

## **An autoethnography exercise.**

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### **Abstract**

Who has the time for introspection? I don't. Nevertheless I stole some hours from my life and from my sleep to think of, articulate and exemplify my new reality as a PhD student, as a researcher in training, as a writer fighting to find her words. And that in itself is what it is all about.

### **Introspection**

As I sit to type a short story of my experience as a researcher, two emotions emerge from my recollections. The first one is fear, fear of failure, fear of disappointment, fear of inadequacy, fear of not belonging. The second is exhilaration, my world is not only moving at the speed of light where every moment counts; it is also, in some ways expanding.

Of the many ways of dealing with fear that experience has brought me, preparation and readiness are the more efficient responses. The ability to prioritize, efficiency and organization are the skills upon which I relate the most to be ready. Another ability that I am still working on, but seems to get easier as I get older, is the ability to make decisions and assume responsibility for them, knowing and accepting that I will make mistakes or bad choices and yet be able to move on, to overcome setbacks. Setbacks come in different shapes and forms, some are easily overcome and some may take days or more. From my point of view, setbacks occur when control and power are in somebody else's hands. An easy setback that I had to overcome recently, was family related and as often is the case for a minor setback, time related. The other day my daughter was supposed to drive her little brother around when she called me, suddenly unavailable. I had just sat in my chair in front of my computer, to read two articles, one on validity in qualitative inquiry written by Creswell and Miller (2000) and the other on Appreciative Inquiry by Mohr and Watkins (2002). That was it. Creswell and Mohr had to wait, I was distracted and not on task anymore. Luckily, I am an avid reader who has developed over the years the ability to read quickly and to be able to extract pertinent information from what I read. But I know that many more major setbacks are still to come, from possible lack of funding to some difference of opinion within my committee that will lead to additional work and constructive discussions.

Since having to carry on multiple responsibilities between my family, my teaching and my research, I found, surprisingly that instead of being overwhelmed, and in a state of panic, my organizational skills just took over my agenda, my week became organized like never before. I don't remember ever having a desk so clean. The downside is that I do not handle unpredictable situations as well as before. Multitasking and prioritization associated with sometime heavy time constraints do not leave much non-dedicated time periods that allow overcoming unplanned activities. For me, it means sadly less patience for and more demands on the people that surround me. I surely hope that, as I will grow into my role, I will be able to develop new strategies to deal

better with surprises. After all, one of my many goals in pursuing my education is to improve myself, not to scare people away.

The fact that time is not completely my own anymore is compensated by the true interest that I have in my readings. Consumed might be a bit too strong a word, but my work is taking a place it was not used to have. Being French and having read “*les Misérables*” from Victor Hugo (1862) more than once, I was really excited, when in January 2013, the movie of the musical “*Les Miserables*” by Tom Hooper (2012) came to Corner Brook. I might add that I had literally lobbied the movie theater manager to bring this particular movie to our theater. Believe me, the last thing, I expected to happen, was for me to disengage from the middle of this pretty intense movie to rephrase the conclusion of an upcoming paper. This is a behavior that I am not used to experiencing and it is, for me, a sign that I am more deeply involved in the process of researching than I first thought possible.

I don't remember many satisfactory writing experiences in my past, except, maybe, when in France, I started corresponding with a friend in Quebec. Before that point all my writing had been at the high school level, and I found it really hard to express opinions on literature for which at the time I didn't have time nor interest. Writing was a burden that didn't serve any other purpose than getting a grade for a specific topic that didn't hold much interest. But when I started writing to my far away friend that I had met through an exchange program on a regular basis, writing became a different experience, a tool that allowed me to paint my life with word, a tool to describe information and to express and often share emotions. You have to remember that at this time, a simple phone call was far from my reach as the cost of a minute of communication was \$10. So through regular letters she described her life in Quebec for me, and I described my life in France, including the political and historical context as we went. At this time, the excitement came from my emerging ability to explain and describe without any other medium than a few pictures, my view of my country to somebody who had no direct knowledge of my environment. It sometimes took a lot of back and forth before we reached the same level of understanding. We created each other's world in each other's consciousness. This world went far beyond the romanced vision described in “*Maria Chapdelaine*” by Louis Hemond (1913), and ultimately brought me to Laval University to further my education a few years later in 1989 and ultimately here to Memorial University.

I may still not write every day, as I have a tendency to conceptualize first and write later. But I start to understand and visualize why I will need to write, not only when I have to, when a paper is due, but also, when I feel I have something to say, after a reading or after a more challenging experience. As I continue my exploration, discover my interest and conduct my research, writing day after day is the tool I have at my disposition to be able to share my findings. Therefore, I can predict that a more regular time will be set into my agenda for the sole purpose of writing in a very near future.

Reading other people's works, starting to understand how paradigms compete and how diversified the research world is, is a major eye opener, bringing depth, I hope, to my way of thinking and to my way of understanding the world. Some readings like Freire (1970) are truly inspirational for the values he defended and for the work he accomplished.

As for the type of researcher that I may become, I know that I always wanted to be a teacher, that I am a teacher, and I will always be a teacher. The teacher I am will bring into my life as a

researcher my most essential qualities: patience, perseverance, observation skills, listening skills and attention to details, to be added to the other skills already listed above. It is Saturday evening, 7:30 pm, in my basement by the stove, with my dog, working for my class, texting with my daughter about her whereabouts, looking at the pile of articles that I want to read like Foucault's lecture at the College de France (2010) "Le gouvernement de soi et des autres" in French or that I have to read like the description of the French Immersion program in Newfoundland, at the correcting that I have to do, thinking at all that must be done, I feel like Camus' Sisyphus pushing his rock to the top of the mountain for all eternity, accepting my never ending tasks, content and at peace with my world...for now.

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