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SOARING AND TUMBLING

An autoethnography from higher education

Summer

Beanbag before his nose fell off
penny sweets in a paper bag
the 3 Billy Goats Gruff
with all the voices
hot chocolate by the pool
at the Ivy Side Hotel
Yannis cocktail bar, *'this is a tick'*
Gandy asleep in the front seat of the Citroen
Butterscotch Angel Delight and Agadoo
*'I can see a great big spider,
creeping up on you'*
4 inch heels and purple mohair
learning to tie laces
on Jim's right shoe
drawing on the walls at 2am
Nana Liz's cake with glace cherries
the smell of Simple soap
and a copy of Oink
my parent's dancing
their Groovy Kind of Love
Enid Blyton books – the lot in one summer
watching dad play God
almost passing out
patent shoes I wasn't allowed
the exploding soda stream
our first VHS
Knock Down Ginger on Mead Road,
Dartmoor in the rain, again
Dr and Mrs Cooper in cardies
she'd made
Golder's Green Park
and banana lollies
a wasp sting and
my red dress with the flowers
Father Christmas with black leather gloves
losing Matt at the Zoo
his face when we found him
my first day at school
and not feeling scared.

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,¹ (Richardson, 2000. p.923).

¹ Richardson, L. (1997) *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press

In *Fields of Play*, Laurel Richardson explores the inextricable way in which working in academia has affected her writing, how writing has affected her sense of self and how her sense of self has affected her role in academia, and so on and so on. It is a weave that is complicated and imperfect. It makes complete sense. In previous work (Moriarty, 2015) I have argued that a splintered and multi-layered text is suitable for reflecting lived experiences and that this style of writing responds directly to Kant's notions of enlightenment (Kant, 2009). Writing in 1794, Kant suggested that an enlightened reading can take place when the text empowers the reader to evolve past a self-imposed immaturity and have confidence in their own understanding, appreciation and/or criticism without explicit guidance from another (in this case, the author). In this chapter, I present fragments of my lived experiences via a split text that uses poetry, memoir, prose and reflexive writing to explore how my autobiographical stories have impacted on my teaching practice. I hope that the process of uncovering and recovering stories will help me to better understand where some of my strategies for teaching are rooted and how they have evolved. I hope that this might have relevance for my colleagues working in education and people wondering what teaching is and can be like. As with all autoethnographic work, I cannot make any absolute claim on any absolute truth, nor would I wish to. As someone who has been through the education system in the UK, trained to be a teacher in higher education (HE) and is now a principal lecturer at the University of Brighton, I feel I have something personal and professional to say about teaching – who of us hasn't? – and I hope this might trigger reflection, discussion and understanding on the part of the reader and help them to value their own experiences in terms of how they can enrich our teaching and also our individual and shared learning.

I HATE TEACHING

I never wanted to be a teacher. Never ever. Why bother? My mum was a teacher before she became a counsellor and she was brilliant. Even under a Thatcher administration, she managed to teach drama and English in a comprehensive school in Watford with an energy and a genuine joy that I'm not sure I've never had. Whilst the emergent neo-liberal agenda has undoubtedly intensified pressure on teachers to teach not how they wish but in accordance with a Conservative agenda driven by targets² (rather than a desire to inspire and motivate pupils), even back then - my mother worked hard. Part-time never really looked like part-time when she was directing school plays or marking work or planning theatre trips or teaching and still finding time to be a terrific mum. It looked busy and though she didn't complain or rant or side line us or her pupils, there was always a sense that teaching (and parenting too maybe?) was demanding, exhausting, wonderful. When she was diagnosed with Meniere's disease and lost most of her hearing, we moved from Edgware to Brighton in the summer of 1986, where she quickly became part of the senior management team in a school for the deaf. While my brother and I sometimes waited for her in the drama studio, we would register how engaged and enthusiastic her pupils were. We would sit there, rolling our eyes and moaning, pretending that watching her do something she loved and do it so well was utter torture and that watching Neighbours or speaking to our friends on the single house phone – how did we cope?? – was many, many times more appealing. She worked incredibly hard because it mattered to her, because it was important and whilst we gave her a hard time and said that we'd rather have her at home as our domestic slave, we knew it was part of who she was and that we were luckier because of it.

Maybe it was in her blood the same way my father's identity is tied up with being an actor? At 70, it still is who he is. He still gets nervous before auditions and feels the rush before walking onto stage, he still values the potential of theatre as a political lens, to put the world on a platform and challenge audiences to think and engage with, rather than just about the performance. But I didn't want to be an actor either. I thought that you were born to be an actor and failed to understand that being good at anything takes blood, sweat and tears, a mantra I now try and work into every creative writing lesson. Teaching is as much a craft I now realise, as acting. Quite frankly, growing up I felt justified in blaming my parents and their hard work and success in their fields for my own malaise regarding what I would do and who I would be. I didn't particularly want to help or inspire people, and I hadn't been hit by the bolt of lightning that made you good enough to be an actor. I don't think this was your typical rebellion against ones parents, rather I was humbled by what they had achieved and thought it inconceivable that I would do as well. Again, to their fault (!), they had also imbued me with the confidence and sense of possibility that meant I had ideas of what I could be. This

² Docherty, T. (2012). Research by Numbers. *Index on Censorship*, 41 (46), 46-54.

Evans, M. (2005) *Killing Thinking: The Death of the University*, London, Continuum. P.12

unrelenting faith coupled with the infinite options worked with and against me like air currents, lifting me up and then buffeting me down and this has been a mechanism for gliding and crashing through life that has actually served me pretty well. Keep going and eventually you will stagger up into the atmosphere again. You know you might fall again but maybe you won't? Or maybe next time you'll rise that bit higher? Or the air stream will be faster, kinder, like nothing you've ever known. And of course, sometimes you will just want to get off. I've adapted this model a few times now to demonstrate to my students what the creative writing process can be like too. Recently a student compared their experience of my writing workshops to being pushed out of an aeroplane before you know you have the parachute on. A sort of alarming uncertainty followed by a more joyful and safer descent to somewhere new. I think perhaps this sense of 'what if I can?' and all the terrifying and joyful implications that go with it has driven me and my teaching all along.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHIES

In other research (Moriarty, 2015) I have used an autoethnographic frame to detail my early experiences of teaching in higher education (HE) and of how being professionally undermined led to feelings of anxiety and of not being good enough as a teacher, researcher, partner, mother. When I joined HE in 2004, and certainly later when I experienced feelings of negativity and of being outside the academy, I would have found it useful for someone to tell me what it was like for them, so I could gain insight into a shared or different perspective and feel encouraged to share my own experiences with a view to having them validated or dispelled or just listened to. If I have learnt anything in the last twelve years, it is that the sharing of stories is the best way to understand how we feel and what we think. When done in isolation, our narratives can help us to reinforce negative or harmful beliefs, but the focus of this book and certainly this chapter, is to encourage the telling of stories from education with a view to developing self-understanding, mutual respect and empathy for teachers (or those training to become teachers), and that this process will be ultimately empowering and positive for the writers and readers of the research. Autoethnography "requires that we observe ourselves observing, that we interrogate what we think and believe" (Ellis 2013 p.10)³ in order to help us make sense of experience and offer insights into a particular culture or way of being⁴. This process seeks to democratise academic writing and resist dominant and oppressive narratives that are synonymous with academic writing and academic life. Instead, this chapter seeks to trigger a process of self-study and storying the self that might help readers to resist reductive discourses that can trigger anxiety or feelings of inadequacy and instead value self-narratives and view them as a tool for reflection that may lead to a more enhanced sense of self. Autoethnography is a methodology that legitimises personal experiences and evocative writing in academic research and seeks to resist conventional academic discourse that is traditionally male, hierarchical, objective. Instead, autoethnographers are concerned with the production of necessarily vulnerable and creative texts that offer a personal insight into how life is (or was) for the writer, with the aspirational aims of fostering empathy, understanding and meaning making on the part of the reader. This process offers a potential method for resisting traditional academic writing (Grant, 2010) and it is through this process that we can then begin to re-imagine, recover and reinvent the world as we know/knew it (Denzin, 2003).

Autoethnographies often use tales of pain, suffering, hope and loss that seek to move audiences/readers on an emotional level but also encourage them to have an enlightened connection that is reflective and critical (Denzin 1997). The stories I present here move away from traditional autoethnographies, as many of the experiences that have enriched my teaching have been illuminating, uplifting, joyful. I can only hope that this doesn't reduce their value. A problem with writing autobiographically about trauma, is that we can become trapped in narratives of ourselves where we exist only as victims. In the past, the process of writing autoethnographic work where I detailed experiences with anxiety (Moriarty, 2015) was therapeutic and transformative and, for now, I don't have such crippling feelings of self-doubt. I still identify the work in this chapter as autoethnographic but it seeks to develop empathy and a sense of what it has and can be like in teaching using a variety of writings that reflect a mix of emotions but with less emphasis on a traumatic past.

In autoethnography, the writer represents their lived experience and invites the audience/reader to interrogate that experience and take a moral stand on what is presented and what it might mean (Conquergood 1985). The text offers

³ Ellis C (2013) Carrying the torch for autoethnography. In: Holman Jones S, Adams TE and Ellis C (eds) *Handbook of Autoethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, pp. 9–12.

⁴ Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, Arthur P. (2010). Autoethnography: An Overview [40 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12(1), Art. 10, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1101108>.

an interpretative process of the social world or group under study without enforcing meaning on what is being researched. The combination of aesthetic practice and depictions of cultural experience can provoke audiences and readers to form critical social realizations that potentially resist dominant structures and also (and perhaps more usually) help them to consider themselves in relation to others (Alexander, 2005). Autoethnographic work can be harnessed in this way as a useful and powerful tool of developing cultural awareness and facilitating social change. Such work can illuminate cultural politics, develop understanding, inspire change and enhance the lives of those in and readers of the research (Alexander, 2005).

Creative writing plays an important role in self- and social-understanding and determination. That is why it is such a fantastic subject to teach to undergraduates and postgraduates. I try to encourage my students to write their stories and to use this process to make sense of themselves and their experiences over the course of time, and to use this as a strategy for identifying meanings and coping with changing circumstances. Such narratives are existential, in that they reflect our desire to grasp or seize the possibilities of meaning and to imbue life with imagination and creativity. To imagine and re-imagine the world and what it is and can be like and this can generate powerful meaning making and inspire rich creative work. An aspirational aim of this book and certainly this chapter would be to encourage readers to carry out their own writing and think about the individual pathways that took them into teaching. Try not to self-censor or judge. Just write and see what happens.

DISCOVERY

In this chapter, and in all of my writing, I am hoping to find something out. The purpose of this chapter is to uncover and recover stories in me that have impacted on my teaching and might help me better understand why and how I teach. I write for the same reasons I read: to develop understanding and acquire knowledge and, as with all writing, it is motivated in some way by the narcissistic belief that this might be of some interest to the reader. In *Fields of Play*, Richardson encourages the reader to experiment with form and to “write lives differently in shape and style and format in order to build a new communal understanding of what constitutes sociological “knowledge” An exemplary text comes to life and creates life.”⁵(Richardson, 1997, p.80). She identifies this strategy as offering an alternative way of being in academic writing that might engage wider readerships and more diverse audiences and discusses the complexities of intertwining our “academic interests, social concerns, emotional needs, and spiritual connectedness” (Richardson, 21997, p.5) via research that is necessarily multi-layered and playful. So here it is. This is a little bit of me.

Summer ‘82

*We lived in a flat above Sketchley’s on Edgware High Street. There was a Wimpy opposite but the smell of fast food was overpowered by dry cleaning fluid, a scent someone should bottle and sell. Just two floors up from the people and pace of North London, I remember sunlight. We must have had winters and it must have been cold quite often but I remember my childhood in terms of summers. Maybe, if we are lucky, most of us do? The kitchen door opened out onto the rooftops with a view over Edgware that reminded Matt and me of the scene in Mary Poppins where the chimney sweeps high kick their way over the city’s skyline. Realistically, it was pretty grim. The neighbours had a dog in a cage that they fed leftovers too and my mum had to get up three flights of stairs with a double buggy and shopping in the days when you still went to the baker or butchers or greengrocers and online shopping wasn’t even an idea in someone’s head. She had gone back to work part-time and we used to have a minder who was called Maureen who was kind and firm and smoked all over us. In July 1982 I had said goodbye to Maureen and it must have actually been summer when this memory took place. Perhaps August because we hadn’t yet moved round the corner to a terrace house just off the high street, and I remember sitting at the kitchen table with the door open and the sun streaming through. Hitting the Formica and making everything gleam. My mum took out an HB pencil and a stack of dad’s old scripts from *The Gentle Touch* and wrote ‘Jessy’ at the top of the first page. ‘You’ll need to do this when you start school.’ So I sat there and copied it out, slowly. Getting used to the formality of the pencil and the definite direction I was meant to take. Wanting to please her with my first attempt, wanting to get it right. ‘That’s really good.’ She said approvingly. And I don’t remember anything else about that day. Just my name on that page and wanting the summer to end.*

MOVING ON

⁵ Richardson, L. (1997) *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press

Moving to Brighton was surprisingly tough. I had been lucky in Edgware which was happy school with a tiny but powerful Head Teacher called Miss McKie who had a Great Dane called Lucy who was almost bigger than her. There was a sense of grounded wisdom in Miss McKie but an irreverence too. I'm sure that under Thatcher, this balance of expertise and irony would have come in hand. They are traits most of us in education find useful, perhaps now more than ever. When Miss McKie emails me to tell me about her latest adventure – jungle trekking or sailing or writing – her alluring mix of knowledge and devil-may-care hasn't diminished which can perhaps, at a time of proposed tests for 5 year olds, academies and university fees, offer some sort of hope to the rest of us. The school was lively, noisy and learning was fun. For me anyway. I was lucky because I was supported at home with reading and craft and trips to the theatre and museums and this had imbued me with a love for learning and play. When we left London for Brighton, I went from being one of the most popular kids in my class to the bottom of the social heap. I was also, shockingly to me, quite far behind my new classmates in terms of handwriting – in Edgware we were still using pencils and not joining up letters and concentrating on telling and sharing stories instead of presenting them neatly. At my old school, there was a real mix of cultures: Chinese, Sudanese, Jewish, Pakistani, Spanish, Jamaican, Italian, Indian – all blended together in a harmonious way. In the Brighton suburbs and even in the town centre (it is a city now), non-Anglo faces were rare to the point of unique. I found this unsettling. The cultural shift and an initial sense of failure meant that I felt outside, as if I somehow lacked the tools to be part of the friendship groups and community that this new environment offered. I also had a teacher I didn't like. He would draw attention to individual mistakes and publicly humiliate pupils who struggled. My handwriting and my addiction to chewing my pencil (which developed soon after I joined his class) became a class joke and I was bullied by one pupil in particular. In the autumn/winter term, I spent every playtime on my own and every evening begging my parents to let me move back to London and live with my grandmother. My mum was soaring at her new school and making a real difference to the pupils and how the school operated. My dad didn't mind the commute from Brighton to London, it seemed many actors had made the pilgrimage to the coast and the train was almost as social as the theatre canteen or next door pub. They both loved living by the sea and my brother, who had always been poorly and friends with the most anarchic children he could find in London, was fitting in effortlessly with nice boys and girls. I just didn't get it. But what I was developing was a tough outer layer and the ability to publicly self-deprecate and I was also working hard to catch up with my peers. By the spring term, I had made friends and was back to being in the top half of the class. I no longer felt the initial shame I'd encountered when we arrived, but I also had a sense of how quick and how far the fall can be and this has motivated me to continue to work hard and invest in people. Two of the people I met in that spring term are still my best friends now in fact. A year later and with a new teacher I did like, I was back in love with school and the South East but the transition and the problems that came with it are ghost scars even now.

With the exception of that early blip when I moved to Brighton, I have been lucky with the teachers I have had. I can remember all of them. Ms Booth who helped me identify myself as a feminist and allowed me to put on a musical with my lyrics depicting the start of World War I to the music of Joseph and his Technicolour Dreamcoat (think The Producers meets Grange Hill?), Mr Lloyd who championed inclusivity and encouraged my clichéd gothic horror entitled 'Poor Jenny' (think The Woman in Black meets Playskool), John who told me I'd never get anywhere without more self-discipline in swim class (he was right but I'm still a bit half-in, half-out with that one), and all the others tasked with the challenge of igniting and illuminating a chatty and often over-bearing child and then worse, teenager, and receiving no thanks and meagre remunerations. Where was their incentive? What possible motivation could there be for working so hard, having so much responsibility and no obvious glory? I dismissed teaching as a career path at a very early age, it had to be something that was in you and it was missing in me. My comprehensive school was supportive and run by a former member of the British Weightlifting squad. He liked discipline and results and had a team of staff who cared less about discipline and more about making learning thought-provoking and alive. It was an impressive school and many of the incredible teachers I had then are still out in the world using their expertise and warm humour to bring out the best in other kids – I hope they know how lucky they are.

I went to a sixth form near the city centre that was more arts and humanities focused than the other local college. Again, I had amazing teachers. Perhaps Brighton attracts an unusually high calibre? I studied English Literature, Theatre Studies and Politics and partied hard. Too hard. When my father collected me from hospital after I fell twenty feet behind a bar at a nightclub in town, and then accompanied me for a subsequent MRI, I think he wondered if I would make it to university and in what state if I did. Whilst my parents never piled on the pressure, they wanted me to do well, but I was always much harder on myself. I was in the top 10% at college, predicted all A grades, I was popular, I had wonderful friends, a great part time job scooping ice cream in what was then a trendy parlour with overtly sexual marketing (those who lived through the 1990s will know) but rather than enjoying it and feeling

empowered, I maintained a desire to please people. I think that getting bullied by the teacher and a fellow pupil when I first moved to Brighton and desperately trying to fit in, instilled this in me and whilst I've got better, it's still a thing. I have always liked to work hard and then play hard and probably like many teenagers, I pushed it too far but I didn't learn my lesson either. When I was advised by my English teacher and director of the college play not to try for Oxbridge, I felt off the hook. That if no-one was expecting me to try for Oxford and Cambridge that I could just go where I wanted and see what happened. That I could keep balancing work and being popular and that eventually this would get me into my as yet unknown dream job. That I could stop pleasing everyone else and please myself. But actually this plan was flawed because I still didn't know what that meant.

Whilst studying for an English degree at the University of East Anglia (UEA), and without parental guidance, I did just about everything to put off thinking about what next. And I couldn't even blame Thatcher or the Tories. Blair had been elected during my first year at university and my flatmates and I had stayed up, almost as smug faced as Tony himself – we had never had it so good. I was a terrible undergraduate student. I did the reading, I turned up for lessons, asked questions and genuinely enjoyed the teaching and learning but I felt constantly over and underwhelmed by what might happen afterwards. Having gone straight through education with no year out or time to reflect appreciate the value of the experience I was getting, I sort of missed the boat. Rather than just enjoying three more years of wonderful education, an education I didn't have to pay for, I spent the whole time wondering 'what now?' instead of 'what if?' and every possibility came up short. Or rather I came up short because even if I had known what I wanted to do, I certainly wouldn't have thought I was good enough to do it. I felt safe in class where you could find most of the answers in books and when that failed, ask the tutor or debate with your peers who were generally supportive and friendly and wanting to do good in the world. I applied for work experience at the BBC and also did some interning at various national and local papers, hoping that I would evolve as a journalist. But journalism felt tough. It felt lonely. And I was too soft, too cared for, to have a hunger for it. I still loved writing and was lucky enough to take creative writing modules at UEA but instead of using it to entertain my friends or get them performing as I had in the past, it became more reflexive. Probably because I was trying to make sense and figure out what next.

The Learner

Chewing gum grey bras hang off the radiator
while you and I lie in sheets of skin and
sweat. Too hot to touch, still too empty of
longing to want to. We meet at points that
were strangers just last night and now they share
the same dismal morning air. I thought that
student life would be about books and art,
men with unkempt facial hair and ideas
that promised to change the world from the safety
of the pub. I find myself choosing between super noodles
and solid, walking three miles to save money
for white wine that makes me retch on every
sip. I turn to see a face as lost and blurred as mine,
needing answers to questions not found in
textbooks: Can I face another 2 hour
lecture? What am I doing here? Should I
call my mum and ask for just one more loan?

I graduated feeling utterly useless. At least as part of the last cohort that didn't have to pay fees I was debt free but I was miserable. I often wonder now what the impact of being in so much debt – and all because you wanted to think and learn and develop - and still being unsure of what next must be on the confidence of graduates. It seems like a hard punishment for daring to want to be more than you are.

I spent a year post-graduation managing a cinema and getting drunk, not always in that order, acutely aware that all the confidence and pleasure I had derived from my early studies was not just dwindling but collapsing. My parents, whilst supportive, were also despairing which is why I decided to do the MA in Creative Writing at the University of Sussex. When I enrolled I was living with someone who had agreed to financially support me but we broke up in Fresher's Week and I had to take a full time job at the University of Brighton to pay for the MA. I was helping to

manage the shops and bars on campus but what that meant is that I was usually covering staff and doing jobs my boss was too busy to do. At the end of the MA I ran away to Asia with a boy who was five years younger than me and spent nine months not thinking about anything but temples and beaches and Thai rum. Whilst in Australia, my boss from the University of Brighton turned up in Sydney on a holiday and to persuade me to take my job back ASAP. As I was running out of money and although I wrote a regular blog about our adventures, my parents were still wondering what I was doing and maybe I was too. I was twenty five when I got back to the UK with nowhere to live, no dream job and a partner who wanted to keep traveling. And while I absolutely don't blame him (not now anyway!), I knew that for me, it was time to settle.

WHEN THE HOLIDAY IS OVER

Once back at the University of Brighton, I realised that this is where I was meant to be. Brighton is a beautiful rainbow bubble and the majority of my friends and family had settled there. It felt like coming home but for good this time. I broke up with the toy boy so he could keep traveling (he still is) and so I could get a career. And by some weird osmosis, when I got back to the university I was put in touch with the Head of the School of Languages who asked me if I would give a session on how creative writing might be taught to undergraduates. Well why not? I put a twenty minute presentation together and included local writers I would bring in and how I would motivate the students to write. I thought they would use it to devise a job description but they decided I might be able to practise what I preached and gave me a module to teach – two hours a week - whilst I worked full time as a commercial services manager for the university and simultaneously completed the Post-graduate certificate in higher education. It was bonkers and absolutely like being pushed out of a plane with no parachute but I loved it. Watching the students take risks, be vulnerable, share their work, improve their sense of what good writing is and support their peers through that process was and is still the best thing about this job. It is easy to lose sight of this but inspiring and encouraging students to write and develop confidence with the things they have to say and what it means is an honour and a joy that I hope I never take for granted.

It is hard and it is getting harder. The pressure to do more for less is increasing and the shift in culture that sees universities view students as paying customers rather than learners has not, in my opinion, added value to their experience or ours. As I write this, Trump is being taken as a serious political threat in the States, Nigel Farage and Boris Johnson are encouraging the UK to get out of Europe and the revolution against all of this is struggling to spark. And I don't have the answer to any of it. I often think that despite all the positives that education has to offer us as staff and also to our pupils and students, that my initial thoughts were right. Don't be a teacher. Don't get into education. It is too hard. You will not be valued – not by this government anyway. You will sometimes lose your mind. But I can't say that. I won't. What I will say is if you care about learning and want to share that passion with the people who will look to you in class then strap the parachute on and jump out of the plane. It will let you fall and there will be moments of panic and 'I can't do this, I don't want to' but there will also be undeniable moments of pure joy when you watch your students become independent and empowered thinkers and that is when you will float. And then you'll drop again, but hold onto those other moments? Thirteen years in teaching and I still don't want to come down.

CONCLUSION

Similarly to Muncey (2005), the writing and telling of my story has provided clarity and been ultimately cathartic. The writing about and reflecting on my own experiences has been pleasurable but it has also reminded me to be angry, angry because the pressure on teachers to do more for less is damaging, it can suck the passion and joy we have for teaching and learning out of the role. But I see this book and the telling and sharing of stories as part of a strategy that seeks to engage readers in dialogues exploring experiences with teaching and to use those discussions to imagine and facilitate ways of being in education that maintain the joy and energy we have and need to have for our roles.

Tedlock (2000) argues that “women's ethnographic and autobiographical intentions are often powered by the motive to convince readers of the author's self-worth, to clarify and authenticate their self-images”⁶ and identifies this as a feminist issue. Perhaps there is a little bit of this in this chapter but as much as I want to convince the reader of my value, I also need to remind myself. Teaching takes blood, sweat and tears. It is a craft just like writing or acting. It is

⁶ Tedlock, B. (2000). Ethnography and ethnographic representation. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 455-486). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. P.468

hard, it is exhilarating, it matters. Through all the stuck places I found myself in, I was pushed on and up by the teachers who understood this. I include my mother in that list. Because while being a teacher is not like being a parent – something else I know now – both roles need time, commitment and a genuine interest in those we support with their development.

The writing of this chapter has offered me the up close intimacy with my lived experiences and also the necessary detachment that is needed when seeking a viewpoint from which to examine ones lived experiences. This distance can provide a compelling space from which to review, reflect and revise. This process of meaning-making can offer powerful insight into one's own identity and I would heartily recommend it to anyone in or getting in to education. My experience is that this process can offer us a method for authenticating self-image and recovering feelings of self-worth, allowing for a more expansive and liberated self that is able to critique and also resist the pressures we are under. The subsequent telling and sharing of those stories can help us to feel a deeper connection with colleagues and peers. I agree with Hunt (2000) that for some, 'where the imagination sets to work on the raw material of the unconscious and turns it into art... engaging with their inner world has a strong self-developmental or therapeutic dimension.'⁷ The process has been transformational, positive, liberating. Writing can help us to legitimise and value our experiences, to reconnect with who we are and where we have been. Embrace the freefall that teaching and writing may excite you with and brace yourself for wherever you may land.

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