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"Why nobody told me and why it would have been impossible to do so until now" : an autoethnographic inquiry into teaching and learning towards social justice in early childhood teacher education

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***“WHY NOBODY TOLD ME AND WHY IT WOULD HAVE BEEN IMPOSSIBLE TO DO SO UNTIL NOW”*: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC INQUIRY INTO TEACHING AND LEARNING TOWARDS SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER EDUCATION**

by

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A Major Research Paper

presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in the Program of

Early Childhood Studies

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2008

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“Why nobody told me and why it would have been impossible to do so until now”: An autoethnographic inquiry into teaching and learning towards social justice in Early Childhood Teacher Education

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Master of Arts
Early Childhood Studies
Ryerson University

ABSTRACT

In this paper, a personal narrative autoethnographic methodology is used to begin mapping a transformative learning journey towards teaching and learning for social justice in early childhood teacher education. In autoethnography, personal lived experience is the primary source of data. This inquiry explores two stories of personal transformative learning using a journey metaphor to structurally frame the inquiry. Through a process of writing as inquiry (Richardson, 2003) and emotional introspection (Ellis, 1991) and using a conceptual framework based on postmodern perspectives, this autoethnographic research paper reveals the steps toward critical consciousness (Freire, 2006) taken by the author/researcher—a student in early childhood teacher education—as she uses personal narratives of lived experience in early childhood teacher education as primary data to explore the implications of this transformative learning process to explore themes around teaching and learning towards social justice in early childhood teacher education programs.

Key words: autoethnography, early childhood teacher education, social justice, narrative inquiry, transformative learning

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Dedications

I dedicate this paper to my parents for the unquestioned support and encouragement that they have shown me during this entire process.

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Introduction

We learn to live meaningfully in the stories of our lives....We learn to see and feel the world in a complicated manner and then reflexively turn that lens on ourselves (Ellis, 2004, p. 98).

In this paper, I use an autoethnographic inquiry methodology to begin mapping a transformative learning journey towards teaching and learning for social justice in early childhood teacher education. As a result of this research process, two interweaving stories have emerged along the way. The inquiry explores two stories of transformation. In one I share the story of my research process, my autoethnography journey. I explore the ways in which I have come to understand how this inquiry could only have developed and experienced using a personal narrative autoethnographic methodology, and in doing so, I set out the conceptual framework for this inquiry. A number of narrative vignettes highlight my experiences during this research process, and provide the data with which to explore a conceptualization of autoethnography as a relevant method of inquiry for professional development in early childhood teacher education. I use these narrative vignettes to frame the inquiry and create the structural framework for the remainder of the paper.

The other story I share explores my lived experience, of professional development and identity as a student of early childhood teacher education. In my story of professional identity, three personal narrative 'episodes' of my lived experience in early childhood teacher education are presented as data 'snapshots' that I use to unpack conceptual themes related to teaching and learning towards social justice in early childhood education. These themes are revealed through

a critical and reflective exploration of the narratives on both a micro and macro level of analysis using postmodern perspectives.

It is important to note that the events that I use as signposts along this journey and which have emerged through both stories have not been experienced in a chronological or linear manner. However, I am going to explore these narratives in parallel because of the way in which this inquiry is organized. In reality, two of the three personal narrative 'episodes' that I use as data to analyze in this paper had occurred during the last year of my undergraduate early childhood teacher education program. The other personal narrative 'episode', as well as the other narratives framing the entire paper have developed during the course of my time as a graduate student in a masters of early childhood studies program.

Shaping this autoethnographic inquiry is a conceptual framework based on a postmodern theoretical paradigm. Through a process of writing as inquiry (Richardson, 2003), this autoethnographic research paper reveals my steps toward critical consciousness (Freire, 2006) and the implications of this transformative learning process for teaching and learning towards social justice in early childhood teacher education programs.

This autoethnographic inquiry is structurally organized using the metaphor of an inner journey (Miller, Cassie, and Drake, 1990). The narrative vignettes that frame this inquiry form the "*metaphorical map*" (p. 22) that can guide readers along my journey through a non-linear path of transformative learning and professional growth. A brief outline of the metaphorical inner journey, its three-dimensional spiraled model, and recursive nature of travel is presented. In doing so, an archetypal journey story line emerges that guides readers with signposts—archetypal central themes—with which the path I have traveled is mapped along the way. These

include a separation, “call to adventure”, tests and trials, and a “return to service” (Miller, Cassie, and Drake, 1990, p. 23).

To introduce this paper, I have chosen to include text from a children’s story familiar to me, one that I have found to be meaningful during this research process. Even though I have read this story before, its value and meaning has become multifaceted in that I have been able to uncover personal meaning from the text in ways that I had not seen before. I use this text as a metaphor for a way of knowing and learning in this autoethnography.

In the following section, I present an excerpt from the children’s book, *Oh, the places you’ll go!* by Dr. Seuss (1990) as a way to illuminate the challenges and fears I faced prior to embarking on this autoethnographic journey. Like the story of my graduation day that follows this poem, *The Waiting Place* (Seuss, 1990) describes in metaphor such a time of transition—of waiting and confusion—during my life as both an undergraduate student in early childhood teacher education and as a new graduate student in an early childhood studies masters of arts degree program:

You will come to a place where the streets are not marked.
Some windows are lighted. But mostly they’re darked.
A place you could sprain both your elbow and chin!
Do you dare to stay out? Do you dare to go in?
How much can you lose? How much can you win?

And IF you go in, should you turn left or right....
Or right-and-three quarters? Or, maybe, not quite?
Or go around back and sneak in from behind?
Simple it’s not, I’m afraid you will find,
For a mind-maker-upper to make up his mind.

You can get so confused
That you’ll start in to race
Down long wiggled roads at a break-necking pace

and grind on for miles across weirdish wild space,
headed, I fear, toward a most useless place.
The Waiting Place....

For people just waiting.
Waiting for a train to go
or a bus to come, or a plane to go
or the mail to come, or the rain to go
or the phone to ring, or the snow to snow
or waiting around for a Yes or No
or waiting for their hair to grow.
Everyone is just waiting....

NO!
That's not for you! (Seuss, 1990, p. 23-34)

I had come to a place in my life where I was uncertain about my future. After graduating from an early childhood teacher education program, I did not feel as though I knew where I was going. What was around me was familiar, but at the same time, it was not where I wanted to be. I didn't know exactly where to look for support or guidance, but I couldn't continue the way I had been heading.

Whereas I have only come to understand through this research process that I had actually been at *The Waiting Place* (Seuss, 1990), at a crossroad in my life, both personally and professionally, it wasn't until I became immersed in this autoethnographic inquiry that I have come to recognize just how important it was for me to wait no longer. Through this research process, I have come to understand that I had actually begun to plan for a journey as I entered a new phase in my life after graduating from early childhood teacher education without even knowing it at the time. As I attended my convocation ceremony, which follows as a narrative vignette, I realize now that I was, in fact, beginning a new journey. The separation I was beginning to feel from the group identity—that of early childhood educator—I had worked so hard

to achieve and had planned for during the previous five years marked the initial stage of this transformative learning process.

In light of and inspired by the poetry of Dr. Seuss that I have come to know and enjoy, both through my early childhood and as a student in early childhood teacher education, I offer a different, but complimentary way of introducing the scope of this autoethnography.

I have been on a path full of curves and bumps,
But soon you'll discover why I've made this big jump.
My mind is a furry of questions and clues that
if put to the paper make sense of my moves.
To stay or to wait at a place that is known
prevents me from testing the seeds I have sewn.
I must look within but also around
to know where I planted my feet on the ground.
The challenge I have is to understand why
my questions since graduating seem to fill most of my sky.
It's been important for me to take these questions, and
illuminate the journey that I have begun.
My wish is to voice a story of knowing,
which then may be used for curriculum growing.
Doesn't set up the course for one direction
Instead spirals around, back and forth, for reason.
The stories tell both the past and present
Both self and culture form the accent.
New ways of thinking and learning is bound
When one stops and says, "Here's a problem I've found."
So I share with you a story of learning
And hope that you see within you a yearning
To examine your practice and ways of knowing
For that's what we do for continuous growing.

The poem I have written above may be seen as a way to foreshadow the depth of this inquiry. It is one that is interwoven and multi-layered in context; it is experiential and social; it is dynamic yet historicized, and it is through this paper that I suggest that we begin to explore ways to reconceptualize early childhood teacher education programs towards teaching and

learning for social justice education by using autoethnography as a both a pedagogical tool and research methodology for the field.

This is a paper grounded in lived experience. It is a *personal narrative autoethnography* (Ellis, 2004), framed both in personal and social contexts across a *landscape of professional knowledge* (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994) in early childhood teacher education. I no longer remain at *The Waiting Place* (Seuss, 1990), and it is only by engaging in an autoethnographic research process that I have established the voice to share my story of learning, my journey of transformation in the hopes that readers too engage in autoethnographic methods. As Ellis and Bochner (1992) suggest:

By making intricate details of one's life accessible to others in public discourse, personal narratives bridge the dominions of public and private life. Telling a personal story becomes a social process for making lived experience understandable and meaningful. (p. 79-80)

This autoethnography attempts to bridge reflections of my lived experience as an early childhood education student with that of the larger context of professional early childhood education development through which I have and continue to be engaged. In this paper, I will examine the impact of using autoethnographic methods as a way to discuss three significant events I refer to as 'episodes' as a student in early childhood teacher education that I experienced, which have fundamentally influenced the course of my professional development and personal motivation for teaching and learning towards social justice education in early childhood teacher education.

Goodall (2000) argues that in autoethnography, researchers use “creative narratives shaped out of a writer’s personal experiences within a culture [to address]... to academic and

public audiences” (as cited by Patton, 2002, p. 85) an exploration of self and culture for the purpose of arriving at a better understanding of a particular phenomenon or experience in a social context. Autoethnographic writing emerges from our own stories of lived experience (Sparkes, 2002), and according to Ellis (2004), “the stories we write provide a snapshot that holds us in place for others-and ourselves—to interpret from multiple points of view, locations, and times” (p. 343).

The goals for this autoethnographic inquiry are three-fold. First, this inquiry is meant to introduce autoethnography as a relevant and important research methodology and pedagogical tool for professional development in early childhood teacher education programs. Second, by sharing with others the story of significant events in my lived experience in an early childhood teacher education program, the insight of a student’s perspective and authentic voice is presented whereby a meaningful transformative learning process is revealed in the context of professional development. Whereas the voices of students in the literature are often (re)-presented by others (Cook-Sather, 2002; Brooker & Macdonald, 1999), through this autoethnography, I have the opportunity to share with others my experiences through my own voice. Third, the overall goal of this autoethnography is to begin exploring a reconceptualization of professional development in early childhood teacher education towards teaching and learning for social justice education by utilizing autoethnography as both method and practice to support students in becoming more reflexive writers and researchers, whose experiences and stories will help shape and guide an early childhood teacher education curriculum towards social justice educational practices, thus opening the possibilities for critical consciousness and transformative learning as both personal and professional lives merge.

The following section provides a contextual framework from which my two stories emerge. The personal narrative that opens this section is a written account of my lived experience at my convocation ceremony after having completed my undergraduate degree in early childhood education. In this narrative—*The Ordinary World*—I present the social setting of which I was a part and illustrate my emotional state as I remember it, as well as the questions and thoughts that had come to mind after the ceremony was finished.

Narrative Prelude

The Ordinary World

I am standing in a line of students (mostly women), in alphabetical order, along side the wall by the theatre stage. I am waiting for my name to be called so that I can walk across the brightly lit stage, shake some hands (I know some of their faces), and collect the piece of paper that I have been working to get for the last two years.

From where I stand, waiting for my name to be called, I look into what I believe to be a theatre full of proud parents, siblings, grandparents, spouses, children, and significant others. It is dark. I can't see their faces, but I am thinking that they are all here to bear witness to this special day for those of us wearing these awful itchy blue polyester robes.

It is Convocation Day: the gathering of students from the faculty of community services, all who have accomplished what many others have not as yet (or ever will). Today marks the day of my 'official' graduation ceremony. I stand there waiting for my name to be called and my stomach is turning. My hands are sweaty and my heart is racing. I look once again to the stage. Like a production line, my classmates are called by order of last name: A, B, C, D.... It's going to take forever to get to R, I think.

It is really quiet. The only interruption in between graduating students on the stage is the sound of applause—some louder than others—as names continue to be called out by the emcee of the early childhood education (E.C.E.) graduating class of 2006. I have done it, I think to myself.

All of a sudden the stage seemed to be fading away. I can hear no sounds, except for my racing heart and the voice in my head asking: *What does this all really mean? Am I actually ready to be a practicing professional now?*

Then, as if I un-muted a television, the graduation scene resumes. Around me are the voices of my classmates with whom I have spent much of my time over the past two years. I have seen their faces, listened to their conversations, responded to their questions, done 'group' work with them, and participated in their presentations for the last two years. Today, the conversations seem to be the same as they have been for the last month or so.

By now many of them have already received their letters of acceptance into Bachelor of Education programs across the province. Since December they have been anxious, nervous, excited, and terrified all at the same time. The beginning of December was the deadline for getting applications into their choice teachers' colleges. It's June now, and many of them are thrilled about the idea of being accepted—of getting the chance to move beyond the status of 'early childhood educator', and into the 'real' world of teaching. In about a year or so, many of them will graduate again, but it won't be until then that it actually counts. This time it's nothing. In a year, they will become 'official' teachers, and after that they will have a chance to finally have their 'own classrooms'. This was my dream once. Not any longer. Something has happened to me. I am not that person anymore. But, I don't quite understand how or why.

My name is called, and like always, my last name is pronounced wrong (even though we were each given a cue card to write down how we would like to be presented). It never fails. I even broke it down phonetically with the hope that the announcer would actually read what I wrote on the cue card. "Ram-na-rase...like Ran The Race!" In that very instant I am annoyed. Ever single teacher reading the attendance list out and getting to my name flashes in my head. I used to wish that I had a last name they would know how to pronounce like 'Smith' or 'Lee'. But oh well, it is what it is. Here I go. Look straight ahead and for all that is good in the world, don't trip and fall flat on your face, like you often do at the most inopportune times!

It all seemed a blur after that. Only when I look at 'Katrina's Graduation June 2006' video and digital pictures do I realize that I practically ran out onto the stage. I think about it now and realize that if it wasn't for those digital images I wouldn't have remembered having something thrown over my head, shaking hands with some man who was sitting on what looked like a throne, shaking hands with the President of the university, and then scuttling along to a little corridor where I remember picking up a sealed piece of paper that stated I was rewarded a Bachelor of Arts degree in Early Childhood Education with honours.

I took the usual pictures out in the quad—pictures with my family and friends, and said my goodbyes to teachers and classmates within my sight line. Some of them ask what I am going to do in September. "I'm starting our new graduate program," I respond. It almost seems robotic since many assumed that like what seems to be ninety-nine percent of my graduating class I would be anxiously waiting to hear whether or not I got into teacher's college. "No, I didn't apply," I say, waiting to see the wide-eyed look of shock that often accompanied this response.

I am getting used to the uncomfortable "Oh, really" and "You can always apply next year." I should by now, really. It has been practically a year. For many of my classmates, planning for teacher's college applications began the summer before fourth year, but not for me. I am in pursuit of something different. How that looked, I did not know at that moment. All I knew was that it just wasn't the dream I once had before.

Something had changed in me. I had started to move away from the course I had previously set for myself. My interests were changing, and that left me feeling uneasy and unsure of myself as a new graduate and early childhood education professional. I never would have thought that this was where I was headed, I think to myself.

What I discovered in my final year of professional E.C.E. training was that I was becoming more fascinated and curious about the students who wanted to become early childhood educators, as well as the teachers who taught them. I had been developing an interest in preservice teacher education, and although I had enjoyed and learned so much from the children

and families with whom I had the privilege to interact, my motivation and interests were being refracted.

Graduating from a professional E.C.E. training program was not new for me. I had been through this type of ceremony before. I graduated with a diploma in E.C.E. just two years before. However, at that time, I knew where I was going. At that point in my life I also knew I was in pursuit of a tangible finish line—that link between my diploma in E.C.E. and that of the vision I had of myself becoming an elementary school teacher.

I had applied to the university E.C.E. program with the promise of entering as a third year student (direct-entry) in the hopes of obtaining a degree in E.C.E. so that I could pursue a Bachelor of Education degree. Like many other 'direct-entry' students from other E.C.E. college programs, I knew that this was only a stepping-stone for my desired career path. I was going to become an elementary school teacher—preferably grades two or three working in the local public school system.

Why then was this particular graduation ceremony leaving me feeling like my stomach was in knots at the very thought of me becoming a new professional in the E.C.E. field? After a total of four years of dedicated class time, practical field experience, and professional knowledge, my insides were spinning. I was nervous, anxious, and excited all at the same time. The questions were stirring, my answers seemed rehearsed, but everything was beginning to feel out of place. *How did I lose sight of that finish line? What happened to that dream? Where was I really headed?*

A Separation

I felt as though I had already begun to drift away from the 'ordinary world' that I had worked so hard to remain a part of for as long as I could remember. It seemed that I no longer had the same general interests as the rest of my cohort. I did not want to become an elementary school teacher as I had previously mapped out for myself. There was something else that I desired to pursue further. How I would do that I did not know at the time, but I made the choice to take the risk into the unknown because I felt that there was something missing, or that needed to be further explored, in my professional life, as I entered a new period of growth and learning. I ultimately had already begun a quest. I was headed on a journey for which I had not mapped out ahead of time.

In the following section, I introduce the first of my transformative stories: My Story of Autoethnography. In it, I begin mapping the research journey on which I have embarked. This section is organized using signposts, which outline the structural framework for the inner journey metaphor that is used as a guide for telling my research. The section begins with a narrative vignette that takes place in the middle of a conversation between my graduate supervisor and myself during the initial phase of the major research paper that I chose to complete in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the masters degree I had been pursuing.

The narrative vignette that is presented represents collectively a number of conversations between my supervisor and myself over the course of several weeks. The conversations ranged in topic, but were primarily focused on what I was learning in the graduate program, as well as what I wanted to pursue as research for the purpose of the major research paper. Because the following narrative is a storied reconstruction of my lived experience over the course of several weeks in the form of fictitious dialogue between my supervisor and myself, it may be considered a *fictionalized narrative* (Ketelle, 2004).

Fictionalized narratives, representing 'composites' of real lived experiences, are often used in autoethnographic texts. According to Ketelle (2004):

Fictionalizing real experience offers an opportunity to connect to the less noticed through connecting to the evocative. The evocative narrative reveals aspects of human expression that are often left out of other types of inquiry. (p. 451)

Although fictional techniques like dialogue and plot development are used in autoethnographic writing (Ellis, 2004), the integrity and 'truthfulness' of this narrative may be called into question. For this reason, I refer to Hinckley (2005, p. 767), who suggests that, "the goal of autoethnography is not to write a completely factual, observation-based account of an

interaction or event. Rather, it is to share with the reader aspects of the experience that are not readily observable, that are known only to the writer.”

Mapping a Journey: My Story of Autoethnography

A Call to Adventure

“That’s it,” my graduate supervisor says, sounding frustrated by the voice of doubt and insecurity spewing from my mouth as I try once again to describe what I want to do with my Master’s major research paper (M.R.P.). In an instant, I think that I am in some kind of trouble. Does he know that I am feeling overwhelmed and lost? I think to myself. I suddenly feel as though I have been rambling about myself too much. The doubt and insecurity is real, but how is it helping me to define what it is that I want to do with my M.R.P.? I have done nothing more than to share with him how I am feeling about what I have been reading. Why does it feel as though I have lost my footing? Then, he says, “Stop talking. Start writing. I think you may have a story to tell.”

“A story,” I say, puzzled by where this may be going. “What do you mean?” *What the heck am I going to do with a story?* I ask myself, thinking about the fact that I still have so much to do without knowing yet what that all entailed. The thought of completing my M.R.P. on time (whatever that actually meant) is fading into oblivion. *What is writing a story going to do to help this seemingly hopeless situation?* I say to myself. I can’t seem to stay focused. The possibilities were endless, it seemed. I had so many interests that it was as if I was trying to grasp smoke. I was reading and reflecting on so much, but I still did not feel as though I had a research focus and I was still struggling with what my problem of inquiry was and how I was going to report what I had found.

My supervisor gets up, walks over to the bookshelf just a few steps away at the other end of the cramped little office. He begins to scan the shelf from top to bottom. “I have been listening to you for nearly a year now,” he says, as he moves from one bookshelf to another, “and from what you have been telling me it just seems as though you have already begun to define your research. Everything you are sharing with me leads in one direction. Katrina, you have a story to write. Have you thought about narrative research for your M.R.P.?”

I look at him, furrowing my eyebrows as I roll my chair to the left, avoiding the near collision as he moves from one bookshelf to another. I don’t know what he means, but shrug my shoulders as I stare at him scanning back and forth along the crowded bookshelf. It looks as though he is ready to pull every book off of the shelf. I sit and stare, desperately waiting for him to share with me what he was thinking. As I wait I think to myself, narrative research? But, I haven’t done that before, even as a student in the early childhood teacher education program. Our research methods class never really taught us about that. What kind of story could I tell that could become a major research paper? Exactly whose story would I be telling?

Finally he turns around and faces me. “Did you even know that you have been sharing with me a learning story?” he asks. “Mind you, it is not fleshed out well enough yet. I don't even think you realize you have made your research problem pretty clear to me.”

I find myself dumbstruck by the very thought of me sharing a story of learning. What does that mean? I think to myself. “You have already started some research, Katrina,” he continues, turning around to face the bookshelf behind him, “I just think that there will be so much of you that will be missing if you chose a research methodology that didn't embrace the learning process that you have been sharing with me. What you need to figure out is just exactly how you are going to share with others this story you have already begun to tell.”

“Where is that little book?” he asks out loud. “Did I ever get you to read anything by John Miller?” he asks. “You need to get a hold of this book.” He stops scanning the bookshelves and sits at his desk. I roll closer to the desk and stare at the letters appearing in the Google Search bar as he types: “Holistic Learning” “John Miller”.

In that very instant I know exactly what his is looking for. He already gave it to me, I say to myself. I picture in my mind exactly where it is—neatly stacked among other texts in a basket labeled “M.R.P.”. I haven't touched it for months. In fact, until that moment, I had forgotten that it was even there. I immediately find myself asking why he had given it to me to read in the first place, and suddenly a rush of guilt filled my body.

“You gave me that book already,” I say, waiting for the “why didn't you tell me that in the first place” I was expecting. “Life stories and mythology.... The journey metaphor readings, right?” I say. Suddenly, I realized the significance of the chapter for me. I sat there reflecting on the chapter, waiting for him to say something, but I didn't need him to tell me. I am my research, I think to myself. This whole process so far has been about a journey—my own journey of learning and transformation.

The Inner Journey Metaphor

Structuring the Research: A Metaphor for Transformative Learning

The metaphor of the inner journey may be seen as a way to tell a story of experience and learning. It provides a pattern of experience that has been reflected across cultures and history in narrative form. By mapping an individual's experience, the journey metaphor outlines a transformational learning process through which self-discovery and growth takes place using a literary framework (Miller, Cassie, and Drake, 1990). I have chosen to use a journey metaphor

for the structural framework of this autoethnographic inquiry because, as Schmitt (2005) reminds us:

Not only is it complicated to present the results of qualitative research, but the research process itself generally proves to be a complex undertaking: Metaphors serve well to give some orientation for the researchers in their endeavor and in its presentation. (p. 361)

For the purpose of this paper, the journey metaphor will be used to provide a guide with which to share and present my research (Dyson, 2007), both the story of my research process and the story of my developing professional identity.

Structure of the Inner Journey Metaphor

Miller, Cassie, and Drake (1990) provide a skeletal framework to understand the literary structure of the Inner Journey metaphor. According to Miller, Cassie, and Drake, a gyre, or a three-dimensional cone can visually represent this metaphorical journey, where “one proceeds from one winding to the next as one successfully learns life’s lessons” (p. 23). This continuously spiraling path occurs temporally, connecting “the past, perceived present and anticipated future” (p. 25).

Phases of this spiraled pattern, according to Miller, Cassie, and Drake, help to identify a process of transformation. These phases are represented in Figure 1.

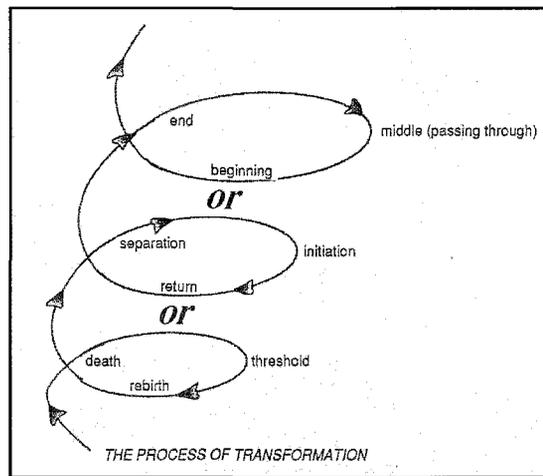


Figure 1. *The Process of Transformation as presented in the Journey Metaphor (Miller, Cassie, and Drake, 1990, p. 27).*

The spirals of the journey metaphor can be seen as “cycles of change” (Miller, Cassie, and Drake, 1990, p. 26). A cycle of change occurs as a traveler faces a series of three basic steps. For the purpose of this paper, the steps that I have chosen to represent my inner journey are marked by three phases: a separation (from the known), an initiation (including tests and trials), and a return (to service). By presenting these structural divisions as signposts throughout this autoethnography, a road map for my journey is produced. As Brown & Moffett (1999) suggests, “like every archetypal voyager, we must find our way out of darkness and back to a more powerful and sustaining light” (p. 14), the use of metaphor in this autoethnography attempts to guide readers along my transformative learning journey.

Using the inner journey metaphor as a guide, the following section begins with a narrative vignette that describes my travels into the unknown. Taking place after my initial ‘call to adventure’, this narrative continues my journey as I find myself thinking about using my experiences as my research as I leave my graduate supervisor’s office and into the *unknown*. In this section, autoethnography is explored, as well as the reasons for which this method of inquiry is used.

Into the Unknown

Methodological Foundations

“Where do I begin?” I say to myself as I walk out of my graduate supervisor’s office. “It all seemed so simple when I said it,” I think to myself. The backpack I am carrying on my shoulders, weighing me down with books and journal articles, suddenly feels heavier. There is something else weighing down on me. It is not material, but rather, a mental sort of weight that is so heavy that I feel as though with every step I take as I walk around campus the floor beneath me would give way.

I really wasn’t sure where to start. It had never really been suggested to me before to write a story of my experience in this context, and although I found myself making the suggestion, it would be my supervisor who would suggest that I check out a qualitative research method known as ‘Autoethnography’.

“I am so over my head,” I think to myself. “Stories for research? Autoethnography?” I continue. Instantly I recall the ‘Introduction to Anthropology’ course that I had taken a few years before. Ethnography was the research methodology of choice—telling the stories of others for the purpose of arriving at a better understanding of the culture being researched. Nobody seemed to be both the subject being researched and the researcher. That was then.... Or at least, that was how I was remembering it.

“What are stories of my own experiences going to mean for this major research paper?” I say to myself. I had to first understand how stories, personal experience, autoethnography, and educational research all fit together. I seemed to be venturing into the unknown. So, it was for that reason that I thought it wise to map out where I might be headed. I was determined once I arrived at home to begin searching for scholarly literature using storytelling, autoethnography, and education as key words.

When I got home, I logged in to the school library system, and began my search. Not expecting to have much luck, I was amazed to see a world of research related to those key words that generally fell under the broader genre of narrative inquiry. Soon I was noticing that there were a number of genres of qualitative research in education that specifically focused on narrative methodology. Writing stories about one’s lived experiences and the insights that emerged from this narrative writing process was in fact a type of research process others had done before. “Why haven’t I seen any of this before in research class?” I say out loud. The new discover leaves me asking several questions. *What kinds of research then had been valued in my E.C.E. program? What did these kinds of research actually look like? Who was this research for?*

I had just come to realize that doing a major research paper using my own personal experiences as data was something that I could do. But, what that actually involved I did not know. I had experienced writing reflective journals before. That was where I thought to begin—with the style of reflective practice that I had acquired and honed during my time as a student in early childhood teacher education. Reflective practice was encouraged and supported for professional development in early childhood teacher education for knowledge building and sharing, meaning-making and discussion through the practice of writing about the self. However, to move into the realm of research using self-reflection and personal experiences seemed to be entirely beyond the scope of my own knowledge base. “This will be something

new,” I think to myself. In fact, this will be something that I haven’t experienced in the context of research in early childhood teacher education before. So, where do I begin?

“What is autoethnography? What does that kind of research look like? Where do narrative fit into it all? How does telling our stories help us to make sense of our experiences?” The questions began to flood my mind. I furiously began to write them down with the hope of exploring them further.

Where do I begin?

Defining Autoethnography

According to Ellis (2004), autoethnography is “an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness” (p. 37) by “writing about the personal and its relationship to culture” (p. 37). Autoethnography blends autobiographical text and ethnographic research methodology by “drawing upon the experience of the author/researcher for the purposes of extending sociological understanding” (Sparkes, 2000, p. 21).

Originally introduced as a term by David Hayano (1979) to “describe studies by anthropologists of their own cultures” (as cited by Patton, 2002, p. 85), the development of autoethnography as a research methodology in the past twenty years has been contributed to a number of researchers in a variety of fields including sociology (Bochner and Ellis, 1999; Ellis, 2004; Sparkes, 2000), nursing (Foster, McAllister, and O’Brien, 2006; Johnstone, 1999), and education (Duarte, 2007; Dyson, 2007, Sparkes, 2002). By describing, narrating, and interpreting their lived realities and experiences, these researchers place themselves at the centre of the research process.

Autoethnography may be understood as both a product of and process in scholarly research (Ellis, 2004). Encompassing “research, writing, story and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political” (Ellis, 2004, p. xix),

autoethnographic texts attempt to situate the researcher by using “a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context” (Reed-Danahy, 1997, p. 9).

Forms of Autoethnography

As a research product, autoethnography is often presented using a wide variety of strategies and diverse, engaging formats by many social science researchers. Ellis (2004) describes this variance in the following:

Usually written in first-person, autoethnographic texts appear in a variety of forms—short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, scripts, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing and social science prose. They showcase concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness. These features appear as relational and institutional stories affected by history and social structure, which themselves are dialectically revealed through actions, feelings, thoughts, and language. (p. 38)

For the purpose of this paper, I have chosen to use a personal narrative autoethnographic methodology in which I write about my own lived experiences for data generation and analysis. Richardson (2000) suggests that personal narrative autoethnographies are “highly personalized, revealing texts in which authors tell stories about their own lived experience, relating the personal to the cultural” (p. 11).

It is important to note, however, that although literary techniques are used in personal narrative autoethnographic texts to produce highly personal and evocative stories of lived experience, Duncan (2004) emphasizes that this method of inquiry offers more than narrative accounts of personal experience. According to Duncan (2002), autoethnographic texts also

provide “reports that are scholarly and justifiable interpretations... [that] do not consist solely of the researcher's opinions but are also support by other data that can confirm or triangulate those opinions” (p. 5).

Understanding Autoethnography: Self and Culture

To situate autoethnography in the context of the broader ethnographic research, Patton (2002) asks the following question as a way to understand the ways in which autoethnography blends *auto* (self) and *ethno* (culture): “How does my own experience of this culture connect with and offer insights about this culture, situation, event, and/or way of life?” (p. 84). This self-reflective questioning allows for the personal to become the centre of an exploration of the social. According to Pelias (2003), autoethnography “lets you use yourself to get to culture” (cited by Wall, 2006, p. 2).

In this paper, the cultural group I explore is students in early childhood teacher education. According to Creswell (2005), a culture-sharing group is “two or more individuals who have shared behaviours, beliefs, and language” (p. 443). As a student in early childhood teacher education, I have “adopted some shared patterns of behaving, thinking, [and] talking” (p. 443) as a result of the prescribed program curriculum, the selection of liberal arts courses, as well as classroom interactions (group assignments, projects, and discussion) throughout the duration of the early childhood education degree program. Therefore, students in early childhood teacher education programs may be considered a culture on a variety of levels; they are college or university students who are studying to become professionals in the field of early childhood education, for instance.

Autoethnography and Narrative Research

Autoethnographic methods of inquiry are grounded in narrative forms of qualitative research. Bell (2002) suggests that, “narrative inquiry rests on the epistemological assumption that we as human beings make sense of experiences by the imposition of story structures” (p. 207). According to Polkinghorne (1995):

A storied narrative is the linguistic form that preserves the complexity of human action with its interrelationship of temporal sequence, human motivation, chance happenings, and changing interpersonal and environmental contexts. In this context, story refers not only to fictional accounts but also to narratives describing "ideal" life events such as biographies, autobiographies, histories, case studies, and reports of remembered episodes that have occurred. (p. 11)

We tell stories as a way of understanding “one another through the use of concrete examples rather than through vague abstractions and generalizations which have no relationship to life’s experiences” (Abrahamson, 1998, p. 441). Polkinghorne (1995) suggests that human action constitutes the “subject-matter of stories” (p. 11). Our stories reveal our “attempts to progress to a solution, clarification, or unraveling of an incomplete situation” (p. 11). Accordingly, we live ‘storied’ lives, and narrative, as both a process (of storytelling) and a product (a story) of inquiry, may be seen as a way of documenting, exploring, and connecting storied human experiences in social, cultural, historical, and political contexts (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

We understand, organize and interpret our experiences—our actions and the consequences of those actions—using narrative (Chase, 2005). Connelly & Clandinin (1990) state that, “narrative [is] the making of meaning from personal experience via a process of reflection in

which storytelling is the key element” (p. 245). Therefore, narrative, as a process of reflection, may be seen as the reconstruction of experience through stories that is both temporally and socially contextualized in the past, present, and potential future. According to Clandinin & Connelly (1994):

When persons note something of their experience, either to themselves or to others, they do so not by the mere recording of experience over time, but in storied form.... Stories are the closest we can come to experience as we and others tell of our experience. A story has a sense of being full, a sense of coming out a personal and social history.... Experience, in this view, is the stories people live. People live stories, and in the telling of them reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones. Stories such as these, lived and told, educate the self and others, including the young and those, such as researchers, who are new to their communities. (p. 415)

The importance of stories in teacher education

Leshem & Trafford (2006) view stories as educational texts and practice in that they can be seen as meaning making produced from the construction and reconstruction of experience. As such, the process of storying—that is, engaging with narrative, may be seen as a way of learning and knowing in education. Our knowledge bases are comprised of the stories we construct from our experiences. Stories create opportunities for readers to become self-reflective in that they invite readers to make the stories they read their own by opening up possibilities for continued dialogue and the sharing of new stories (Coles, 1989). Therefore, the ways in which

we reflect on and tell our stories educate us about what we know of our experiences (Schank & Berman, 2006). According to Schank and Berman (2006),

Each time we tell stories, we teach ourselves the point of the stories. The more stories we experience that share the same point, the more we can glean a larger lesson about the point itself, apart from the specific memories that illustrate it. In this way, when we tell stories, we create for ourselves lessons about our own views. (p. 220)

Autoethnography, as a narrative form of inquiry can be understood as an educational practice, which through the use of personal experience stories (Chang, 2008), students can begin to understand and explore the ways their knowledge is grounded in their experience—their actions and beliefs—within the larger social and cultural contexts. Storytelling can therefore be seen as a vehicle for engaging students of early childhood teacher education in critical reflection about images of themselves when social, cultural, historical, and political contexts are uncovered and explored as they interact with the personal (gender, class, ethnicity, language background, for example) in the stories students tell. Personal narrative autoethnography provides one way in which to critically reflect on and interpret our stories of experience in early childhood teacher education.

What do I take with me?

A Guiding Theoretical Framework for Autoethnography

Autoethnographic research methods have emerged out of a conceptual framework based on postmodern and critical perspectives that call into question the positivist methodologies

originally employed by ethnographers whose studies of the “Other” served to distinguish “the relationship between the observed and the observer” (Patton, 2002, p. 84). The goal of postmodernism is to interrogate the traditional objective scientific approach by questioning its dominance and exploring different ways of inquiring and sharing knowledge (Wall, 2006). Patton (2002) sums up the significance of these critical perspectives for illustrating the emergence of autoethnography:

Postcolonial sensitivities raise questions about imbalances of power, wealth, and privilege between ethnographers and those they would study, including critical political questions about how findings will be used. Postmodern critiques and deconstruction of classic ethnographies have raised fundamental questions about how the values and cultural backgrounds of the observer affect what is observed while also raising doubts about the desirability, indeed, the possibility of detachment. (p. 84)

By using an autoethnographic methodology for the purpose of my research paper, I contribute to a growing body of postmodern research that works to continuously challenge and question existing cultural norms, authority, and knowledge.

John Dewey: Experience and Education

Another significant influence in autoethnography is grounded in an understanding of experience as an educational phenomenon. Guiding this understanding is the work of John Dewey (1938). Autoethnography is grounded in the understanding that it is through an exploration of personal lived experience that we gain deeper “insight into the larger culture or subculture of which [we] are a part” (Patton, 2002, p. 86). This conceptualization of

autoethnography can be seen in John Dewey's (1938) educational philosophy on the nature of experience, in which he suggests that:

Experiences in order to be educative must lead out into an expanding world of subject-matter.... This condition is satisfied only as the educator views teaching and learning as a continuous process of reconstruction of experience. This condition in turn can be satisfied only as the educator has a long look ahead, and views every present experience as a moving force in influencing what future experiences will be. (p. 87)

The subject of autoethnography reflects Dewey's understanding of experience in that experience, according to Dewey (1938) is both personal and social. He indicates that individuals, while needing to be recognized as such, are also bound by a social context. Therefore, when we examine personal lived experience, we recognize that this experience does not occur in isolation or in a vacuum, but rather, in a multilayered system bound by social, cultural, historical and political contexts.

How do I do it?

Writing the Emotional as Inquiry: A Method and Process for Data Collection

Autoethnographic methods involve more than, as Chang (2008) suggest, “casually recalled and accounted memories” (p. 61). Autoethnography draws on lived experience as the primary data source, yet the methods in which it these experiences are collected vary, from self-reflection data like personal journals (e.g. Duncan, 2004) to external texts like interview transcripts (e.g. Foster, McAllister, & O’Brien, 2005), and even photographs and other media

images (e.g. Harper, 2000). In this paper, primary data is collected using a method that blends writing as inquiry (Richardson, 2003) and emotional introspection (Ellis, 1991). For Richardson (2003), writing can be understood as “a way of finding out about yourself and your topic” (p. 499). She further states that:

Although we usually think about writing as a mode of “telling” about the social world, writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of “knowing”—a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable. (p. 499)

In this inquiry, writing about my personal experience stories emerged through, what Ellis (1991) describes as emotional introspection. For Ellis, emotional introspection involves an understanding of emotion as a necessary product of individual meaning-making and thus, describing emotional reactions to experiences in autoethnographic writing is critical to any analysis of the relationship between the personal and the cultural. By including emotional experiences within narratives of personal experience, autoethnographic texts reveal “multiple layers of consciousness” (Ellis, 2004, p. 37) and produce thicker descriptions for more in-depth insights into the analysis and interpretation of the texts.

Although emotional introspection in the autoethnographic writing process provides a means of becoming more self-aware and reflexive (Ellis, 1991; Richardson, 2003), the introduction of the emotional experiences of the researcher into the research process creates a level of subjectivity most often excluded in qualitative research (Ellis and Flaherty, 1992). In the following section, the subjective nature of autoethnography is explored and criticisms related to the inclusion of emotional experience in the research process are addressed.

Is this really only about me?

Addressing Criticisms of Autoethnography

Subjectivity and Self-Indulgence

According to Ellis and Flaherty (1992), subjectivity may be seen as “human lived experience and the physical, political, and historical context of that experience” (p. 1). Whereas the dominant scientific paradigm minimizes the subjective (Wall, 2006), autoethnographic methods challenge the traditional scientific approach, thus allowing “space for the sharing of unique, subjective, and evocative stories of experience” (p. 3). Because autoethnography weaves personal experience “stories from the past with ongoing self-discovery in the present” (Chang, 2008, p. 140), it is often considered to be self-indulgent and narcissistic (Coffey, 1999). For Bochner and Ellis (1999), the claim of self-indulgence is based on the use of subjective personal experience as the primary source of data in autoethnography research methods. Experience stories of the ‘self’ in this way can be seen to be in danger of focusing too heavily on the local and personal, reducing the possibility of situating these experiences in larger social and cultural contexts.

However, Wall (2006) addresses the claim of self-indulgence by relating the connection between the personal and the cultural. According to Wall (2006), although personal narratives are written using a single subjective voice, “no individual voice speaks apart from a societal framework of co-constructed meaning” (p. 9), therefore, our experiences are both personal and social (Dewey, 1938), and as such, when we use autobiographical text as the primary source of data in autoethnography, we are in fact gaining insight into both the individual and the social context in which that individual is a part.

Ellis (2002), referring to particular experiences she had after the tragedies in the United States of America on September 11, 2001, offers her understanding of autoethnography as a method of inquiry that begins with personal lived experience, but which invites others to reflect on their own experiences and engage in dialogue. She states:

Expressing my feelings vulnerably on the page invites others to express how they feel, comparing their experiences to mine and to each other's.... [A]uto-ethnography works toward a *communitas*, where we might speak together of our experiences, find commonality of spirit, companionship in our sorrow, balm for our wounds, and solace in reaching out to those in need as well. (p. 401)

The following section opens with a narrative vignette that I present that explores the emotional unrest and challenges I faced as I explored writing as a method of inquiry. This narrative introduces the tests and trials I faced during the second phase of my autoethnographic journey as I attempted to negotiate the research methodologies I had learned in early childhood teacher education with what I was discovering during this autoethnographic research process.

Why is this so hard to do?

Tests and Trials

I soon found that I was facing challenges to a seemingly easy enough task: write your thoughts and experiences down on paper, reflect on them, and then analyze them within the larger socio-cultural context. I could not imagine how difficult a task it would soon become. The following fictionalized narrative outlines this struggle:

I really wished that it were as easy as it had been when I was an undergraduate student. Why couldn't I just write this research paper? I thought to myself, as I sat at my desk, leaning over my keyboard with my elbows resting on the desk. I cover my face with my hands. Why couldn't I just treat it as a bigger version of any of the other research papers that I had ended up putting together right at the last minute as an undergraduate student.

I sit up, rub my face with my hands, and then stretch my arms above my head. It is 12:30 a.m. I should go to sleep soon, I think to myself, I have to go to work in the morning. I swing my desk chair around and put my feet up on my bed. I'll just take a quick break. My eyes feel heavy so I close them. The silence is calming, but only for just a moment because now I have a chance to think about just how difficult a task this is for me. What is my problem? I think to myself. Why can't I get this?

It was never this hard. There was always a template to follow. First it was the five-paragraph rule-introduction with thesis statement, three paragraphs to make three different points, and then a conclusion. That worked easy enough in high school. Oh yeah, and don't use "I" statements. That does not make up a good essay. That was a hard one to get over. Then came post secondary papers. In college and university, "I" statements were acceptable, depending on the course, of course. Forget about it in a history or English course, in my experience. But, as a student in early childhood teacher education, "I" statements were acceptable, but mostly in reflective journals. For other papers-the ones that informed readers about policy for instance-"I" rarely made an appearance. Soon papers were informed by qualitative research methods. Different kind of format now: research problem and statement, theoretical framework and research questions. Don't forget about methodology, data collection, analysis, discussion, recommendations, and conclusion.

It felt familiar, even though it wasn't five paragraphs anymore. But now-especially now, at a time like this-I feel as though I am caught in a storm. In one sense, I am thrilled. I am feeling as though I can do what I want, in terms of topic to write about, but what I will soon be writing about doesn't fit neatly into the format that I have been using for the past couple of years. Where will this fit? What can I do about it? Why can't I just use what I know? It's not going to be like everybody else. So, is it really worth it?

The struggle I faced as I tried to balance the research methodologies that I had come to learn in school with what I was trying to accomplish using autoethnography during this research process was evident. I felt similar to Wall (2006), when she acknowledges her own personal challenges of using autoethnography as research method and inquiry tool. She states:

I cannot deny that my conventional habits are challenged by this entirely new way of thinking, but I suspect it is precisely the fact that I am forced to bend in a new way that is the reason behind the growth I see in myself. (p. 4)

The following section opens with a fictionalized narrative that presents the ways in which I found myself challenged by the task of generating data using writing as a method of inquiry for my research. Tenni, Smyth, & Boucher (2003) suggest that “data generation becomes problematic when working with one's own life” (p. 3). The narrative account that follows identifies the ways in which I found gathering autobiographical data problematic and sets the context in which the three main narrative episodes of my lived experience in early childhood teacher education are presented.

Narrative Interlude

Confronting Challenges

As I approach my supervisor's office my heart begins to pound. “I know what I have to do,” I think to myself, “but, why can't I just start getting it done?” I knock on the office door, half-heartedly hoping that he forgot about our scheduled update meeting. “I have nothing to show him,” I think, “He is going to kill me.” “Come in!” he says.

It has been three weeks since I have last seen him. “So much time and nothing to show for it,” I think to myself. I smile when he smiles at me, and I struggle to say hello without breaking down. “How's it going?” he asks as I remove the backpack from my shoulders. There are several books and journal articles crammed in the bag, but soon, as the result of my insecurity about my severely limited accomplishments these past weeks, they emerge from the depths of the bag and onto the floor in front of me. “Look's like you have been doing a lot of reading,” he says, staring at the new pile of papers and books near the foot of his desk.

“Yeah, I guess so,” I hesitantly respond. I hold back the tears I so wish to release. I didn't imagine it would have been this hard. “Why can't I just write something down?” I ask myself, wanting to cream it out. Instead, the emotional silenced voice trembles inside my head.

He spins around to face me and asks, "So, do you have anything for me yet?" At that very moment the aching feeling at the back of my throat is overwhelming. My eyes begin to burn. I can't hold it back any longer. The tears begin to flow.

"I have nothing!" I declare as I throw my arms up in the air and slap them down on my lap. "I don't know what my problem is," I continue. I lower my head, staring down at the pile of papers and books in front of my feet. "I just can't seem to write."

"What do you mean?" he asks. "You've written plenty of things for me before." The look of confusion on his face is bothersome. I know that I can write. In fact, I know that I write well. My professors in undergrad complimented me on my writing often. I begin to shake my head. I feel so ashamed. I don't want him to see me like this. "What's going on?" he continues.

I look up to face him, trying to collect my thoughts. "Okay," I start, "You know how Richardson (2000) suggests that writing is a method of inquiry, and that in the process of writing, you begin to discover more about yourself and your research problem."

"Yeah," he responds, "You told me this when you decided that you were going to do autoethnography for your major research paper."

"I know," I respond. I really had never imagined writing in this way before. Writing was always something that you did as a product of your thinking. The process—the rough drafts, notes on scrap pieces of paper, the actual 'thinking' part—nobody saw. It always disappeared when you wrote the final version.

I reach down for my notebook and begin flipping through the pages to where I remember writing something down that Richardson (2000) says. "She says that "Writing is also a way of knowing—a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable" (p. 923)".

"Continue," he says as he waves his hand in front of him as if to tell me to move it along. I don't want to tell him what I am struggling with. It seems so silly. But, I continue, "Well, every time I go to write something down, be it a thought or response after I have read something or whatever, I never write myself down." My voice trails off. I know what he is going to say next. "Write myself down," I say to myself. "Would he get that I am writing without the "I" I so wish to express more explicitly?"

"Write yourself down?" he asks curiously. "What, like you are finding that you aren't seeing yourself in your writing?" he asks.

"Yes, exactly!" I respond. I quickly remind him about our initial meetings, when I wasn't even sure what I would be doing for my major research paper. My interests were in technology and early childhood teacher education. I had thought that I would focus on that area of research for the purpose of the paper. When I would meet with him after I had read some scholarly research on the topic, I would inevitably pour my heart out—my frustrations, my moments of triumph, recognition, connection, and confusion about topics that emerged out of blending my own experiences in early childhood teacher education with that of the literature on teachers' perceptions, learning theories, curriculum development, and evaluation.

"Boy, do I remember," he says, chuckling at the fact that it was during those initial meetings that he actually realized that I had a voice that was dying to share what was on my mind. "I used to tell you to write everything down," he says. He gets up and takes a couple of steps to the window and opens it. "But, what does that have to do with you not being able to write yourself down, as you say it?" he asks.

“Fair enough,” I respond as I bend down to neatly pile the papers and books on the floor. I continue, “I would go home, open up the notebook and begin to write. But, what I wrote did not come out in the same way as our conversations did in your office.”

“Ok,” he responds, seemingly waiting for the point to emerge. I notice the hurried tone in his voice, so I continue, “As I skimmed through the pages I would notice a style of writing emerging over the course of those initial meetings. I realized that I was totally absent in them. I could not see myself in the writing; I essentially did not exist with the words I read. I had no visible voice, like when Patton (2002) comments about the academic style of writing he was taught to do in graduate school. He suggests that the “third-person, passive voice communicates a message” (p. 63) and that that type of “writing style still predominates in scholarly journals and books” (p. 63).”

“Ah,” he says. “The traditional academic voice you have honed over the years seems to resist any changes to method. Your personal voice appears to have been missing,” he states as he returns to his chair.

“It’s not like I don’t know how to write with a personal voice,” I state, “I have had my fair share at reflections in the early childhood education program.” Thoughts of countless reflective journals flood my mind telling of my experiences in field placements.

“But don’t forget, like McKillop (2005) suggests, “the value and purpose of reflection can easily be lost in the rush to provide [reflection] activities. It is easy to ask, or require, a student to reflect, but to ensure they do so and that they learn from that process is more difficult...” (p. 2).”

He pauses for a moment, and then continues, “Writing in autoethnography, like you have told me, is about writing yourself analytically so that you may explore and arrive at a better understanding of the larger cultural context through your experiences” (Ellis, 2004; Sparkes, 2002).

“I know, but it is the writing part that is giving me some trouble,” I say, interrupting my supervisor, before he could say another word. “I can’t seem to break out of that traditional academic voice when I am writing anything. Nothing seems to be in my personal voice. It makes it very hard to just write.”

“Well, push aside that traditional academic voice for now, and just write whatever comes to mind—be it a memory or something that has made you angry or happy.... What ever—and keep on writing, no matter what it is or what it looks like, for at least one hour straight,” he says, pausing as he notices me raise my eyebrows. He quickly continues before I can get a word out, “Don’t even think about spelling or grammar necessarily. All I want you to do is put pen to paper, fingers to keyboard, whatever. However you decide to get ‘it’ out of my head and out in the open is all that matters,” he states, looking right at me as if he was trying to get it through my head that I just had to overcome the barrier that I had created for myself.

I can’t seem to take it in fast enough. My eyebrows furrow as I look at the notebook and pen in my hand. “Just write whatever comes to mind?” I say. “What is that going to tell me about my research?” I ask to myself. As if he could read my mind, he turns to face me and says, “It is just as much about the process as it is the content when it comes to writing. Just getting into the habit of writing everything down, I have noticed, seems to be a difficult task for you. All I want you to do is write. You’ll see. Something will emerge from some mysterious part of your brain that says ‘I want you to figure this out. It’s bugging’ me!’ He swings around on his chair to respond to an instant message popping up on his screen.

I ask him how he wants me to share with him what I write. “For the next three days, write for an hour or more, however long you feel like you want to, as long as it’s at least one hour. Then type it up, and send it to me via email.”

I wasn’t sure where my writing would take me in that I had been used to writing for a specific purpose that was clearly defined and outlined according to requirements of my professional development courses. In this case, however, I was writing as a way to discover what it was within me that ultimately needed to be expressed. I reflected on Polkinghorne (1995), who suggested, “the subject-matter of stories is human action. Stories are concerned with human attempts to progress to a solution, clarification, or unraveling of an incomplete situation” (p. 11). I found myself wondering what story would emerge through my consciousness. It was as though I couldn’t bring to light the story I wished to share without resorting back to the method of writing I had adopted throughout my education.

Although I was hesitant to believe that in writing whatever came to mind would help me to dig deeper and discover what was stirring within me—what was driving my passion to continue on—I was also fearful of the unknown. To step off of a path that was known—the sense of security that the knowledge and structure that guided me during early childhood teacher education provided me—was terrifying. I thought that I would have to start fresh, as if I were entering school for the very first time. I didn’t think that what I brought with me would help me along the way. I was petrified to just cross the threshold—my own fears and doubts, my ways of knowing and practice. I felt unprepared and disoriented. I remembered Conle (2000), who stated that “...interests emerged from certain tensions in our lives. These tensions were personal tensions... emerging from the personal lifelong experiences... and tacitly pushing for particular resolutions...” (p. 196). I needed to confront and challenge whatever personal tensions were

holding me back in my writing. By recognizing that emotional introspection allowed for those tensions to reveal themselves, I found the process of writing begin to ease. Inevitably, what I had to voice in those few days of writing would ultimately change the course of my professional development.

In the second half of this paper, I present the second story of my transformative learning—my story of professional development—as I continue on this autoethnographic journey. This story picks up as I begin to gather data ‘snapshots’ of my lived experience, which I present in the form of three narrative episodes.

The following three episodes represent the writing that I had completed in those three days. The presentation of these episodes is inspired by the email format used by Bochner & Ellis (1999). It is important to note that these narrative accounts are based on my own recollection of these experiences. They are my own in the sense that they are solely based on my memory of them. It is with through this memory work (Austin & Hickey, 2007) that these data are generated, and from which an analysis of my lived experiences is explored, critically and reflexively engaging broader themes in the larger early childhood teacher education context.

Episode 1

From: Katrina
To: Professor
Date: April 22, 2008
Subject: Here you go! Writing for Day 1

Developmentally- (In)/Appropriate Practice: Shattering Foundations

“Well that was two years down the drain!” I said quietly to myself as I listened to the professor introduce the topic of the week: the culturally-biased nature of the Western understanding of Developmentally-Appropriate Practice (D.A.P.) (see Bernhard, 2003). It had seemed like any other day, any other reading. There was no, “Hold on to your seats, ladies. Boy, do I have something to tell you!” Instead, the talking continued, but I wasn’t listening any longer.

The classroom was speckled with faces I had seen for over a year, but there were only a few of us who decided to be there. In total, there were less than fifteen students. So few that the course barely scraped through the enrollment minimum to actually be part of our fourth year curriculum. And even though in that very moment my professional identity was cracking under the pressure of an awareness of cultural biases and dangerous assumptions, I could do nothing more than to look around to see what the expressions on the faces of my classmates were. Would they be as crushed as me? I looked to my classmate who seemed equally horrified, shaking her head in utter disbelief. “What?” she asked me as I slumped down into my chair. I didn’t know what she was referring to, so I just shrugged my shoulders, shook my head, and felt the urge to say, “Stop for a second! I feel like I got slapped in the face! Why aren’t you concerned that we are only now talking about this, lady? It’s fourth year, damn it! We’re almost done!”

I had spent the last three years laying the foundation for my professional early childhood teacher education training on an understanding of D.A.P., but found it both frustrating and embarrassing that in the span of a single class, maybe in a matter of a precious few minutes in one professional elective course in my final year of undergraduate studies, a huge fault line was being exposed in an almost nonchalant way. How did I not see that, and more importantly, why wasn’t this mentioned at all until now? The anger and frustration was boiling within me like a screaming kettle on the stovetop. A sense of vulnerability soon followed. What am I going to do now? Where do I go from here?

The first professional early childhood teacher education program I completed was at a local college in Toronto, Ontario three years prior to my enrollment in the ‘Ethno-Racial Training’ course I found myself in. From the first day of the program children’s development became the pillars for our foundation of appropriate professional practice. I remember making a little pipe-cleaner figure, based on the areas of development that we would soon be focusing on in depth: a pipe-cleaner heart for social-emotional development; a head for cognitive and language development; a set of arms and legs for physical development. It all seemed so right and obvious-simple categories that we could use to inform our practice as we trained to become professional early childhood educators. According to the program description, “The program is designed to help students learn about the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional needs of children, and to provide the skills and knowledge necessary for planning and carrying out programming which optimizes individual development of young children” (Seneca College, 2008, ¶ 1).

It seemed that we always referred to children’s development, no matter what we were doing in class—be it behaviour management, program planning, or family and community-related work. And, it just became second nature after a while. To talk about early childhood education meant referring to children’s areas of development and the cognitive developmental paradigm

that informed our understanding of these areas of development, as a trusted guide—something that distinguished us from the ‘babysitters’ they often referred to us as. The problem was that it was never acknowledged and recognized to be a Western understanding of children’s development, based primarily on principles that had been grounded in developmental psychology. In fact, the word “Western” was never something that was mentioned or revealed in any way. In that sense, I never found myself asking or even questioning which ‘children’ we referred to as we continued to discuss children’s areas of development.

Our foundation in child development grounded our practice. To be a ‘good’ quality early childhood educator meant having an understanding of D.A.P. Field placements allowed us to practice what it was that we were learning in the program. These experiences were primarily located in child care settings or pre-kindergarten school settings, and it was program planning (observation, development, and implementation of learning activities and centres) in the name of “development-appropriateness” that comprised the bulk of graded assignments, learning assessments and practical evaluations.

I had completed these assignments believing that D.A.P. was the guiding theoretical foundation of professional early childhood education teaching and learning for two years, with each field placement experience building on this foundation. More significantly, I did so without questioning its appropriateness in the context of rich cultural and linguistic diversity present in each of the field placement settings I found myself in. Why did this not stick out like a sore thumb? Was I forcing a way of knowing and method of practice that perpetuated inequity and exclusion?

I felt as though I got punched in the gut as I listened to the professor talk about Western notions of individualism and universalism (see Bernhard, 2003; Cannella, 2005; Walsh, 2005). I felt crushed and overwhelmed as I tried desperately to reflect on my college experience—to scan through my classes, assignments, and placements—so that I could say that I at least once questioned what ‘appropriate’ meant in the context of early childhood education developmentally-appropriate practice. But, it all collapsed when I realized that not once did I ask, “If we strive for developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood education, what is considered inappropriate and for and by whom?” Maybe if I said that, I wouldn’t have found myself feeling like the foundation with which I had been building my professional identity was in fact heavily value laden and culturally-biased.

The feeling of anger and shame was building in me. How could we not have to learn about this in our program? I asked myself, thinking about how significant it had been for me to hear about the presumptions implicit in the concept of D.A.P. Of course I would have had to learn about the concept of D.A.P. initially, but why couldn’t we have asked to think about it with a critical eye? I asked myself. “Tell me what’s wrong with D.A.P.,” I could imagine hearing an instructor in the program say. But, what course would it be in and what would that actually mean for teaching and learning in the early childhood teacher education program?

The fact that I chose the ‘Ethno-racial Training’ course in my fourth year of undergraduate studies bears some significance to the way I was feeling about questioning and challenging D.A.P. ‘Ethno-racial Training’ appealed to me because I could self identify as an ethnic minority in Canada. I was very curious what type of ‘training’ would occur in the course, and thought that we may have begun to open up a dialogue about race and ethnicity in our professional training—something that I had already had a feeling was a gap in need of filling in the program. Nowhere else did I imagine that constructs of ‘race’ and ethnicity would play a

leading role in our professional development, not even when these ideas had already been introduced in other courses like 'Diversity in Canadian Families' or 'Working with Families'. In these courses, concepts such as race and ethnicity were introduced by definition. It never felt as though we interrogated the concepts enough. It seemed as though if we did so, there would be too many toes stepped on along the way. There wasn't ever enough time dedicated to open up a dialogue about these concepts. To talk about 'race' or ethnicity would inevitably open the door to less comfortable territory like racism, discrimination, and oppression. Where would that kind of discussion lead us? Would we stray too far from our prescribed goals and objectives?

In addition to just being curious about what we would be exploring in the course, I also had a burning desire to see just who signed up for the course so that I could say, "Ha! I thought so. Of course it would be us in this course." I wanted my underlying feelings to be validated somehow. I felt that it would mainly be self-identifying 'minority' voices representing the early childhood education students who actually recognized a need for this course, and I often imagined the rest asking, "Why would I have to take this course?" Why would they choose it over any of the other professional electives that were offered? Why, in fact, was this actually an elective course to begin with? Why did I come to feel this way? Was this in fact a problem that I was beginning to recognize or identify with as a student in early childhood teacher education?

How could what I believed to be the 'truth' in early childhood education be crumbling as I was finishing my fourth and final year of undergraduate early childhood teacher education? Was it done on purpose, like, "By the way, everything that you learned to be the foundations of your professional knowledge was wrong or misleading, and now you have to figure out how to negotiate that for yourself." Where was the support I needed to help me rebuild, or pick up, the shattered pieces of my professional knowledge that I had worked so hard to acquire? Could it have enabled me to become a stronger and more confident new graduate and budding professional in the field?

I was glad to take that course, even though it made me angry most of the time. It made me question everything that I had previously learned in the context of developmentally appropriate practice, like program planning, observation and assessment, and evaluation methods. I found myself asking questions like "whose voice does this include?" and "who is excluded when they say that?"

However, the problem remained. This course was not mandatory. It wasn't part of the explicit early childhood teacher education curriculum in that no student in the program was required to take the course. Why was this the case? As the course was only offered as an elective, and given that there were barely enough people to keep the course going for the semester in which I was enrolled, the anger and frustration within me continued to fester even after graduating from the program. Was this course not worthy enough for teaching and learning in the program? Am I, therefore, not worthy of representation? The following year, the course was removed from the list of professional electives. I am still waiting to see its replacement. It has been two years.

Episode 2

From: Katrina
To: Professor
Date: April 23, 2008
Subject: Here you go! Writing for Day 2

What's Important to learn for who I will become?

“The Doll Test?” I said under my breath as the student at the front of the class began her presentation. The class was a part of a theoretical foundations course that I was taking in graduate school. I was enrolled in a new masters program in early childhood studies at the same university had previously graduated from the summer before. “Why haven’t I heard of this?” I asked myself, saying the words loud enough so that my classmates on either side of me could hear what I said. The image on the screen at the front of the class burned my eyes (Figure 2)¹. It was all I could see. Why hadn’t I seen this image before? I asked myself.



Figure 2. Classic image representing the 'Doll Test' study.

The student presenting continued, “In the 1940s, American psychologist Dr. Kenneth Clark and his wife, Mamie Clark, designed and conducted a research study on young black

¹ From Ebony Magazine, v. 2, no. 9, 1947 July, p. 21 by Parks, Gordon. Retrieved April 27, 2008 from Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. <http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/>

children (between 3 and 7 years old) to explore the psychological effects of segregation on black children in The United States by asking them questions to determine perceptions of race”².

I listened intently as she continued by outlining the procedure of the study: “In the study, children (both white and black) were presented with baby dolls. The dolls wore diapers and were the same, except for skin colour (two white dolls and two black dolls). When asked to identify the race of the dolls, most of the children identified them with ease. The children were also asked to choose the dolls they thought were ‘nice’, ‘bad’, and ‘pretty’. The majority of the children chose the white dolls to represent the ones that embodied ‘nice’ and ‘pretty’. At the same time, the dolls that were considered to be ‘bad’ had skin that was black.”

Suddenly, the words pierced through me like needles. “Why haven’t I seen this before?” I repeated in frustration. I threw down my pen and leaned back against my chair. “I can’t write anything else down”, I said to myself. The frown on my face must have spoken louder than the words I desperately wanted to scream out. Instead, I took a deep breath and leaned over to my classmate.

“I don’t see why we didn’t talk about this in my undergraduate early childhood teacher education program,” I said to my neighbour. She had also graduated from an early childhood teacher education program. She nodded and said, “We didn’t talk about a lot of things in the program.” Her statement reassured me in some way. There was a sense of acknowledgment about the way I was feeling inside. As I continued to sit and listen to the presentation, I found myself wanting to interrupt the student presenting, turn around to the professor, and scream out loud, “we should have seen this before!”

It was almost embarrassing to me that I hadn’t heard of The Doll Test. We valued issues of diversity and inclusion in the undergraduate early childhood teacher education program, but too often it seemed that we were a bit too ‘politically correct’ to identify our biases and challenge our assumptions about... Well, just about anything. We rarely spoke about ‘race’, other than in the context of ‘multiculturalism’ (whatever that really meant), and it seemed that we did little to interrogate how ideas like ‘race’ were constructed and bound by social, historical, and political contexts. Why was this the case? I hadn’t really been asked to reflect on what I thought about ‘race’. In fact, the only course that I took that ever spoke about ‘race’ was one that nearly didn’t exist because there weren’t enough students enrolled in it. What did that say about its importance in the E.C.E. curriculum? I thought to myself.

The sound of students clapping startled me as I sat there, continually asking why I hadn’t seen or heard of this research study before. The class was over when the presentation ended. As students hurried to rush out of the classroom, I remained seated. It was as if I couldn’t find the strength to get up. The weight on my shoulders was growing heavier and heavier as I began to take in what I had just experienced. “It took four years of schooling to come to know about The Doll Test,” I thought to myself as I slowly got up from the table. I began packing my backpack. “If it took until now-after graduating from an early childhood teacher education program-to be exposed to this research study, then what else haven’t I seen?” I questioned as I looked at the notepaper and textbook I was shoving into the bag.

I left the classroom with a sinking feeling in my gut. “How could this have happened?” I asked myself, “If I wasn’t in this program, in this course, on this day, I don’t even know if I

² From The Library of Congress Exhibitions (2004) “With an Even Hand: Brown v. Board at Fifty” Retrieved on April 27, 2008 from <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/brown/brown-brown.html>

would have ever heard of The Doll Test,” I thought to myself. As I walked, my footsteps seemed to get heavier and heavier. My mind was racing. Flashbacks of courses and assignments appeared and disappeared just as fast. “What was it that I learned in these courses?” I asked myself. All of a sudden, it all hit me at once: “It’s not really about The Doll Test, is it?” I said to myself. “It’s about what I didn’t see or do in the courses,” I paused for a moment, only to add a second later, “What else didn’t we get a chance to read and discuss in our early childhood teacher education curriculum?”.

The sinking feeling in my gut grew stronger as I walked towards the library. The laughter of students around me felt like a distant memory in my past. I once felt a sense of happiness and confidence. But, it seemed with every question I raised, the sea of doubt I had about my professional identity grew deeper and deeper. “What kind of teacher will I ever be if I find myself thinking, as I do now, that there was so much left out of the curriculum that was so important?” I thought to myself, “Was the result of what I was taught and how I was taught in early childhood teacher education who I am as an educator now?” I continued. I entered the library and found my way to a quiet study area. I dropped my backpack on the ground beside me. It felt like a tonne of bricks was just removed from my shoulders. But, in fact, there was no sense of relief.

Episode 3

From: Katrina
To: Professor
Date: April 22, 2008
Subject: Here you go! Writing for Day 3

It’s not what we say, but how we say it: Voice, Power, and Perception

“Katrina, what other languages do you speak?” asked the professor at the front of the lecture hall. The course was Language Development. The topic for the week was bilingualism. I knew it was coming. She had already looked to other ‘minority’-looking faces from the front of the lecture hall, asking them the same question. As those students answered her and shared a bit of their bilingual or multilingual story, anger grew within me. I stared at the front of the room thinking that I couldn’t believe what I was seeing and hearing, especially from a professor in the Early Childhood Education department.

When our eyes made contact and she asked me about what other languages I spoke, I resisted the urge to say, “Why are you asking me, lady? Is it because I am brown?” Instead, I responded, “I only speak English,” as though these were the only words that I could have actually spoken. I had no voice with which to speak honestly and truthfully; I had lost myself.

She quickly moved on without pause. "How about you?" she asked my neighbour. Her skin tone was similar to mine and I got the feeling that the question was asked specifically to my neighbour because of it. "Oh, I only speak English", the student responded. The professor did not respond but resumed asking the same question a few rows in front of me towards another group of 'minority' faces.

Why hadn't I had the guts to say what I really thought? How could I? It was she who held all of the power in this relationship. Ultimately, she would be the one to give me a grade. So, how could I let her know how I really felt when she asked me what other languages I spoke? Even though I wanted desperately to put her on the spot-tell me why she thought I spoke another language, I felt utterly powerless, even hopeless in the sense that with that one question asked, I could never truly open up in a completely honest and meaningful way. Never once did I feel so uncomfortable and self-conscious as I did staring at the front of the lecture hall, waiting for the professor to ask me that seemingly inevitable question.

I wondered if she realized what she had done. She seemed so oblivious to the fact that she was making huge assumptions about me by asking that seemingly simple question. It infuriated me to feel as though nothing could be done to rectify the situation. If I felt as though I could address what she was asking in a way that exposed her assumptions about me, would she continue to ask the same question to other 'minority' students in the program in the same way?

How about asking if I spoke any other languages. "Do you speak any other languages?" is what I would ask, but is that too subtle a difference? This is the question I ask of people now, but do the people that I ask feel as though I am presuming something of them when I ask that question? Do I ask that question of everybody I encounter in the context of language acquisition and bilingualism?

As I sat there in utter disbelief and anger, I couldn't help but remember my own teaching experiences in early childhood education. I sunk down in my chair and shook my head. "Oh my goodness," I said to myself, "I have done that!" I sighed and stared up at the ceiling of the lecture hall and close my eyes. "Crap!" I exclaimed. I knew that I was guilty of the kind of situation I found myself to be in as well. I instantly felt a sinking feeling in my gut. I had already looked at children in my field placement experiences and made assumptions about them without ever having spoken to them or gotten to know them. And, yes, skin colour had contributed to my assumptions of them around language. "Could I actually be like her?" I asked myself, hoping that the sense of guilt I was feeling would go away as quickly as it emerged.

"How could I have fallen in the same trap that made me feel so angry with my own teacher?" I asked myself. I knew that I was making assumptions about these children and that doing so went against what I had learned in my professional E.C.E. training. But, it seemed almost to be an automatic response- different skin colour potentially equals different languages spoken. Was that really what I was doing? Was that really what my own teacher was doing?

I couldn't concentrate after that, and the remaining time spent in the class was passed in a dense, angry fog. I was still fuming as I left the lecture hall. I didn't make eye contact with the professor and refused to say goodbye. I had stormed out of there. I was still feeling so angry and powerless, but I knew that I had to collect myself. I questioned whether I should have been feeling so angry. "It was only a question," I said to myself in an almost reassuring way. But, why did she ask me? It wasn't like she was asking the entire class. It only seemed to be a select few. And, what was apparent to me was that these faces were being distinguished from the rest of the class because of their skin colour.

As I huffed out of the classroom, it suddenly hit me. “Wait a minute! If I felt so singled out and powerless as an adult, was this the same kind of emotion that I could have caused the children in my field placements to feel?” My heart began to race, not because of the pace of my walk, but because I couldn’t believe that my own actions resulting from my unquestioned assumptions could have resulted in children feeling the way I did just a few hours before. “Maybe I am not really angry with the professor so much,” I thought, “but instead with myself for doing what I felt was the exact same thing.” I continued. My experience in the class just seemed to reinforce what I knew I had done wrong with the children whose skin colour I assumed had everything to do with the language they spoke.

At that very moment, I saw myself in a totally different way. “Practice what you preach,” I said to myself with a sarcastic tone. “But, what exactly am I practicing and preaching?” I asked myself. “It was only a question,” I said to myself again. “Could she have really known just how powerful those words really were?” I asked, all the while thinking to myself just the same thing of my own actions with those children in my field placements. “What would they have to say if they knew what I assumed of them?” I thought to myself. The sound of the words in my mind rung as loud as an alarm, and suddenly it hit me, “Would I actually have had a chance to hear their voices if they felt the same was as me?” I thought. “Or, would their emotions forever be silenced?”

In the following section, I present a fictionalized narrative discussion of my data in the form of a dialogue between my supervisor and myself after emailing out the three ‘episodes’ of my lived experience to him. Through this narrative account, I begin a discussion about the themes that have emerged out of the episodes using postmodern perspectives for the purpose of exploring teaching and learning towards social justice education in early childhood teacher education. I offer my insight into these episodes by reflecting on what I was able to see within them about myself and the larger social and cultural context of early childhood teacher education. I integrate scholarly research within the dialogue as it relates to different aspects of my lived experience in early childhood teacher education as expressed in the narrative episodes.

It is important to note that this fictionalized narrative of my lived experience represents numerous meetings I had with my graduate supervisor over the course of several months. Although the topics of discussion in this narrative are presented in a linear manner and over the

course of one meeting, it must be noted that the analysis of my lived experience (as (re)-presented in the three narrative 'episodes') did not occur in this way.

Narrative Discussion

Insight and Transformation

"Come in!" my supervisor yells from behind the partially closed office door. It has been a few weeks since I have sent those emails and I am anxious to chat about them with him.

"Hi," I say, "I'm sorry I'm late. I was printing off a few things and I had to pack some textbooks so that I could tell you about what happened since I wrote and sent those emails out to you." I fling the backpack I had been carrying off my shoulder and onto the floor of the office. I can't believe how full it has become once again, but this time it feels as light as a feather.

"Is that so," my supervisor says, swinging around on his chair so that he is facing me instead of the usual computer screen. "So, what's up?" he continues.

"I can't believe it all just flowed out of my pen so easily," I say, throwing my arms in the air. "It just seemed as though I needed to get those feelings off my chest," I continue. "Initially, I guess I just wanted you to feel what I felt, but as I continued to write, I was finding myself engaged in an analysis of those experiences in the larger cultural context at the same time." I am looking directly at my supervisor, anxiously waiting for some kind of response when I stop.

"Uh huh," he says, swinging back around to his computer screen. He quickly pulls up the three emails that I had sent some weeks ago. "I was pleased to see that you really didn't hold back," he says, smiling slightly as he turns to face me once again. "You really presented evocative stories. It's like what Tenni, Smyth, and Boucher (2003) state: "It is not about presenting ourselves in a good light—in charge, competent, controlled, organized.... Or how we might like to be seen. Rather, it is about writing rich, full accounts that include the messy stuff—the self-doubts, the mistakes, the embarrassments, [and] the inconsistencies..." (p. 3)."

"I know!" I say, shaking my head in disbelief. "I really didn't know where it all came from or why I felt I had to get it out, but I can't tell you enough how glad I am about it because without writing it out, I wouldn't have really had the chance to understand what it all actually meant. It's like what Ellis (2004) says about writing—how it really is 'a process of discovery' (p. 3), one in which 'you find out what you are thinking' (p. 180)."

"So, here they are," he says, as he gets up and pulls the last sheet of paper coming out of the printer. "These stories are rich," he continues. As he holds the papers together in one hand, he says, "What do you want to share with me about them?" He sits back down on his chair, swinging it around to face me once again. He begins to flip through the papers.

"You know what," I begin saying. "I... I don't even know where to begin!" I continue. There is so much that I want to say, so much that I feel I have to say about these experiences that I automatically begin to get flustered. "I just couldn't have imagined that by writing those experiences down and trying to make sense of them the number of ideas and connections and revelations that emerged." I shake my head, and then continue. "It really has been a journey in

which I have come to find out that what I built my E.C.E. knowledge on has been challenged by others in a way that makes me feel like I ultimately don't have a clear sense of what I think it means to be an E.C.E. professional. In this way, I am faced with uncovering and examining my professional identity. The ways in which I have been challenged I have ultimately described through the three episodes that I shared with you. Kumashiro (2002) refers to those kinds of moments as 'moments of crisis'. Ellis (2004) says that those moments are often epiphanies buried in our memories. It has been in those episodes of my lived experience that I ultimately realized that I was in troubled waters." I pause.

"What do you mean?" asks my supervisor.

"What I mean is that I found myself in a place where I was faced with confronting unknown and unfamiliar landscapes. It was in this space that I have faced, if I use the journey metaphor, trials and tests, and using my experience and examining my taken-for-granted assumptions (Cannella, 2005), along with having postmodern perspectives as guides along the way, I feel as though I have emerged through this research process as a transforming learner—learning more about myself and others in early childhood education."

"Tell me," he begins, "is there any one thing that stands out for you after reconstructing these experiences?" he asks, pointing to papers in front of me on the desk.

"Well, everything that I read about my own experiences in those stories, I realize, actually comes back to one thing," I say. I point to the papers on the desk and say, "My stories—my lived experience in early childhood teacher education that I have written about here—can actually be used to help me and possibly others understand what it might mean to begin exploring ideas around teaching and learning towards social justice education in early childhood teacher education."

"Really?" he says. "How so?"

"Well, first let me define what I mean by social justice education." I open up my backpack to find the notebook of quotes I have been collecting during this process. "I refer to Adams, Bell, and Griffin's (1997, p. xv) definition of social justice education. They state that social justice education 'includes both an interdisciplinary subject matter that analyzes multiple forms of oppression (such as racism and sexism), and a set of interactive, experiential pedagogical principles that help students understand the meaning of social difference and oppression in their personal lives and the social system'."

I close my notebook and continue talking. "When we talk about social justice education, then, we explore the ways in which our social positions influence and are influenced by social systems on multiple levels. We look at the ways our cultural practices and institutional structures support and/or challenge inequities that people experience based on their social positioning, group membership, as well as how social power and privilege emerge out of multiple forms of oppression on individual, institutional, and cultural levels."

"Okay, you've given me a definition for social justice education, but so what?" my supervisor says.

"Well, through this autoethnographic research process and as a result of exploring the stories of my lived experience in the context of early childhood teacher education, I have really begun to identify and address some of the main principles of social justice education like questioning taken-for-granted assumptions about teaching and learning, power dynamics, voice, and identity in a more personally meaningful way."

My supervisor leans back in his chair, looks directly at me and asks me to continue.

I roll my chair forward towards the desk and grab the stack of papers that we have been pointing to. I flip through them to get the story about Developmentally-Appropriate Practice (D.A.P.). I say, "Okay, look.... Remember this one? The one about me coming to realize just how culturally-biased the concept of developmentally-appropriate practice was and not knowing what I was going to do because I had been learning about it and practicing it all of time?" I wait for a response, hoping that my brief synopsis would jog his memory.

"Yes, I remember," he says, and before he can say another word, I continue.

"That experience really forced me to begin questioning the theoretical foundation and knowledge base I had established as a early childhood education student. The problem was that I hadn't until that time thought to question what I had been learning." I pause, only long enough to take a sip from the bottle of water I had in my backpack. Then I continue, "I realized that I was using D.A.P. in my field placements and it was only until that class that I was made aware of the fact that there were scholars and practitioners out there who actually thought that it was culturally-biased and in fact, oppressive in many ways." I reach down for my backpack and place my bottle of water back inside. "It wasn't until I had begun my research-identifying themes and reading about what others had to say about D.A.P. that I really started to understand just how pervasive the developmental discourse in early childhood education is, like Stott & Bowman (1996), Zimiles (2002), Cannella (2002) and Ryan & Grieshaber, (2005) suggest, and from seeing that I realized that if we don't recognize it as such, it really is easy it is to remain complicit in working to maintain the status quo if we don't constantly have opportunities to explore our knowledge base and practices in early childhood teacher education" I stop, waiting for a response.

"And this research process—writing autoethnography—has enabled you to reflect on your experience in the program this way?" he asks.

"Okay, yes, but I really need to take a few steps back first," I respond. I roll back towards my backpack. I have already started to do some research about this experience. I open up the bag and begin to empty out its contents. There are textbooks and journal articles crammed deep within the bag, but I am not looking for those right now. I have my own version of the D.A.P. story that I have been working on. I grab a hold of the folder containing research on D.A.P. and open it up on my lap.

"I didn't really give that class much thought after I had finished, but in writing about my lived experience through this process, I realized that the experience I had in that class really 'stuck to my ribs'. After writing that narrative, I went back to explore in more detail what that class was all about to me. I think maybe this will help," I say, pulling out a section of typed up work that I had been putting together for this meeting. "Have a look. I wrote this last week to support my narrative account of the D.A.P. class," I continue.

I hand the text over to my supervisor. "I started doing some more research on D.A.P. because of my memory of this class. That class really struck a chord for me, so I wanted to find out more about just how influential D.A.P. has been and as a result of my research, I realize just why we need to examine grand narratives like developmentalism, of which D.A.P. emerged and is practiced-more carefully in the program."

He begins to read:

Because of our multicultural and linguistically diverse society, the significance of developmental theory training in the field of early childhood education (E.C.E.) appears to require a much closer examination for both the philosophy of education that pre-service E.C.E. training funds itself on, as well as the practical experiences through which E.C.E. students apply their theoretical knowledge. With children's cognitive abilities being extensively valued and measured in dominant Western educational discourse, the emphasis on predictable and sequential ages and stages in children's overall development has contributed to a functional and widely acknowledged model of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (D.A.P.) in early childhood education. This has been largely developed and promoted by The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in the United States. According to Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, pp. 8-9):

Developmentally appropriate practices result from the process of professionals making decisions about the well-being and education of children based on at least three important kinds of information: 1) what is known about child development and learning-knowledge of age-related human characteristics that permits general predictions within an age-range about what materials, activities, interactions or experiences will be safe, healthy, interesting, achievable, and also challenging to children; 2) what is known about the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child in the group to be able to adapt to and be responsive to inevitable individual variations; and 3) knowledge of the social and cultural context in which children live and develop to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful, relevant, and respectful for the participating children and their families.

Not only have the principles of D.A.P. been used in the delivery, guidelines, and training of professionals in the field of early childhood education, more significantly, the NAEYC document separates cultural diversity from what they suggest are universal ideas of child development. Walsh (2005) and others (Bailey & Pransky, 2005; Bernhard et al., 1998; Gardiner & Kosmitzki, 2005; Roberts-Fiati, 1997) have asserted that culture is an ecological system that is integrated directly to learning and development, and to distinguish them from one another will lead to distortions in the perception of not only optimal development of children from culturally diverse backgrounds, but also in the relationships and expectations E.C.E. professionals have with children and their families.

According to Bernhard et al. (1998), the principles of the D.A.P. document are founded on Western dominant cultural values and practices, and it is through this cultural view that the universal assumptions of developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood education have come to pass as acceptable and recommended. They challenge the concept of universal indicators of child development by reflecting on parts of the document through five categories

(culture and universality; parent-professional partnerships; language issues and bilingualism; anti-bias education; the explanation of school failure for certain groups) relating cultural and socioeconomic diversity to examples of what is deemed as appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. By doing so, illustrations of how the dominant Western cultural discourse fails to take into consideration the culturally diverse context of both Canadian and American societies come into focus.

The failure to acknowledge and explore areas of cross-cultural difference including independence and interdependence, as well as linguistic diversity and socioeconomic status accentuates both the embedded developmental theory from which the D.A.P. principles have emerged, as well as the need to further explore the contexts in which D.A.P. is practiced (Bernhard et al., 1998). Noting that different cultural groups may not place as high a value on independence as the D.A.P. document signifies, Bernhard et al. (1998) assert that it is necessary to embrace a sociocultural and ecological approach to D.A.P. in early childhood education and care. In doing so, there would be greater potential for stronger, more collaborative and holistic relationships with families.

Bernhard et al. (1998) explore the benefits of linguistic diversity and home language promotion. Whereas the D.A.P. document superficially suggests that English should be learned in addition to the maintenance of the home language, the document is limited in its suggestion that early childhood settings within the dominant cultural context challenge home language growth. According to Bernhard et al. (1998), specific measures should be addressed in the document for not only hiring staff that speak the children's home language, but also through the promotion of bilingualism and the equitable treatment of all languages spoken in the early childhood setting.

Of profound concern in the D.A.P. document is the lack of attention made to the effects of discrimination and bias both within the child care context and in the greater society. Strategies for early intervention within an anti-bias framework is necessary, and the need for professionals in the field that reflect the racial backgrounds of the children within child care settings is recommended (Bernhard et al., 1998). Although the D.A.P. document acknowledges that certain groups of children are faced with more challenges that ultimately affect their progress through school, Bernhard et al. (1998) suggest that it does little to address where the responsibility lies for change. Within an ecological framework, the D.A.P. document would have to consider socioeconomic factors as integral aspects of child development.

As practitioners in the field of early childhood education, whose standards and measures of quality childcare are guided by the NAEYC document on Developmentally Appropriate Practice, the implications of this understanding of D.A.P. are profound. We must begin to question in the D.A.P. document, as well as in other curricular tools, which hold significant value as teaching and learning tools in early childhood teacher education. Within our culturally and linguistically diverse society, quality childcare and early childhood education must not be based solely on the dominant cultural context. Without a more

careful examination of the theory in which this document is framed, as well as the context in which it is set, we will continue to perpetuate the widening gap between those children who meet the standards and norms set in the document and those children who just fall through. To measure quality childcare based on the D.A.P. document would challenge our ability as professionals to create collaborative, long lasting and responsive relationships with the families of the children in our care as the principles and guidelines that are intended to be followed would limit information sharing and a more dynamic understanding of the cultural, linguistic, and economic contexts of the child's development.

My stomach is in knots as I watch my supervisor continue to flip through the pages. I get up and walk over to the window. As I look outside, I hear my supervisor say, "Interesting." He continues to read:

Although Piagetian cognitive-developmental theory continues to permeate throughout all areas of child development in pre-service E.C.E. training, a critical exploration of the dominant Western cultural perceptions and practices around school readiness and early elementary education that are based on the concepts of this theory is necessary to interrogate the framework from which early intervention and assessment occurs in the early years. Roberts-Fiati (1997) suggests that when we observe children's development:

Our interpretations are always made against our background conceptions on what children should be like. These notions are formed in different contexts: in childhood, as a function of our personal experiences growing up; from observations we make of the consequences to self and others.... Those of us who are engaged in the study of children also form these conceptions from the professional training we receive. (p. 124)

The theoretical knowledge acquired by E.C.E. students and professionals about developmental theory can be further explored through the developmental goals and outcomes for children in early childhood education and care settings. According to Rosenthal (1999):

In most Anglo-American child care studies premises about childhood and development, social values and the developmental goals or competencies valued by industrialized Western cultures are at the heart of the outcome measures used.... As a result, nearly all measures focus on individual achievement of competence, adjustment, or adaptiveness in social, emotional, and intellectual development. These measures reflect the "hopes" placed on the potential contribution of child care, as well as the "concerns" about the possible damage it may cause. (p. 489)

Dominant Western cultural norms are also explored in Bailey & Pransky (2005). Best practice in constructivist pedagogy, which is developed within the Piagetian cognitive-developmental theory (ShIPLEY, 1998), is seen to produce a mismatch between majority and minority cultural values. According to Bailey & Pransky (2005), the constructivist pedagogy is viewed as universalized “because they purport to represent the best learning of all children” (p. 20). However, when learning is viewed as a cultural process (i.e. a sociocultural approach), these universalized best practices clearly identify preferred “cultural ideals, beliefs, and values that are grounded in a particular context” (p. 20). Therefore,

If educators embrace pedagogical theory that claims their own cultural best practices are best for all children, it follows that they also believe these practices must be superior to the pedagogical traditions of other cultures. (Taylor, 2005, p. 21)

When developmental theory results in the practice of culturally biased assessment in early childhood settings, the implications are profound. If our dominant Western early childhood discourse has weaved dominant developmental theory into measures of competence, success, and accountability in the school system, how then can E.C.E. students utilize developmental theory? Furthermore, does this mean that developmental theory does not serve a useful function in early childhood education at all? I would suggest that abandoning a developmental perspective would narrow our attempts, as early childhood professionals to gain a better understand of the ways in which we influence children, in either a constructive or detrimental way.

“All of this from that one story of your lived experience in the program.” I hear my supervisor ask. I quickly turn around and find my way back to my chair as he hands over the papers I gave him to read.

“I really can’t believe how easy it was to put that all together after my narrative account of my lived experience the class,” I respond, grabbing hold of the work that I had done about the D.A.P. episode. “It really is like what Ellis (2004) says about her writing process. I reach for the notebook of quotes that I have written down during this process and begin flipping to the section on autoethnography. I continue, “She states “I tend to write about experiences that knock me for a loop and challenge the construction of meaning I have put together for myself... I write when my world falls apart or the meaning I have constructed for myself is in danger of doing so” (p. 33).” I close the notebook and place it on my lap with the rest of my work. “I feel like Ellis. This experience really hit me hard, and now, it seems, is the time when it is beginning to make sense beyond my initial reaction to it, and for that matter, in the larger cultural context of early childhood teacher education.”

“Hmm,” my supervisor says with a smile on his face. “It really does seem that you have taken that experience and examined it in ways that you hadn’t actually been able to do so before now.”

“Well, yah! That’s what autoethnography is all about, right?” I respond. “It’s like what Grumet (1987) says about writing narratives: It “pulls experience out of a continuum and places

it in a new frame where it can be considered” (p. 457) in multiple ways.” Before giving him a chance to speak, I continue. “The truth is, writing about and examining this experience really forced me to reflect on the ways in which D.A.P. was introduced in the early childhood teacher education program, as well as how it was and continues to be integrated and practiced in the curriculum and during our field placements. Ultimately, I have moved beyond my own personal experience into the broader cultural context of early childhood teacher education in that I am beginning to think about knowledge claims, discourse, and curriculum development from my one experience, which until I reflected on it further, was just locked away in my memory.”

I pause, looking at my supervisor at his desk. Then I continue, “It is through this autoethnographic process that I have begun to recognize, acknowledge, and challenge the discourses that have been my guide, my knowledge, my understanding of professional identity in early childhood education. When we are able to explore our taken-for-granted assumptions and epistemological claims in early childhood teacher education, we can take the steps necessary to begin teaching and learning towards social justice education because we become more conscious of the ways in which power and privilege interact with what we learn and teach, like Cochran-Smith (2004) suggests.”

I notice that my supervisor is looking intently in my direction. It feels as though he is beginning to understand where I am coming from. Suddenly, as if I am at a podium in front of some class, I get up and continue talking. “What that means is that although the knowledge that we gain in our program really sets us up to believe that what we are doing is right, we actually need to interrogate and challenge the theory and practice because, like Zygmunt-Fillwalk (2005) states, “[our] belief systems are the foundations upon which teachers build their pedagogy and upon which their interactions with students are based” (p. 134), and if we don’t start paying attention to what we are learning, we may just be engaging in oppressive practices.”

I pause for a moment, waiting to hear what he has to say. When it seems as though he is waiting for me to continue, I say, “It’s like what I wrote here.” I flip through the pages I had given him to read to the conclusion to the section I had been working on. I begin to read out loud from my own work:

If we continue to follow the principles and guidelines suggested by literature and research based on universalistic norms that are rooted in the dominant Western cultural view of child development, then we will continue to perpetuate structural inequalities that are oppressive and severely limited. Therefore, the implications for learning about developmental theory in the E.C.E. undergraduate program are profound. Contemporary developmental theory, as Walsh (2005) suggests, has to be established and framed within the context of culture. Knowing that learning is a cultural process will encourage E.C.E. students to more critically examine Western dominant developmental theories that have conventionally been used in the field in both education and child care settings. As a result, a more holistic understanding of early childhood education and care can flourish.

Gardiner & Kosmitzki (2005) suggest that by framing developmental theory within a sociocultural approach, we will benefit from “opportunities to expand [our] awareness and sensitivity to global similarities and differences in human development and... reduce any ethnocentric thinking” (p. 9). Thus, using

a sociocultural theoretical framework to begin understanding children's development would encourage early childhood teacher education students to become critical, self-reflective, divergent thinkers who realize the need to put on and continuously wear 'critical lenses'.

My supervisor gets up from his chair and walks over to the window. "So, are you trying to tell me that we need to begin questioning the discourses found in early childhood teacher education curriculum, in general?" He opens the window and begins rearranging the plants on the windowsill.

"Well, yes!" I respond. "But, I wouldn't have thought to do that without having gone through this process. What student would turn around to their teacher and say 'why are we learning this and not that?' and not live to regret it some how? Come on... Who really holds the power in that dynamic?"

"Aren't you basically doing that already?" he responds. I pause for a moment, looking at what he is doing at the window. "Yes, I guess so," I say. "But, it's easy when it is just like this." I gesture with my hand the invisible space between him and myself. "When it's just you and me—engaging in a dialogue to interrogate ideas and explore new ways of knowing as the topics emerge, it doesn't feel so scary. I don't have to be thinking about the consequences.

"Are you referring to your experiences with the Doll Test and the language development class when you tell me that the consequences you were afraid of prevented you from engaging in learning in a more dialogical way?" he asks, returning to his chair.

"Of course!" I respond, nodding my head up and down. "Both of those experiences really left me feeling like I couldn't really speak my mind... Like I had no voice or power, even though I had something to say and I thought it was important." I stop for a moment, only to grab my notebook full of quotes. I frantically flip through the pages to the section on voice and identity. I begin to read out loud, "Elbaz (1991) says, 'having 'voice' implies that one has a language in which to give expression to one's authentic concerns, that one is about to recognize those concerns, and further that there is an audience of significant others who will listen' (p. 10)."

I close the notebook and continue, "I really didn't think that I had a strong enough voice to express my concerns. Not only that, I didn't really think that in the bigger picture the concerns that I had were really that important. What I needed to focus on was not really the questions and concerns that I was having, but rather, what assignments and projects I had to complete to fulfill the requirements of the program."

I look to my supervisor. He is busy typing away on his keyboard. "Are you listening to me?" I ask, hoping that what I was saying was sinking in somehow.

"Of course I am," he responds. "I do have a class to teach in half an hour, you know. Continue."

"It's like my experience with the Doll Test. It just didn't make sense to me why it was that we hadn't ever heard of or discussed the implications of that study. To me, the Doll Test story that I wrote actually helped me to begin understanding its significance for the social constructedness of race as a discourse in early childhood teacher education and the power constructions like race and even gender hold for self-concept, self-worth, and identity formation." I pause for a moment, but quickly continue. "We often spoke about gender, but how little though it seemed we actually talked about race by itself."

“Why do you think that you hadn't come across that study, or any mention of it, in your experience in early childhood teacher education before?” my supervisor asks.

“First, I don't know that it's not being taught anywhere else, but in my experience in early childhood teacher education, I don't think that it was ever mentioned because.... Well, maybe it just didn't seem important enough to mention. Or, maybe it was already assumed that we would have come across it in some other grade.... In elementary school or high school when we learn about... Well, when did we learn about race, really? I don't really remember spending a whole lot of time talking about what race was all about, other than in the context of multiculturalism or diversity.” I respond. I raise my eyebrows and lift the corner of my mouth. Flashbacks of classes in elementary school and high school flood my mind, but none seem to become clear. It's as if I don't have any distinctive memories to draw upon that relate to discussions about race. I shake my head and say, “If only I had seen that study before.”

“So, now what?” my supervisor asks. I almost forgot he was there. “What do you do now?”

I take a moment to collect my thoughts. “That study explored race in a way that totally relates to young children and early childhood education. That's what I thought when I initially saw it during that presentation. We could have introduced the study in the program for any discussion about race or identity or social-emotional development, but we didn't. It just never made it into any discussion. I never read it on any course outline or weekly seminar related to race, identity, toys...Whatever. You name it, that study could have been used to discuss several things that were a part of the curriculum, but it wasn't until after I graduated from the program that I actually heard of it.”

“What do mean by ‘several things’,” my supervisor asks. I was hoping that he would ask that very question because I had already begun to think of all the ways that one study could have been used in the program. It was like the concept webs that we used for brainstorming—from one idea or theme, several other related themes and ideas begin to emerge.

“Okay, toys, for instance. In early childhood education settings we use toys all the time. Children play with all sorts of toys, and we learn in our program that the toys that we provide children with should be representative of them, be age-appropriate, and durable, among other things. But, when you hear about the Doll Test, all of a sudden, toys take on a whole new light in the sense that you don't really get a chance to see just how differently children may look at the toys that we provide them with. Maybe I just don't remember doing it as a child, but it seems, from that study, that we attach value and meaning to something as simple as a doll.”

I pause for a moment to reflect on my own experiences with dolls. “I lied. I do remember doing that. The dolls I often played with at home and at school were White. I didn't have dolls that looked like me. And, I rarely played with Black dolls because, first of all, they didn't look like me, but most of all, they weren't the ones that I saw on TV or in books or on full display at the toy store. It was always the White dolls.” I pause and raise my eyebrows in amazement. “All of this would have made a great discussion or, at least, a great launching-off point to start talking about social-emotional development, our perceptions of race, and even our assumptions about children's play.” I stop and lean back on my chair. I shake my head and say, “Look at how much we missed out on just from this one study. What else did we miss out on then?”

“Fair enough,” my supervisor says. “Continue.”

“The fact that there was no mandatory class in the program that made race and issues around race its primary focus really bugs me. We never actually took up race explicitly as a discourse in ways that I think we needed to. We never deconstructed its meaning in the context of education or the institution of learning. The only reason that I was able to begin exploring race as a discourse in our lives was because of the sociology courses that were offered as professionally related electives. I took a few of them, but we weren't required to take them.” I stop talking and get up to stretch my legs.

I begin to pace around the small office. “This means that in terms of an early childhood teacher education curriculum, what I was realizing from this experience was that I was beginning to question what exactly we were being taught in the program. How was the structure of the program addressing race and issues around race when what we were seeing and hearing more about was diversity and inclusion? Race was being avoided in a way that made its implicit recognition apparent through the lens of diversity and inclusion, and that just wasn't good enough,” I say as I wave my hand horizontally, as if I was cutting through the air with the edge of my hand. I sit back down on my chair and begin rolling slightly back and forth.

I continue, “From this event in my lived experience as a student in early childhood teacher education, I was beginning to realize that the construct of race deserved a much more substantial place in what we were learning in the program.”

“Huh,” my supervisor says, “so much from just writing down a memory.” I pause for a moment, but then continue speaking. “This Doll Test experience ultimately got me thinking about a few things.” I begin counting with my fingers: “1) What issues are taken up in the program, 2) how we construct meaning from these explorations and 3) how and what is valued. The same is reflected in my D.A.P. story as well.” I stop. I feel as though I have been talking without taking a breath. I can hear myself breathe.

“It's things like this that have made me begin to question early childhood teacher education, in general. What is it that we are actually learning?” I pause for a moment, but continue, “Then again, are we actually learning, or are we just being trained to become ‘good’ early childhood educators?” I look to my supervisor. He raises his eyebrows. I continue, “We already know what that can mean. Remember the implications of Developmentally-Appropriate Practice? If we don't begin to question our taken-for-granted assumptions, especially in the context of early childhood teacher education, then we may very well be supporting a dominant view, but at the same time be engaged in oppressive acts and practices,” I stop. “Just look at how I was feeling in the language development class.”

I pause to see if he is following my train of thought. I can't tell, but I continue on. “If I was feeling powerless and silenced when the professor made the comment, ‘what other languages do you speak?’ and I had realized that I was doing the same thing with children in my field placements, then I too was engaging in ways that could have left the children I was caring for feeling the way I did...Like I couldn't say, ‘why are you assuming that of me?’ Just that little question could have begun a transformative learning process. It's like what Zygmunt-Fillwalk (2005) suggests, “Becoming cognizant of personal bias is a requisite step in personal modification and potential social action” (p. 143).”

“Alright,” my supervisor says as he raises his arms and folds them behind his head as he leans back on his chair.”

I continue, “Kumashiro (2004) echoes this clearly,

I am suggesting that learning to teach [for social justice] involves disrupting this desire for certainty...I am suggesting that we need to learn to want to teach in ways that center the uncertain elements of our teaching. Admittedly, asking students to raise critical questions about the necessarily partial and political nature of what and how they are learning requires a level of vulnerability and unpredictability for which we as educators have rarely been prepared. But perhaps the desire for certainty and control is what has prevented us from imagining and engaging in ways of teaching that would allow us to escape the oppressive relations that have seemed inescapable in education. (p. 115)

“Okay, yes, it truly does seem like the Doll Test would have been something to include in the curriculum somewhere. You have shown me a number of topics that could have been addressed using the Doll Test for provoking discussion, potentially all of which could raise critical questions and help us engage in dialogue that could disrupt currently oppressive ways of knowing, like Kumashiro suggests,” my supervisor says. “But, even though it wasn't found anywhere, don't you feel that you have gained something even in the absence of that potential discussion about the Doll Test?”

“Today, maybe, but at that time, no. I was just so frustrated by the fact that we hadn't even seen it before,” I quickly respond. “In fact, it has only been through this autoethnographic writing process, and examining the meaning found within my stories, that I couldn't believe that I never once asked what it was that we were supposed to actually learn as early childhood educators.”

“That's pretty important, I would think,” my supervisor says. “What do you think we are supposed to be learning here?”

“We should be getting to know ourselves—learning about how we learn and what influences our understanding of teaching and learning through a sociocultural framework. We need to find ways of uncovering and challenging our taken-for-granted assumptions about teaching and learning.” I respond. “The point is, I never had to think about my assumptions about teaching and learning, really. Everything was just provided for me. Right from the start...Of school, that is. Nothing has changed really. Then, I would listen to the teacher teach the lesson, do my assigned homework, and study for tests, which often meant memorizing facts. Now, I just enroll in the courses that I am required to take, receive the course outline, which tells me what I am expected to learn and how to achieve those expectations, and basically, do the same thing as when I was younger—do my homework, which is typically reading and reflecting and complete my assignments. Why would I think to challenge that system if it is what I have been a part of for so long? In any case, when it comes to school now, I would assume that what is on the course outline is what was deemed necessary to become a professional early childhood educator.”

“Isn't that an assumption on your part?” he asks. “Why didn't you think to question what it was that you were learning?”

“Well, I don't remember being taught to question what I supposed to be learning. So, I don't suppose I actually thought to question the curriculum...well, besides when I was going to use trigonometry or Shakespeare in my life after school, of course,” I say, smiling. “It really is like what Freire (2006) describes as the *banking* model of education. Information was being deposited into us by our teachers, and we just took it. That was what it meant to learn. We never

questioned where that information came from, who determined what we would be learning, and why it was that information that we needed to learn. Illich (1970) speaks to this clearly when he talks about the institutionalization of schooling.” I grab my notebook of quotes and flip to the page on *Deschooling Society* by Ivan Illich (1970). “He stated,

Many students, especially those who are poor, intuitively know what the schools do for them. They school them to confuse process and substance. Once these become blurred, a new logic is assumed: the more treatment there is, the better are the results; or, escalation leads to success. The pupil is thereby “schooled” to confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new. His imagination is “schooled” to accept service in place of value. Medical treatment is mistaken for health care, social work for the improvement of community life, police protection for safety, military poise for national security, the rat race for productive work. Health, learning, dignity, independence, and creative endeavor are defined as little more than the performance of the institutions which claim to serve these ends, and their improvement is made to depend on allocating more resources to the management of hospitals, schools, and other agencies in question.” (Illich, 1970, ¶ 1)

I pause to take a sip of water. “It really wasn't until I experienced that class on Developmentally-Appropriate Practice that I began thinking about all of this,” I continue. “Even then, if I didn't choose to take that course, would I really ever have found myself thinking that there was a problem with it?”

My supervisor turns to me and says, “Freire (2006) did say that the *banking* concept of education was what had often used in the past, and he said that we need to begin problem-posing in order for us to become liberated from forms of institutional oppression. Discussing what you have with me today leads me to believe that you have begun a process of what Freire called *conscientization*—of becoming critically conscious—or, “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and [taking] action against the oppressive elements of reality” (p. 36), it seems. This autoethnographic research process is helping you gain insights into the larger early childhood teacher education context of which you have been a part for the last five years.”

“Yes, but, it wasn't really until after I graduated from early childhood teacher education that I started to put it all together!” I exclaim, throwing my hands up in the air. “I would never have gotten to this point—of even thinking about these kinds of questions—if I didn't travel this path.”

“Well, hopefully, all students who graduate from early childhood teacher education programs do find themselves beginning this kind of problem-posing and questioning, at some point, and it seems that autoethnography just might be one way in which to achieve this,” my supervisor says. “But, we all have to learn the concepts first before we begin to start problematizing them.”

“Yes, that's true. But, it seems that not all of the courses in early childhood teacher education do both—the teaching of concepts and questioning and analyzing them...Deconstructing them,” I respond. “Shouldn't our early childhood teacher programs be shaped so that, like Cochran-Smith (2004) says, “The goal is building, interrogating, elaborating, and critiquing

conceptual frameworks that link action and problem-posing to the immediate context as well as to larger social, cultural, and political issues” (p. 15)?”

“Yes, go on,” my supervisor says.

“We need to start taking the steps necessary to learn to teach for social justice education in early childhood teacher education programs. We have to identify issues that are meaningful to us as they emerge from our personal and professional experiences. We have to discuss them, break them down, figure out where they come from and how they influence our lives. Unless we begin seeing ourselves as part of the problem, we might not be able to change and learn to become part of the solution. That is truly what I mean by becoming critically conscious about our complicity in all of this.”

I notice that my supervisor is beginning to pack up his belongings, so I quickly glance at the clock on the wall. “Yikes! You are going to be late for class,” I say as I begin to grab the many books and papers that have spread across the office floor like a large paper carpet.

“No kidding,” he says, “but it was well worth it.”

“I am really excited about where I am now. All I have to do now is write the final product. I already know what I am going to do. I will formally write this up in the next couple of weeks,” I say as I fling my backpack over my shoulders and begin to head for the office door.

“I am looking forward to reading it,” my supervisor says. “Actually, I am looking forward to experiencing it.”

The Transformation

The introspective nature of the personal narrative autoethnographic research process allowed me to be transformed in the sense that the emotions I was feeling since graduating from early childhood teacher education had not escaped me, but were now allowing me to gain insights about their place in my developing professional identity. Even though I had dismissed them initially, they were deeply embedded in my being—my identity—as a new professional early childhood educator. My experiences meant something more than just a topic for reflective journaling (as I had found myself believing as a student in early childhood teacher education). My experiences were the data of my research (Ellis, 2004). To realize this was to change the way I understood how our experiences shape the way we think, know, and learn. I began to understand how our experiences are never our own—that they are socially constructed—in the sense that our multiple subject positions create a dynamic exchange of experiences with one

another, ultimately constructing multifaceted dimensions of ourselves that some times we are not aware of (Dewey, 1938).

The Return

This exploration of my lived experience in a professional early childhood teacher education program reveals a number of important ideas that are relevant to any discussion or potential transformative learning opportunity related to social justice education in early childhood teacher education programs. It has been through this autoethnographic research process—of learning to reflect on and become critically engaged with the stories of my lived experience in the larger cultural context—that, like Watt (2007) suggests, has “permitted me to make meaningful connections between theory and practice” (p. 83).

Next Steps

In this paper I have tried to show how autoethnography is a research method and pedagogical tool that can be used for an inquiry-based approach for exploring ideas around teaching and learning towards social justice in early childhood teacher education by presenting a number of fictionalized narrative accounts of my lived experience during the research process. Social justice education, as I have presented it through narratives of personal experience, involves identifying and exploring: taken-for-granted assumptions and epistemological claims; social power and the ways in which power influence our social positions; voice and authority; and the interaction of these principles in influencing our sense of identity and our prior experiences. In this inquiry, I have primarily used an exploration of race in my narrative

episodes as a construct with which I have identified ways to explore social justice education using autoethnography as a vehicle for critical reflection.

Autoethnography and Professional Identity: an Inquiry-based approach for Social Justice in Early Childhood Teacher Education

Chang's (2008) "building blocks" (p. 29) of autoethnography—culture, self, and others—can be seen as a way to begin exploring the ways in which autoethnography attempts to address a sociocultural understanding of the personal in the context of early childhood teacher education. Currently, an understanding of these concepts (culture, self, and others) is foundational in all Ontario-based early childhood teacher education programs. A search for curriculum standards in early childhood teacher education programs in Ontario led me to the Ontario Ministry of Education website. At the time I had found myself questioning what it was that we were expected to learn in our early childhood teacher education programs. According to the Ontario Ministry of Education, Early Childhood Education Program Standard (2002), all graduates of early childhood education diploma programs must demonstrate the ability to do the following with respect to cultural, personal, and social understandings:

- Develop an understanding of cultural identity by linking personal history to broader cultural study;
- Develop intercultural understanding through reasoned reflection on various cultures' responses to universal human issues;
- Consider one's expectations and values and analyze their impact on personal goals;
- Develop informed understanding of social organization and institutions and of ongoing issues in relationships between individuals, groups, and societies;
- Develop informed understanding of social trends, social change, and social problems and of implications for social and personal response. (p. 35)

These broad goals and learning objectives may be seen to set the foundation for teaching and learning for social justice in early childhood teacher education programs in that they can be seen as discourses necessary for early childhood teacher education programs to reflect on and

engage with as students begin to develop their professional identity. Using autoethnographic methods, we may begin a critical exploration of the ways in which these goals and learning objectives play out through our lived experience, as well as our teaching choices, and knowledge bases. As a result, we may begin to uncover and examine the ways in which our professional identity is shaped by larger social and cultural contexts. This type of discourse analysis, reflected in autoethnographic methods, can be used to begin thinking about the underlying principles of social justice education. As Danielewicz (2001) states:

Individuals are constituted subjects; their identities are produced through participation in discourse. As active participants in a variety of discourses, individuals have agency to shape selves. On the other hand, discourses (and all other participating individuals) affect the development of those identities. Identities then are the result of dynamic interplay between discursive processes that are internal (to the individual) and external (involving everyone else). (p. 11)

The interconnectedness of cultural, personal, and social understandings in the context of identity development and early childhood teacher education creates a space in which to explore concepts of diversity and inclusion—elemental themes in many early childhood teacher education programs. Autoethnography may be seen a pedagogical tool by which we may begin to explore more explicitly the concepts of culture, self, and others in the context of diversity and inclusion in early childhood teacher education programs—all of which are necessary to begin teaching and learning towards social justice education—by engaging students’ lived experience in personal narrative form. Ayers (1998) suggests that,

Teaching for social justice demands a dialectical stance: one eye firmly fixed on the students—Who are they? What are their hopes, dreams, and aspirations? Their passions and commitments? What skills, abilities, and capacities does each one bring to the classroom? —and the other eye looking unblinkingly at the concentric circle of context—historical flow, cultural surround, economic reality. (p. xvii)

Although Ayers (1998) contends that the sociocultural, political, and economic contexts in which students live play a significant role in establishing the complexities of teaching for social justice, I would suggest that, in addition to this contextual eye (the other being students), a third one has to be recognized as critical to any commitment to teaching and learning for social justice education. This may be referred to as an ‘inner’ personal eye. French (2002) articulates this understanding when she asks the following questions:

Does our identity influence what kind of school—White, upper-class, underprivileged, racially diverse, rural, urban—we teach in? How much does our personal identity influence our pedagogies and our everyday practices? How do we develop a broader professional identity that extends beyond our personal experiences growing up and incorporates a commitment to teaching for social justice? (p. 39)

Implications of this inquiry identify the importance of personal experience stories in the development and implementation of a social justice framework in early childhood teacher education as narratives of lived experience provide a means to scaffold knowledge claims with that of practical experience.

Autoethnography for Transformative Learning

Through this autoethnographic inquiry, I have embarked on a journey that has led me through the depths of my personal experience stories, which has allowed me to engage in a transformative learning process through emotional introspection and critical reflection in the larger cultural context of early childhood teacher education. Spry (2001) suggests, “autoethnographic methods recognize the reflections and refractions of multiple selves in contexts that arguably transform the authorial ‘I’ to an existential ‘we’” (p. 771).

Writing autoethnography may allow students of early childhood teacher education, as well as teacher educators, the opportunities necessary to begin questioning epistemological claims as we work to identify and challenge them in our personal experience stories. By critically reflecting on our own experiences in early childhood teacher education, as well as other experiences that hold personal meaning and value in our lives, we may discover multiple paths towards transformative learning in that we begin to tease apart—to deconstruct—our knowledge claims and personal biases by situating our experiences in the larger sociocultural context. Students and teachers alike can engage in these practices using autoethnography as a pedagogical tool in which dialoguing about social justice concepts in early childhood teacher education may occur.

Brown & Moffett (1999) state that as educators,

Our quest is to become more self aware and efficacious as individuals at the interpersonal, organizational, and systemic levels. And each time we hear the call and begin the journey again, we will be doing so with a higher level of self-knowledge and a deeper and more relevant understanding of the individuals, community, and world around us. (p. 17)

Like the methods found in autoethnographic research, transformative learning does not take place in isolation. Exploring narratives of lived experience through autoethnography allows for many readings of the same text by multiple readers, thus interrogating the taken-for-granted assumptions and biases implicit in autoethnographic texts becomes a socially constructed discourse that is necessary for teaching and learning towards social justice education. Early childhood teacher education programs, therefore, should consider the use of autoethnography as both pedagogical tool and research method for engaging students in this type of transformative practice.

Autoethnography and Curriculum

We must begin to explore our personal experience stories through autoethnography methods so that they become curriculum tools in and of themselves. Our experiences provide rich and personally meaningful avenues through which to identify and interrogate principles of teaching and learning towards social justice education as we are inextricably tied to the social through our experiences. Autoethnography may inform pedagogical principles of social justice education and curriculum as, through autoethnographic methods of writing and critical reflection, we begin to uncover and explore the ways in which what we do and how we come to know are connected to our subject positions in the larger social and cultural contexts. As such, we may begin to write more reflexively by becoming more self-aware of the interconnectedness of multiple influences that inform our knowledge and practice in early childhood teacher education.

Autoethnography provides one way in which to address and examine the knowledge bases of students in early childhood teacher education. As Kessler & Swadener (1992) suggest:

If knowledge is power... the nature of knowledge, as well as the practices that are valued or privileged in the early childhood curriculum, must be examined within a number of larger contexts as well as from multiple perspectives. In order to reconceptualize... we will need to become better listeners... honor the voices... learn how to make the 'familiar strange' and many of our prized assumptions problematic. (as cited by Soto & Swadener, 2002, p. 53)

Advocacy for Social Justice and Autoethnography

Autoethnography engages students in becoming more self-aware and critically reflective in that the stories they present offer glimpses into the challenges faced when uncovering and examining taken-for-granted assumptions, biases, and knowledge claims in early childhood teacher education—necessary steps for teaching and learning towards social justice education. Autoethnographic writing prepares students to challenge belief systems and practices that work to suppress their voices and authority by validating their personal experience stories as primary data in qualitative research. By doing so, autoethnography in early childhood teacher education creates a space in which sharing struggles and fears around emotionally and socially charged topics like race, for instance, becomes both a process and practice that is encouraged and supported.

The following is a fictionalized narrative vignette that I present as a way to understand how engaging in autoethnography may support students of early childhood teacher education in strengthening and advocating for their own voices and authority in curriculum development and implementation through a social justice framework. I choose to end this paper with this narrative as a way to begin discovering ways of continuing the journey for which I have embarked, as well

as sharing with others my path towards transformative learning in early childhood teacher education. This narrative represents a new ‘call to adventure’—where I am going now as the result of my autoethnographic journey, using personal experience narratives as signposts along the way. In this way, I resonate with Ellis (1997), who states:

The question for me now is not whether narratives convey precisely the way things actually were, but rather what narratives do; what consequences they have, and to what uses they can be put... (p. 132)

Narrative Conclusion... or New Beginning?

“So, what are you going to do now?” asks my graduate supervisor as I handed over to him the autoethnography I chose to present for my major research paper. He places the large envelope on the desk and continues, “Does this mean that you are done now?”

I am leaning against the doorframe of his office. I flip the backpack that I am carrying on to the floor and find my way over to the chair that has become so familiar to me in the last year and a half. “No way!” I respond with a big smile on my face. “This is only just the beginning,” I continue.

“Is that so,” he replies, swinging around on his chair to face me. “What are you planning on doing now?” he asks.

“Well, I am actually headed to meet the Director of my undergraduate program. I asked her to meet with me. I have something to share with her,” I say confidently. I begin to swing back and forth on my chair as if I were anxiously waiting for something to happen.

“What is that?” he asks, although it seems as though he knows what I am going to share. “Do you need this envelope back?” he asks, grabbing the envelope off the desk. We both smile.

“I have already sent a copy for her,” I say as I pat the front of my backpack. “I really can’t wait to share all of this with her, even though it has been a few years since I graduated from that program, it still resonates with me to the point that I feel a need—a calling, if you want—to do something about it all.”

“You seem to be a different person than the one that entered my office so long ago and didn’t know who she was or where she was going,” my supervisor says as he leans back on his chair with his arms crossed behind his head. “Has the student become teacher?” he asks.

I smile, thinking about where this research process has taken me. The inner journey metaphor rings clear—from a separation to places unknown, through tests and trials, a transformation, and the return to service—I have emerged out of this experience as a transformed learner. But, it has only just begun in the sense that I now begin a new cycle in the gyre—one with more knowledge and experience as the result of this autoethnographic research process. I swing around on my chair to face the window and say, “I can’t believe how this process has

uncovered so much to me in terms of my understanding of social justice in early childhood teacher education and how my understanding of the discourses in early childhood education have ultimately become more clear and informed as a result of writing stories of my lived experience as a student in the program,” I say and continue, “I have become a changed person because of autoethnography.”

I stand up, grab my backpack from off the floor and say, “I look at it like this. Without having gone through this process—engaging in scholarly qualitative research using my personal experience stories as data with which to explore conceptual themes around teaching and learning for social justice in early childhood education—I would not have found the authority in my voice to share with others the challenges I faced as I began to uncover and explore my experiences as a student of early childhood teacher education more critically.” I pause for a moment. “Finding autoethnography has helped me achieve this. More importantly, using autoethnography for my major research paper has provided me with an opportunity to share with others the potential this method of inquiry has for reconceptualizing early childhood teacher education using a social justice framework. Autoethnography invites a level of critical engagement with our personal experiences that reveals the principles of teaching and learning towards social justice education, I have been able to uncover and explore my taken-for-granted assumptions around the dominant discourses of early childhood teacher education, as well as the social dynamics of my professional identity in the context of power, voice, and oppression. All of that from memories of experiences that really just stuck to my ribs, but which I felt were to be ‘lost in translation’ if I shared with others how I felt. Instead, autoethnography allowed those weighty experiences to reveal themselves to me and also exposed a number of important ideas—all of which are necessary for any discussion of social justice in education. Without having gone through this process, I feel as though those experiences would have weighed me down to the point resistance to change. I would have continued to use those experiences as anchors for my confusion, my sense of separation, and feelings of discontent.” I stop and begin digging around in my backpack for my notebook full of quotes. “Maxine Greene (1995) says it best, I think. She states:

There is always a certain weight in the lived situation—a weight due to the environment, to traumas from the past, or to experience with exclusion or poverty or the impacts of ideology. We achieve freedom through confrontation with and partial surpassing of such weight or determinacy. We seek this freedom, however, only when what presses down (or conditions or limits) is perceived as an obstacle. Where oppression or exploitation or pollution or even pestilence is perceived as natural, as a given, there can be no freedom. Where people cannot name alternatives or imagine a better state of things, they are likely to remain anchored or submerged. (as cited by Hutchinson & Romano, 1998, p 257)

I close my notebook and hold it close to my chest. “I would never have thought that this research process would have enabled me to confront my emotions to experiences in early childhood teacher education in ways that would be considered worthy of scholarly research or changes in curriculum development and implementation... cross my fingers.” I cross my fingers. “I feel validated in the sense that my voice is no longer silenced—that my experiences may evoke in those who also feel silenced a desire to share their own stories, providing opportunities, like

Ellis (1997) suggests, for “growth, change, and resistance to our culture’s canonical narratives” (p. 134).

“Well, I am glad that I could have been a part of this process of transformation,” my graduate supervisor says. “I have seen your growth through your writing. The conversations we have had over the last year or so have not only demonstrated to me the ways in which you are exploring the larger social and cultural contexts of early childhood teacher education, but also forced me to think about my students and my teaching in a different light.” He pauses for a moment and continues, “Because of you sharing your doubts, questions, and challenges with me as you embarked on this journey, I have decided to explore narrative inquiry and autoethnography further in early childhood teacher education.”

Before he can continue, I interrupt. “That is what I want to encourage,” I say, “but, even if in reading this paper, it provokes the telling and retelling of stories of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996) by students and educators alike, I feel as though it has achieved part of its goal. It will be in that process of storying and of dialoging about those stories through autoethnographic methods that change may occur.” I look at my watch. It is almost time, I think to myself. I stuff my notebook in my backpack, sling it over my shoulders and take a step towards the door. “It is for this reason that I am heading to the Director’s office right now. I am ready now to advocate for a reconceptualization of early childhood teacher education that explores more explicitly teaching and learning for social justice. My research supports this and through this process I have the strength in my voice—and with the voices of others in academia—to challenge educators in early childhood teacher education programs to explore the possibility of using autoethnography as a pedagogical tool and research method to embark on this journey as well.”

“Well, good luck with your meeting,” he says as he gets up from his chair. He walks over to the door to walk me out. “But, I don’t really think you are in need of luck,” he says.

“Thanks,” I respond. “I am ready for a change.” I say goodbye and leave the office. As I approach the Director’s office, I notice a group of students sitting on the floor in front of the department. I can hear them chatter about assignments that are due and readings to be done. I am suddenly taken back to my own undergraduate experiences in early childhood teacher education. How familiar it all seems. I excuse my way through the textbooks and papers that are spread out on the floor and enter the department. I walk towards the Director’s office and knock on the door.

“Come in, Katrina,” she says. “I have been waiting for you.” The smile on her face melts away the feeling of butterflies in my stomach. “Have a seat,” she says waving to the chair in front of her desk.

“Thanks,” I say. “Boy, do I have a story to tell you!”

“That’s funny,” she responds. “I have already read your major research paper, and let me tell you, I truly became absorbed in your experiences as a student in the program in a way that I haven’t been able to achieve before. Your stories were a vehicle with which I could reflect on some of my experiences—my teaching, my students, the schools I have been a part of—and oh, have I some stories I want to share with you too!” She smiles.

Fantastic, I think to myself. The process has begun.

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