Finding Myself in Methodology:
An Autoethnographic Account

Maggie McDonnell, McGill University, Canada

Abstract: A college teacher and doctoral candidate explores autoethnography. The author suggests that her research is suited to an autoethnographic approach, but struggles with how such research is perceived and valued. Research into educational practices focused on quantitative data until the late twentieth century, reflecting a larger shift from research-centred to subjective research. Researcher-practitioners have since become increasingly regarded as ideally positioned to contribute to the ongoing discussion of teaching and learning. Autoethnography focuses not exclusively on the self, but on the relationship between self and other. The author describes variations on autoethnography, her own positionality and her methods, including interactive interviewing.

Keywords: Autoethnography, Self-Study, Researcher-Practitioner, Methodology, Positivism, Social Constructivism, Interactive Interview

Introduction: The Voice in My Head

My dad is an engineer. A now-retired metallurgical engineer, to be precise, who wrote a thesis in 1967 on non-destructive testing techniques. My mother is a physicist, who spent a great deal of her last decade before retirement developing hydrogen fuel cells. I am a college English teacher, a part-time yoga instructor, and a doctoral candidate in education, using… autoethnography and narrative inquiry. You can imagine our family reunions.

I have to admit there is a small voice inside my head asking if autoethnographic research "counts." Of course, it does; good autoethnography is founded in scholarship. So, objectively, this approach "counts." I guess it's the word "objectively" that fuels that small voice, which, I think, sounds a little like my dad. A few months ago, my dad triumphantly thrust a copy of *The Globe and Mail* under my nose, and proclaimed that everything I thought was true wasn't. He was referring to a column by Margaret Wente (2016), in which she crowed about the "doubts and scandals that have plagued the field" (para. 4) of psychology, because recent research called into question the reliability of research from previous decades. Wente's column, however, reveals the author's lack of understanding of how research—not just knowledge in the disciplines—has changed in the interim; it is not that the research is now unreliable, it is that times, methods, and subjects have changed such that the results cannot be "reliably" reproduced.

Context: Shifting Tides in Pedagogical Research

Despite my father's cynicism, I know that times and methods have changed, and I am convinced that while traditional, quantitative approaches continue to have an important place in research, they are often completely inappropriate for certain lines of inquiry. This is, arguably, very much the case for in-depth exploration of modern pedagogy. Once upon a time, research into educational practices focused on producing quantitative data, aimed at improving effectiveness and accountability (LeCompte, 2009). Until the latter half of the twentieth century, despite trends in other areas of social science research, educational researchers were typically behavioural scientists, anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists (LeCompte, 2009); and if they taught, it was at the university level. Naturally, their bias toward deductive reasoning, experimentation, and objective, observational research was self-perpetuating, and was manifested in surveys, case studies, and observations of everything from curriculum to parent groups (LeCompte, 2009, pp. 26-27). In short, research into teaching and learning was done by everyone *but* teachers. If anything, expert associations such as the American Educational Research Association actively *discouraged* as "ill-conceived [and] messy" (LeCompte, 2009, p. 27) any research model that did not adhere to a standardized, positivist framework. Eventually, however, "it became obvious that input-output studies of innovations would not provide answers to [pragmatic] questions," (LeCompte, 2009, p. 30) so "designs and methods from the social sciences" (LeCompte, 2009, p. 30) were needed. As LeCompte reported, educational research became increasingly interactionist and constructivist, with ground-breaking

work including Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development, Wertsch's (1988) sociocultural approach to the mind, Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory, Dohrer's (1991) exploration of the value of feedback, and Sadler's (1989) work on formative assessment. More recently, an even more radical shift, from what LeCompte (2009) described as "post-post-positivistic objectivism" (p. 38) to constructivist and post-constructivist methodologies, reflects a larger paradigm shift from research-centred to subjective research that seeks openly to challenge the positivist "neutrality" of traditional theoretical constructs.

I want to stress that I don't disparage empirical methods out of hand. Even within the natural sciences communities, however, the positivist approach has come under fire for various reasons; Houghton (2011) recounted that the work of scientists in quantum theory, for instance, undermined positivism's claim to certainty, and that others have criticized positivism's singularly narrow perspective, its reliance on objectivity, and its inability to "distinguish between the natural and social worlds" (para. 10). Past reliance on the so-called neutrality of the positivist approach to research has been challenged as rooted in "the institutionalized, normalized politics of male supremacy, class exploitation, racism, and imperialism" (Harding, 1992, p. 568). Within the context of post-constructivist epistemology, the foundationalist stance (Crotty, 2003) of the positivist—that is, that the world exists independently and autonomously from the observer—is clearly problematic; this is true whether one adheres strictly to a constructivist model in which all knowledge is created by the individual experiencing the world, or to a more social or post-constructivist model in which our knowledge of the world is (re)constructed through our ongoing interactions with each other as well as the world. Despite its claims to be objective, "value-neutral, normal, natural, and therefore not political at all" (Harding, 1992, p. 568), the positivist view of research merely serves to validate the existing order, effectively silencing alternative perspectives as "too subjective." In the social sciences, the approach is often challenged as impractical on different levels (D'Amato, 1986; Hwang, 2005; Zammito, 2004), among which is its reductionist tendency to overlook the role of social interaction, not only within the scope of the research, but also between the researcher and the phenomena under scrutiny. In fact, Johnson (2006) argued that positivism not only hinders genuine understanding of social phenomena, but that it does harm to qualitative inquiry by awarding a "badge of honor" to researchers who eschew overtly subjective research in favour of (purportedly) objective, rigorous, and solid research.

Finding Myself in Autoethnography

My point is this: If one were to explore teacher identity in 2017, from a positivist stance, what new results would be produced? More statistical data? Can we draw anything meaningful from this approach? I say "no," or at least, no more than we already know. As Johnson (2006) implied, numbers, quick surveys, and algorithms into identity might be good fodder for a Facebook quiz, but we're not getting anything of value in terms of scholarship, because these numerical data offer no exploration nor explanation of social inquiry.

At the same time, writing about teacher identity from a more holistic and humanistic perspective can be fraught with tension, if one attempts to write "objectively" about other people's lives as teachers, from a supposedly impartial distance. The safest and, arguably, most honest approach may well be autoethnography—as my own research subject, I can rely on my interpretation of the data and avoid any risk of appropriation of voice or culture. But—and here we come to the crux of the problem, moving forward—of what value is my research to anyone else? I am excited about the idea of reflexive practitioner research, but that small voice asks why any journal would want to publish one person's account of her own practice. And if I can't quell that voice, it's only going to get more insistent—how can one person's discussion of her teacher identity, and how it affects her approach to assessment, be of value to anyone else?

Pedagogical researchers have contributed much to our collective understanding of learning and instructional methods, but as Samaras and Freese (2009) pointed out, it is only within the past thirty years that real-life teaching experiences—and the in-practice teachers who experience them—have been taken seriously in research contexts. The late-twentieth century paradigm shift to action research infused pedagogical research with a renewed interest in the "complex and dynamic interactions between the teacher and the students" (Samaras & Freese, 2009, p. 5) taking place in actual classrooms. Researcher-practitioners have since become increasingly regarded as ideally positioned to contribute to the ongoing discussion of teaching and learning, and, in particular, to use personal experience "to make sense

of their teaching and participate consciously and creatively in their growth and development" (Samaras & Freese, 2009, p. 4). As a practicing teacher, then, I not only have an opportunity to reflect on practice, personally and immediately, but to engage in critical self-study that reflects my interest in improving my own practice while contributing to teacher education as part of a community of practice.

While action research in a pedagogical context may focus on what the teacher does, and how these actions affect students and their learning, self-study allows researchers to incorporate their own experiences—as well as reactions, emotions, and impacts on practice—into their research. Self-study as a research approach seems a comfortable fit for post-constructivist or social-constructivist pedagogues, who "understand that knowledge production has a cultural component," (Samaras & Freese, 2009, p. 9) which suggests a "reflective and analytical stance [that seeks] to identify the cultural, interpretive, and ideological basis built into their conceptions of knowledge" (Samaras & Freese, 2009, p. 9). Samaras and Freese (2009) further suggested that the disposition of the self-study researcher included openness to collaboration and dialogue, and that self-study is in fact "validated through collaboration including testing, sharing, and challenging exemplars of teaching practices" (p. 8); in short, my self-study becomes richer, and resonates on a larger scale, through my ongoing dialogue with colleagues within a community of practice.

Stories and the Spaces in Between: Narrative Inquiry and Autoethnography

As a form of self-study, autoethnography focuses not exclusively on the self, but rather on the relationship *between* the self and the other, and, in the case of autoethnographic educational research, specifically between the self and practice (Starr, 2010). At the heart of autoethnography, then, is the idea that the intimacy of the personal relates to, reflects, and is reflected in, the context in which the self is situated. Each instance of self-study brings me, as the individual researcher, further into myself and leads me to a wider understanding of my practice. At the same time, I am inspired to share that understanding with colleagues, who in turn may take that reflection back to their own practice.

Sharing and reflecting on previous exchanges can be illuminating, since each person's narrative is ever-changing. Griffin, Ciuffetelli Parker, and Kitchen (2010) suggested that approaching experience through narrative inquiry means understanding how our individual story is connected to our specific context. Clandinin (2013) argued that narrative inquiry, as a methodology and as a "way of understanding experience" (p. 9), allows teachers to think of their lived experience as a source of knowledge. Essentially, each experience can be (re)experienced myriad times and in multifaceted ways: first, as the lived experience, then as an experience to reflect upon, then to share with others, then to reflect on anew with insight from the shared story. From my position as a teacher of English Literature, I interpret this notion of experience as a *storied phenomenon* (Griffin, Ciuffetelli Parker, & Kitchen, 2010) in relation to Greenblatt's (2006) ruminations on New Historicism, a methodology that Greenblatt described as a *practice*, as opposed to a *doctrine* (Gallagher & Greenblatt, 2007). The New Historicist approach to literature, and indeed to history, challenges the dominant narrative and actively seeks to discover alternative narratives, using these alternatives to complement and challenge the dominant version. From this background in New Historicism, I see the idea of narrative inquiry coming from the understanding that our stories—personal and professional—are ever in flux, layered, temporal, and interrelated (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Each sharing of a story affects its meaning, and the act of sharing affects the participants in the exchange. When we share lived experience with others who have undergone comparable experiences, our stories resonate with each other, and it is this resonance that builds a transactional, narrative epistemology (Clandinin, 2013).

Researcher as Subject: Positionality

A common manifestation of autoethnography is what Butz and Besio (2009) refered to as a "representationally focused approach to critical reflexivity" (p. 1662). Most discussions of the forms of autoethnographic production describe a spectrum or continuum, such as Pace's (2012) evocative-to-analytic range or Butz and Besio's (2009) continuum of autoethnographic practices. According to Pace (2012), evocative or narrative autoethnography is characterized by a first-person narrative, focused almost exclusively on the researcher; the work may resemble fiction to a great extent, be consciously evocative and intimate, and may invoke in the reader a sense of active participation. On the other end of this spectrum

is Anderson's (2006) model of analytic autoethnography (as cited in Pace, 2012), which contested the more narrative template, and instead embraced a "realist" model, in which the researcher "demonstrates a commitment to theoretical analysis" (Pace, 2012, p. 5) by presenting a visible self, engaging in dialogue with others, and engaging in analytic reflexivity. Like Pace, Butz and Besio (2009) described a continuum, from the personal experience narrative, characterized by "the most radical move from agent to object of signification," (p. 1665) that is, the researcher is the primary research subject; to the subaltern autoethnography, in which the act of autoethnographic research simultaneously explores and creates "transcultural identity" (Butz & Besio, 2009, p. 1668). Butz and Besio (2009) concluded that regardless of where a particular autoethnographic practice falls on the spectrum, researchers engaged in autoethnography work to "collapse the conventional distinction" (p. 1671) between themselves as researchers and their research subject.

Pace's (2012) spectrum and Butz and Besio's (2009) continuum are limiting and potentially problematic. For instance, in Pace, *evocative* is set in opposition to *realist*, suggesting that autoethnographic writing can be either narrative/evocative or realistic. Likewise, Butz and Besio focused on the self as the exclusive subject at one end of their continuum and the self in relation to the transcultural at the other. For Butz and Besio, researchers are morally bound to examine themselves in relation to the intersection of cultures, and certainly, in their field of geography, their proposed continuum may be useful. What I take from both Pace and Butz and Besio is a visualization of my positionality, not along a single spectrum, but within a two-dimensional, dynamic representation:
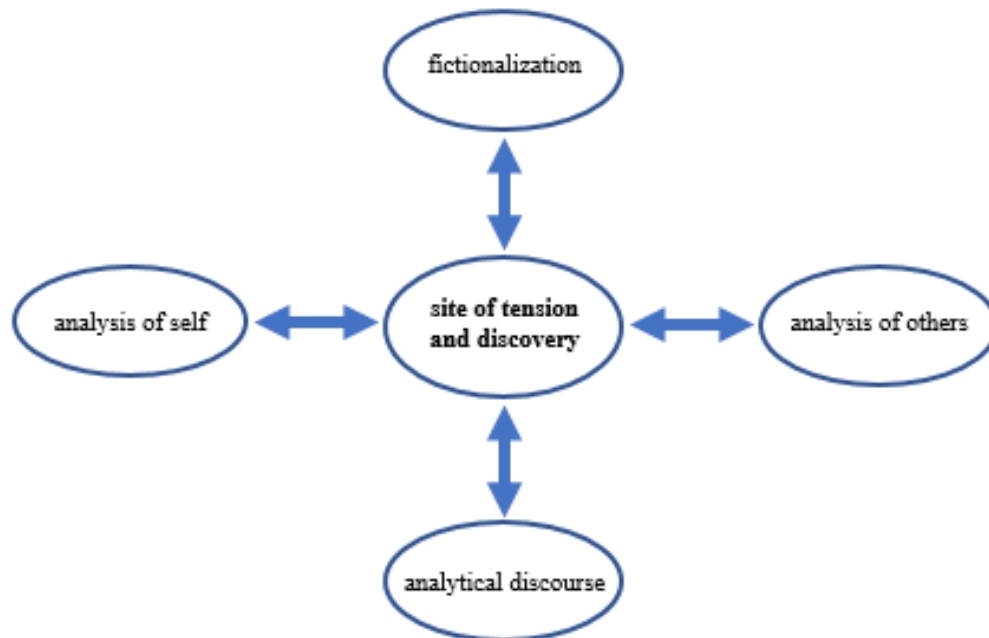

Figure 1: Researcher's Positionality along a Methodological Continua

As represented in Figure 1, my approach begins from a position of tension between my analysis of self and my interactions with others' stories. From this position, I can engage in a cycle of self-study and interaction, allowing each locus to inform the other. At the same time, I write *through* the analysis and interaction, discovering a shared narrative emanating from our individual stories. While I do not aim to make this narrative resemble fiction, I also wish to make the discourse accessible and evocative. Like Clandinin and Connelly (2000), I "understand the world narratively" (p. 17), and I would be disingenuous to write otherwise. From this evocative shared narrative comes not conclusions, but rather my development.

The Water Cooler as Research: Transformative and Transactional Discourse

One of the reasons that autoethnography appeals to me as a teacher and researcher is that I know, from my personal experience and interactions with colleagues, that my ideas and practices are my own, and often quite different from other teachers. Each teacher's distinctive experience is at once a combination of individual interpretation and unique personal experience, both in and outside of the classroom. Furthermore, as a female professional who asks students to engage in intersectional feminist thought, I find it counterintuitive to propose a universally applicable narrative; my story is mine, and it cannot and should not be yours. In the words of Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis (2015), "as a researcher, I am confident about my right (and privilege!) to speak for myself, but I am less confident about my right to speak on behalf of others" (p. 12). Yet, rather than keep each of our individual lived experiences within our own classroom, researchers can use narrative autoethnographic methods to engage with each other, finding resonance in our shared lived experiences, in order to benefit collectively from the individual narrative.

So, despite my early exposure to the perceived supremacy of the Scientific Method and the implied neutrality and objectivity of that approach, I have embraced Muncey's (2010) notion that recognizing my own practical experience and unique lived experience is "healthier" (p. 2) than pretending that I am somehow separate from my research. Autoethnography goes beyond individualistic autobiography because its aim is to create discourse between the researcher and their practice, and between the researcher and their reader (Starr, 2010). As a researcher, I can use autoethnography to better understand myself and my practice, and the relationship between the two; beyond that level, however, is the larger capacity for transformative discourse between teachers in a community of practice (Starr, 2010). Our human nature makes us relational creatures, perpetually interacting with others and our environment (Mayo, 2004); in pedagogical contexts, these interactions—between teacher and student, teacher and subject, student and subject, and so on—become the site of transformational learning. Between colleagues, this kind of interaction allows creative and transformative solidarity.

An autoethnographic study of myself as a teacher, and how the development of my teacher identity influences my practice in general and my approaches to assessment in particular, is grounded in my own experience (Feldman, 2009). At the same time, if my research is to contribute to the larger community, I need to incorporate and interact with other narratives from within the community (Feldman, 2009). Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000) argued that meaning is constructed in the space between researcher and researched, since our interactions happen within this space. Thus, meaning does not come from a single entity, but rather, from the relationship between that self and the other, both of which are "coevolving" (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000, p. 551) through the interaction. Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000) defined this relationship between self/researcher and the other as interdependent and intersubjective. We are interdependent in that I will affect my participants, and they will affect me, through our interaction; we are intersubjective in that the interaction will construct meaning, or rather, multiple meanings, from multiple perspectives. Thus, by engaging in discussion with other teachers as part of my autoethnography, I not only examine my own understanding of the development of teacher identity and its influence on assessment practices, I may also validate how this process adds to the collective community of practice.

Creating Knowledge in and of Ourselves: Epistemological and Ontological Considerations

Methodology has been one of the most confounding aspects of my research. I know I keep coming back to this, but it's foundational: I come from a family littered with doctors, engineers, physicists, economists, and accountants; data, in this environment, is objective, numerical, and factual. Like Wall (2006), I have "grown up believing that positivism is science ... Without knowing about the alternatives, I have been socialized to believe that "real" science is quantitative, experimental, and understood by only a select and elite few" (p. 2). The idea that research might consist of self-reflection, conversations among colleagues, and weaving together a narrative is, to say the least, novel.

In reading, writing, learning, and practicing teaching, however, I've developed a different notion of what it means to do research, and, in fact, of what constitutes learning, and knowledge. As Elizabeth Murphy (1997) suggested, our concept of knowledge—how it is created, and how it affects us—is an

important consideration, perhaps especially for the teacher researcher. In terms of explorations of teacher identity, objectivism allows us to deem one person suited to teaching, and another unsuited, working from a static and rigid definition of what makes a good teacher, as opposed to who can *become* a good teacher and how—or even what each of us understands as *good* in terms of teaching practice. A more constructivist perspective, however, suggests that knowledge and identity are fluid, being built and rebuilt through our interactions with the world; social constructivist thought in particular rests in the belief that this building happens in our daily social interactions. More pragmatically, somewhere between these two extremes lay "as many varieties of constructivism as there are researchers" (Murphy, 2016, p. 2), such as von Glasersfeld's (1996) notion of viability, wherein "concepts, models, theories, and so on are viable if they prove adequate in the contexts in which they were created" (as cited in Murphy, 2016, p. 2). It has become clear to me in my practice that students—in fact, all of us—learn by doing, and that "doing" may mean literally performing actions, but "doing" also means more generally interacting with other people, with the physical world, and with one's own inner world. In short, knowledge is a construction, built through interaction, intimately connected to who we are as individuals and how we connect to the rest of the world.

My personal evolution in thinking about knowledge and knowing about thought reflects a more universal paradigm shift, "from a static, passive view of knowledge towards a more adaptive and active view" (Murphy, 1997, p. 1). From my perspective, both as a teacher in higher education and as a Canadian in the twenty-first century, this shift makes sense, as we become more global, more aware of and open to different cultures and histories, and more open to multiple perspectives to understand our world. At the same time, the primacy of science that dominated the twentieth century has been under scrutiny, as increasing pressure from other disciplines questions the assumption that the scientific method of inquiry is the best or only way to explore and explain our world. Autoethnography positions the researcher within a complex world, in which boundaries are blurred (Starr, personal communication, February 8, 2017). This positionality allows me not only to recognize the intersections of this world, but in fact to embrace them and to acknowledge and subsume the emotional self.

Truth(s) and Trustworthiness: Addressing Validity

As the daughter of a physicist and an engineer, and now the wife of a computer programmer, I have admittedly struggled with the idea of autoethnography as a valid research method, but I'm increasingly convinced that it is at least as valid—or, to use Craig's (2009) word, *trustworthy*—as any other method, if not "more authentic than traditional research approaches, precisely because of the researcher's use of self" (Wall, 2006, p. 9). Given its self-conscious sensitivity to questions of validity and value, autoethnography is arguably more trustworthy than the "intellectual traditions" (Harding, 1992, p. 569) of the positivist stance, which both construct and perpetuate themselves, and, in the interest of self-preservation, resist change.

In her discussion of the problematic intellectual traditions, Sandra Harding (1992) referred to Novick's (1988) idea that truth is not singular, i.e., *the* truth, but rather, perspectival. As such, "the articulation of the perspective from the lives of … such marginalized peoples as racial minorities in the first world, third-world people, women, and the poor [provides] some of the most powerful challenges to the adequacy of objectivism" (Harding, 1992, p. 573). Similarly, Stivers (1993) stated, "a vision of universal truth is really just a dream of power over others and that liberatory, emancipatory projects are better served by alternative knowledge production process" (as cited in Wall, 2006, p. 3). Although Harding (1992) was careful not to accuse the individuals involved in traditional research of objectionable personal views, she argued that "the neutrality requirement [is] not just ineffective at maximizing objectivity; it is an obstacle to it" (p. 580). Operating from a critical feminist stance, Harding (1992) believed that the researcher must maintain a critical distance that allows her to recognize her own "institutionally shaped research assumptions" (p. 572); in autoethnography, the notion of critical distance is, by definition, impossible, as the subject is the self. Harding's challenges to the conventional, supposedly neutral, tradition of research can, however, inform my understanding of my own stance. Harding (1992) proposed a model of *strong objectivity*, which operates from the premise that researchers are aware of the tacit social assumptions underlying their field, their research problem, their institutions, and even their own thinking.

Engaging in Autoethnography

Perhaps one of the biggest hurdles in engaging in autoethnography is that this one term, like other research methods, actually encompasses a wide range of approaches, and, it must be said, it is not instantly clear what an autoethnographic study looks like. Autoethnography, for me, was one of those esoteric terms I had heard thrown around, often with the implication that I should know what this word means, and if I didn't, I should keep quiet. During my first meeting with my doctoral supervisor, she seemed very keen on the idea of an autoethnographic approach for my research; I nodded and smiled, and made a note to look *that* up when I got home. Looking it up didn't clarify things as much as I had hoped. Unlike the traditional research model, autoethnography can seem like a "foray into postmodern philosophy and critical theory, reflexivity and voice, various vague approaches to autobiographical inquiry, validity and acceptability, defences and criticisms, and a wide range of published personal narratives" (Wall, 2006, p. 2). Furthermore, researchers use a variety of labels, i.e., *not* autoethnography, so that it is not always immediately apparent that this is in fact the approach employed. These terms include personal narrative, lived experience, critical autobiography, reflexive ethnography, ethnographic autobiography, personal sociology, and autoanthropology (Wall, 2006). The product of autoethnography can take myriad forms as well, including "short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, as cited in Wall, 2006, p. 5). In short, the "doing" of autoethnography is not necessarily immediately evident; however, this complexity and variety means that I can find my own space, define my own position, and shape my own methods.

An Example of Methodology in Practice: Interactive Interviewing

Muncey (2010) wrote that her "most influential ideas were invoked not by generalized studies but individual perspectives and chance acquaintances" (p. 4); when I read that, I had a profound moment of recognition. As my doctoral journey unfolds, I naturally find myself explaining my research over and over again, to family, friends, and colleagues. Even before this most recent leg of my professional and personal journey, I often found myself discussing my teaching practice with colleagues, and it seems only natural to continue that discussion as I move forward. It is, of course, gratifying to see people's faces light up as they hear about my research—even if they are not teachers themselves, people have all worked with teachers, and especially for those of us who have navigated the sometimes murky waters of post-secondary education, the idea of contemplating teacher identity and how that identity influences teachers' decisions about and approaches to assessment is a compelling one. Fellow teachers all have stories to share, and more often than not, one or both of us involved in a discussion will suddenly stop, with a look of wonderment or consternation, to express a revelation or epiphany, or to ask a question or challenge an assumption we didn't even know we had.

The autoethnographic approach in and of itself feels like a natural fit for my research and philosophy, and as described above, autoethnography focuses not exclusively on the self, but rather, the self in relation and interaction with the other. I cannot imagine conducting the kind of research that interests me in isolation, since my explorations are already firmly rooted in, and influenced by, my everyday interactions with fellow teachers, students, friends, and family. Approaching these interactions from within the context of narrative inquiry—which, as Clandinin (2013) stated, "begins and ends with a respect for ordinary lived experience" (p. 18)—shifts the focus somewhat from the self alone to the collaborative relationship. It is with this understanding of narrative inquiry and autoethnography that I decided to use interactive interviewing as my principal research method for my doctoral research.

Carolyn Ellis (1998) looked at autoethnographic interactive interviewing as a way of exploring "our experience in the conversational realities of everyday discourse" (p. 59). Unlike more traditional, "objective" interview techniques that ignore the emotional facet of the interview relationship itself (Ezzy, 2010), interactive interviewing uses autoethnography to recognize and reconstruct or redefine the relationship between researcher and participant. Ellis (1999) described her own experiences with interactive interviewing as an opportunity to engage in immediate responses to a participant's story with her own lived experience. The stories, experiences, and attitudes of the interviewer and interviewee flow into and through each other, blurring or even erasing the traditional boundaries and distances between the two participants (Fontana, 2002).

Fontana (2002), Ezzy (2010), and Ellis (1998, 1999) used interactive interviewing as an interactional event based on "reciprocal stocks of knowledge" (Fontana, 2002, p. 163), but beyond that, as a way to acknowledge and reflect upon the role of the interviewer and how their own story influences the interview before, during, and after the event. Interactive interviews go beyond the conventional researcher-participant construct to establish a collaborative relationship between the researcher and the participant (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Chase (2010) explained that interviews in which the interviewee is perceived as a narrator, rather than simply a respondent, shifts power to the interviewee and allows them to tell their own story; Chase (2010) also described that the interactive approach to interview narrative reflects the imperative that as the researcher, I must understand myself in order to understand my interpretation of the stories told, and that my own story must be included, so that readers understand the perspective from which my analysis emanates. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) argued that consideration of the researcher's personal stake in the research—what motivates me, what I think about the topic, how I feel about the participant, and how my own thoughts and practice may be influenced as a result of the discussion—adds "context and layers" to the narrative (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 278).

Because interactive interviews, particularly in the narrative, autoethnographic context, rely upon what Adams (2008) called "emerging and well-established" relationships (as cited in Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 279), I have chosen to meet with participants several times over the course of my doctoral research process. Multiple sessions allow the researcher and participants to deepen the interpersonal relationship and to revisit emerging themes and explore together how previous encounters may be manifest in the current exchange. Given the deliberately and overtly intimate nature of interactive interviewing, building close relationships with participants is a likely outcome. In my research, I have elected to engage in interactive interviews with colleagues with whom I already have at least a friendly working relationship; Tillmann-Healy (2003) suggested that friendship is a viable and valid method of inquiry, because it offers a site of authentic engagement. In fact, Tillmann-Healy (2003) said that interactive interviewing is a form of "friendship as method" (p. 733), since it requires the researcher to share her own personal and professional experience. She argued that rich, open, heteroglossic inquiry necessitates the complex relationship between researcher and participant most akin to friendship (Tillmann-Healy, 2003). In Tillmann-Healy's (2003) model of friendship as method, the researcher uses not only the conventional methods of gathering data, in this case, interviewing, but also the compassion and vulnerability of everyday, conversational friendship. In this model, the researcher does not seek to control the interaction, but instead, to use dialogue, both in person and in writing, to deepen mutual understanding.

Data Analysis in Autoethnographic Interviewing

I have chosen to use voice-centred analysis (Brown & Gilligan, 1991) to explore how dialogue with fellow teachers intersects with and challenges my own narrative. This method provides an analysis that is at once deeper, thanks to the insights and provocations of individual teachers, and broader, once the major themes of personal professional development begin to emerge. Brown and Gilligan (1991) argued that when we start to question the dominant voice in traditional research approaches, we find that otherwise unacknowledged voice begins to sound detached and distant. Clearly, this voice does not sit well within the context of an autoethnographic interactive sharing of stories. Brown and Gilligan (1991) proposed instead an approach that responds to different voices, relationships, and contexts revealed and concealed in the text of the interview. The voice-centred approach asks the researcher to listen to the stories several times, listening and reading each time for different voices and narratives (Brown & Gilligan, 1991): the story itself, the teller of the story, the underlying messages, and the story of the exchange itself, that is, the hearing and telling of each other's narrative. Brown and Gilligan employed this method in their ethnographic work in psychology; other researchers have used the method, or hybrids of it, in various other disciplines, including sociology (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003); nursing (Paliadelis & Cruickshank, 2008); and pedagogical psychology (Kiegelmann, 2010). Like so many facets of autoethnographic research, voice-centred analysis uses researcher reflexivity to challenge traditional researcher-participant relationships, and to acknowledge and embrace the position of the researcher in the interaction and interpretation. While certain advocates of the approach apply methods of coding to analyse data further, for others, it suffices to use the approach to reveal and reflect on the themes that emerge from our conversations with others.

Conclusion: This is Just the Beginning

Like Wall (2006), I find myself inexorably attracted to autoethnography, because "my inner process and reactions connect to the experiences of others in the world beyond me. My personal experiences link to the cultural" (p. 10). As I have previously noted, I find myself already discussing my research with friends and colleagues, many of whom are eager to share their unique experiences: seeking common threads in our different narratives. Each of us brings to the shared narrative our own identities, both professional and personal. For instance, my own experience as a yoga teacher offers a different yet complementary perspective on teaching, both in the yoga studio and in the college classroom, and provides me with opportunities to reflect on my practice from another angle. My experiences as a parent of two sons who are in the process of navigating the Quebec education system adds yet another dimension to my researcher practice; as does my own experience as a student of the same system prior to the educational reforms of the 1990s, and as a student re-entering higher education now. Even my debates with my dad challenge me to define my position, to consider my ideas from other perspectives, at least until I throw up my hands and walk away, for my own sanity and his safety. Finally, and thankfully, my ongoing interactions with other teachers and educational researchers continue to open new paths of inquiry while revealing the many shared challenges and rewards of educational research, teaching, and learning.

Acknowledgement

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maggie McDonnell: Maggie McDonnell is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University. She is a course lecturer in Education at McGill and teaches in the English Departments at Concordia University and Vanier College.