Me, My*rself and I: Personal and Professional Re-Constructions in Ethnographic Research

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Abstract

Negotiating the tension of the various positions available for oneself in ethnographic research is the central issue of this paper. Constructing and re-constructing the very availability of different positions is a necessary element in this process and extends through all aspects of ethnography. However, this paper focuses on the construction of the narrative, as experienced in the actual doing of an ethnographic research project and the construction of my narratory self. At the heart of one of the many challenges I faced was my desire to move beyond a single authorial writing style in my thesis. How could I interweave multiple voices and realities into the telling of the story? How could I construct a place or places for my*rself within it? How could I add the story of my own growth and development as a social researcher? I experimented with a number of representational strategies in my quest to make explicit my subjectivity and my*rself-reflexive practices. One method involved constructing an additional self by including several brief reflexive extracts from my own personal journal into the narrative of my thesis. They reflected my learning, my thoughts and feelings as I experienced them throughout the life of the research project. Another approach was to incorporate non-traditional forms of both textual and non-textual material, for instance, a poem (crafted by my sister, a poet) and a painting (courtesy of my mother, an artist) introduced the narrative. They created their own construction of my emergence as a social researcher and their art then becomes an innovative form of disclosure about my*rself and a subsequent element in my construction of my*rself as both an author and a narrator. A later addition was the article reviewer's voice, which has also been interwoven into the telling of my stories. While such experimental writing can be seen as violating social research conventions, it can also be seen as an attempt to construct an organic whole similar to "Weber's idea of 'the webs of significance' we spin ourselves" (BOCHNER & ELLIS 1996, p.16). In spinning the story of this article, I have merged additional layers and created extra textual spaces as part of the knowledge construction process.

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Keywords

reflexive ethnography; reconstructions of self; narrative styles; thesis writing; multiple audiences; subjectivity

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identities which we construct and re-construct in response to the continuing uncertainties and ambivalences within the initial education of teachers in England. This raises a number of questions about what it means to be a university-based teacher educator in England during the first decades of the 21st Century. My Mum and elder brother left me in the playground before school and I started crying as they walked away. I remember that my brother laughed and Mum smiled at my distress. She said there was nothing they could do and that it would be alright. Ethnographic research is the scientific description of specific human cultures, foreign to the ethnographer. Each ethnographer has his or her own way of conducting research and all of these different ideas can be transmitted and understood in a number of different ways. Because there is no one set idea of how an ethnographer should go about his or her research, conflicts arise. Ruth Behar uses her own writing and personal accounts to show the good aspects of ethnological reflexivity and it’s importance in the anthropological field. Behar writes about reflexivity as “I think what we are seeing are efforts to map an intermediate space we can’t quite define yet, a borderland between passion and intellect, analysis and subjectivity, ethnography and autobiography, art and life.” Throughout this research, my thinking and professional experience have developed as I have moved from being a family visitor, to volunteering, to gaining work as a museum educator. The bearing this has had on this research is acknowledged and it has served to create a framework for heuristic practice, around which I have developed ideas. Exploring a wide-range of literature on family learning, I often draw on research in art galleries concerning families as I have found it relevant to my field of inquiry. This is followed by a self-reflexive ethnography in which the author explains how drag king performances affected her own life history and how this led her to a problematization of gender identity.