verwysing/Reference:
No. 19/39/5/3/1

DEPARTEMENT VAN INDIËRSAKE
DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
Oribigebou/Oribi House
hoek van Proes- en Andriesstraat
corner of Proes and Andries Streets
Privaatsak/Private Bag X92
Pretoria
0001

Mr. D.N. Bowter
Po. Box 110
Harding
4680

Sir,

APPLICATION TO ATTEND THE UNIVERSITY OF DURBAN—WESTVILLE

Your application of 1 August 1978 refer.
Before the matter may be considered kindly inform me urgently —

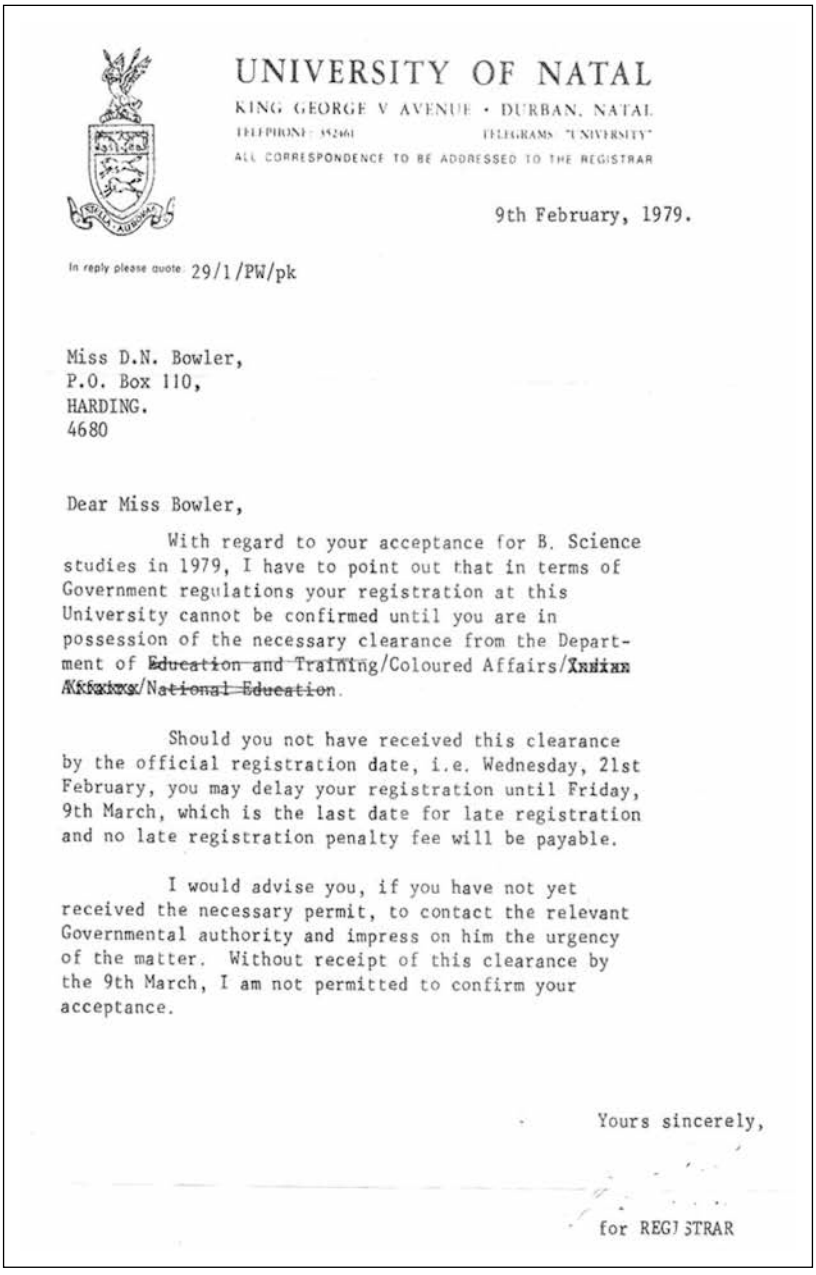
(1) The full reasons why it is not porsible for you to study at Western Cape.
(11) Your fathers monthly or annual income.
(111) The names and dates of birth of any brothers and sisters still at home.

Urgent Please

Yours Faithfully

SECRETARY FOR INDIAN AFFAIRS

Figure 7.2. Department of Indian Affairs' response



UNIVERSITY OF NATAL

KING GEORGE V AVENUE • DURBAN, NATAL

TELEPHONE 35261 TELEGRAMS "UNIVERSITY"

ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE REGISTRAR

9th February, 1979.

In reply please quote: 29/1/PW/pk

Miss D.N. Bowler,
P.O. Box 110,
HARDING.
4680

Dear Miss Bowler,

With regard to your acceptance for B. Science studies in 1979, I have to point out that in terms of Government regulations your registration at this University cannot be confirmed until you are in possession of the necessary clearance from the Department of ~~Education and Training~~/Coloured Affairs/~~Indian Affairs~~/~~National Education~~.

Should you not have received this clearance by the official registration date, i.e. Wednesday, 21st February, you may delay your registration until Friday, 9th March, which is the last date for late registration and no late registration penalty fee will be payable.

I would advise you, if you have not yet received the necessary permit, to contact the relevant Governmental authority and impress on him the urgency of the matter. Without receipt of this clearance by the 9th March, I am not permitted to confirm your acceptance.

Yours sincerely,

for REGISTRAR

Figure 7.3. University of Natal's response

than just inclusion; I began to experience being in my Element. I felt the need to understand more about education to be effective as a trainer in the industry. I was also influenced by mentors I had met whilst studying at university, because they were science and mathematics teachers, respectively. They had successfully completed postgraduate qualifications in education. Therefore, I enrolled for a correspondence postgraduate diploma in education while still a trainer in industry. Whilst enrolled for this diploma, I had an opportunity to apply for a position as a lecturer in chemistry at a technikon.[5]

What Did I Learn as a Teacher Within a Technikon?

I had become familiar with the education offered by the technikon through assisting and supporting my colleagues in the laboratory to solve problems they experienced whilst they were registered students at a technikon. They were registered for a chemistry diploma on a part-time basis. I felt very privileged to be able to assist them at that time, even though I was not a formally trained teacher or lecturer. I was also very interested in learning about the very practical course they were studying. The course was very relevant for working in the laboratory, and had a great influence on me applying for the position at the technikon as a chemistry lecturer. I was so excited at this time. Not only did I feel included, I was also in my Element. I was getting married and planned to start a family of my own. I felt a position in education would allow me to be a mother as well as pursue a career that would not be too demanding. I would be a whole new person breaking new ground. In my Element!

I was the first coloured female lecturer to work in the institution, which was reserved for Indians only, as well as the only female chemistry lecturer at the time. I experienced similar feelings to when I changed schools. To follow my heart, I went from a very comfortable zone to something new and unfamiliar. I took a risk to work in an environment that was different to what I had been in before. I entered where I was "not supposed to enter." I was taking yet another risk in my life. I loved the challenge presented by the new job. I discovered that my heart was in education. I was no longer just not good enough! I was absolutely good enough!

I felt absolutely good enough when I was approached by a local newspaper that wanted to do a feature article on me as the only woman lecturer in the chemistry department. I was in my Element to be acknowledged in the newspaper. Figure 7.4 is the article that appeared in that newspaper.

I soon learned that I needed help in understanding the learning processes happening in my classroom. This was very different to what I had experienced as a trainer. There were varying learner backgrounds—in terms of work experience in the field and different levels of interest in the subject—that I was faced with in my classroom. I noticed soon enough that I needed different strategies for dealing with each class. In the part-time class, I had learners who had vast experience of working in the chemical industry. In the full-time class, the learners were directly from school

MRS Delysia Timm shows students how to prepare an experiment

Delysia's got the right formula!

DELYSIA TIMM, the only woman lecturer in the school of applied sciences at Durban's ML Sultan Technikon, has the formula to reach the top.

Mrs Timm said she was so determined to specialise in chemistry that when physical science, a vital subject in the course, was not offered at the school in Harding she was forced to leave home and head for a school in Port Elizabeth.

The move paid off — she was able to study physical science, passed her matric and work towards her ambition.

"At times personal sacrifice is important if one is to achieve success. Facilities at black schools are inferior.

"The school which I attended in Harding did not offer physical science but that did not stop me from pursuing with my aim to study chemistry," said Mrs Timm.

She said most people had the misconception that chemistry was a difficult subject.

"It all depends on how one approaches one's studies. If one adopts the correct approach then there should be no problems."

Mrs Timm said her job was demanding. "But I am enjoying it because I like working with people. Although I am the only woman lecturer at the school of applied sciences do not feel out of place," she said.

Mrs Timm, who obtained her B.Sc honours at the University of Natal in 1982, worked for three years as a training officer and laboratory analyst for a leading soap manufacturer before taking up the post at the Technikon.

Figure 7.4. Only woman lecturer

with no experience of the industry. In spite of these differences, they all had to be taught the same content because they had the same assessments at the end of the course.

I taught chemistry to learners at all levels of the National Diploma in Analytical Chemistry. These learners were eager to know and understand more about chemistry because it was their chosen career. I also taught chemistry to learners for whom chemistry was only an introductory subject for their diplomas in fields of the health sciences or engineering. I was the only female lecturer in the department and the only coloured person at a time when South Africa was still experiencing the hurt, pain, and tensions of apartheid. The learners in my classes were mainly of Indian origin and spoke English as their mother tongue. However, over the years, this learner profile has changed to mainly black South Africans for whom English is a

second, third, or even a foreign language. Many of these learners came from schools that were under resourced with respect to facilities as well as teachers. They were often from families, rich in culture and tradition, but of low economic status because of the apartheid regime. They were also first generation university learners who found it very difficult to fit into the technikon environment. First generation students are students whose grandparents, parents, or siblings have not attended university. I was the first in my family to graduate from university—see Figure 7.5, showing my siblings at my graduation. I thus identify with the 76% first generation student population at Durban University of Technology (Strydom & Mentz, 2010, p. 15).

Figure 7.5. My siblings at my graduation

Faced with All These Differing Experiences in the Classroom, How Did I Cope?

I experienced different flows of energy and values in the different classrooms. In some, there was compatibility and a relationally dynamic and receptive response towards me. In others, there was incompatibility in the rhythmic, pulsating electric current between us (Pert, 2008; Whitehead, 2009). I felt this was due to the students' deeply emotional experiences they had had whilst studying chemistry at school level. My own experiences of studying chemistry at school—how I had to change schools to study chemistry; how studying chemistry at university was not really my first choice, as mentioned previously—all came back to me when I walked into the first Chemistry 1 class I lectured. Many of my students had attended schools that were under resourced, had no chemistry laboratories and unqualified science teachers (Bloch, 2009). I had to accommodate the notion that these students might be experiencing feelings akin to

my own when I first started to learn chemistry at university. There was a possibility that there were many JNGEs in the class I was teaching.

I realised that even though I knew chemistry, I did not know much about teaching and education. I was still studying towards the Higher Diploma in Education, and while the course was interesting, it did not help me understand what was happening in my class because it was more applicable to the school environment than to the higher education environment. Most of my colleagues in the department at that time knew their content, chemistry, but seemed to have very little understanding of education. From my observation, they taught the way that they had been taught. I found that it did not work for me to teach the way that I had been taught, especially considering that the university I attended had an almost homogeneous, predominantly white, advantaged and privileged, second or third generation learner profile in the class.

At that time I believed the relationships of the students with each other, with their teachers, and with the content, influenced their learning. This could result in a feeling of being just not good enough or absolutely good enough. The relationships needed to be built on love and care for each other, with teachers and the content in vital, dynamic community with each other. I felt influenced to promote loving and caring relationships that would assist the learners to "feel good" (Pert, 2006, p. 11) during their learning. They would possibly be moved to be in their Element.

How Could Assessment in the Classroom Impact on My Learners?

All the assessments at the university I attended as an undergraduate student were designed and conducted within the university, whilst at the technikon where I was teaching chemistry, this was not the case. Until the mid-1990s, all the learners from all the different technikons across the country wrote a common external national examination. The final-year examination for our students at the technikon was set by external lecturers from other institutions. So in teaching, I was soon trained to prepare the learners for the external examination. I had to complete the syllabus as per national instruction so that my learners were not disadvantaged. I felt excluded from the curriculum decisions.

I felt very uncomfortable and uneasy. I felt that there could be a better way of teaching to ensure that the students were actually learning or engaging with the content. I was not happy to continue without getting some assistance to establish a better relationship with the learners in my classes. I could see that the learners were suffering, perplexed, and fearful of failure. I too was suffering, perplexed, and fearful of failure in the classroom. I believed that there was a need for understanding and care, a need for human relationship between myself and the learners, a dialogue needed—similar to what Oliver Sacks referred to when treating patients not as "cases" but as people (Sacks, 1990).

The technikon at that time had a unit with one person in it responsible for staff development and curriculum development across the campus to support and assist lecturers in their teaching practice. I soon found out where the person was because I

kept asking my head of department for assistance. He eventually sent me off rather sceptically, to the unit with the words, "Go and see if they can be of any help to you." In my conversation with the colleague in the unit responsible for staff development and curriculum development, I became excited as I quickly realised that I was not alone in my concerns about how I could improve what I was doing. I felt included when he listened to what I had to say, understood my difficulties, and together we worked out a plan. I felt encouraged. Someone listened. Someone cared. Someone was willing to help me move from being just not good enough as a lecturer.

The plan we made together included an annual workshop for the chemistry department during the end of year exam period to help us develop strategies and skills to deal with some of the problems we faced in the classroom. Soon these workshops were held twice a year and later, they became more frequent as the technikon employed more people in its academic development unit. I learned much from these workshops and, on reflection, that is where the seeds for my involvement in academic development were planted. I became a lecturer in my Element. My knowledge and practice of teaching evolved over the years. I was largely influenced by my interaction with the staff development unit. I was willing and eager to try something new in my class—to do things differently for the sake of improvement.

As time went by, technikons were given more control to design and conduct their own assessments and I was able to contribute to these developments in the chemistry department. But it was not only in and for the department that I contributed; I was included in a wider community of practice (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). I eventually became the person who coordinated the development of the chemistry curriculum across all the technikons: our institution was the convenor technikon for chemistry. This meant that we were included in facilitating the development of a shared chemistry curriculum for all the technikons. As I interacted with industry representatives and colleagues from other institutions who were part of the process of curriculum development, my passion for engaging in learning, teaching, and assessment issues developed and I was faced with new beginnings, a new journey that took me into my Element.

What Have I Learned from My Postgraduate Journey?

The qualifications offered at the technikons soon changed from only national diplomas and national higher diplomas to master's diplomas. This meant that my honours qualification was not sufficient for me to teach at the master's level. I needed to improve my qualifications to a master's qualification. I was faced with a dilemma: "Do I complete a master's in chemistry or in education?" By that time, having completed the postgraduate higher diploma, and having taught for 12 years, my passion for education was just as strong as my passion for chemistry. The technikon insisted that if I was to develop my teaching career within the chemistry department, I had to register for a master's in science. I wanted to stay in the chemistry department, however, I wanted to include education in my studies

because I saw my primary role as being an educator and not as a chemist. I needed to find a university that would be able to include education as part of a chemistry postgraduate qualification.

At that time, the notion of a multidisciplinary postgraduate qualification was frowned upon by most universities. How could I want to do a combination of disciplines whose epistemologies were generally regarded as being so different, especially in South Africa? I could register for a master's in education and consider the science of chemistry, and teaching of chemistry, as a science. However, this would mean I could not supervise or be involved with a master's diploma in chemistry in the future, I would need to move and teach in the education department. I did not want to do that; I wanted to teach chemists and not teachers.

Through my networks across the tertiary institutions, I eventually found a university that offered a master's in science with a specialisation in chemistry education. I really enjoyed all aspects of the programme that was coursework-based with a mini dissertation. I completed a chemistry research project as well as a mini dissertation that included the teaching of chemistry. I was in my Element. The master's course was offered through distance learning, which meant that I did not have any face-to-face sessions with my lecturers. The only time I had face-to-face sessions was when I met with my supervisor for my mini dissertation. So I had to be a self-directed learner again, which gave me a sense of being in my Element as I made decisions for myself.

How Did Personal Experiences Impact on My Studies?

Whilst journeying through the roles of, amongst others, wife, mother, daughter, educator, and learner I completed the master's degree on a part-time basis. I experienced major changes in my life while I was registered for my master's studies. I changed jobs, and both my biological father and stepfather died within 9 months of each other. The change in jobs happened whilst doing my coursework. I accepted a 2-year contract position, in the same institution, in the academic development unit. This position was learning centre coordinator, where I would have an opportunity to engage with learning, teaching, and assessment matters whilst helping academics to develop innovative learning materials. I was in my Element, excited to take this contract position because my position in the chemistry department would still be there after the 2 years, if I wanted to return. I saw this as an opportunity to test whether my passion for learning, teaching, and assessment would grow or just fade away.

The loss of both my dads was a traumatic time for me because I was present at both their deathbeds. One died of cancer, and the other from a ruptured aorta. I had a good relationship with both men and felt the losses deeply. They would not be present at the award for my master's qualification. In addition, the double loss came soon after I received feedback on my mini dissertation; both examiners had written extensive comments. I did not even read them carefully, I felt that my knowledge and experience was not good enough to be included, so I felt excluded. I thought there was no way I would be able to address their concerns. The mini dissertation

lay on my desk for over a year, uncorrected. I just could not pick it up and make the changes. I did not believe in myself; that I was able to do anything. All that lay between me and getting the master's was completion of the mini dissertation. For that whole year, no one from the university where I was registered contacted me. My supervisor had left the university. She was in a new job and I knew that if I was to be awarded the master's, it was up to me.

It was a dear colleague in the academic development unit, who, every time she came into my office, kept asking me when I would complete the qualification. Eventually I gave her the documents and said, "Please advise me what to do here. I just cannot believe that I can do it." She read through the comments from the examiners in the document and said, "Take the comments one line at a time and respond to them." From what she could see, I had the ability to make the changes and resubmit. It was this colleague who assisted me to eventually commit to spending one week to make the necessary changes and resubmit. She believed in me. I felt this was a negative experience that ended up positive. We made a connection and since then, she has been my mentor and friend. I finally graduated with a master's degree in science (chemical education). I have included a photograph of my family—my husband and two sons with me at my graduation in Figure 7.6. My graduation served as a motivation for our elder son, who was in final year of high school, to register for a degree in dentistry. A few years later, our younger son completed a diploma in maritime studies. Both of them completed their qualifications in the minimum period of study. We are all in our Element!

Figure 7.6. My family at my master's graduation

How Did I Deal with Still Further Changes in My Life?

In 2002, my technikon merged[6] with another technikon and we became an institute of technology. The negative impact of this merger was immediately felt in matters relating to human relations and resources, such as the downgrading and freezing of posts, disparities in salaries, cronyism or nepotism, and poor human relations in general (Chetty, 2010). Further to this merger, in 2004 the institute became a university. All of us who worked in the academic development unit were challenged because of the merger and the status change to a university. The unit had no permanent head of department, no defined structure, and hence, was not recognised by the university even though we had provided valuable academic development support for academic staff in the institution. In the midst of all this, I was asked to lead the unit.

I was excited by the opportunity presented but was also fearful of failure. I still had much to learn. I experienced mixed emotions. I drew on my deep reserves of feeling and intuition as I was faced with leading the people in the unit. I had to discover my aptitude and demonstrate an intuitive feel or grasp to lead the unit. Many of the decisions I made were based on my intuition, which I felt in my whole being—not only in the frontal cortex of my brain that is associated with rational thinking (Robinson & Aronica, 2009). I had the passion. I had the opportunity and the aptitude to learn all I could, and soon I was in my Element. The relationships with my colleagues were life affirming and we shared some deeply emotional times. It was during these times of intense emotion that I truly learned about myself as a leader, and how to lead.

Simultaneously, I knew that I needed to read for my doctorate as a requirement to teach in a university. The same colleague who influenced me to continue with my master's study approached me to read for a doctorate in technology with a specialisation in education, and she became my supervisor. At this point I realised that no journey is a straight line; there are iterations from exclusion to inclusion to exclusion, to being in my Element, to inclusion to being in my Element and so forth, and no journey is common to everyone. We are not all similarly and simultaneously self-aware. Our journeys may intersect, interweave, and interact (Timm & Conolly, 2015).

WHAT EDUCATIONAL INSIGHTS CAN I SHARE ON MOVING FROM BEING EXCLUDED AND REJECTED TO BEING IN MY ELEMENT?

My lived experience of not believing in myself and being excluded is deeply rooted in the apartheid system of education that was prevalent in South Africa. I believe we are experiencing a legacy of apartheid in South Africa that has negatively influenced the education and living conditions of both teachers and students. The majority of our students and staff come from groups of people previously classified by race as black or African, Indian, and coloured. These people suffered then, and still do, from a lack of economic empowerment, poorly resourced and underfunded education systems,

and living conditions with high incidences of crime and violence. In addition to all this, the students and staff at our institution are faced with serious losses of lives of family members, fellow students, and colleagues due to HIV and AIDS. They live in emotionally charged and unsafe environments. The physical violence in the communities stems from anger and fear. There is an overwhelming experience of physical and emotional, mental, and spiritual abuse. Their "whole beings" are no longer whole due to the (di)stresses they experience. They find it very difficult to be in their Element. The (di)stresses are felt deep down in all their fibres and in the very viscera of their beings. They no longer have a "strong sense of self" (Antone & Hill, 1992, p. 2).

For many students and staff, the societies, communities, and families are dysfunctional and "threadbare" (Palmer, 1993, p. x). The classroom has, to a certain extent, become dysfunctional and threadbare. Both students and the staff have so much happening in their viscera as their molecules of emotion (Pert, 1999) are set in motion within their whole beings through the emotional (di)stresses they are experiencing. Both the students and the teachers are seeking for increased self-confidence and self-esteem: seeking to be in their Element. The continued loss of belief in themselves, and mental and emotional pain leads to a lack of joy, a lack of love, and a lack of learning in the classroom.

Through writing about my lived experience, I have been able to illuminate both the exclusions and times of being in my Element as a student, chemist, and teacher in higher education. Through the inner dialogues, I have allowed readers to recognise and connect with my story. I have uncovered layers of meaning in my life as I have written my stories and critically reflected on my writing. Through self-reflexive relational autoethnography, I have "[provoked], [challenged] and [illuminated] rather than [confirmed] and [settled]" (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 20) what it means to move from exclusion to being in my Element as a teacher in higher education.

Through discovery of my own JNGE—Ginger and AGE—Aggy, I had the opportunity to step back and look for connections with others—students and staff with whom I interacted. I ask myself: Do they also have JNGE's and AGE's that prevent them from believing in themselves and doing the best they can to learn successfully? If they do not know, then I would like to encourage them to be self-reflexive as they write about their inner dialogues and get inside their living moments to connect with outer dialogues of self and others as practitioner–researchers.

In researching my own practice as a teacher, I have demonstrated how I am influenced by many others such as those in government, those in society, mentors, and students—directly and indirectly. In researching my lived experience filled with inner and outer dialogue, I have situated both these voices within personal and broader sociopolitical contexts and discourses. I have adopted relational reflexivity in that I have "extend[ed] the idea of reflexivity beyond that of individual experience and into a relational context" (Simon, 2013, p. 12).

CONCLUSION

As a teacher in higher education I have explored "unconventional resources" (Palmer, 1993, p. ix) in order to find relief for my real pain of exclusion during apartheid. As I engage across the apartheid–democratic interface in higher education,

I have a real pain—
Because of the difficulty
of actively engaging learners in the classroom,
I have a real pain—
Of being unable to connect
with colleagues, with learners, with
their own heart,
I have a real pain—
When I experience that deep intense
suffering of disconnection,
I have a real pain—
When there is more combat
than community,
I have a real pain—
When I feel an alienated spirit, mind, and body,
I have a real pain—
When I am depleted
with little left to sustain me
or others.

(Timm, 2013, p. 156)

In retracing this pain and brokenness of my life, I find being in my Element an unconventional resource that offers hope to get reconnected and provide me with wisdom to "recall [me] to that wholeness in the midst of [my] torn world, to reweave [me] into the [teaching and learning] community that is so threadbare today" (Palmer, 1993, p. x).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Chapter consultant: Theresa Chisanga.

NOTES

[1] In South Africa, pass laws were a form of internal passport system designed to segregate the population, severely limit the movements of the black African populace, manage urbanisation, and allocate migrant labour. The black population was required to carry pass books with them when outside their homelands or designated areas.

[2] The women's march was a public protest by women demonstrating that they would no longer be intimidated and silenced by unjust laws such as the pass laws (South African History Online, n.d.).

[3] High school students in the black township of Soweto, outside Johannesburg, marched against the introduction of Afrikaans as a compulsory language in schools. The police fired on the peacefully demonstrating students, which led to a countrywide revolt against the government (South African History Online, n.d.).

[4] As suggested by a critical friend who was the first person to read the story after it had been written.

[5] The technikons are now called universities of technology and still offer career-focussed programmes but also now offer degrees and postgraduate qualifications.

[6] Mergers were legislated as part of the new democracy in South Africa, post 1994. See http://www.saqa.org.za/docs/legislation/2010/act101.pdf

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8. TRANSFORMING IDEAS OF RESEARCH, PRACTICE AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN A FACULTY OF EDUCATION

An Autoethnographic Study

INTRODUCTION

As a relatively recent appointee in a merged university in South Africa, my job description as a research professor mandates me to build research capacity within the Faculty of Education, and to "lead through research" (R. Balfour, personal communication, October 7, 2012). For someone who is passionate about the generation of knowledge for social and educational transformation, this is an ideal job. However, it is not necessarily an easy one in a climate where ideas about research and academia are rather more traditional and rigid than my own. In this chapter, I present an autoethnographic account (Belbase, Luitel, & Taylor, 2013) of learning as I critically reflected on my own practice to find answers to the many questions I grappled with as I tried to build a body of research, and researchers interested in participatory, engaged research with people to bring about contextually and culturally relevant change. An autoethnographic pedagogy (Armstrong, 2008) promotes "dialogue, collaboration and relationship" (Ashton & Denton, 2006, p. 4), very necessary in our times of "super diversity" (Vertovec, 2007, p. 1025). It also allows us to expose "power-based lies" (Pelias, 2004, p. 25) about the exclusive value of positivistic and objective conceptions of research. It has enabled me to "wonder about myself" (Hunt, 2014, p. 3) and to share my own experience with others who might be able to learn from it. As Hunt (2014, p. 6) said, autoethnography "is a useful approach to professional education and lifelong learning."

Drawing on entries in my reflective diary and visualisation techniques such as drawing (Chang, 2008), I explain how reflecting on this data helped me to understand better my leadership practices and my interaction with others, allowing me to make positive adaptations. As an action researcher, I am in the habit of reflecting on my practice at least on a monthly basis. Critical self-reflection took me on a journey of self-discovery, which I believe has helped me to be better able to influence the emergence of a vibrant research community committed to conducting research with people to help them find ways to improve complex social issues that impact on their well-being.

D. Pillay et al. (Eds.), Academic Autoethnographies, 117–132.

INTRODUCING MY IDEAS OF RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

My research interests focus on the promotion of psychosocial wellness within various education contexts. Previously a social worker, I was asked to join the academy as a lecturer on a life skills course in a foundation programme. After completing my doctorate in education, I was approached to join the Faculty of Education, primarily to develop programmes on HIV and AIDS for teachers, a topic no other academic appeared willing to take on, presumably because they did not perceive it as being relevant to the core discipline of education. Seeing it as an opportunity to really help teachers cope with the educational consequences of the pandemic, I threw myself wholeheartedly into this emerging field of research. Based on my social work training, my research naturally took a participative, emancipatory slant, and I gravitated towards paradigms that foregrounded educational research as social change (Schratz & Walker, 1995), using participatory methods that enabled participants to be active agents in the change they desired. Action research became my methodology of choice and I began to gain some degree of academic status by publishing regularly in this field, particularly linked to HIV and AIDS in education. And so, in 2012, I was asked to apply for my current post as research professor on the grounds of my success in leading and publishing in these fields. Because it is in my nature to continually move myself out of my comfort zone, and because I knew the faculty was focusing on improving its performance in terms of research outputs, I accepted—not without some trepidation.

MY INITIAL PERCEPTIONS

The first difficulty I encountered in my new position was adapting to the hierarchic power relations—colleagues did not call directors or professors by their first name; they also seemed hesitant to challenge existing viewpoints and procedures, accepting the decisions of their "superiors" as gospel. Often, when I suggested that things might be done differently, I was told: "That is not the way things are done around here." I felt very frustrated in such a climate, and naturally gravitated towards a few other colleagues who I guessed felt much the same as I did. We all felt like outsiders, for various reasons, and took solace in being able to discuss our feelings openly with each other. However, I did not want such conversations to be a breeding ground for more discontent and knew I had to find another way to come to terms with my feelings.

I also experienced existing structures, systems, and ideologies set up to promote research, as exclusionary. The university encouraged the setting up of official research focus areas, and colleagues whose scholarly interests lay elsewhere tended to feel excluded, leading to negative attitudes towards research and the research entities. The majority of staff were not engaged in regular research activities (only 37 out of 130 academic staff members were involved in the faculty entity) and consequently tended not to consider themselves as being part of the researchers. Thus, as a research

mentor, I had to expend a considerable amount of energy on containing feelings emanating from past hurts, and helping people perceive themselves as having a valuable contribution to make in terms of research. I continually had to draw on my social work training to empathise and support.

Another thing that worried me was how the core areas of research, teaching, and community engagement were viewed. Because I see them as different sides of the same coin, so to speak, it follows that a transformed teaching curriculum will influence the type of research and community engagement that is being conducted, and vice versa. The key performance indicators of academics have been revised to include community engagement, in addition to teaching and research (Council for Higher Education, 2010). My thinking is in line with Subotzky (1999, p. 402) who maintained these three areas can easily be merged through universities becoming "more responsive to societal needs" via Mode 2 knowledge production, driven by social rather than discipline-specific needs. An example: When I made enquiries about how HIV and AIDS were included in the curriculum, I was told a decision had been taken to exclude the topic because of external parental pressure—notwithstanding the fact that policy requires it to be infused in all higher education programmes (HEAIDS, 2010), and research that shows it is sorely needed for South African teachers to be able to deal with its impact on education and learners (Theron, 2007; Wood, 2012). If the curriculum does not change in line with societal needs, then our graduates will not be equipped to act as agents of social change towards a more just and equitable society. Furthermore, a narrow discipline-specific approach does not encourage academics who design the curriculum, to critically reflect on their practice and the social relevance of the curriculum. Critical self-reflection is also a rich source of research that is being overlooked (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). Many changes have taken place in higher education in South Africa since 1994 (Jansen, 2004), including increased demand for transformation of higher education to be more in line with the values and rights espoused in the South African Constitution (1996). Thus, I think that, as academics, we have a responsibility to critically reflect on our activities to make them more aligned with the democratic values embodied in our constitution, with the ultimate goal of creating a more just and humane society. I also had concerns about how service learning was being presented—as a form of "upliftment" of the less fortunate, rather than as a means of providing a profound and life-changing learning experience for both students and the school communities with whom they engaged. A presentation by final year students convinced me that the engagement was student-centred rather than involving the school community by assessing their needs, or learning how to meet them and how to sustain change. A couple of the students did report that when they left the school, their changes were "undone" and were perplexed as to why. A more participatory approach to community engagement could open up areas for research to promote social change (Schratz & Walker, 1995).

I began to mull over how I could be influential in introducing ideas and paradigms about research, teaching, and community engagement that would allow colleagues

to research their own practice and to work collaboratively with internal and external stakeholders to promote transformation both within and beyond the institution. I wanted to be able to influence the thinking of colleagues around their ability to conduct research that would be meaningful for both their own development and for the development of the students and communities they work with. I wanted to influence the research climate of the faculty to make it more in line with the espoused values of the university: human dignity, equality, freedom, integrity, tolerance, respect, commitment to excellence, scholarly engagement, academic freedom, and justice. The above concerns strengthened my desire to embody democratic values to unleash the transformative potential of educational research. I was therefore prompted to ask myself:

- How can I make research a more inclusive, equitable, and welcoming activity, while working within the current systems?
- How can I shift thinking about research and selves as researchers so that it is more in line with the transformative values that inform policy?

I reflected on these questions at regular intervals over a period of 2 years, beginning in November 2012. Of course, my personal research paradigm underpins my concerns. What concerns me, does not necessarily concern my colleagues or students. I am an outsider in many ways: my home language is different from the language of teaching at the institution and the preferred language of most of my colleagues; my formative years were spent in another country; my professional training has been in social work, rather than teaching; and I hold very definite views about the need to conduct research that promotes educational and social transformation, rather than just produce knowledge for academic purposes. I decided I would have to practice what I was preaching—action leadership.

MY CONCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP

Zuber-Skerritt (2012) positioned transformative, emancipatory action research as a philosophy that informs methodology. It becomes a lifelong habit of enquiry, leading to the growth and development of self to be more aligned with democratic and inclusionary values. This personal process of transformation enables us to practice "authentic leadership" (MacFarlane, 2014, p. 2) which is values-based, holistic, and person-centred. Zuber-Skerritt (2011) preferred the term *action leadership*, that promotes transformative learning through the facilitation of action learning sets that provide a space for people to connect, cooperate, and communicate, learning from and with each other. I conceptualise action research as an emancipatory, values-based project—whether for professional development purposes (McNiff, 2013) or as a means of community engagement—in collaboration with others for mutual learning and action to reach democratically negotiated outcomes (Wood & Zuber-Skerritt, 2013). Action leadership requires the leader to be an active participant in the change process through modelling the processes and principles of action

research. Learning from and in action (Schön, 1995) is achieved through critical self-reflection and reflexive dialogue (Winter, 1989) with others. As a research professor, I wanted to be a critic, an advocate of new ideas, and to transgress boundaries (MacFarlane, 2012) through action leadership.

I also find aspects of invitational theory (Purkey & Novak, 1996) useful to operationalise action leadership. Invitational leadership is based on principles fundamental to action research—respect, trust, optimism, and intentionality. *Respect* means dealing with others in a way that promotes open communication and welcomes diverse opinions; *trust* refers to confidence in own judgment and in the ability of others to perform well if a conducive climate is created; *optimism* means being able to imagine successful outcomes and to persevere in face of adversity; *intentionality* refers to making conscious decisions to attain the vision for change. Invitational theory also teaches us that people are always motivated to act (or not) and that just because they do not act in a way that we want them to, does not mean they are not motivated, just that they have a different motivation. Thus, I have to accept that colleagues are free to accept or reject my leadership, but that does not mean that I have to abandon my vision. As an action leader, I need to practice what I preach by modelling what I expect from others. I have to be person-centred yet strategic and, most of all, I have to persevere because change does not happen overnight.

Bennis (2000) defined a leader as someone who is excited about reaching a vision and encouraging others to work collaboratively towards it. My vision, based on my own experience of action research and its transformative potential, was to encourage research that integrated teaching and community engagement with the ultimate aim of influencing positive social change towards a more equitable and just society. By engaging collaboratively with communities to co-create knowledge, we research new contextually and culturally relevant ways to improve social circumstances. This knowledge enhances our learning and informs what we teach our students.

Yet, leadership was a relatively new role for me. In my few years in higher education, I had built up an impressive academic record, but that was mostly through working independently on developing my research portfolio. Although I had worked in research teams on specific projects, and even led some, I had never been responsible for developing research capacity in colleagues, most of who had been in the academy much longer than I had. An extract from my reflective diary in my early days in this position reflects my uncertainty about this:

> This stage in my career as an academic is a critical one. I made the choice to move from a very safe space to embark on a challenging adventure in a new environment. The decision to accept an appointment as research professor places me in a vulnerable position. I know that I have a need to perform, and I expect that many people are waiting for me to perform and this is causing me to panic somewhat. I have to learn to be my authentic self and continue doing what I have been doing up to now—working hard, engaging wholeheartedly in new research opportunities, constantly looking for new ways to develop and

learn as a researcher, and drawing strength to do this from working with like-minded people. (December, 2012)

I decided that I needed to draw on my knowledge of action leadership to find ways to inspire others, to invite them to try something new, to join me in stepping out of their comfort zone. I could quell my fears by approaching this job as an action research exercise: by first taking time to observe and learn before acting intentionally to try and create opportunities for others to engage in learning about research, teaching, and community engagement—opportunities that would allow them to become excited about research and see how they could integrate these three core areas. I would do my best to live up to the following description of an action leader: "Action leaders delight in helping others succeed. They are experienced, wise and other-centred rather than self-centred" (Zuber-Skerritt, 2013, p. 229).

A CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE

Because emotionality can be a barrier to learning and thinking (Pithouse-Morgan, Khau, Masinga, & van de Ruit, 2012), I knew I had to deal with my own feelings of exclusion. I decided to do a narrative drawing to help me to become aware of my thoughts and feelings about my current situation, and what and how I needed to begin to change. This free drawing was a way to visualise my self within my social ecology (Chang, 2008) and so be able to unpack its meaning in relation to my professional learning and practice. Figure 8.1 shows the drawing and narrative.

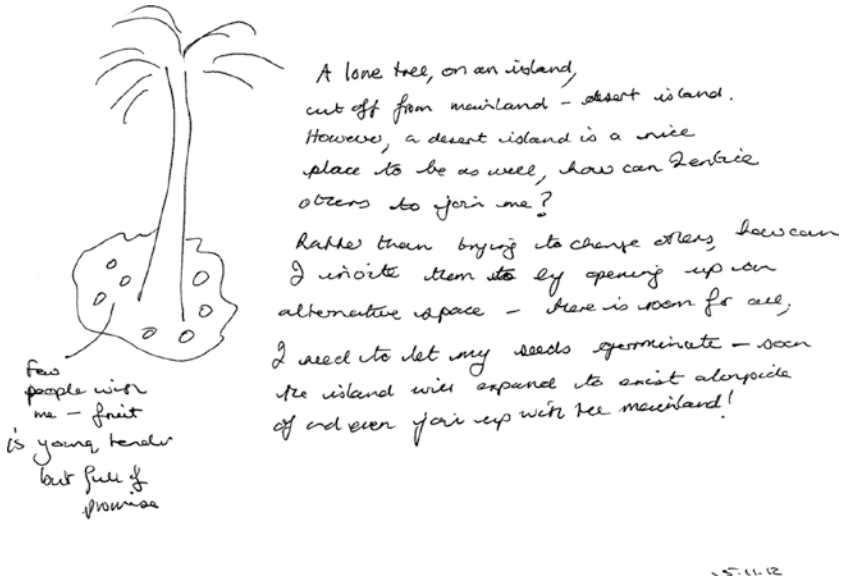

Figure 8.1. Dealing with feelings of exclusion

As I wrote the narrative, I found myself reframing the desert island to be a desirable place rather than a lonely outpost. I began to understand that I could offer something different without having to change the whole system. This autoethnographic approach allowed me to see that I was in fact not practicing what I preached. I started to see myself as others might perceive me—arrogant and inflexible—rather than adopting a dialogic and reflexive stance, as befits an action researcher. Why should I try to change others to think the way I was thinking? That assumes I believe that my paradigm is right and theirs is wrong. I was reminded of the words of Catherine Odora-Hoppers (2005) who said that we should not be creating polemic, but a space where we can all express our diverse views, learning from each other, rather than making the intellectual project a win or lose debate. At this time, I was reminded of an image I had used a few months earlier as part of a photovoice exercise with colleagues in an HIV and AIDS community of practice, when we were documenting our feelings and knowledge about leading change in HIV and AIDS education (see Figure 8.2).

Figure 8.2. Change as an impossible effort

I had depicted change as an almost impossible effort; it was taking all my strength to try to convince others of the need to integrate HIV into the curriculum. Looking again at this photograph, and comparing my thinking at that time with what I had depicted in my drawing, it became clear to me that, if I wanted to be an action leader,

I did not actually have a right to suggest others needed to change. I had to change myself, live out my own values through my research, do my work with integrity and be inviting, rather than enter into a debate that sapped my strength and created more opposition. Unwittingly, I had become a "living contradiction" (Whitehead, 1989, p. 49), intent on changing others rather than aligning myself to my values of inclusivity and embracing diversity.

I saw the need to shift the focus of my research questions to find ways to share my experience of research as an exciting, doable, and worthwhile activity for those who felt an affinity to values similar to my own—to add to and enrich the smorgasbord of paradigms we were using to address the complex problems we were facing as educational researchers. I adapted my questions to read:

- How can I *offer* research as a more inclusive, equitable, and welcoming activity to *add to our diversity of knowledge*?
- How can I *add* thinking about research and selves as researchers so that *it encourages others* to conduct research that is ultimately aimed at social and educational improvement?

What did I do to try to find answers to these questions? Change is a process rather than a one-off occurrence, and I had to intentionally set this process in motion to explore answers to my research questions. I now understood what my wise dean had meant by leading through research. I would have to provide opportunities for colleagues who would like to engage with my understanding of research to become aware of different possibilities and deepen their understanding of participatory and emancipatory forms of research; create opportunity for them to apply their learning and, ultimately, develop an identity for themselves as researchers, who can in turn mentor others. I had to remind myself what I had written in my reflection just before I joined the faculty (see earlier excerpt), and start to do it, rather than just talk about it—be authentic, engage in new opportunities, look for ways to learn and develop myself so that I can lead others to do the same. In the following sections, I explain what I did, why I did it, and provide some evidence of how my colleagues and students have perceived my action.

Integrating Teaching and Research

Because I was aware that many of my colleagues had heavy teaching loads and did not see how they could take on the additional task of research, I wanted to provide opportunity for them to understand that these activities can, and should, be integrated. As I listened to colleagues speak, I heard comments such as "research is difficult," "not everyone can do it," "I have never had to do it, so why must I start now?" Research became an important output in annual performance management agreements, and many people felt forced to do it. I knew that self-reflective forms of action research provide ways to integrate teaching and research, creating publishable knowledge to contribute to the scholarship of teaching and learning. Drawing on my

knowledge of invitational theory (Novak, 2005), I knew that I had to be strategic and person-centred, and persevere in providing action leadership based on the democratic and life-enhancing values of action research.

I made a strategic decision to bring in esteemed international experts (Jean McNiff and Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt) in the field of action research for professional learning to present workshops. I also presented introductory workshops, not only to my own faculty, but also in collaboration with the academic development department. In 2014, I and one of these experts were asked by the institutional office of the university to present workshops on action research for the scholarship of teaching and learning across all three campuses—an indication of how this approach is beginning to be recognised. I find, in general, that colleagues are very open to this form of research of which they were formerly not aware:

> Thank you—your presentation opened a new world for me! To stress the active part that I as a researcher play, was new and strange. (Participant, Faculty of Arts)

> I now understand what AR [action research] is! This methodology is definitely worthwhile in a HE [higher education] environment where we value change and improvement of practice. (Participant, Faculty of Economic Sciences)

I led by example by continuing to write and publish in action research. I also made a strategic decision to refuse a request to guest lecture students regarding HIV and AIDS in teaching. Instead, I suggested to this colleague that we research, together, how we could integrate HIV and AIDS into the curriculum of the programme through the specific module she taught. We did the investigation and I helped her to write an article that was duly published, providing a research output for the colleague.

I embodied a person-centred approach by having one-on-one consultations with people who wished to use action research as a way to improve teaching, inviting colleagues to regular action research "cafés" where we could chat informally about research issues, and generally investing time in providing a listening ear for colleagues who had been put off research through past experiences, or who did not perceive themselves to be researchers.

I had to persevere in my attempts to position action research as a viable and valid way to create scholarship. For example, in research committee meetings and ethics meetings I had to explain many times how the research process and validation methods for action research differ from more traditional, objective methodologies. Several times, critical readers of student proposals requested the removal of the "I," criticised the narratives as "too personal," and questioned the fact that participants were acknowledged in visual and written format. I was patient in educating those who were more used to quantitative or traditional qualitative paradigms; I used external critical readers who were prolific publishers in action research, and used my own publications to validate how this enabled the creation of knowledge that was valued by academia. I knew I was making some progress

when my students began to receive compliments rather than criticism from fellow colleagues:

> This is the most enjoyable proposal I have ever read—in fact I read it twice! And it is a very sound piece of work. (Colleague, and critical reader of AR proposal)

Integrating Teaching, Research, and Community Engagement

The requirement to include community engagement as part of an academic's workload has been generally perceived as an added burden by many (Fourie, 2003). However, action research allows the three core activities to be integrated. I was strategic in volunteering to head the service learning committee, which allowed me to ensure that the service learning projects were designed to produce research outputs, thus integrating teaching, research, and community engagement (Waterman, 2014). I also engaged students and colleagues in projects with a service learning or community engagement focus, and assisted them to publish their findings. I have persevered in promoting action research as an integrated approach to engaged scholarship over the past 2 years, and I believe it is beginning to be accepted by colleagues as a valid, and even desirable, methodology:

> I think AR is not only research, but going out and making a change. You have to stop referring to the general, you have to look at yourself; values play an important role in teaching and understanding your students. (Colleague in AR project)

Changing Ideas about Research and Self as Researcher

Over the last couple of years, I have persevered with students and colleagues to build their trust in me as academic leader, and in the methodology of action research. It has not been easy because most of the established researchers were already in the existing research entity, and those outside of it did not have strong identities as researchers. I made the strategic decision to begin a new research entity to include those who had hitherto felt excluded—rather than taking the easy way and becoming part of the existing, strong unit I was recruited to join. We now have three experienced researchers in this new faculty project, and we have successfully applied for a focus area in conjunction with Health Sciences, meaning that we are now an interdisciplinary unit conducting research to promote community wellness. The difficult and lonely times are forgotten when I receive unsolicited feedback such as the following e-mail:

> Don't you ever leave us—we need you here! Thanks for introducing me to action research and photovoice—I think I am going to enjoy research now! I have been struggling with my proposal for 2 years and now I am done after 6 months! (Colleague, coauthor, and doctoral candidate)

I also strategically applied for a National Research Foundation (NRF) community engagement grant that allowed me to actively promote action research within the institution and nationally through organising seminars, conferences, workshops, and supporting colleagues and students to network with internationally acclaimed action researchers. I also led my projects in a person-centred way, promoting symmetrical and less formal communication as opposed to the traditional hierarchic communication colleagues had been used to. One of the principles of action research is action learning through small collaborative groups (Zuber-Skerritt, 2013), and these democratic and dialogic action learning sets were a feature of all my research. I thought the best way to help colleagues forge an identity as researchers, was to support them in publication. I encouraged people to publish—looking for potential rather than judging them on their past performance. Reflections by members of these action learning sets indicate that they found this to be a "humanising" space where they could learn and grow:

> I think we feel comfortable with one another and there is a genuine support atmosphere amongst the group. (Doctoral candidate, NRF project)

> What I also must say is the way some have just blossomed in the P [participatory action research] group makes me feel proud to be part of it. (Colleague, NRF project)

> These shared reflections enhance our meetings and my overall experience of being part of this group tremendously. I cannot overstate how impressed I am by how well the reflections work to create group cohesion and familiarity amongst members. I can identify with the experiences the members reflect on and feel as though we are undergoing this research journey together. (Master's student, NRF project)

I was generous with my material and intellectual resources. For example, I funded my colleagues and students in their projects, and brought academics to the university who I knew would inspire them; I lent equipment, did critical reading for those not under my official mentorship, and regularly shared articles and other resources electronically. When one of my students was struggling to find a research site in this area, I organised for her to work in a school in another province where I knew the principal was an ardent action researcher, supporting her travel expenses from my research budget. I was gratified when the principal reported to her in an e-mail that one of the heads of department (HODs) in the school said the highlight of the academic year for him was working on the project with the student—which helped him to improve his practice. The student responded that she felt they both owed a lot to my mentorship and guidance,

> because all that happened at your school is demonstrating that her roots are growing deeper and are also spreading widely. This denotes that her wisdom spread from the university through a student to your school through HODs and teachers and will spread to the community through learners. (Doctoral candidate, unsolicited e-mail, 4 December, 2014)

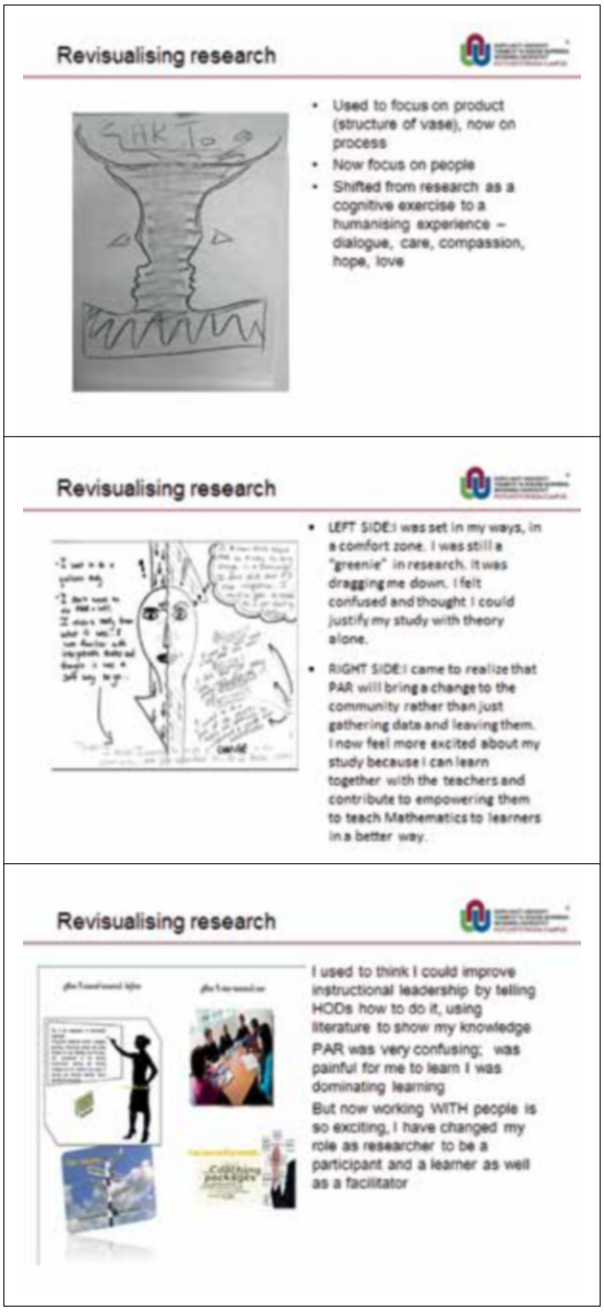

Figure 8.3. Visualising change in thinking of postgraduate students

Although I was rather embarrassed by her profuse expression of admiration, I was interested to see that she also used the metaphor of a tree to describe my influence on learning. She had not seen my reflective drawing, nor had I shared my use of the metaphors (see Figures 8.1 and 8.4) with her. I found this to be motivating for me, because it gave me hope that my vision was slowly taking shape. Figure 8.3 offers some evidence of the change in thinking about research of three of my postgraduate students who used visualisation (Chang, 2008) to reflect on how working with me had changed their perceptions of research.

AN ONGOING JOURNEY OF REFLECTION

I do not want to present this narrative as a self-congratulatory story. I know that in action research there are no final solutions, just "temporary resting places" (Elliott, 1990, p. 7). Making an intentional effort to use autoethnographic strategies such as the creation of visual artefacts and critical self-reflection helped me to explore my own learning and live out the values I profess in my research, rather than fall into the trap of complaining and judging others. I have learned to be inviting, to share my ideas rather than try to change those whose paradigms might differ to mine, but are just as worthy of my respect. This was, and remains difficult for me, because I frequently felt (and still feel) like an outsider due to my language, culture, and history.

To be inviting also means to be optimistic and able to imagine successful outcomes. It requires resilience to persevere in face of adversity and, often, I did experience what Stern (2014, p. 5) called "research viciousness" where colleagues make unkind or insensitive remarks about other staff members' ability to do research or about the value of participatory or self-study forms of research. I survived by creating a support network both within and without the university through joining national and international networks, attending conferences, hosting a World Congress of Action Learning and Action Research, and generally taking leadership in action research in South Africa. By gaining recognition for my research publications, I think I was able to better position action research as a meaningful endeavour. There will always be people who see transformation and change as being mutually exclusive in their idea of quality education, but I have learned to follow my own vision and let others follow theirs.

I now present a visualisation I recently composed to explain how I have changed my practice in an attempt to answer my research questions (see Figure 8.4). This image is very different from my drawing of the lone palm tree on a desert island. I am now rooted, more like the oak trees that line the streets around our campus than the alien palm of before. I am happy to realise that I have learned to live more fully in the direction of my professed values, rather than fighting against a system I imagined I had to change. I am now working on "growing my own timber" by collaborating with like-minded colleagues across the divide (there actually is a railway line that separates Education from other faculties on campus). I have attracted two strong

education researchers to my education niche area and together we are leading students and colleagues in publishing and securing funded projects to promote our vision of helping people to improve their own educational and social circumstances. We are working across disciplines and learning from, and feeding back into, the other research entities in education. The picture might have looked very different if I had not used an autoethnographic approach that allowed me to place myself as the object of critique.

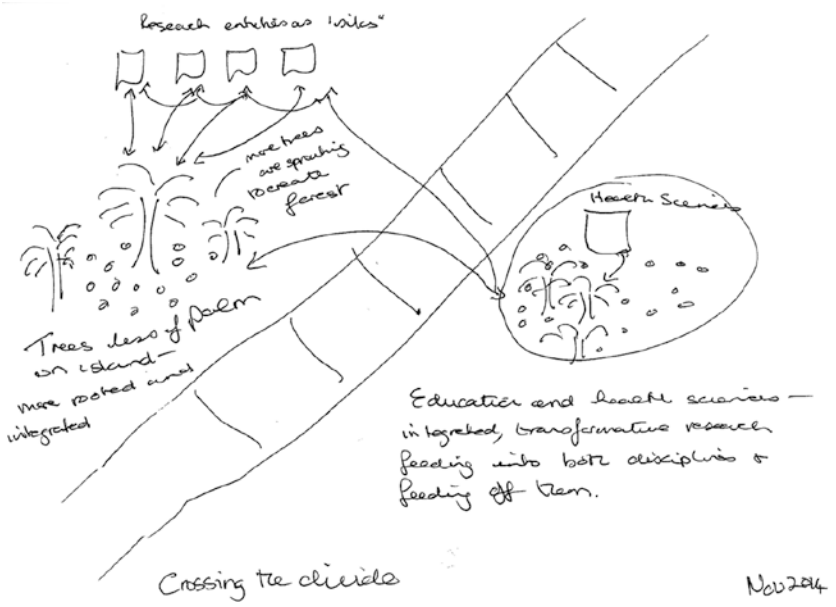

Figure 8.4. Closing the divide

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MY LEARNING AND HOW CAN YOU TRUST MY STORY?

Doing this autoethnographic enquiry has helped me understand myself better as I become accountable for my actions and interactions. It has helped me to think deeply about my motivations, my visions, and my paradigms and allowed me to find ways to pursue my goals while living in harmony with my fellow academics. I have no doubt that this form of learning would be invaluable for our students because it "permits researchers to apply flexible modes of inquiry from their life experiences [to effect change] in educational institutions and classroom practices" (Belbase et al., 2013, p. 86). I have explained the actions I took to answer my research questions, and offered evidence to support my claims. I hope my story comes across as authentic, believable, and possible—three validating criteria of narrative forms of research suggested by Ellis (1995). My story has catalytic validity (Herr & Anderson, 2005)

if you believe I have offered evidence that I have been able to encourage others to broaden their thinking about what constitutes valid academic research and, perhaps, to try new ideas out in practice. It was a challenge to write this story without sounding arrogant or defensive. My story will have rhetoric and personal validity (Herr & Anderson, 2005) if you, as reader, are convinced that I managed to stay true to my professed values as I strived to improve my practice. However you judge it, I offer it as an explanation of how I learned to be a better leader of research by being critically reflexive about my practice. Autoethnography has been described as being able to arouse "pedagogical thoughtfulness and wakefulness" (Belbase et al., 2013, p. 94), and it certainly helped me to be more alert to how my practice influenced those around me. As Willis, (2004, p. 323) attested, academic learning is about "deeper changes in the inner self of the …researcher. It is to a greater or lesser extent, a road of transformation." I hope my autoethnographic story may entice you to embark on a similar journey of learning and growth.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Chapter consultants: Lasse Reinikainen and Heléne Zetterström Dahlqvist.

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9. THE (IN)VISIBLE GAY IN ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP

Implications for Reimagining Inclusion and Transformation in South Africa

INTRODUCTION

The South African Constitution (1996) recognises historical and structural inequalities pertaining to groups "based on perceived or 'real' differences" (de Vos, 2004, p. 185). Law thus has an important role to play "in reordering …power relations in ways which strive to ensure that all individuals are treated as if they have the same moral worth" (de Vos, 2004, p. 185). Rothmann (2014, p. 84) noted that "though decriminalisation [of homosexuality has occurred, this does not] …ensure an eradication of homophobia" through legal or constitutional provisions. Rancière argued that "the rights of [people] and of the citizen are the rights of those who make them a reality. They were won through democratic action and are…guaranteed through such action" (2006, p. 74). Ndashe (2010, p. 6) echoed this statement to suggest that LGBTTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, intersex, and queer) South Africans must engage in "identity assertion."

This chapter has five parts. The first describes the problematic of leadership in a postapartheid context in which rights, whilst seemingly secured in the Constitution, do not guarantee acceptance. Thus the difference between an aspirational democracy, and the experience of acceptance having still to be won, suggests that the possibilities for LGBTTIQ people to be viewed as role models, let alone credible leaders, remain problematic. The second part overviews selected scholarship on gender and leadership to situate the reimagining of transformation for the inclusion of sexuality, whilst the third describes the methodology used to create a discourse for visibility for LGBTTIQ persons. The fourth part details my understanding of leadership in relation to inclusion as well as transformation. I show how the experience of misrecognition makes possible subsequent erasure of identity. The fifth part describes the experiences of leading in (and learning about) three universities, showing how contextual factors and what I term *totemic examples,* modify a subjective understanding of leadership as transformation in relation to expectations and institutional values.[1] Totemic here refers to a public occasion or experience that not only represented the values of the institution, but also its characteristics, which might not always seem commensurate with the values. The convergence of both characteristics and values constitutes a

D. Pillay et al. (Eds.), Academic Autoethnographies, 133–147.

totemic experience, rather than simply a symbolic one (in which personal values might or might not converge, with only the values embodied in a public process or institutional occasion). In conclusion, I reflect on LGBTTIQ visibility within academic institutions with a view to reimagining the politics of the possible.

CONTESTED CONTEXTS

Between 1998 and 2006, several legal cases resulted in the decriminalisation of same-sex desire (for example, the cases concerning decriminalisation of sodomy in 1998, and those that led to the legalisation of same-sex unions in 2006) in South Africa. Despite progress, de Vos (2004) argued that "a mere extension of marriage rights to some same-sex couples will also not lead to a necessary and fundamental re-imagining of the nature of …intimate relations in our society" (p. 182) on the grounds that "because of homophobia, gender inequality and patriarchy in our society, gay men, lesbians and many women in different-sex relationships often do not have the social or economic power to freely 'choose' to set the terms of their relationships" (de Vos, p. 183). De Vos' point applies equally to other areas of society and, in this chapter, is extended to the world of work where this reimagining is long overdue.

For people unaware of the extermination, torture, and marginalisation inflicted on persons who identify or were identified as LGBTTIQ (during and after the apartheid period, but also long before it), the question arises as to why these persons in South Africa require special protection or rights, given that the Constitution (1996) already provides for the protection of human rights. Appiah argued that the need for such measures arises from the fact that the simple right to human dignity is not sufficient protection in a state where a group or individual might still be attacked on the basis of not conforming, amongst others, to a heteronormative ideal (2005, p. 109). Where identity cannot be considered as chosen (gay people do not choose their desires), and where the consequences of such identities are severe, rights and protection cannot be assumed. The question this chapter addresses is: Why are LGBTTIQ people as a vulnerable and minority group, rendered invisible in the world of work when it comes to considerations affecting transformation?

Three points are relevant. First, the struggles in South Africa to assert LGBTTIQ suggest that acceptance is neither unproblematic nor cause for (legal or other) restitution (for example, employment equity). The Employment Equity Act (EEA; 1998) defines *designated groups* as black people, women, and people with disabilities. Thus, whilst explicitly mentioned in the Constitution, no further provision concerning the status of LGBTTIQ people as a disadvantaged group is made. Few seem to have celebrated LGBTTIQ rights as part of "the world we have won" (Weeks, 2007) in the name of non-sexism, non-racism, freedom, and equality. And, if gender as a category for the recognition of previously disadvantaged groups is to suffice, then it is clear that in South Africa, it is simply a euphemism for biological sex. No application forms for employment make provision for applicants to identify as lesbian, homosexual, transgendered, bisexual, or heterosexual. This affirms the

relative insignificance, indeed invisibility broadly speaking, of LGBTTIQ people as a disadvantaged group. This group, despite colour or gender differences, has experienced (and continues to experience) violence and lack of protection in a largely heterosexual and heterosexist state (Nel & Judge, 2008). Because *gender* is corrupted as a "category" in the EEA, I use the term *sexuality* to signify the differences in identity that still make for discrimination in South Africa. It could be argued that the invisibility of LGBTTIQ people as part of the transformation of South Africa also occurs because of a lack of education concerning sexuality or gender in schools. For example, a handbook, *Issues on Gender in Schools* (Department of Education, 2002), aims to equip teachers to deal with issues concerning gender, but in fact deals narrowly and exclusively with issues concerning women as the subject of a range of discriminatory social practices. In the absence of a genuinely inclusive approach to education, ignorance is reinforced.

Second, and in relation to the above, identifying as gay in (academic) leadership is rare but also risky because sexual orientation is not considered, generally, as a necessary modification to heterosexist perspectives on role modelling in which credible leaders can also be accepted as gay. Michael Warner (1993) defined heteronormativity as arising from heterosexual culture's ability to interpret itself as coextensive with society, as "the elemental form of human association, as the very model of inter-gender relations …and as the means of reproduction without which society wouldn't exist" (pp. viii & xxi). Universities are microcosms of society, albeit privileged ones, and reflect social norms and values that in themselves can be exclusionary. In hierarchical organisations, the interface between power, work, and leadership is complex. Unsurprisingly gender, sexuality, and identity are important though uncomfortable factors in the exercise of leadership (documented in studies on women in leadership, for example, Branson, 2007). Sexuality can stretch conventional understandings of transformation as an overt and necessarily inclusive political project in South Africa, applicable to white, black, female, or LGBTTIQ South Africans alike. But, in employment terms, LGBTTIQ identities, whether for EEA reporting purposes or not, are simply not central in the politics concerning inclusion and transformation in higher education (let alone education).

Third, higher education makes few provisions for spaces that are considered safe or LGBTTIQ friendly. The choices for LGBTTIQ people seem binary: contestation and othering, or assimilation and invisibility. If education and employment policies make no provision for LGBTTIQ people as a subordinated, historically disadvantaged group, then it is unsurprising that this group continues to be discriminated against visibly and invisibly by institutions (staff and students alike). The Soudien Report confirmed this in relation to LGBTTIQ people on South African campuses:

> although sexism has been raised …with a few exceptions there has been a deafening silence on sexual harassment in general and in residences… The silence …does not mean that the problem does not exist …it is clear that sexual harassment, of women and gays and lesbians, is rife. (Soudien et al., 2008, p. 95)

Protected by the silence of the EEA, employers do not account for sexuality in the same way as race or gender—either in terms of employment policies or, indeed, in codes containing universities' values. Why? Perhaps the suffering of LGBTTIQ people is too problematic to consider in the context of a range of other types of restitution that need still to occur? As much has been acknowledged, even by students in higher education institutions:

> Homophobia was reported as a serious problem at RU [Rhodes University]. As a student pointed out: 'The views of "gays" are discounted by house committees. It is easier to ask for more black lecturers than it is to ask for more gay lecturers.' (RU meeting with students as cited in Soudien et al., 2008, p. 76)

To summarise the above: heteronormativity ascribes, even to sexual identity, normalising discourses that obscure material differences (for example, the assumption that all lesbian experience is the same) between groups. These three points provide a motivation for the choice of autoethnography as a methodology that enables a discourse about LGBTTIQ leadership and (in)visibility in order to interrogate the assumptions made within heteronormative working environments about gender and sexuality as a factor prioritising attention for some, whilst denying it to others. Furthermore, autoethnography enables knowledge to be generated by the subject about subject positioning, as Richards (2008) noted:

> One of the ways in which so-called abnormal lives are controlled and normalised is through being written about… People who do not belong to a dominant ideology or mainstream …are seen by those who do to be 'homogenous', all the same. (p. 1720)

I return later in the chapter for a more fulsome account of autoethnography as methodological framing for the self as focus of research.

WHO COMES FIRST? THE PROBLEMATICS OF RESTITUTION IN THE SCHOLARSHIP ON RACE AND GENDER

There is some scholarship on LGBTTIQ identity in relation to work (examples include: in the context of pastoral ministry, Gremond & de Gruchy, 1997; in the context of work and rights, Reddy, 2010) but little on LGBTTIQ leadership. Paragraphs to follow contextualise this gap in terms of related areas of scholarship touching on inclusion and transformation.

An extensive scholarship exists concerning the conflict that arises even within (heteronormative) higher education institutions between men and women. This work draws upon Ahmed's (2010) theory on happiness and Berlant's (2011) theory of cruel optimism (leadership is a normative fantasy that can be a bad desire) and concludes that women are rarely identified or supported in leadership. Morley (2013), for example, asked why gender has escaped attention in the academy. Do cultural scripts for leaders collide with gender performances? Citing Shackleton,

Riordan, and Simonis's (2006) literature review on women in leadership, Morley (2013) argued that there is an essentialised debate (women have better skills, better people intelligence, and so forth) about women that confirms negative stereotyping. Overall, the literature "blames the gap," advocating that more women need to be seen figuring in structures, without questioning the patriarchal power imbued in these structures (Morley, 2013). Morley argued that equality does not equal quantitative change. Success, for women, depends on internalising the dominant accountability systems and this can result in leadership being experienced as a loss of authentic identity and autonomy. Barad (2007) argued that differences are made via the politics of difference.

In other scholarship, like law, it has been argued that using a moral framework to understand race may be less helpful in relation to gender, and may serve to obscure the power relations at work.[2] Instead, as Botha suggested, questions of political disempowerment and material disadvantage should loom large in a court's inquiry concerning cases where gender discrimination features: "The Court should concentrate on questions of domination and access to the means of political and economic power" (Botha, 2004, p. 748). The struggles are not straightforward; although defined as a secular matter, the overwhelming majority of religious institutions from the beginning of the struggle for same-sex marriage in South Africa (and elsewhere) vehemently opposed it. The Constitution thus mediates value systems (Barnard, 2007, p. 509), but law should act to protect groups against ideological or dogmatic interpretations of cultural institutions (be it marriage or chieftainship).

In South Africa, the focus on race has for obvious reasons, dominated discussions concerning transformation, equity, and social and economic change. Williams stated that

> racial discrimination is powerful precisely because of its frequent invisibility, its felt neutrality…Racism inscribes culture with generalised preferences and routinized notions of propriety…It empowers the mere familiarity and comfort of the status quo by labelling [it] …as 'natural.' (1995, p. 82)

Dealing with gender within the context of race-based prejudice has been more complex because as Fraser (1996, p. 218) argued, gender equity is best understood as "a complex notion comprising a plurality of distinct normative principles." With reference to my experience in leadership, I argue that though this scholarship is not neatly transferable, it can be applied to leaders who identify as LGBTTIQ. Notwithstanding the scholarship on women in leadership, or black people in leadership, scholarly discussions of LGBTTIQ identity have tended to focus on the politics of recognition (coming out, being outed, contesting prejudice) in the social sphere. There are few accounts, barring perhaps Edwin Cameron's (2005), on leadership and identity in South Africa with reference to being LGBTTIQ, and certainly none in higher education, though that is not to suggest that LGBTTIQ people do not feature in higher education leadership; they do, albeit invisibly. Perhaps because sexuality

is considered messy, LGBTTIQ people, though historically discriminated against, appear to be "disappeared" in relation to transformation.[3]

METHODOLOGY: A TALE OF THREE UNIVERSITIES

Autoethnography as a self-reflexive research genre combining autobiography and ethnography, is concerned with the inscription of identity into the research process from the perspective of the subject itself through the narrativisation of those conditions producing identity, milieu, autobiography, and culture (Chang, 2008; Grant, Short, & Turner, 2013).

This chapter, narrated from my perspective in three leadership positions at three universities over a 10-year period, explores the complexities of power and identity within institutional spaces configured as heteronormative though not homogeneous (in terms of race, class, gender, or values). The autoethnographic accounts are framed by scholarship drawn from law, education, and gender studies in order to situate my experience in leadership in postapartheid public and private universities. In so doing, a private–public discourse is created to render visible the "invisible gay" in academic leadership. The narration draws from memory work (Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, & Benton, 1992) as a deliberate reconstruction and distillation of experience. Chang (2008, p. 128) termed this as analysis of data to be followed by interpretation "to connect fractured data." The fractured data is thus my experience, and the process of interpretation enables connections to be made about myself and also higher education institutions. The process thus involves transforming the text (in this case a series of journal notes) into "culturally meaningful explanations" (Chang, 2008, p. 126) to reveal a particular perspective or argument: whilst diversity might be celebrated as a national theme, being and identifying as LGBTTIQ is (at best) neither encouraged nor acknowledged as contributing to diversity. Because this perspective is derived both from observation as well as perception, there are a range of ethical considerations. Ellis (2007) termed these *relational ethics* because using personal experience implicates me as well as the persons with whom I interacted, and whose perceptions I reflect upon (Ellis, pp. 4–8). In terms of the continuum of ethnographic accounts, the account described in this chapter approximates what Ellis, Adams, and Bochner described as "the ethnographer studying her or his life alongside cultural members' lives, to ethnographic memoirs" (2011, para. 19). And, because this data (drawn from memory work) is organised into three exemplary (totemic) experiences over time in three higher education contexts, it constitutes what Ellis et al. described as "layered accounts [that] often focus on the author's experience alongside data, abstract analysis, and relevant literature. This form emphasizes the procedural nature of research…layered accounts use vignettes, reflexivity, multiple voices, and introspection" (2011, para. 20).

There is a problematic concerning the research ethic of the observations recounted here. First, given that my sexuality is precisely what is at issue (as shown

in previous sections) in higher education institutions as a very real basis for threat or discrimination, it is not appropriate or possible to interrogate the subjects described in terms of whether they knowingly or unknowingly marginalise LGBTTIQ people. Second, it would not be possible for me to confront persons with such questions without fear of repercussions. How then to speak about the issues for which no protection exists other than through confrontation? In leadership, such challenges might be more normative within the framing allowed for by the EEA, but no similar framing exists for the protection of LGBTTIQ persons. Power is not evenly distributed in leadership, and hierarchy makes for contexts in which certain subjects cannot be spoken for fear of conflict or consequence. What I have demonstrated earlier is that fear of both is neither groundless nor minimal in relation to persons who identify as LGBTTIQ. Whilst I cannot thus verify data with my subjects, I agree with Richards (2008) that "auto-ethnography can address and problematise the role of the researcher when the researcher is explicitly located in a narrative and therefore cannot be understood as absent or neutral" (p. 1721). Third, I have not referred to persons at all, and real locations and even geopolitical regions are obscured by pseudonym.

The methodological choice of autoethnography draws also from scholarship concerning LGBTTIQ identity in the academy. Rothmann (2014, p. 171) argued that LGBTTIQ academics either identify as heterosexual in order to avoid "homo-negativity," or risk isolation and loss of support by being open. Either way, the consequences of assimilation or difference for the LGBTTIQ academic (let alone students, see Francis & Msibi, 2011; Reddy, 2002; or Soudien et al., 2008) can be severe (Cox, Dewaele, van Houtte, & Vincke, 2011). The chapter explores these issues through scholarly reflection on an autobiographical narrative. I argue that the contested political nature of leadership makes for the reassertion of heterosexism on the basis of race and gender affinities in which gender is purposefully erased.

The three higher education institutions selected differ in culture and context: two merged universities and a private university in South Africa. All three institutions espouse clear identity statements (in terms of mission, vision, values, and other policy framing) and provide for differences that make each university singular in terms of institutional culture and climate. Broadly speaking, these are all postapartheid universities, Boundary University being founded in 2004, Sentral University in 1998, and Inlands University in 2004. All three institutions align themselves explicitly with the transformation project in South Africa.

Autoethnography as methodology is employed in relation to my narrating of experiences of, and learning about, leadership in each institution as a manager, although at different levels. The specificity of institution is useful because, methodologically, it enables contrasts between my experience of each institution and my interpretation of its culture and climate. The purpose is thus to situate my experience of differences in leading and being lead in these universities.

GAY LEADERSHIP: IMAGINING INCLUSIVE INSTITUTIONAL SPACES

I do not pretend to neat divisions between the personal and the public life. Instead, for me, the personal becomes public once the identity of the LGBTTIQ person is disclosed, precisely because deviance from heterosexual norms is regarded as such. As a student leader at a South African university, I knew disclosure had its risks and consequences. Whilst chairperson of a student society and head student of a residence, I heard of another student being bashed and molested for identifying as LGBTTIQ. The incident was "disappeared," but served as a powerful reminder that one could expect little affirmation from one's peers, and no protection from the university authorities. It was only as a master's student (and thus with the privilege of seniority, some experience, and distance) in another city that I could identify as gay to academic colleagues. That early positive experience provided confidence to disclose my identity to the local chaplain but after that, I was not invited again to participate in church leadership; disclosure could mean exclusion, leadership could mean concealment.

Nonetheless, I aspired to lead; leadership was about change and, armed with the discourse of black consciousness, as gay person I reimagined this to include reference to all people previously subject to victimisation on the basis of colour, gender, and sexuality. Reading Steve Biko's work about racism: "Racism does not only imply exclusion of one race by another—it always presupposes that the exclusion is for the purposes of subjugation" (as cited in Stubbs, 1987, p. 97), provided me with a discourse concerning the effectiveness of heterosexism as a prejudice with consequences for self and other. Being white afforded no protection in a country in which being gay was the equivalent of being satanic. Within this personalised interpretation—leadership, and what became possible with the end of conscription in 1993 and subsequent release of Nelson Mandela—was thus the confidence to reimagine changed institutions to become the kinds of places in which I would have liked to work. A tension inhered in this formulation: the institutions in which I found myself had no space (conceptually or ideologically) for this idea.

Furthermore, although I described myself as oppressed, that discourse did not include my otherness in terms of race or sexuality. My motives, when aspiring to leadership, became visible in attempts to reimagine the transformation project, concerned as it was with race and gender, to include sexuality; it was a fragile and compromised ideal given that no LGBTTIQ lobbying group existed in higher education. As a white and gay male, transformation meant discrimination. Whilst Zoë Wicomb (2000) could declare after 1994 that no South African was free until every woman was free, no one in leadership seemed to have anything to say about LGBTTIQ—an embarrassing silence. This silence and invisibility was noted in the Higher Education South Africa (HESA) Sector Position Paper that appeared 2 years after, and in response to, the Soudien Report:

> The Committee's view that the impact of sexism is as pernicious as that of racism…Women continue to experience painful exclusion, discrimination,

> victimisation, violence and sexual harassment across the sector…forge institutional cultures that are women friendly…rather than expecting *women* [emphasis added] to thrive in conditions where the expectations, norms, values, traditions and ways of behaving derive from masculinised conceptions defining … 'normal.' (HESA, 2010, p. 13)

Despite the effacement of LGBTTIQ experience in the HESA document, I understood my role in higher education as a leader not of any particular group or subculture, but as leader of an organisation of academics devoted to the pursuit of knowledge and informed change. For me, diversity as a feature of social life provides, especially in education institutions, an opportunity to challenge heterosexism in terms of assumptions regarding deviance, whether thus declared (coming out or being outed) or intuited (discovered or surmised). The position of the leader is always tenuous, contextualised, and ambiguous. Leaders rise from within, or are recruited from outside, organisations to effect change, create sustainability, secure opportunity, and promote institutional values. With each of these terms there are contrary impulses and tensions. For example, whether a leader is "outsider" or "insider," leadership is by its nature dialogical—to be a part of, and apart from peers. How an academic understands his or her role as leader depends on academic credibility and social reinforcement concerning generic (already gendered, as shown earlier) characteristics of the leader. I could never understand appeals made for loyalty to institutions or groups when those institutions to which I had belonged, seemed to be welcoming of my labour provided that who I was remained concealed.

RACE AND SEXUALITY AT BOUNDARY UNIVERSITY

At Boundary University (BU) I was appointed leader of a unit. Conversations with other leaders highlighted two priorities concerning transformation as a management (rather than leadership) process: first, was the policy concerning promotion based on academic merit, coupled with the gradual relinquishing of academic staff not in sympathy with this policy. Second, was a policy initiated over 4 years in which the appointment of white men was to be discouraged so as to encourage EEA groups.

Though colleagues were aware of my sexuality, the university had confidence in me to lead the change processes with a clear commitment to transformation. The unit I led shifted from being 70% white at the start of the process in 2004, to 70% black by the time I left. Those transitions were equally concerned with the quality of education in the context of redress of race and gender imbalance. A totemic experience occurred when Justice Edwin Cameron was invited by the vice-chancellor to launch his book *Witness to AIDS* (2005) at BU. The vice-chancellor provided the introductory remarks on this occasion and it was clear that in his perspective, discrimination on the basis of race, let alone gender or sexuality, was unacceptable.

As leader, I understood my role as change agent both in terms of establishing a new institutional culture in which race figured prominently as a feature, and in

which I believed sexuality could feature equally and openly as a gay male despite EEA categories. After 4 years, I nevertheless began to experience dissonance as leader: What were the possibilities, going forward? I was too white in EEA terms.

On one occasion, I discussed with fellow leader possible employment at another university. Race was mentioned as possibly counting in my favour at an interview. The comment affirmed the invisibility of sexuality at the time when it ought to have mattered more as part of the transformation agenda of BU. The comment also revealed a wider dissonance as regards race in relation to sexual orientation in South Africa, because implicit was a suggestion that racist white people would prefer a white gay candidate to a black candidate of any sexual orientation. Even from a school-going age, I knew this not to be true: where heterosexism was considered a permissible prejudice, neither white nor black heterosexist people would allow for the possibility of LGBTTIQ men or women in leadership on the basis that that difference could add value. I thus imagined it would be possible to find another sense of affinity (belonging) based on the values of the institution where these seemed to balance an overly compliant perspective on the application of EEA categories.

VALUES AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION AT SENTRAL UNIVERSITY

Blair (2014, p. 1) noted that the role of religious values in higher education institutions remains controversial. For example, in 2014 Bowdoin College (USA) withdrew recognition, support, and funding from Christian fellowship societies on the campus if they prohibited homosexuals from seeking a leadership role. The idea that homosexuals could perceive of themselves as Christian, legitimately, and seek leadership speaks of the complexity of values, sexuality, and institutions that came together at Sentral University (SU).

SU had a reputation for social responsibility, corporate governance, business ethics, and education. Though many universities aspire to values-based education, the curricula at SU demonstrated these values in relation to issues prevalent in the public and private sector in South Africa (for example, corruption, business and environmental tensions, corporate greed and responsibility) affirming Arendt's (1973) notion that knowledge requires reference to values in order to be socially applicable, ethical, and responsive.

At SU I engaged fully with aspects of higher education regulatory systems and networks with peers. Although a values-based institution, students and academics were admitted to the university irrespective of their religious background. Religious differences were obviously of interest to the university because they went to the heart of teaching and learning. The university selectively focused on emphases found in the Constitution, not with the purpose of excluding either students or staff, but with a view to understanding the extent to which its values could be identified in its appointments of staff—with common, despite different, religious perspectives. Other types of differences (notably race and gender) were similarly seen as sources of strength to the institution; but sexuality was problematic.

The totemic experience at SU involved a conversation with leaders concerning the suitability of a candidate to teach undergraduate modules. This academic specialised in gender in women's novels in which issues concerning same-sex desire featured. One leader queried whether the academic would, given her focus, be likely to teach values not compatible with those of the university. Although the university made the appointment, the process demonstrated that values could indeed transcend particular beliefs, and that the university saw value in the differences of scholarly perspective and life experience brought by academics who may not have subscribed to heteronormativity.

These dilemmas are evident elsewhere too in higher education. In Canada, Lee (2014, p. 1) reported on state agencies refusing to accredit Trinity Western University (British Columbia) degrees on the basis that the university encouraged faculty and students to adhere to values not supported by the state. Sexuality and institutional values are not matters for private conscience only, but also public contestation.

INLANDS UNIVERSITY AND THE ERASURE OF DIFFERENCE

A previous manager at Inlands University (IU) had written about efforts to transform a unit from its ancestor institutions within a newly merged university, and made a point of noting that she was the first female leader in the university's history. This explicit celebratory mention of gender was evidence of the university's commitment to transformation.

At IU transformation concerned not only race and gender, but embracing research. The university had a history of education development with an intolerance of religious, sexuality, or race difference. Ironically, race, language, culture, and religious affiliation could, in various combinations, form the basis for heterosexual belonging at IU, but organisations for LGBTTIQ people splintered within an institutional culture that promoted only some forms of inclusion.

At IU invisibility of those "difficult" differences was normalised. This made for friendships and alliances with those also considered outsiders either in race or language terms. Because South Africans have long, complicated histories of several oppressions (race, gender, class, religion, sexual orientation) we are not yet experienced at imagining freedom as inclusive of diversity because pedagogically, politically, and socially, it is valuable. Even with Constitutional protections, the practice of freedom remains contested, a matter affirmed by legal (and other) challenges concerning the exercise of human rights at IU.

One incident of totemic value at IU encapsulates the erasure of difference there. I was approached by another leader to offer a workshop on transformation, diversity, sexuality, and disability in the workplace. This was an imaginary step forward, in which IU's values coincided with raising issues concerning sexuality, the workplace, and leadership. The vice-chancellor supported the workshop by inviting student and academic leadership. Yet, on the day, the workshop was full with mostly administrative staff, with only one black woman leader present. It seemed that the

workshop (and by implication myself) was irrelevant to the leaders for whom it was intended. Thus, my values coincided with those of the university—but without the support of other leaders, our purpose there was made pointless.

REFLECTING ON THE VISIBLE LGBTTIQ ACADEMIC LEADER IN HIGHER EDUCATION

If higher education institutions are mirrors to society, then it is seldom possible to see LGBTTIQ people included in the image reflected back to the public. The lived experience of leadership in higher education remains a constricted, heteronormative space—even if this seems normal for persons who identify as heterosexual. In these circumstances, where aggression, victimisation, and marginalisation may still occur, persons who either identify or who are identified as LGBTTIQ should raise awareness and, where possible, contest exclusionary practices. This occurs mostly where (heteronormative) institutional culture and leadership are sufficiently open to understanding the complexity of identity-related issues represented in the workplace, and the transformatory potential of this complexity. Instead of becoming immobilised by a series of misplaced hopes and strategies to avoid threats or violations, many of which are discriminatory and some of which are criminal, the leader should articulate hope and a vision for transformation as the lived experience of inclusion. This articulation enables other vulnerable people to become visible in order to claim acceptance, and thus make normal the kind of environment in which disclosure, contestation, or isolation need not be the only choices. For myself, to claim openly to be the first gay leader appointed at a higher education institution, remains sadly, and unacceptably, a tenuous and risky claim to visibility, unnecessary were it not for the fact of the non-recognition of LGBTTIQ people anyway—a matter noted also by Eusebius McKaiser (as cited in Smith, 2014) in relation to the appointment of Lynne Brown as the (first openly lesbian) Minister of Public Enterprises in the Zuma administration in 2014.

Higher education institutions are not yet safe spaces, either intellectually or physically in South Africa. The chapter shows through the reconstruction of specific (totemic) experiences, how inclusion or exclusion is practiced, learned, and imagined by universities and leaders. Crucial to the development of inclusionary policies and practices, is reimagining transformation in higher education to become more inclusive of diversity in terms anticipated by the Constitution.

What does the above imply for a leader who identifies as LGBTTIQ in higher education? First, political, social, or institutional support (sought through an essentialised loyalty to, or understanding of, race or language or religion) is not, and should not become, assumed. Second, the leader has instead to rely more, in persuading the institution, on the intellectual and academic merits of arguments about, or perspectives on, issues—particularly those relating to transformation and diversity. Third, leaders are effective because of the support they secure in moving institutions forward; these allegiances should not be automatic, ‘natural’, or static;

the leader has actively to seek out those most marginal to power, or most vulnerable to its abuse, and seek redress and improved access for these groups. This requires a reflexive sensitivity (awareness of the complex layering and exchange of power to enable some and disable others). Fourth, the leader has actively to create forums or safe spaces where the views of such people may come to be expressed and, more than that, has to create an awareness among other, more powerful groups, of the legitimacy, and indeed necessary inclusion, of such views as may come from such groups in higher education. LGBTTIQ people do bring experiences and understandings of difference that interrogate, contest, as well as nuance contemporary understandings of transformation from the perspective of inclusion. Such insights can be used to better develop intellectual, social, economic, and indeed political leadership for all South Africans, and not just some.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Chapter consultant: Michael Samuel.

NOTES

[1] Evans-Pritchard (1953) defined a totem as an animal with which the person or group identifies in terms of traits and values. I have used totem as a metaphor because the concept speaks both the characteristics and values of the totem. Totemic is thus a moment where characteristics and values appear to come together for the researcher.

[2] I am indebted to Nicola Smit (North-West University) for her comments on this chapter and in Endnotes 2 and 3, acknowledged as hers, verbatim. In South Africa the value and right of dignity is most often still used as yardstick to determine vulnerability and susceptibility of discrimination.

"The Constitutional Court has emphasized the role of human dignity in deciding whether unfair discrimination exists. The court has also distinguished between mere differentiation and differentiation on a listed ground. It is accepted that South Africa's Constitution embraces substantive rather than mere formal equality. See *President of RSA v. Hugo* 1997 6 BCLR 708 (CC) at 728H–729B: 'At the heart of the prohibition of unfair discrimination lies a recognition that the purpose of our new constitutional and democratic order is the establishment of a society in which all human beings will be accorded equal dignity and respect regardless of their membership of particular groups'" (Smit, 2013).

[3] "Also, court-endorsed hierarchy amongst African category of EEA (Black more disadvantaged than Coloured or Indian) *Fourie v. Provincial Commissioner of the SA Police Service (North West Province) and Another* (2004) 25 ILJ 1716 (LC); *Baxter v. National Commissioner Correctional Services and Another* [2006] ZALC 23 (19 May 2006); and *Solidarity on behalf of Christiaans and Eskom Holdings Ltd* (2006) 27 ILJ 1291 (ARB)" (Smit, 2013).

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BERT OLIVIER

10. INFORMAL CONCEPTUAL MEDIATION OF EXPERIENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

> It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think right.
>
> (Thoreau, 1849/1993, p. 3)

CONVENTIONS

Every society has conventions that allow it to function. Some conventions should always be respected, such as driving on the left side of the road, in South Africa and Britain, and on the right side in Europe, America, and most other countries of the world. Other conventions can be stifling, and should be challenged creatively—and, with the epigraph (above) from Thoreau in mind, disobediently—from time to time. One of these concerns education. In virtually every respect, the conventions governing education in South Africa should be challenged, and have been challenged by some teachers, including myself. This chapter is an exploration of the ways to do so creatively, always with unpredictable, but sometimes creative, results. The courage to experiment in this fashion is consonant with what Thoreau (1849/1993, p. 3) conceived of as the "only obligation which I have a right to assume … what I think right."

A LITTLE STORY

When my family and I were living in New Haven, in the United States, my children attended a primary school somewhat misleadingly called Worthington Hooker Public School. It was thoroughly international as far as the students were concerned, because it was situated just off the Yale University campus, and all the foreign staff and fellows at the university sent their children there. One morning my elder son, Carl, left his lunch box at home, and I decided to take it to him on my way to the university campus. On arriving at his classroom, I noticed that his teacher was sitting at her desk, writing, while the students were clustered around tables, strewn with books, talking softly. I did not see Carl anywhere, so I approached the teacher to inquire about his whereabouts. She told me that the students were working on an assignment, and that she had sent Carl to the library to do some research for her

D. Pillay et al. (Eds.), Academic Autoethnographies, 149–161.

about the theme in question. I thanked her and went to look for him. When I found him in the school library, he was sitting at a table, surrounded by books (this was 1986), making notes on a notepad, evidently for the teacher. He looked happy and engrossed in what he was reading and writing. He was 10 years old.

FORMAL AND INFORMAL TEACHING

I am willing to bet that the little story, recounted above, would go against the grain of the didactic sentiments on the part of the vast majority of primary (as well as high school) teachers and even of university lecturers in South Africa. As for myself, it was imprinted on my memory as a paradigmatic instance of combining informal teaching with ways of allowing even young students to develop critical independence as far as learning is concerned. Although still in primary school, these students, my son included, acted in a manner that reflected the ability to embark on independent, and interdependent, learning ventures that are very different from what I was used to in South Africa. This independence was (or is) critical insofar as it presupposes their ability to make decisions for themselves about the best way to carry out didactically motivated instructions from their teachers and lecturers. Small wonder that American students, at Yale University and elsewhere, display an independence of mind that is rare among South African students—and even rarer among Japanese students because of the well-known collective mindset of obedience to authority that exists in Japan (Beech, 2014).

I frequently get comments from students in my classes that indicate in no uncertain terms that other lecturers' approach to teaching is vastly different from my own very informal approach, which I was already practising by the time I went to Yale for 4 years as a postdoctoral fellow in philosophy. My experience at Worthington Hooker Public School merely confirmed to me that my intuition about ways of bridging the gap separating teacher or lecturer and students was didactically sound. So, what are the best ways of reaching students, of connecting with them when it comes to teaching, not only at university level, but (I would argue) at school level too? And why are some ways better than others? These questions call for a detour.

A DETOUR ON LANGUAGE TEACHING

Before I was offered a post as a university lecturer, I taught English and German at an Afrikaans-medium high school in Port Elizabeth. It was located in a part of the city that drew pupils from relatively poor areas, which meant that many of them came from what one might call culturally poor homes, with few, if any books or magazines to read in the house. Moreover, given their sub-economic circumstances, as well as the fact that the English–Afrikaans divide among South African white people was still keenly felt in many circles at the time, there was a palpable degree of hostility towards English as a subject on the part of the pupils I had to teach (from Standard 7 to matric). There were two options open to me: either I persevered in forcing

the English syllabus down their throats through formal teaching according to the division between grammar, prescribed literature (prose and poetry), comprehension, composition, and so on, or I adopted an approach designed to subvert their hostility, in the hope that it would yield fruit regarding the completion of the compulsory part of the syllabus. I chose the latter, encouraged by my own love of literature, as well as by what I had learned, and was still learning, through philosophy (I was working on a master's dissertation in philosophy at the time). The key to understanding my new, experimental approach, was informality, combined with the undeniable truth that the fundamental category for human beings' self-understanding is narrative (one's own life-story), which inescapably implicates language, as several theorists have demonstrated (e.g. Lacan, 2007; see also Olivier, 2009a; 2009b). And because narrative is linguistically constituted, it further unavoidably involves concepts, because of the sign structure of language: every sign consists of two inseparable sides (like a page in a book), namely, what de Saussure (1966, pp. 65–75) called a *signifier* and a *signified*. The signifier can be a word, for example, *tiger*, or an image, or a gesture, while the signified is the conceptual meaning of the signifier, in this case something like "a striped, mammalian, carnivorous quadruped inhabiting the forests of the Far East." Hence, when students learn language, they simultaneously learn to understand the world around them through the conceptual side of language.

What my informal approach to teaching English to Afrikaans-speaking students amounted to was this. I offered them a deal: we spend three quarters of a timetable lesson's time on the formal aspects of the syllabus, for example grammar. If they cooperate by concentrating on the topic, for example, "how to use adverbs," we could devote the last quarter of each lesson to storytelling, on condition that I would tell these stories in English, and if anyone wanted to ask a question, it would be in English too. I chose storytelling in the beginning, instead of reading stories because I knew that I would have to grab their interest and, because I had always loved drama—I had acted in many amateur stage plays and musicals by that time—it was easy to add dramatic action to impart colour to the story I was telling. These stories included the story of Robin Hood, of King Arthur of Camelot, Siegfried the Dragon Slayer and Brunhilde, the siege of Troy (Homer's *The Iliad*) and the journey of Odysseus (Homer's *The Odyssey*), which I narrated from memory, adding dramatic colour by enacting certain episodes from the stories. For example, I would dramatise King Arthur's rage when he discovers that his wife, Queen Guinevere and his best friend, Sir Lancelot, have been having a love affair behind his back, and his whole being is crying out for revenge—something that these students, mostly from culturally impoverished homes, found captivating. The result was astounding—not only did they seem to forget that they were listening to a narrative account in English (a language in which they used to have a negative emotional investment), but their acquisition of the grammatically correct use of English appeared to be facilitated by the informal circumstances of storytelling.

What can one learn from this? First, that enjoyment is an important, if not crucial, factor in learning. These children, in their early- to mid-teens, had an antipathy

to English to begin with, and overcame this because of their interest in what they evidently experienced as exciting tales of adventure, love, betrayal, joy, suffering, and death, all of which comprise the stuff that human lives are made of. Secondly, their enjoyment banished the fact of their learning a second language and of gaining insight into the vicissitudes of life through this language (the principle on which the traditional bildungsroman is based; see Gadamer, 1982, pp. 10–18) to oblivion; they assimilated knowledge without even being aware of it. Thirdly, it was a way of developing their intellect(s). Most people, including education authorities in South Africa and elsewhere, are oblivious of the fact that there is no more complex system than natural human languages such as English, Afrikaans, Zulu, French, German, Farsi, and Swahili. By learning these languages, individuals unconsciously assimilate grammatical rules, vocabularies, metaphorical interconnections between words, cultural values, and more. It is no exaggeration to say that, without learning language, no science would be possible, because the sciences—even the most abstract ones—are embedded in what the "father" of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl (1970, pp. 48–51), called the human "lifeworld." This is why language—not in the formal sense of linguistics or even formal grammar at school, although these are valuable at a supplementary level, but the study of literature, which embodies the most creative use of language available to humans—is undoubtedly the most important discipline, or subject at (both primary and secondary) school level. Neglect that, and students lack a foundation for the study of any other discipline (see Habermas, 1987, p. 124). To be able to make sense of this claim, one has to take a brief look at the function and place of language in relation to individual subjects in society.

THE SYMBOLIC AND NARRATIVE AS PRIVILEGED CATEGORY FOR SELF-UNDERSTANDING

One should not make the mistake, however, of thinking that, if narrative is a privileged category for anyone's self-understanding, the human world comprises countless personal narratives as its basic building blocks, as it were, atomistically interacting when the occasion requires and allows. After all, for an individual to become an individual, she or he has to become socialised—that is, be taken up into kinship relations of a symbolic nature, primarily by being given a name signifying her or his place in society, as Lacan, following Freud and Levi-Strauss in this regard, has argued (Lee, 1990, pp. 18–21). This is a truism, but no less true because of it, and it resonates with the African axiological principle of *Ubuntu* [I am because others are]. One of its most incisive formulations has come from Freud in the form of the Oedipus complex (Freud, 2011, p. 2925). According to Freud the entry of a child into society is unavoidably by way of a kind of triangulation with regard to her or his father and mother. Briefly this means that the boy identifies with the father despite resenting him for coming between himself (the boy child) and the mother, while the girl, initially identifying with the father too, has to abandon this in favour of identifying with the "castrated" (that is, patriarchally disempowered) mother.

Lacan's linguistic reinterpretation of Freud emphasises what is already implicit in Freud, given the "talking cure" in psychoanalytic treatment: language, or what Lacan called the *symbolic* register, comprises the domain in which the subject, after an initial identification with her or his mirror image at the level of the *imaginary* register, finds his or her identity coordinates. But at the same time language alienates one forever from what Lacan called the *real*—of the mother's body, for example, as when one is still in the womb, or of nature as source of fulfilment generally, as soon as language comes between yourself and the natural domain.

This may seem to posit language in the form of individual narratives as being fundamental, once again, but such an impression would be misleading. This is because, as indicated above, the symbolic (language as discourse, that is, as the nexus where meaning and power converge; Foucault, 1980, p. 114) mediates individual subjectivity and is therefore in an important sense more fundamental than individual subjectivity. Lee, commenting on Lacan's position in this regard, that the subject cannot identify her- or himself before finding a place in kinship relations in the symbolic order, put it this way (Lee, 1990, p. 20):

> Here the *moi* [the "me" or ego of the imaginary register] becomes a *je* [an "I" who can speak]: the essentially individual identity constructed through the child's image-constituted relations to others is transcended by a universal identity created by and sustained within that broad range of cultural forces that goes by the name of language. The imaginary product of a particular history of visual identifications becomes a genuine human subject, able to use the first person pronoun and to identify herself as the child of a particular family: 'I am Joanna Smith.'

It should therefore be clear that an individual narrative, or for that matter a narrative or story like the ones I used to tell the students in my English classes at high school, is less fundamental than language as a system of meaning and power relations, or what Lacan called the symbolic realm (also known as *discourse*). This is important to realise, lest the impression be created that personal narratives are somehow free floating; they are not, and always presupposes the encompassing matrix of the symbolic, which, in its turn, is the repository of culture or cultural values. Only if this is grasped, can one understand how it is possible for students (or any other subject) to identify with a character in a narrative that exceeds their own particular place(s) in society, for example, the character of the humble rabbit leader, Hazel, in Richard Adams's wonderful allegory, *Watership Down* (2014), or of the Egyptian Queen or Pharaoh, Cleopatra, in the story of her and the Roman Emperor, Julius Caesar.

LANGUAGE AS INESCAPABLE HORIZON OF MEANING (SEEN IN CONJUNCTION WITH LACAN'S IMAGINARY)

Although Hans-Georg Gadamer (1982) formulated this fundamental function of language in a different idiom, deriving from the work of Heidegger, it is largely

consonant with Lacan's notion of the symbolic (despite the fact that Gadamer does not work, as Lacan does, with the relation between the symbolic and the unconscious). For Gadamer language comprises the ontological horizon of human existence, and therefore all adequate self-understanding is ultimately linguistic understanding. Individual narratives presuppose language as this ontological horizon of meaning. Gadamer (1982, p. 274) described three stages of linguistic interpretation, all of which are essential for self-understanding insofar as such self-understanding is always, ineluctably, situated in the context of language. Not that this denotes a static thing; it is a never-ending process, which has the structure of a hermeneutic circle. There are three stages to the hermeneutic circle of understanding, including self-understanding (Gadamer, 1982, pp. 235–236, 274–275). These are: *understanding* at the implicit, primary lifeworld level of relating to one's world in a meaningful, but largely unquestioned manner; *interpretation* as the explication or deliberate unpacking of what this primary understanding entails; and *application* as the explicit interrogation of what the preceding interpretation implies or entails for oneself as the subject of interpretation. Moreover, this triadic process is ongoing, and as one progresses from one level of understanding to the next, its interpretive yield is enriched and complexified in light of the discursive–linguistic layers of meaning or signification that are constantly added.

My approach is therefore somewhat different from that of Heewon Chang (2008, pp. 15–22), mostly because of her focus being on culture, while mine is on the convergence of language as discourse (Lacan's symbolic) and the sphere of images (Lacan's imaginary), where the generation of meaning and of the establishment of power relations is located—in other words all the building blocks of culture. I believe this is a more accurate way of locating these, to my mind inescapable, constituents of subjectivity, or what Chang (2008, pp. 23–29) called the "self." The self is only one aspect of the human subject, in Lacanian terms, although what Gadamer had in mind with language appears to encompass both aspects of Lacan's model of the subject that I have referred to so far (the other being the Lacanian real, which surpasses language or what is symbolisable). While Chang's (2008, pp. 43–51; see particularly p. 46) approach to autoethnography is compatible with my own autoethnographical approach to teaching—in the sense of situating an autobiographical account of teaching–experience in relation to the cultural context within which it was and is located—I believe that my explicitly discursive or symbolically oriented reflection has certain advantages over that of Chang, largely in light of the fact that culture is embedded in language or discourse (which is imbricated with iconicity) as its bearer. Whether it is via an examination and interpretation of visual (paintings, cinema) or auditory (music) artworks, literature, architecture, philosophy and the sciences, or diverse rituals and cultural practices such as religion and education, the only ontological mode in which it is accessible to one is language in the encompassing sense.

Moreover, while Chang (2008, p. 24) contrasted the modern and the postmodern self with the help of several writers, such as Gergen, for instance, she failed to

enlist the most fruitful philosophical-theoretical conception of the human subject, namely the one articulated in different ways by poststructuralist thinkers such as Lacan, Foucault, Derrida, Lytotard, Deleuze, and Kristeva. The advantage of the poststructuralist conception or model of the subject is that it is flexible without descending into the pure flux of the postmodern subject, and it affords one relative stability without rigidifying into the isolated, self-transparent, fully autonomous modern subject. It has the "both/and" structure of simultaneously displaying being and becoming, stability and mobility, identity and difference; for example, in the case of Lacan's subject who exhibits an imaginary ego (*moi*) position, a symbolic "I" (*Je*) position, as well as a trans-symbolic real position (for example, in the face of a traumatic encounter). The first imparts relative stability to the subject, the second is always already ahead of any stable point, and the third accompanies the other two as the always potential source of their traumatic, irruptive interruption, which, in the case of trauma, would reconfigure the subject's symbolic and imaginary horizons radically.

In what follows, the preceding theoretical explication of the individual subject's insertion in language or the symbolic realm—and along this avenue in culture—should be kept in mind, although I shall draw attention to its pertinence when necessary.

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY, LITERATURE AND CINEMA IN AN INTERDISCIPLINARY, EXPERIENTIAL MANNER AT UNIVERSITY

When I was appointed as a lecturer in philosophy at the University of Port Elizabeth in 1970, my first teaching task was to present a course on ancient Greek philosophy. In retrospect, this was fortunate, given the importance of the work of Plato in ancient Greece, because of the structure of a Platonic dialogue. The dialogue form, in which Socrates (Plato's spokesperson) engages with his interlocutors on topics such as beauty, justice, or truth, provides the opportunity for a philosophy lecturer to stage the unfolding of a dialectical argument through students' enactment of the Platonic dialogue. Just as I had done when I was teaching English at a high school, bringing dramatic action—here imbricated with philosophical argumentation—into the didactic situation yielded fruit such as enjoyment and enhanced understanding on the part of the students. This was particularly because in this manner of enlivening it, Plato's thinking was transported across more than two millennia to 20th-century South Africa, into the lifeworlds of young students, where their understanding of it eventually found what Gadamer termed *application* in and to their own lives.

DRAMATISING PHILOSOPHY

For example, in Plato's *Symposium* (1965, pp. 58–65)—a dialogue on the subject of Eros or erotic love—one of the characters in the dialogue, Aristophanes, gives a mythical account of the origin and nature of love that explains that humans

were four-legged, four-armed beings to begin with, in the shape of two present-day humans joined at the back, with two faces looking in opposite directions. They became arrogant, according to Plato's Aristophanes, and tried to scale the sides of Mount Olympus where the gods lived, in an effort to dethrone the pantheon of gods. The chief god, Zeus, who was also the god of the weather, decided to teach these hubristic creatures a lesson and, with his lightning bolts, he split all of them neatly in two down their spines. As they lay on the ground, bleeding and dying, he took pity on them and healed their wounds, but without putting them back together again. And because in the confusion the respective halves had become separated from one another, when they were mended each half frantically started looking for its other half, which was sometimes a male other half, and sometimes a female other half (a neat way to explain homosexuality: sometimes a woman's other half was another woman half, and sometimes a man half, and the same for men). This, declared Aristophanes, was how love as Eros came into being—it is simply the desire to find your other half and attempt to become whole again by merging with it in the sexual act.

My reason for reconstructing this narrative from the *Symposium* is to bring across the potential it has for involving students in its enactment, as it were—which is exactly what I did, with this as well as the other intra-textual accounts of Eros by other characters in the dialogue. The result was quite astonishing, insofar as students claimed to be able to understand the nature of love as Eros for the first time—there are other kinds of love as well according to the ancient Greeks, namely *philia* [friendship], *agapé* [godly love] and *storge* [affection]—and attributed this to their ability to dramatise the story of Aristophanes. From a psychoanalytic point of view, what they were given the opportunity to do, in Lacanian terms, was to identify with the separated beings (enacted by themselves, in turn) once they were torn asunder by Zeus's thunderbolts—they had an image of sorts to identify with (Lacan's imaginary), and this made all the difference. Add to this that they talked about it, in this way translating the image–configuration into language with its universalistic implications (language allows one to move from the particularistic image to the universalisable concept), and the transition from the imaginary to the symbolic, where knowledge finds its linguistic–conceptual embodiment, has been completed. In Gadamerian terms, they had progressed from an intuitive, unreflective understanding, through explicit interpretation to application, specifically as far as they themselves were concerned, in this way completing the hermeneutic circle with regard to the notion of erotic love. In the course of the rest of their lives, they would complete this circle again and again, enriching, nuancing, and sometimes modifying their initial understanding of Eros, gained through Plato when they were first-year students at university.

The above account is only one among many instances of teaching philosophy in an informal manner, in a relaxed atmosphere of participatory learning. In those days, all the students were white English- or Afrikaans-speaking young men and women. Imagine what one could do today, in the newly democratic, multiracial

South Africa, where the two halves dramatically enacting the story could be individuals from different races, in this way dramatising the common humanity of all people, regardless of race, which also implies that love between culturally and racially distinct individuals is a constant possibility, whatever cultural barriers may exist.

INTERWEAVING PHILOSOPHY, LITERATURE AND FILM

Learning to understand philosophy further benefits from interdisciplinary juxtapositions and interweaving of philosophical themes or concepts and their embodiment in literature or film. In the late 1990s, Andrea Hurst and I wrote an article (Hurst & Olivier, 1997) on critical practice (that won us a prize for the best article on the practice of higher education in the *South African Journal of Higher Education*) in which we demonstrated the educational value of combining the study of critical philosophical thinking with that of a carefully selected cinematic artwork that thematises notions such as revolt and critical thinking extended to critical practice at an intra-cinematic level. Our article was based on our own critical practice of combining philosophy with literature or film. In addition, the narrative of the film we chose (Moyle's *Pump up the Volume,* 1990) in this specific case itself enacts what one might call "adolescent critical practice," set in the context of an American high school. Here an anonymous radio talk-show personality, combining wit, music, and bawdy comments about being a teenager, foments rebellion against the dictatorial policies of the school principal, with liberating, if somewhat painful results. Given the virtually universal phenomenon of adolescent rebelliousness (as part of the process of finding one's own "voice" or identity), our students (who were usually only slightly older than the high-school students in the film) found it easy to identify with the protagonist, Happy Harry Hard-on (himself a student at the intra-diegetic school), which promoted their understanding of the philosophical concepts introduced to grasp key aspects of the film. These included the appearance–reality binary, the notion of rationality or reason, different modes of communication, language games or discourses, common sense, ideology, stereotypes, logic, and critical practice.

It is not difficult to understand why this approach to teaching university students what it means to think and act critically worked so well. In terms of the theoretical explication above, all the elements of Lacan's imaginary and symbolic were provided in both written (textual), audiovisual and verbal form—the philosophical texts relating to the concepts referred to earlier, viewing and discussing the film in class. Considering the fact that, as pointed out earlier, cultural values are embedded in language (as well as in images, of course: compare the image of a Masai warrior in an African landscape, holding his spear, with one of a businessman standing possessively next to a sports car in an advertisement), the cultural differences among students emerged clearly in these discussions. For example, individuals from a traditionally conservative, especially collectivist background, saw the revolt initiated by Happy Harry's talk show as something they would not participate in,

even though they agreed that it was somehow justified by the unconscionable actions of the school principal. On the other hand, students from a cultural background where the independent judgment of individuals is encouraged, found it completely acceptable. The film, together with the philosophical concepts as a kind of critical framework for discussion, therefore facilitated understanding among the students—of the issues involved, such as the nature of critical practice, as well as inter-cultural understanding of differences among them. Most importantly, however, it equipped students with the conceptual means to reflect critically on the implications of their own cultural positions, and the possible need to modify these in the course of the appropriation of their own identities, in the interest of approaching what Habermas (1971, pp. 196–310) conceived of as an emancipated, rational society, partly made possible by the critical social sciences such as philosophy.

If the interbraiding of philosophy and film, as explained above, works well, it is partly due to contemporary students inhabiting a social world where audiovisual media predominate—today's students are more audiovisually literate than former generations, who were more written-text literate (Bloom, 1988, pp. 63–64; Olivier, 1997). And yet, given the arguably enhanced role of the imagination in the reading of literature, as opposed to films—where things have already been imagined for the spectator—the reading of novels where important philosophical ideas are embodied in the words and actions of characters, for example, represents another fruitful interdisciplinary way of teaching. One of the most successful instances of this approach in my own teaching has been the reading of John Fowles's novel, *The Magus* (1983), together with teaching Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytical theory of the subject and its epistemological implications (Lee, 1990; Olivier, 2009c).

Briefly, what the narrative of this counter-bildungsroman stages, is the antithesis of what the tradition of the bildungsroman claims (Gadamer, 1982, pp. 10–18), namely that one gains wisdom through the trials and tribulations of living (as exemplified in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*). In contrast, *The Magus* is the story of Nicholas Urfe, an overconfident Oxford graduate who tries to escape from the confines of England by accepting a teaching position on a Greek island where he meets the mysterious psychiatrist, Maurice Conchis. The latter is the eponymous magus who introduces Nicholas to a beautiful woman staying at his villa, as well as to a number of mysterious experiences supposed to impress on Nicholas the futility of believing implicitly in his own ability to understand everything around him. Despite being disillusioned repeatedly after his initial belief that he has finally understood what it is all about, Nicholas never seems to learn from his experiences (hence the negation of *bildung* by the novel), and even after the culminating experience of being "put on trial" by Conchis and a panel of other "scientists," which is designed to lead him to self-knowledge, Nicholas still fails to gain insight into the limitations of human knowledge.

In short, he remains shackled by what Lacan (1977, p. 3) called the "paranoiac" structure of human knowledge—the illusory assumption that what appears to be well-founded, unified knowledge, provides certainty once and for all. Contrary to

this assumption, Lacan demonstrated that human knowledge—of objects in space and time, as well as of human subjectivity—is ineluctably subject to becoming, and the necessary illusion of permanence and stability is a function of the epistemological exigency for stable reference points. Hence our experience of what is essentially a series of sensory impressions in flux, as an identifiable object, and of the correlative subject as an identifiable ego or self. The truth is far more unsettling, Lacan shows, and consists in the unconscious positing of the ego as the "true" self in the face of the unnerving signs, intermittently manifesting themselves in slips of the tongue, stammerings, negations, and so on, that the "truth" of the subject resides at the level of the unconscious, or the discourse of the "other," the symbolic realm. Even more disturbingly, certain experiences, such as trauma (which Nicholas is privy to in *The Magus*), bring the subject face to face with the ineffable, unsymbolisable real (not reality, which is constituted by the synthesis of the imaginary and the symbolic), which subvert the notion of stable, unified knowledge even further.

Teaching philosophy, specifically epistemology, together with Fowles's novel and Lacan's poststructuralist theory of the subject, not only draws the parameters of contemporary thinking on these issues for students in both a theoretical and a highly imaginative lifeworld context as projected by the novel; it furnishes them with the imaginary as well as symbolic means for situating their own subject positions somewhere on the spectrum of self-understanding made possible by the novel and the theory in question. In Gadamer's terms, it takes them from implicit understanding via explicit interpretation to the point of application as far as their own lives are concerned—it enables the "fusion of horizons" between their own culturally specific positions, and the meanings opened up by the texts concerned.

From the above it should be clear that such an interweaving of literature and philosophy (as well as psychoanalytic theory) affords one the opportunity to introduce students to profound epistemological insights on the part of thinkers and literary figures acknowledged to be among the most important in world history. This is only one example, however, and one could substitute many other examples of the same kind of interdisciplinary approach to teaching, employing the work of Julia Kristeva (1984, p. 26) on the semiotic, together with the cinematic work of Jane Campion (*The Piano*; Chapman, 1993), to answer Freud's famous question, "What does a woman want?" (see Olivier, 2014).

CONCLUSION

In the space available (a mere chapter of a book) one cannot really do much more than provide a kind of snapshot of one's own teaching practice in broadly autoethnographic terms, as I have attempted to do here. Hence, I have concentrated on what I take to be the salient features of my teaching practice: interdisciplinary, experience-oriented teaching, where my own and students' lifeworld experience is constantly mediated by the cardinal concepts in terms of which such experience can be articulated. In the process I have tried to show that language as discourse

—Lacan's symbolic register of meaning—together with the realm of images (Lacan's imaginary) is indispensable for understanding our experiential world. This claim has further been expressed in terms of Gadamer's language-oriented hermeneutics, which enables one to come to grips with the possibility (and desirability) of mutual understanding, or a fusion of horizons, between interlocutors, or between readers and a text of sorts. It is necessary to qualify something, however; considering that I called the account of my didactic practice broadly autoethnographic, and did so in the context of a practice that takes the claim that we increasingly inhabit a globalised world seriously, it casts doubt on the accuracy of the concept, autoethnography. After all, ethnography is thought of as the scientific study of groups of people, communities, cultures, and the interactions between and among them. Add the prefix, auto-, and it implies that ethnography has become reflexive, being turned back on the ethnographer him- or herself, but without subverting the ethnographic activity. It seems to me, therefore, that my position regarding the interconnectedness of everything in the extant social world subverts the ethnographic claim to being the study of cultures and communities. If all the world's cultures are interconnected in the "Network Society" (Castells, 2010), perhaps it is time to start thinking in terms of what Ulrich Beck (2006) has called a *cosmopolitan vision*, and not only, myopically, along the lines of various ethnicities. Such a cosmopolitan perspective would be inclusive instead of exclusive, where such inclusivity would neither obliterate what is singular about a culture, nor despair of attaining mutual understanding among the different cultures that comprise human society, globally. And in my experience as a university teacher, an interdisciplinary, discourse-oriented didactic approach is most successful in achieving this double aim: mediating the simultaneous recognition of differences and the acknowledgement of a shared humanity on the part of students.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Chapter consultant: Rose Richards.

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11. SUBJECT TO INTERPRETATION

Autoethnography and the Ethics of Writing about the Embodied Self

INTRODUCTION

Autoethnography taught me a great deal about my embodied experience of chronic kidney disease, research as an embodied act, and my stance as a researcher. As a methodology, it has long proven useful for a variety of research fields, not the least education (Hayler, 2011; Sparkes, 1996; Starr, 2010). In South Africa, autoethnography has been used to interpret experiences in the changing landscape of higher education (Grossi, 2006; Harrison, 2009) because it offers researchers a number of possibilities concerning identity and transformation work, including problematising traditional categorisations and old hierarchies. Autoethnography offers an alternate way of knowing: a different epistemology and ontology that shows the complexity and the challenges of our embodied experiences. With this comes a reconsideration of the ethics of our teaching and research practices. My chapter concerns my own encounters with autoethnography and what I have come to see as ethical anxiety in autoethnographic research.

I used autoethnography for my doctoral research, but it took me a long time to be able to do this because I had felt muzzled by other people's narratives of how my life should be. There was an epistemic break between what I experienced and what I was told my story was. And so, for nearly 20 years I remained silent. I went to work in academic development where I helped students to learn the discourse of academic language. I took part in educational biography research where I heard people tell their stories of how they came to academia. I researched storytelling and narrative tropes. And along the way I found a curious and exciting article by Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) about using writing as a methodology and a form of discovery. Eventually I decided to use this methodology in my doctoral work and it really did change me. It also opened my eyes to the embodied nature of research ethics.

BOUNDARY PUSHING AND EMBODIMENT

Autoethnography is "both process and product" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 1). This appealed to me particularly because my work with students and their writing concerns convincing them that writing is a way of learning. It seems obvious, perhaps, that writing is a way we develop our ideas, rather than simply a

D. Pillay et al. (Eds.), Academic Autoethnographies, 163–174.

way of recording data. But I think this crucial fact is lost when one reads finished articles and does not see how ideas have changed—and more importantly, how ideas have changed the writer. I like the way that autoethnography can make this process explicit, because it provides a more accurate account of research and shows changes in the researcher's identity (Raab, 2013). When I discussed this with a colleague, she described this as "embodied academia" (D. Pillay, personal communication, 26 September, 2014).

However, beyond that autoethnography is difficult to pin down. As I discovered, "autoethnography is slippery precisely because of what it does: adapts, individualises, blurs boundaries and subverts categories" (Richards, 2012, p. 74). In essence, autoethnography is a way of writing about oneself within a social context (Reed-Danahay, 1997). This has many implications for research.

Traditionally in research, the researcher is considered to be the one who knows, even when researching communities she does not belong in. She is seen to achieve this infallibility because of her "objectivity" (Delamont, 2007). However, even as researchers, we inhabit a relativistic world. The latter half of the 20th century saw us starting to question authorial omniscience and to scrutinise whose story is heard and whose voice is dominant (Denzin, 2009). We started to see that meaning is not fixed, but negotiated. We started to challenge traditional power hierarchies and came to understand part of our responsibility as researchers is enabling a voice to the voiceless (Denzin, 2009). We learned to question our assumptions and our positionality. We began to expand our view of what constituted research. This is especially apparent in postcolonial research.

Postcolonial qualitative inquiry is grounded in avoiding essentialising categories (such as researcher and researched, subject and object, past and present) and in questioning such categories when imposed by others (Glissant, 2002; Mudimbe-Boyi, 2002; Pratt, 1992; Spivak, 1988). Destabilising power structures and questioning authority is the impetus behind this. When it happens one is forced to confront, as a researcher, one's own power (Richards, 2012). Ideally, this could lead to a form of social justice (Denzin, 2009; Ellis et al., 2011). I see autoethnography as a postcolonial methodology. It provides one way of reflecting on colonisation, identity, negotiation, and resistance (Canagarajah, 2008). Showing what it is like can achieve this.

Goodall (2008, p. 14) explained that beyond "knowing how" and "knowing that," there is a third kind of knowledge, "knowing what it is like." This knowledge is attained through narrative, because narrative is "an alternative pathway to meaning" that is both "imaginative and analytical" (Goodall, 2008, p. 14). When using narratives researchers may be tempted to see stories and storytelling as straightforward and especially to see their own role as researchers in eliciting, choosing, and using stories as unproblematic. However, storytelling is "not politically innocent" (Canagarajah, 2008, p. 261). The narrative path to knowledge is an embodied form of knowing (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), where the researcher inhabits in various ways the experience, and performs it.

Identities in transition can be difficult to understand and one might find oneself in a liminal space—sometimes for longer than one had expected (Richards, 2012). Autoethnography can help one to negotiate this space, even if one cannot resolve the liminality. The potentials and challenges of Wenger's *nexus of multimembership* can be richly explored through autoethnography (Canagarajah, 2008). When the boundaries between certain spaces are blurred (for instance, the boundary between the personal and the professional), assumptions are challenged about what it means to inhabit these spaces. It also becomes possible to reconsider, even challenge, the depersonalising effects of asymmetrical power relationships in them (Denshire, 2014). Because autoethnography concerns the researcher's self and relations with other selves in various spaces, the blurring of boundaries, and the blurring of roles, this inevitably involves what Ellis called "relational ethics" (2007, p. 3).

HERMENEUTIC (IN)JUSTICE AND RELATIONAL ETHICS

Autoethnography has the ability to challenge the status quo (Denzin, 2013) through experimental writing and alternate ways of assessment. Some researchers have gone so far as to describe autoethnographic writing as "a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act" (Adams & Holman-Jones, in Ellis et al., 2011, p. 1). This is because feminist and communitarian criteria are what inform it (Denzin, 2013).

I like autoethnography for its potential to help redress hermeneutical injustice, a type of epistemic injustice. Hermeneutical injustice occurs when someone (usually in a less powerful social position) is denied her or his capacity as knower (Fricker, 2006). Fricker (2006) gave the example of sexual harassment where the victim is unable to articulate her experience or is not believed. Fricker went on to describe a "lacuna where the name of a distinctive social experience should be" (p. 97). There might be various reasons for this, including the speaker not being articulate or not speaking the language of her interlocutors. Sometimes this lacuna is due to deliberate silencing by other members of the community, as may happen when it is a social taboo to discuss the experience. Sometimes it is due to those in more powerful positions not having access to, or understanding of, the type of experience the speaker is trying to convey. Fricker saw attempting to redress hermeneutical injustice as an ethical act, and one in which a power imbalance might be altered for the better.

Autoethnography blurs boundaries between subject and object, insider and outsider, and problematises representation (Reed-Danahay, 1997). This creates a fertile space for stories of the marginalised, the unspoken and unheard (Bridgens, 2007; Canagarajah, 2008). Essentially, autoethnographic work is asking, "What is knowledge and whose knowledge counts?" (Harrison, 2009, p. 253). This is what attracted me to autoethnography in the first place. It seemed to offer the best way of showing my renal experiences to an audience of professionals who, most likely, had not experienced kidney disease themselves. I could speak to them as one researcher to another and could theorise about my existential situation, while

also sharing my personal experience, and how it felt. I could give researchers and medical professionals some glimpses into our experiences without appropriating the stories of vulnerable others—my fellow transplant recipients and people with kidney conditions. This choice was an ethical act, resulting from years of feeling othered and being silenced.

Some researchers have criticised the autoethnographic focus on the individual—specifically, the individual researcher—describing it as narcissistic (Atkinson, 2006; Delamont, 2007). Goodall countered this by explaining that it is not "pointless self-analysis" (2008, p. 39), but epistemological reflection. This type of research and writing is a deliberate move away from colonial research values of authority and authoritarianism (Canagarajah, 2008; Ellis et al., 2011), and problematises the ideas of objectivity, neutrality, and representation. Relationships, especially power relationships and research relationships, can be interestingly explored in this way:

> I try to display how the claim of narcissism rests in an individual/social dualism that obfusticates how writing about the self involves, at the same time, writing about the "other" and how work on the "other" is also about the self of the writer. (Mykhalovskiy, 1996, p. 133)

Because people experiencing illness or disability are so often spoken about, not to, nor listened to, I am an extremist when it comes to hearing the voice of the person who experiences the illness or disability, and I went to the extreme when doing my research about the experience of kidney disease. My focus was only on my own experience. I theorised it in various ways, but I used it to form a theory about my condition too, as a long-term survivor post-transplant. I identified a specific type of liminality that I called littorality (Richards, 2012). Because my autoethnographic doctoral research (Richards, 2012) focused almost exclusively on my own experience of chronic kidney disease, I was able to explore this more deeply than if I had been examining the experiences of more people. The untidiness and unfinishedness of my narratives was a more accurate reflection and interpretation of what I had experienced. I found no glib solutions or neat narrative endings. At first the lack of closure perturbed me; then it intrigued me.

It also prevented me from describing myself too easily, for instance as victim, hero, or guru, all of which were possibilities when I began my research. At first I saw myself as a victim of discrimination when I didn't get the insurance I applied for (the catalyst for my research). I saw myself as a hero for surviving these repeated assaults on my self-esteem. I even characterised myself as a guru—a type of nephromancer, if you will. But I came to see that these types were not accurate reflections of my experience and using them in a narrative was therefore unethical. I had to rethink my narrative tropes if I wanted to achieve hermeneutical justice.

I called my dissertation *"You Look Very Well for a Transplant": Autoethnographic Narrative and Identity in Chronic Kidney Disease, Kidney Failure and the Life Post-Transplant* (Richards, 2012) to capture a couple of different ideas. One was the idea of health in illness (Ellefsen, 2013) or liminality in chronic conditions

(Crowley-Matoka, 2005; Jordens, Little, Paul, & Sayers, 2001). The other idea was to capture an element of my concern with being interpreted. In my dissertation I wrote about my experience of childhood kidney disease, my year on dialysis, and life after my transplant.

Autoethnographic research is by nature subversive. Ellis (1995) used autoethnography to inhabit a space that values personal experience and emotion as part of understanding. Sparkes (1996) has used this approach to uncover tacit agendas around health and wellness in academia. Muncey (2005) has used a similar approach to show how life experiences can inform one's choice of career and how career and life experience influence each other to develop one's identity. In writing about my own experiences, I did something very subversive: I did not talk about the transplant itself because my intention was to move as far from the biomedical position as possible and instead to discuss existential issues around my experience of my condition. This act revealed some of my own biases to me and showed me how I collude in my own victimisation. It also gave me a way of overcoming that.

Some autoethnographers keep the personal writing and the academic writing separate, sometimes treating their personal writing as data (for instance, Chang, 2008; Ettorre, 2005). I took the route of using personal narrative as part of my argument. I did this by allowing my personal and public voices to dialogue with each other, and by combining them to blur various types of discursive space in my text. I wanted to share my experience (the impetus for my research was after all a grim experience of silencing). If you want to get rid of insurance cold callers just mention you have had a transplant; usually they will slam down the phone without saying goodbye. I also, however, wanted to explore an aspect of representation: what happens when you represent yourself in this way? Was it possible to do this in a manner appropriate for research?

For some autoethnographers, combining autoethnography with other ethnographic practices can offer a productive and well-structured way of proceeding (Chang, 2008; Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2012). Others have used grounded theory in order to create a space for exploration and discovery (Pace, 2012). Using significant objects as talking points has also been productive (Muncey, 2005). The role of writing and the juxtaposition of texts are crucial to all. When I started my autoethnography I had hoped to find artefacts I could discuss, but, to my consternation, I found none. I had produced no writing about my experiences in all those years, choosing to remain silent about them for various reasons. All that remained of a lifetime of medical experiences was some fragmentary documentation. These textual scraps became my artefacts.

Similarly, Canagarajah (2008, p. 262) described his process:

> I engage with the texts and narratives from other communities, both to explain my experiences and to critically interrogate their positions. I particularly adopt the *communities of practice* orientation, widely discussed as a model for

professionalization, as a scaffold for my story—keeping open the possibility that the model may have to be modified in the light of my experiences.

Canagarajah's documentary artefacts are being used to create dialogism and polyphony—to talk back to a colonising authority. Mine were, to a large extent, artefacts that I had made: an essay from primary school, an extract from a dream diary, extracts from journaling, and free writing. I revisited these pieces of my own writing in order to reengage with events from long ago. One textual artefact was a fragment of a poem written by one of my fellow patients in the paediatric renal unit. He and I never met, but we shared a doctor for a decade. My fellow patient died young and the fragment of his poem lives with me still. Other autoethnographers who have used poetry include Clarke (1992), Tillman-Healy (1992), and Wyatt (2008).

STIRRINGS OF ETHICAL ANXIETY

Very early on in my research I discovered that one of the areas autoethnography may blur is research ethics. This is partly because "remembering is not yet knowing" (Crites, 1971, p. 300). Remembering events does not mean you understand them or their implications. Another part is that one's memory is faulty and one cannot remember everything. Yet another part is that if I write about something I recall I must call upon my readers to believe me. Usually what I remember is pertinent to me and there will be little (if any) evidence to support me. I came to see that the experiences are not the story. The story needs to be created (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Moreover, stories are protean creatures. The story I tell now is different from the one I would have told a decade ago—or the one I shall tell in 10 years' time.

My first urge with doing an autoethnography was to reveal unfairness and express a silenced voice. However, once I became more familiar with the challenges of working in this way, I was forced to refocus on how to conduct the research in an appropriate fashion. My first challenge was to be sure that I could speak with authority on the topics I raised. To do this I found myself doing what should be done in research anyway: reflecting and rewriting, making sure that my various types of text could have real dialogues with each other, and experimenting with distance and proximity. I did this through writing in different ways: keeping a research journal, keeping a diary, doing different types of academic writing (chapters, conference presentations, and articles), doing personal narrative, and doing creative writing. This allowed me to conceptualise and reflect in different ways on a topic that had immersed me my entire life and carried immense emotional weight. I found juxtaposing these different ways of writing remarkably productive in developing my understanding of the topic because each allowed and disallowed different ways of seeing and expressing.

Understanding certain concepts through the double lens of current research and my own lived experience helped me, for instance, to establish my own view of

embodiment. Doing this showed me that sharing a story and sharing experience are not exactly the same thing. It also showed me that writing is an experience—but not a "get out of jail free" card. It does not allow you to say whatever you like. As in any other type of research one must write truthfully, however, if one does not write truthfully in autoethnography the experience is pointless because the researcher does not gain the insight needed to conduct the research.

CONFRONTING ETHICAL ANXIETY THROUGH METHODOLOGY

I divided my chapters chronologically, discussing issues around my childhood experience of kidney disease in one, my experience of dialysis in another, and the complexities of my life after transplant in a third. A consequence of this was that different ethical issues emerged in the various chapters. I used these issues to problematise my chapter topics and to develop my ideas. Writing is a paradoxical activity.

Certain issues are not in my thesis: unjust situations and other things that, in my opinion, might reflect badly on transplantation. Research has shown that the media influence people's view of transplantation (Feeley, 2007) and I thought it more ethical to avoid these topics because discussing them might cause greater harm than not discussing them. Moreover, as my focus shifted from people to texts, I realised that discussing such events and relationships would steer me away from my emerging topic.

The chapter on my childhood experiences of chronic kidney disease concerned my memory of events that happened long ago. My memory of these events was patchy and there was not much data available from other sources, other than (ironically) biomedical information. There were things that were lost forever and there were things that I could not articulate as a child about loss, difference, and marginalisation. To write my story of this period accurately required leaving gaps. My challenge was deciding what had to be left out and how I had to flag this to be ethical. I used the raggedy effect to illustrate how writing about long-ago experiences can turn out. The story I remembered was a raggedy one and I made this one of the qualities of the chapter. An adult's understanding is different from a child's and I wanted to retain that child's voice as much as I could to be accurate, while balancing it with adult insights.

When drafting the dialysis chapter I discovered that I had unintentionally omitted many important things, for example, the human relationships that sustained me during that period. I decided that I would keep the omissions as omissions to make a point. I did this dialogically by playing off my creative writing sections against my academic writing sections because the two ways of writing produced different information and different memories. They allowed me to talk about different issues, but time and space prevented me from writing about everything.

The chapter about life after transplant concerned other ethical challenges. Compared with the other chapters, the events in it happened much closer in time and

I was much more emotionally involved in them so I had to learn ways of creating distance to allow myself to be analytical and objective. Journaling, writing about my writing, and reflecting on how I felt about the issues I was writing about helped me to contain and examine my feelings. I was able to incorporate some of this in the chapter itself, once I had attained some perspective about it.

Another ethical issue that haunted me through my research was how to deal with texts that I experienced as provocative without perpetrating hermeneutical injustice on the authors by silencing them. These texts took two main forms. The first was texts written by people (often researchers) who had experienced an illness or disability that seemed minor to me. I found myself becoming unreasonably angry reading such texts, because I considered my own medical condition infinitely more serious and "worthy" of research. Once again, I expressed my emotions about them in my journal and then more calmly in my chapters and with more insight. Sometimes I realised I did not need to discuss them in my dissertation. The purpose of my research was to look at a certain type of lived experience, not to judge those of others or to harm them.

The other form of text I found provocative was the research paper written about chronic illness, dialysis, or transplantation by someone who had no real investment in the matter (as I saw it), using it only to generate some abstract ideas and advance the author's career. I found some of these texts dubious because they cast transplantation (that saved my life and those of others) in a dim light. In addition to this, that type of researcher could easily walk away from the topic, while I never can. Working ethically with such texts was a challenge. I had to be certain that I had sufficient distance to evaluate them in terms of argument and contribution, rather than perceived motives. Distance and time to work through my feelings about them helped me to do this in a more scholarly way than when I began.

My methodology chapter also caused me ethical anxiety. It took more than a year to write—by which time I was frantic—and then I found I had accumulated a number of critiques about the method itself, which left me feeling more frantic. I acknowledged the critiques and indicated what I had done about addressing them. One of the things I had done was to reframe my topic (less social justice and more existentialism). The topic was personally significant to me and one of my original motives was justice and revenge. I came to see I was writing about the production of a text rather than about what people did.

Closet positivism was very difficult to identify and to eliminate from the research, despite my intention of escaping the biomedical model. I see this methodological slippage as an ethical issue because it affects the power relations between you (the researcher) and others. The biomedical power distribution can be disquietingly easy to replicate in other ways as well. For instance, if I set myself up as an "authority" and my methodology as the "right" way then I engage in similar relational activities and silencing to what one finds in biomedical research. I do not enjoy being objectivised and I should not take pleasure in doing the same to others. I claim to use a poststructuralist lens—one that eschews the idea of one truth and explores

complex relationality. I need to be able to enact that as well as to talk about it. Are you writing about transplantation or your experience of having had a transplant? I cut out an entire chapter over this issue, because I realised I had strayed back to the biomedical model that I was hoping to complement with something more philosophical.

Clarity in personal writing requires objectivity and distance. Writing about yourself or your experiences changes you, but you have to be willing to acknowledge this and act accordingly as a researcher or else you are being unethical. In autoethnography you cannot maintain a position of omniscience or distance if you want to be truthful.

MY CRITERIA FOR ETHICAL AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

As an autoethnographic researcher I have the following responsibilities to my readers: I must ensure that the reader understands how I am using the methodology, how I am using narrative, how I am using artefacts—and why. The subjective emotional quality of autoethnography can open a door for unethical behaviour. Hence, I must be as transparent as possible and my research must be above ethical reproach.

Ethical autoethnography demands of me flexibility, reflexivity, and a willingness to change my mind. It asks me to explore subjectivity and ambiguity. These are never comfortable or static. So autoethnography also requires a certain amount of courage and a willingness to confront less heroic aspects of oneself. In order to conduct this type of research ethically I may not only have to change my mind, but also my self-perception and even who I am. If I do not, I may not be able to move beyond the very hermeneutical injustice that I seek to transcend.

A certain degree of self-awareness is necessary to conduct this type of research. I myself need to be clear about what I am actually researching and what my purpose is in doing so. My initial motivation in starting my research was to (as I saw it) talk back to power and make public my disapproval of some of the ways in which I had been treated as a person with chronic kidney disease. Fortunately, I moved beyond revenge when I saw that while others did not know my story I myself did not know it either. Research is not about vengeance; it is about the quest for knowledge, understanding, and meaning. Hinging on this I need to be clear about my own role in the research. Am I the vehicle or the subject? Am I the lens through which a subject is explored or am I the subject being explored? In this way one can avoid narcissism.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: WRITING (IN) AN ETHICAL SPACE

Although my doctoral research was about my experiences around kidney disease, I know that autoethnography can play an important role in South African higher education settings. It is useful for witnessing, exploring issues of social justice and social change, for knowing what it is like. It could also help us to understand our identities in a more nuanced way and to break down borders and boundaries. It may also promote healing (Ellis et al., 2011), because it may serve “a ritual

function of creating and defining a liminal space, allowing the narrator to exit an old identity that no longer applies to them and to learn to inhabit a new one that they might not have expected" (Richards, 2012, pp. 64–65). Ideally, we should live what we teach. By doing so we can understand what we teach better. While we open up new spaces for voices to be heard, we should be wary of closing down others, for then we would be guilty of what we seek to change. Hermeneutic injustice may be ever with us, but we need to take cognisance of it and to attempt in some way to address it.

Good autoethnography is scholarly. It is well theorised and well contextualised. It is analytical. Its academic goals are clearly defined. It is useful to others (both academic and nonacademic). In these ways it is like any other type of research. But, unlike some research, it has an external ethical dimension and an internal one. There are safeguards you can use to make your work ethical in the public domain, but you have to make ethical choices yourself, about how you include information, and what you allow it to do to you in the private domain. My extremism again—I don't think you can really practise ethical research unless you are an ethical person. The public and the private are always connected.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Chapter consultant: Bert Olivier.

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12. AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AS A WIDE-ANGLE LENS ON LOOKING (INWARD AND OUTWARD)

What Difference Can This Make to Our Teaching?

INTRODUCTION

One of the defining features of autoethnography that binds all autoethnographies, as Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis observed, "is the use of personal experience to examine and/or critique cultural experience" (2013, p. 7). In this chapter, I address the question of how autoethnography can contribute to teaching in higher education institutions, and situate this work in the context of South Africa. What are some of the considerations, challenges, and benefits of autoethnography? I write from my position of being a semi-insider (and semi-outsider): as an honorary professor in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, currently conducting research with South African teachers (both preservice and in-service), supervising doctoral students, and working alongside colleagues who are both teachers and researchers in various South African higher education institutions. This semi-insider status may give me a somewhat privileged position of looking "inward" through my teaching and research experiences in two countries, Canada and South Africa, and as such being made aware, from time to time, of occupying particular border spaces. But it is also the case that this may also give me a position for looking "outward" in relation to broader issues. It is these border spaces of being both inside and outside, that strike me as being ideal for engaging in autoethnography. My particular angle for this chapter draws on the work of Carolyn Ellis and Art Bochner (2003). As they wrote:

> Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth ethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic *wide-angle lens* [emphasis added], focusing on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then they look *inward* [emphasis added], exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations. (p. 209)

It is their idea of both the wide-angle lens and looking inward that frames the use of the visual in autoethnography (for example, taking or working with photographs, creating cellphilms or videos, and working with other digital media forms), representing something of a border space for exploration.

D. Pillay et al. (Eds.), Academic Autoethnographies, 175–189.

My first explicit and deliberate foray into the work of autoethnography was to embark on "Oil Rights/Rites," a visual and memory-work project that I continue to work on, and which is linked to "growing up in oil" in the 1950s on my parents' farm in rural Manitoba on the prairies of Canada. Petroleum, oil—the oil industry—is of course a fraught one in Canada, in sub-Saharan Africa, and globally, in relation to environment, the economy, oil rights, big business, and oil barons. Largely invisible in the oil discourses, however, are issues of employment, people's lives, and identities. When I carried out the fieldwork and prepared the writing of "Oil Rights/Rites: Autoethnography As a Tool for Drilling" (Mitchell, 2013), a study that draws on photos, newspaper clippings, and other material artefacts from the family archive, I was largely unaware of the emerging work in an area now known as *oil studies* and *oil culture* (Barrett & Worden, 2014b). As these authors observed in the introduction to their book, *Oil Culture*:

> Wishfully, we think that oil's emergence as a subject of analysis signals a shift in its hold on our world. More sceptically, we also acknowledge that this new scholarly interest in oil is so vital because oil is everywhere, and it shows little sign of being eclipsed by another energy source in the near future. (p. xviii)

My autoethnographic piece on drilling highlights some of the tensions in researching inward in relation to a topic that is not only unpopular, but indeed, is laden with what at best could be described as politically incorrect. Yet, when I talk about the issues, or describe my essay to others, I discover vast and untapped stories that continue the from-the-personal-to-the-cultural line proposed by Ellis and Bochner (2003). This, for me, highlights the use of the wide-angle lens metaphor.

In my "Oil Rights/Rites" essay I do not connect the issues directly to teaching, but I do establish a place for examining positionality, something that I see as key to looking inward in relation to our own teaching. If we accept the idea that our teaching is meant to be generative and productive and located within the social constructions of knowledge—all tenets of contemporary teaching and learning—then we need to embrace models, approaches, practices, and projects that allow us to follow the border lines to connect the personal to the cultural, and the cultural back to the personal. In order to explore this, I devote the first section of the chapter to describing a cellphilm project I carried out with a group of other teacher educators. I describe it here in detail as a way to consider a set of six so-what? propositions for exploring the question of what difference this work makes. Drawing on this description in the first section, I go on in the second section, to look at six critical so-whats? of the chapter. In the final section, I offer some ideas on the implications of this work for teaching in higher education institutions in South Africa.

EDUCATORS TRANSFORMING

In this section, I start by describing a cellphilm project, Educators Transforming, that I carried out with a group of 10 other teacher educators in a Canadian context.

We initially came together at a working group session of the Canadian Association of Teacher Education (CATE), finding ourselves in the same small group for 2 days. Our discussions and presentations within the group led us to propose a cellphilm initiative where we would each prepare a short (1–2 minutes) cellphilm (video made with a cell phone), using the same umbrella prompt, "Educators Transforming." Our interest was in the ways in which, as teacher educators, we might think of the idea of *transforming* in relation to our role in teacher education, and our plan was to use the productions to organise a session of the annual CATE conference that would take place 6 months later. While we were not bound to look at the work through the lens of autoethnography, it would be accurate to say that the resulting productions (which were later edited into one longer video, *Educators Transforming*) drew on autoethnography. In my own piece I decided to work explicitly with autoethnography, and used Adrienne Rich's poem "Transcendental Etude," a text I also cite in the last chapter of *Reinventing Ourselves As Teachers: Beyond Nostalgia* (Mitchell & Weber, 1999). I had just purchased the *Handbook of Autoethnography* (Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013), and so it too, appears in the cellphilm. In the production, I read aloud a section of "Transcendental Etude" and as I get close to the end of my reading of the poem, I blow a going-to-seed dandelion into the air.

Figure 12.1. Spreading the seed

Along with the production of these cellphilms (and the longer video), we also agreed to each write a short artist's statement. I include my own statement, "About Etude," below:

> I have always loved Adrienne Rich's poem "Transcendental Etude" and recently I had occasion to quote from it in something I was writing in relation to collective biography. So it was sort of in my mind before I started this project. I did play around with a few other ideas, including a little interview with myself about something, but then I hit on the idea of reading aloud the poem and looking for some images that would go with it. In making the cellphilm, I worked with Laurel Hart a doctoral student in Fine Arts and Art Education at Concordia [University, Canada].
>
> In some ways it was the reading aloud—that is, the audio—that was more important to me than the visual although I realised that my voice just trailed off in places, so it was just as well that I had some images. I liked the idea of going off into a room by myself and reading it aloud three or four times. It was a reminder to me of the role of performance in self-study. How did I sound to myself? What did it feel like reading aloud those lovely words of Rich's? It made me want to teach poetry again. The images in the cellphilm were based on what I had in my office. I had just purchased the brand new *Handbook of Autoethnography* at AERA [American Educational Research Association]. I had actually just taken off the plastic wrap the day before and was sorry that it wasn't still on. Somehow, there could have been an interesting scene of peeling off the plastic. Then I have this ancient book, Harper's Geography, from the late 1800s. It should have been history to go with the poem but I thought the book was so old that it was historical anyway. And there was an African school exercise book that one of my PhD students had just brought back from Cameroon. I liked that.
>
> But what intrigued me most was going outside and filming this in a park-like area of the campus just outside the Education building. The area was covered in dandelions going to seed. I suppose it is a bit trite but somehow blowing those dandelion seeds into the breeze seemed fitting. It was actually breezier than I thought and I barely had to do any blowing. In making the cellphilm, we recorded my voice first so that we could concentrate on the images on their own. It was quite funny. Laurel had taken a course with me on visual methodologies the previous fall and we had done some cellphilming and participatory video. I was always obsessed with the idea of storyboarding in the course—but when it came time to doing the filming it was Laurel who said, "Why don't you do a storyboard?"
>
> In the end, 'Etude' is a little rough but it was fun to do on a Friday afternoon in May. I always love being outside doing things like this. A couple of people stopped to see what we were doing. Maybe I am a bit of an exhibitionist; I like

> to see spaces transformed and in this case, it meant transforming a footpath into an art space. It is funny too—the footpath runs alongside the pavement and there is really no gain to go on the footpath but everyone wants to walk on the footpath which, on that Friday, wound through the dandelions going to seed but at other times of the year winds through early spring flowers, all purple and sweet, and of course at other times fall leaves or snow. (Artist's statement, May 21, 2013)

When I look back at the production of "Etude," I know the technicalities of sound (dealing with wind and the great outdoors) weren't perfect, and the coordination of timing could have been better. But I think I just wanted to use the dandelion (something at hand because it was May and dandelion season in Montreal) to demonstrate the idea of spreading the seed of our work as teacher educators and in so doing contribute to social change. Until I came to write this chapter, I had forgotten about writing the artist's statement and, indeed, only remembered writing it that day of the filming when it appeared on the search function of my laptop two years later. However, as I read it over I think it captured then (and still represents) things that I regard as important in my teaching and which point towards a connecting of the personal to the cultural. While there may be more, there are three points that stand out and connect to Ellis and Bochner's (2003) notion of the wide-angle lens.

The first is the idea of "what goes around comes around," and that what you give out comes back many times over and in unexpected ways (even the seeds you blow out may come back). These may of course simply be aphorisms, but they suggest ways that we make sense of our work through the broader cultural context and, perhaps simultaneously, the ways in which the sayings that surround us in a particular cultural context sometimes construct our interpretation of personal experiences. Placing them here as I do with spreading the seed and what goes around comes around, is an example of working across the personal and the cultural. It is also an area that could be developed further (as in beyond the 60-second cellphilm and artist's statement), especially if my transforming-educator colleagues joined me in exploring the issue further.

The second, coming out of the first, is the idea of serendipity and working with what is at hand. Many years ago, I wrote an article about making-do in our teaching, borrowing from my mother's common sense insistence that we make-do (Mitchell, 1988). I cannot count the number of times that I have stood in my office, just minutes before a class that is already prepared, and I suddenly and at the very last moment grab something off a bookshelf or from a file cabinet that is suddenly "just right." Somehow, the formulations of at hand and making-do come together in "Etude." The things at hand for my cellphilm included the copy of the *Handbook of Autoethnography*, the notebook, and of course the dandelions. Now I wonder what I would have produced in a different season, but know that there would have been something else at hand. Perhaps, as Sandra Weber and I took up in our book on images of teachers and teaching in popular culture, *That's Funny, You Don't Look*

Like a Teacher (Weber & Mitchell, 1995), this notion of working with what is at hand, in itself, is part of cultural critique—both in relation to who is a teacher, and also how we are constructed and construct ourselves as people who are constantly on the lookout for what can work.

The third point relates to teaching as cultural production (for example, performance and rehearsal) even if it may not (and perhaps should not) appear that polished in the final version. Reading "Transcendental Etude" over and over before going outside to film was necessary both in relation to "getting it right" and in terms of internalising its meaning. Some months later, as I sit in a workshop at McGill University on digital memory work, and as others are talking about their work, I hear myself reciting in my head the poem, and am poised to jump in with Adrienne Rich's opening lines. I feel as though I own the poem and it owns me, and for that moment am in perfect accord with the formulation by literary theorist, Louise Rosenblatt (1978), of the notion of *The Reader, the Text and the Poem*.

Studying the production of "Etude" allows me to identify some features of my own teaching, as I have just highlighted, but it also offers up the idea of a cultural map, of sorts, of teaching and learning, and of producing and being produced. The question, "How is it cultural?" is not easily answered. I cannot definitively separate out what I have written about in "Etude" (as a teacher educator) from the many useful frameworks for engaging in self-study in relation to one's own teaching. Is it narrative, or memory work, or self-study or autoethnography? At best I can say that perhaps the answer lies in relation to intention, and for what it can reveal in the context of the wide-angle lens. For me, the Educators Transforming project, drawing explicitly on the cultural (historical, social, linguistic) and cultural production (producing cellphilms, videos, working with family photographs) has the intention to deepen an understanding of ourselves and our work (cultural work) in a broader cultural context of making (in this case, digital making). For this reason, the wide-angle lens (looking inward and outward) is key.

SIX PROPOSITIONS

But what can be gained by trying to connect the personal to the cultural and cultural critique? And why is important that we draw on this self-directed work that draws on memory, history, literature, and so on? Organised around a series of propositions, and drawing specifically on "Etude" and several related autoethnographic projects, this section considers the so-what? of auto-ethnography in relation to contributing to six main areas which, I would argue, have a great deal to do with teaching: (1) creativity and doing something different, (2) collaboration, (3) positionality, (4) ethics, (5) addressing social justice, and (6) advocacy. These are all points of culture and cultural critique that are taken up in the growing number of books, articles, and conference sessions on autoethnography. As the area grows it is possible to see emerging categories within autoethnographic practice: autoethnographic performance (Schneider, 2005), critical autoethnography (Boylorn & Orbe, 2013),

collaborative autoethnography (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2012) and, as I am describing in several examples in this chapter, visual autoethnography (Chaplin, 2011). While there may be differences, and there are certainly commonalities, perhaps the commonality that is key, is the question of so-what?

Proposition 1: Doing Something Different

"Auto-ethnography can be a way of doing something different with theory and its relation to experience" (Kathleen Stewart, 2013, p. 659). Perhaps "doing something different with theory and its relation to experience" should not be the first thing that comes to mind when we think about becoming more conscious in our teaching. Innovation for the sake of innovation may not be the best way to improve teaching and learning, or at least not the only criterion. As Stewart went on to observe, "The prospect is unsettling for some, a relief for others" (p. 659). However, working creatively with what is at hand is critical to social change. More than a decade ago, researchers and practitioners were writing about *AIDS fatigue* and the idea that young people were *sick of AIDS* (Mitchell & Smith, 2003), and began to call for innovative and creative ways for engaging young people. While teaching in South African universities is not only about addressing HIV and AIDS, there is a challenge to keep our work and ourselves fresh and alert to new possibilities. When my colleagues in Educators Transforming produced their cellphilms, it was with the enthusiasm for trying something new. In my "Alone in the Classroom" (Mitchell, 2012) talk at the CATE conference, I had referred to a cellphilm project with teachers in rural South Africa (Mitchell & de Lange, 2013). The immediate response of many of the participants at the conference was, "Why can't we do this too?" and we had numerous e-mails back and forth where people worked out how they could make a cellphilm. One colleague sent an e-mail about how much she had learned about her cell phone, and several others commented on how much they had enjoyed working with (out of necessity) one of their children in order to complete the project.

This same idea of doing something different was central to the work of a group of 25 teacher educators from almost all teacher education schools and faculties in South Africa, all members of the Higher Education and Training HIV/AIDS Programme's (HEAIDS) community of practice (CoP) on teaching and HIV and AIDS, when they embarked on a photovoice project in which they each took photos of change in their respective institutions. They worked with the prompt: "What does change look like? What has changed for you (or your faculty or school) in terms of integrating HIV and AIDS into your academic curriculum?" At a community of practice workshop, people created captions and looked closely at how the images offered a different lens for assessing where we are in relation to addressing HIV and AIDS. The idea that their images would become part of a travelling exhibition, *Seeing, Believing and Acting for Change: Integrating HIV and AIDS in Higher Education Curricula* (de Lange et al., 2014), as well as one that would be virtual, meant that they could

both study themselves and their institution as well as be part of something creative and artistic—and that would tell a new story of HIV and AIDS in South Africa.

Proposition 2: Collaboration

Autoethnography by its very nature invites us to seek and test out new collaborations through interdisciplinary projects as well as new writing collaborations with non-scholar collaborators in our lives. As noted above, the Educators Transforming group was a small working group participating in a working session of the Canadian Association of Teacher Education. Somewhat ironically, perhaps, I had delivered a talk at the conference that I called "Alone in the Classroom" (Mitchell, 2012), inspired by the novel of the same name by Canadian author, Elizabeth Hay (2011). "Alone in the classroom" is, of course, a well-known phrase in teaching circles and teacher education that reflects several discourses, ranging from "be careful—never be caught alone in the classroom," along the same lines as "never touch a child," to the one that speaks to the anxiety any of us might feel alone in the classroom with a group of students. This could just as easily characterise the first-day anxiety of teachers in schools or lecturers in university settings and yet, often, there is little in our preparation or in our work with new teachers that seeks to counter this by promoting collaborative work. Interestingly, a report released by the Canadian Education Association (CEA) and Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF; 2012), *Teaching the Way We Aspire To Teach: Now and in the Future,* is illuminating in relation to collaboration. The study sought to study the aspirations of Canadian teachers. The method involved focus groups across the country, along with an online survey that drew on the responses of more than 4,000 teachers. While there are many interesting findings, an area that I found particularly pertinent was a reference to collaboration. As the study found:

> The desire to build collaborative relationships with colleagues was one of the strongest dimensions. Teachers envisioned policies and processes that would enable the development of more opportunities for working together in ways that current school structures do not always allow or promote. Instead of being bound by traditional disciplines and grade levels, many expressed the desire to collaborate on cross-grade, interdisciplinary units, tasks, and projects that connected both teachers and students in new and diverse ways. Participants were enthusiastic in their support of challenging approaches to schooling that have supported traditional images of teachers working in isolation. Shared planning times, flexible scheduling, and alternative approaches to designing curriculum were just some of the suggestions offered but, at the heart of the discussion, was the desire to be able to learn, plan, and work more closely with colleagues. (CEA & CTF, 2012, p. 18)

The effectiveness of Educators Transforming as an initiative rested on the one and the many. The success of it comes out of the fact that 11 of us produced cellphilms,

and that we were, in a sense, audiences for each other. While many authors in many aspects of narrative, self-study, and autobiography refer to collaborative engagement (see for example Pithouse, Mitchell, & Moletsane, 2009), the place of collaboration in autoethnographic work is particularly key—either directly, as Chang et al. (2012) observed, or indirectly as I found in "Oil Rights/Rites."

Proposition 3: Positionality

Autoethnography can contribute to the ways that we address, build in, and critically engage with positionality in our research (including researching our teaching). Dutta and Basu (2013) wrote about the ways in which, as researchers, we need to navigate our various positions at any one time, and note that we are seldom ever occupying one position. This is especially true for our work inside the university classroom. How best to negotiate our changing positions, and at the same time recognise when our positioning is, in and of itself, contributing to what is happening are both critical issues. Working on "Oil Rights/Rites" forced me to take a stand on my relationship to oil. As Barrett and Worden (2014a) highlighted, there is a certain invisibility about oil. Having grown up in oil, I never quite knew what to do with the experiences. Digging into boxes of photos and newspaper clippings, I learned things that I didn't know before or hadn't paid attention to. In one clipping, I read a journalist's account of an interview with my father. There is something awkward about it, and I wonder if the journalist put words in my father's mouth. Now I think of the types of awkward moments that are perhaps silenced in our classrooms when students are forced to take on unpopular positions, or when the nature of the discussion does not allow for shifting a position without losing face. Educators Transforming also contributed to recognising issues of postionality in several ways. There are the obvious points in relation to the doing and producing of the cellphilm from a technical point of view, which necessitated, for example, many of us to position ourselves as co-producers (with our own children or students). We may be able to write an article or paper by ourselves but outside of a selfie context, we needed to work with others. But putting ourselves into the position of performer or director required us to take other positions.

Proposition 4: Ethics

Autoethnography can contribute to the care with which we research and teach (the ethics of doing). Taking on autoethnographic research, as numerous authors have highlighted, necessitates us to think explicitly about others and their role in our story, or at least to consider whose story it really is (Tullis, 2013). Although it sometimes seems as though research ethics boards (REBs) are there to limit our work, I would argue that engaging in autoethnographic work offers new complexities. On the one hand, this work makes us often realise that REBs do not go far enough in their protection of others and what happens to the other when we take on the role of

protagonist. At the same time, there may be an over-determined view on what constitutes harm, and perhaps a failure to consider what might constitute benefits. Doing visual research, in itself, brings many challenges, especially in working with family photographs and home videos and there remain many grey areas for obtaining consent. Notwithstanding these grey areas, however, it becomes much more of an immediate issue to consider what their effects will be on various audiences, particularly those who are implicated in some way. When I carried out the fieldwork for "Oil Rights/Rites," I became aware anew of my own position as the child who was in all the newspaper accounts of the discovery of oil on my father's farm—simply because I was too young to go to school and my two older brothers were already away at school when the journalists appeared. How would my brothers feel when they read my account?

For Educators Transforming, we were conscientious as a group of implicating others particularly because we were working with visual data. Nonetheless, some concerns arose. For example, one person sent a picture of a new baby in the family. Even though we all knew the baby couldn't give consent, were both the mother and father fine with the image? As Reinikainen and Zetterström Dahlqvist (this volume) observed in relation to curating an exhibition of albums made up of family photos from their own albums and those of various colleagues, even consenting adults sometimes have a difficult time negotiating the ethics of visual display. It is not just that there is visual display; it is where something is going to be displayed, that is an issue. In the case of *Educators Transforming* the video was screened at a national conference in Victoria, Canada. Since that time, I personally have only ever screened my own cellphilm, "Etude." I would not feel comfortable speaking for others and their autoethnographic intentions. Engaging in autoethnographic work, then, also draws attention to power and, in particular, power in research relationships and communities (Hernandez & Ngunjiri, 2013). Perhaps starting with ourselves, as van Manen (1990) wrote, is the most powerful way to become aware of the ethics of power.

Proposition 5: Social Justice

Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis (2013) argued that autoethnography helps us turn our attention to "experiences of exclusion, degradation and injustice, and in so doing create work that not only makes the case for change but also embodies the change it calls into being" (p. 669). This observation by Adams et al. sets an ambitious agenda. How can looking inward, as the various chapters in this book, alongside the essays in such collections as the *Handbook on Autoethnography* proposed, contribute to social change? In the case of the production of "Etude," I wanted to show that it is perhaps both the medium of doing (exposing myself by creating this rather amateur cellphilm with its spreading the seeds cliché) as well as what I hoped would be an outcome of this work—convincing others in our group that they could do it. If we aren't prepared to take risks with colleagues then what can we hope to do in our classrooms? It is a small thing, but the preparation—choosing the images that would figure in this piece

that was meant to be artful, practicing the reading aloud of "Transcendental Etude"—and then executing the production (which in the end had to repeated several times), made me become more aware of the lines I was reading, and also of the movement (blowing the dandelion seeds in the air) I was enacting. For the members of the community of practice who produced photo images of "what has changed" in relation to addressing HIV, there is the obvious challenge of having to make change visible. It was not possible to just talk and say, "Well, this is what we are doing."

Proposition 6: Advocacy

Autoethnography sets up its own 'call for action' in relation to sustainability. Finally, and as inspired by a call to action proposed by Adams et al. (2013) in the concluding chapter of their *Handbook of Autoethnography*, we might think about the ways in which autoethnography inspires us to take on an activist role in engaging in teaching research. As these authors highlighted, autoethnography as a movement needs to be nurtured and supported. Those of us who see the value of this work need to take on the following activist agenda which, in and of itself, is a critical so-what? in researching and teaching, and especially in relation to the following obligations we have to ensure the future of these endeavours for new researchers and teachers:

- Continue to further establish autoethnography as a rich and viable method for social research by teaching, talking about, and writing autoethnography.
- Support others doing autoethnographic work by reading their work and including it on course syllabi and reading lists.
- Seek funding sources that support qualitative, artistic, and narrative-based research and apply for support for your autoethnographic research projects.
- Recognise and carefully consider critiques of the method. Find ways to address these critiques, or put critiques aside when they come from those who would never believe in autoethnography, and for whom a "good" autoethnography would most likely never exist.
- Turn your attention to the harm being done to us and to others and use autoethnographic research to tell, and right, stories of injustice.
- Write stories of compassion, of solidarity and communion, of change and justice and hope. These stories—your stories—are the future of autoethnography. (Adapted from Adams et al., 2013, p. 676)

To these, I would add two more items that are particularly relevant to South Africa:

- Track down autoethnographies written by other South African scholars and make these very visible in your personal and institutional libraries and bibliographies (see, for example, Grossi, 2006; Richards, 2008; Tomaselli, Dyll-Mykleburst, & van Grootheest, 2013).
- Use the opportunities afforded by the visual (and especially the digital) to make public, visual autoethnographic projects. Cellphilms, digital stories, photo, and

other art exhibitions drawing on autoethnography need to be brought into the public sphere. Build on structures and mechanisms in places that support the visual (for example, Centre for Visual Methodologies for Social Change at the University of KwaZulu-Natal), seek out artistic spaces to occupy, and use these spaces to give a public face to autoethnographic work (your own, your colleagues' and your students').

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

The question in the introduction (How can autoethnography contribute to teaching in higher education institutions?) is informed by a recognition that higher education in South Africa remains as a contested site. Not nearly enough young people finish school, let alone have access to tertiary education, and so for those who do get to attend university or a university of technology, the support mechanisms (financial and pedagogical) are critical. If we layer over these features the fact that HIV and AIDS and gender-based violence remain on the landscape of higher education, the stakes are even higher. Our own teaching in this landscape matters in terms of how we approach teaching, learning, and supervision. Scott, Yeld, and Hendry (2007) concluded, in their report to the South Africa Council of Higher Education on university teaching, the following:

> Given the high stakes attached to higher education, we argue that it is critical for the sector—particularly the mainstream academic staff who carry the major responsibility for teaching—to come to terms with the profile of the student body that the sector and each institution needs to cater effectively for, in the national interest. If this does not happen, it is likely that there will continue to be a mismatch between what the institutions are prepared to offer and what many students actually need to facilitate their learning. On the other hand, if the realities and obligations of our context are generally accepted in the sector, it could be a real stimulus for recognition of the importance of educational effort and expertise, and hence for creative initiatives that make a substantial difference to the outcomes of the system. (p. 79)

The authors are, of course, speaking of a broad range of issues, ranging from high levels of attrition for first year students, to disappointing levels of completion especially for black students. Although the report shies away from exploring pedagogical practice or what this work might mean in terms of supporting the type of deep engagement with our own storied histories as teachers and researchers, this should not be taken as a deterrent to embracing the call to action proposed by Adams et al. (2013). Indeed, their conclusion that there is a need for creative initiatives nicely frames the six propositions put forward in this chapter in relation to the so-what? of autoethnography in relation to teaching. Engaging in autoethnographic practices, as I

have tried to show, can contribute to: (1) creativity and doing something different, (2) supporting collaboration in working with colleagues but also potentially supporting collaboration with community members, (3) making concerns of positionality more apparent, (4) taking an ethical stance in our work, (5) addressing issues of social justice, and finally, (6) becoming more committed to taking a stand and embarking upon an activist agenda in relation to recognising the place of looking-inward stories in influencing the wide-angle lens. While there are likely to be other so-what? issues, these six propositions might be taken as a starting point for how we reflect on the effectiveness of autoethnographic work in ways that allow us to look both inward and outward. Ultimately, they should help us "reflect forward" in order to engage anew with our teaching colleagues and students in ways that spread the seeds of change.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Chapter consultant: Thelma Rosenberg.

I acknowledge the keen participation of all the members of the Educators Transforming group. I also thank the members of the HEAIDS community of practice on teaching and HIV and AIDS for their enthusiasm for the "Seeing, Believing and Acting for Change" exhibition. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the provocative questions and comments offered by my colleague, Thelma Rosenberg, who pushed me to think more about the question, "What's culture got to do with it?"

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AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AS A WIDE-ANGLE LENS ON LOOKING (INWARD AND OUTWARD)

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