Book Review

Academic Autoethnographies: Inside Teaching in Higher Education by Daisy Pillay, Inbanathan Naicker, and Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan (Editors)

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In a world consumed by pseudo technological lifestyles and disconnected thoughts and behaviours, the individual floats in chasms seeking meaning and purpose. An unpacking of self in a storied reflexive manner reveals the personal life journeys and experiences that have influenced a person's growth and reality of presence and being. The historied self in relation to the present self gives impetus to the meaning of *auto* in the book, *Academic Autoethnographies: Inside Teaching in Higher Education*. Our understanding of what, who, and why we are, is paramount to revealing the nature and depth of our learning—in personal and professional settings—and our ongoing development in this regard.

The title of the book raises questions about the choice of word combination—academic and autoethnographies—and, ultimately, the theoretical and practical applications of such. But, clearly, this book's focus is highlighted and understood with regard to the higher education sector, the importance of the individual, and in relation to the research methodological approach. The purpose of this book is realised in the transformative manner of engaging the reader and the writer in a re-revealing and unpacking of self in a chosen context—all this fairly complex, but manageable. Furthermore, in the words of the editors it is to "experience autoethnography as a challenging, complex, and creative research methodology" (Pillay, Naicker, & Pithouse-Morgan, 2016, p. 14), which may be used for teaching and researching purposes. The essence of this approach is in the transforming self for greater growth. An aspect could have been included in the introduction section is the relationship between self-study and autoethnography, especially for a novice researcher.

That the book is written as scholarly academic work is evidenced in the 12 different chapters, each with its own focus and particular nature. The process of the development of each of the chapters and its review is transparent and detailed, which leaves no challenging or doubtful thinking about the authenticity and the ethical process that was engaged. The critical creative approach used in the first chapter positions the book and its research methodology in a different league to other books. The use of poetic styles—pantoums and tanka—are well portrayed and provide the essence and depth of

meaning. Moreover, this chapter authored by the editors provides insights into how their respective experiences connected to identities, leadership, and methodological inventiveness. Analysing the subsequent book chapters according to these three aspects draws attention to the multifaceted nature of our lives (as connected to the narratives) and the situating of the self in a historico-relational context.

The professional, personal, and integrated aspects of autoethnography are revealed in the 12 chapters with contexts in higher education where relational and developmental aspects of self, and in some instances in combination, are present. These provide substantive justifications for the theoretical underpinnings and acceptance for the application of this methodology. The descriptive ethnographies take a reader to the possibilities of what can be researched in an innovative, qualitative inquiry manner. Their creative nature, coupled with the ease of language style and understanding, draws the reader in to read and understand further. An unusual, enhanced creativity is evidenced in the words used in the chapters—such as tinker's quest, apartheid, small-C creativity, co-reflective, mother, critical self-reflection, leading in, informal, being ethical, and transforming—because these are indicative of the nature of autoethnography: context, history, relation with self. The sequence of the chapters exemplifies the unfolding nature of this methodology, as also represented by the words listed above. Furthermore, the use of visuals in an interwoven manner illustrates the experiences of the authors and lends imagery and fullness to their stories.

In the words of Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011, p. 2012), "ways of producing meaningful . . . research that would sensitize readers to issues of identity politics, . . . of representation that deepen[s] our capacity to empathize with people," is what the reader experiences when reading the emotive highs and lows experienced by the authors. Weaving the events of her or his particular focus, each author expresses the transformation she or he experienced, which links to the qualitative, transformative research method and changes time, expresses vulnerability, and evokes empathy for the author (Custer, 2014).

The use of auto as previously stated provides challenges for the integrity of the responses to the question of how the data can be acceptable, due to the subjective nature of the research. Also, the focus in the various chapters on the researcher's emotions and influence (Adams, 2008) on research adds further challenges. These, though, are addressed in a personal and contextual manner in the chapters.

Any doubters about this methodological approach to research are soon convinced that this is not a small marble game of hits and misses, but a highly systematic research process of planning and implementation with reflexive thinking and action. So, it brings in the unspinning of oneself in a reflexive manner for greater growth, with a transformative element—change for the reader and the writer.

This book could be used by academics from most disciplines because it prepares one for the methodological aspects. It opens up possibilities for doing research differently—for venturing into qualitative research that takes a critical stance.

References

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