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.

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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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