Academic Autoethnography: Inside Teaching in Higher Education,

Daisy Pillay, Inanathen Naicker and Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan (eds.). 2016, Rotterdam; Sense Publishers,

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I am writing this review from the perspective of its use-value in Living Theory research and in the creation of living-educational-theories. The reason I am recommending this book to all Living Theory researchers is because the insights from the autoethnographies could help to strengthen an individual's explanation of their educational influences in learning and in the generation of their living-theory-methodologies. I am thinking particularly of strengthening the explanations of an individual's educational influence in their own learning as they deepen and extend their understanding of cultural influences in their learning. I am also thinking of enhancing the sociocultural understandings in the explanations of educational influences in the learning of social formations. The strength of autoethnography is that it focuses on these cultural influences and understandings.

In the creation of a living-educational-theory each individual generates their own unique explanation of their educational influence in enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' Each unique living-theory-methodology emerges in the course of creating a living-theory. Such methodologies can draw insights from other methodologies such as self-study, autoethnography, narrative and action research. Each of the following 13 contributions to Academic Autoethnographies, mainly from South African researchers, addresses a different aspect of cultural influence that could enhance an explanation of educational influence in learning. The names of the authors are followed by the titles of each contribution. I do hope that you will focus on the titles as only Claudia Mitchell's

contribution contains a question, What Difference Can This Make to Our Teaching? No contributor to this text has a title in the form of a question of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' I make this point to emphasise the importance of seeing this text as contributing insights to Living Theory research rather than providing an overarching methodological approach for the creation of a living-educational-theory.

Daisy Pillay, Inanathen Naicker and Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan - Writing Academic Autoethnographies: Imagination, Serendipity and Creative Interactions.

The editors make the point that whilst in autoethnography the central research participant is the researcher herself, researchers look through the multifaceted lens of the self to consider issues of wider sociocultural significance beyond the self. (p.8).

They invite readers to experience autoethnographic research as a challenging, complex, and potentially transformative methodology for facilitating sociocultural understandings of academic selves and of teaching in higher education. I agree with their claim that the book will be useful to specialists in the field of higher education and to those in other academic domains who are interesting in self-reflexive and creative research methodologies and methods. (p. 14)

Liz Harrison - A Tinker's Quest: Embarking on an Autoethnographic Journey in Learning "Doctoralness".

Harrison embraces the notion that the core of the work of South African universities of technology is technological criticality by which she means understanding the epistemologies and assumptions that underpin the mechanisms we invent and use to solve problems in our society.

Harrison shows how autoethnography enables her to become critical of her own assumptions about knowledge and knowing:

> … to think deeply about the potential consequences of how I construct and sell knowledge, and to gain an empathic understanding of the work that has gone into creating the knowings that I will critique as a paid thinker. Through questioning and answering myself, I can apply the same standard with integrity to the complex work of others. (p.29)

With Liz Harrison's untimely death her contribution to Academic Authethnographies serves as her living legacy as others continue to draw inspiration and insights from her work.

Thelma Rosenberg - Conversations and the Cultivation of Self-Understanding.

Rosenberg provides evidence of the role of conversation in enhancing cultural understandings:

> Kathleen gave me more encouragement as I considered the unfamiliar idea of this research study being an adventure:

> I like the adventure metaphor for research – especially narrative research. Certainly, I think that the kind of emergent research process that you are undertaking is like an adventure. It can be exciting but also perplexing at times. And you really don't know exactly where you will end up until you get there, but you have to keep following the clues and have faith in yourself. It is risky, but also potentially very rewarding (Personal communication, February 11 2014)

> A key moment in my research process, when I felt my thinking shift from self-consciousness about telling my story to a sense of responsibility towards my children, happened during a telephone conversation I had with Lauren…

Rosenberg also provides evidence of the educational influences of the ideas of others in showing the living legacy of Harrisson's ideas:

> Then I read Harrison's (2009) clarification of her use of autoethnography as a research methodology and, with this, the proverbial penny dropped for me. She wrote:

>> I am questioning the role of my culture in education and vice versa through my own narrative (the primary data), using ethnographic 'texts' such as journals… photographs, the accounts of others and e-mails. The texts are used as 'triggers' to enable me to story my educational experiences in the context in which they occurred and are occurring. Methodologically, it is in my writing and self-analysis that I am able to see culture at work and to question implicit assumptions (emphasis added). (p.255). (p.42)

Chris de Beer - Creative Self-Awareness: Conversations, Reflections and Realisations.

De Beer focuses on his growing self-awareness as creative designer, lecturer in the jewellery design programme, and artist that manifested during two collaborations. In one of these collaborations with his partner Marlene, de Beer engages with a feminist critique of the cultural dominant, patriarchal, symbolic order:

> Marlene's work revolves around how women need to establish a feminine symbolic order or genre in response to the Western dominant masculine-patriarchal order, where women have historically served as a sacrificial substratum and mirror for masculine projections. She feels the need to contribute to the creation of a symbolic feminine order, which should be based on the recognition of ontological difference, while at the same time recognising coexistence. This does not signal the replacement of patriarchy with matriarchy. A mimetic strategy, as put forth by Luce Irigaray (1993), through subversion and parody, would be a method with which to disrupt the culturally dominant patriarchal symbolic. As Marlene said: "My choice of subject matter, techniques, and materials deliberately works to subvert and mimic the stereotypical normative construct of women as objects" (de Beer, 2013) (p.61)

As most Living Theory researchers are working and researching within such a patriarchal symbolic order, de Beer offer's insights from his own learning that could be useful in the creation of a living-educational-theory.

Lasse Reinikainen and Heléne Zetterström Dahlqvist - Curating an Exhibition in a University Setting: An Autoethnographic Study of an Autoethnographic Work.

Reinikainen and Dahlqvist point out that in recent years two different genres of autoethnography have been developed. They say that one is the evocative or emotional genre, which emphasizes the individual personal experience and the other is the analytical genre, which instead emphasises the social world outside the researcher. The authors lean more towards the evocative genre because they focus more on their own experience on an individual level. (p.71) They point to the importance of autoethnography in promoting interdisciplinary collaborative creativity as well as deepening understandings of social change:

> Coming to know ourselves better through this autoethnographic work in higher education in the way presented here, we realize that there is much more to our everyday life at universities than just teaching and research. We deal with a lot of creative work an with building and maintaining relationships as well as friendships, but this might get lost if the university becomes a more competitive environment. Doing this kind of self-reflexive work can help us find opportunities to promote interdisciplinary collaborative creativity as well, as in this case, to give a deepened understanding of social change. (p.81)

Sizakele Makhanya - My Mother, My Mentor: Valuing My Mother's Educational Influence.

Makhanyas contribution was a highlight for me in reading Academic Authobiographies. This was because of her explicit focus on deepening her understandings of an educational influence from both the mentoring of her Mother and the way that Makhanya deepens her understanding of her values of creativity, trust and freedom as she engages with this cultural influence from family life.

> A metaphor I can use to represent the mentoring I received from my mother is the sewing machine. This sewing machine metaphor drawing (Figure 6.2) is important to me in understanding my mother's educational influence because when I reflected on my life I realized the contribution of the sewing machine to us as a family. I value the mentoring I received from my mother on how to use the sewing machine. I learned that if you have a sewing machine you are able to do impossible things, such as educating children and feeding the family. I did not know that having the sewing machine at home was preparing me for my future career. I always share with my students that if you have a sewing machine you will never go to bed hungry. When writing this chapter I realized that, although I was not aware of it, the mentoring I received from my mother was preparing me for the future. (p.90)

> The values represented by the sewing machine metaphor drawing include creativity, trust, and freedom. These values give me direction about what is important in life. I now see that some of the values I brought to teaching were a result of my own lived experiences. I cherish the freedom that is the reward of the sewing skill I was taught at home because I am able to share my knowledge with other people. My niece who stayed at our home is now working as a fashion designer for a clothing company, which indicates that sewing is part of the skills

that were transferred to us. We were mentored on how to use the sewing machine, and developed a love for the sewing machine. (p.91)

Delysia Norelle Timm - From Exclusion through Inclusion to Being in My Element: Becoming a Higher Education Teacher across the Apartheid-Democratic Interface.

Timm engages in a relational autoethnography with a focus on her learning as a student, a young professional chemist, a chemistry teacher in higher education and an academic development professional. I meet many professionals whose embodied educational knowledge is very impressive yet they do not seem to believe in themselves as knowledge-creators. Timm presents a narrative that embraces reflexivity, responsivity, transparency of the researcher, relational awareness and dialogical coherence (p.96)in her lived experience of not believing in herself and being excluded in the apartheid system in South Africa.

Timm locates her autoethnography in her experience of a legacy of apartheid in South Africa that has negatively influenced the education and living conditions of other teachers and students:

> The majority of our students and staff come from groups of people previously classified by race as black or African, Indian, and coloured. These suffered then, and still do, from a lack of economic empowerment, poorly resourced and underfunded education systems, and living conditions with high incidences of crime and violence. In addition to all this, the students and staff in our institution are faced with serious losses of lives of family members, fellow students, and colleagues due to HIV and AIDS. They live in emotionally charged and unsafe environments. The physical violence in the communities stems from anger and fear. There is an overwhelming experience of physical and emotional, mental, and spiritual abuse. Their "whole beings" are no longer whole due to the (di)stresses they experience. They find it very difficult to be in their Element. The (di)stresses are felt deep down in a their fibres and in the very viscera of their beings. They no longer have a "strong sense of self" (Antone & Hill, 1992, p.2). (p. 112)

Lesley Wood -Transforming Ideas of Research, Practice and Professional Development in a Faculty of Education: An Autoethnographic Study.

Drawing insights from action research, of which she is a recognsed international leader, and autoethnography. Wood explains how she uses autoethnographic strategies such as the creation of visual artefacts and critical self-reflection to help her to explore her own learning and live out her values. Wood does not complain about or judge others. She has learnt how to be inviting, to share her ideas rather than try to change those whose paradigms might differ to hers, but are just as worthy of her respect. Wood explains that this remains difficult for her, because she has frequently felt (and still feels) like an outsider due to her language, culture and history. (p.129):

Doing this autoethnographic enquiry has helped me to understand myself better as I become accountable for my actions and interactions. It has helped me to think deeply about my motivations, my visions, and my paradigms and allowed me to find ways to pursue my goals while living in harmony with my fellow academics. I have no doubt that this form of learning would be invaluable for our students because it "permits researchers to apply flexible modes of inquiry from their life experiences (to effect change) in educational institutions and classroom practices" (Belbase et al. 2013, p. 86). I have explained the actions I took to answer my research questions, and offered evidence to support my claims. I hope my story comes across as authentic, believable, and possible – three validating criteria of narrative forms of research suggested by Ellis (1993). (p. 130).

Robert J. Balfour -The (In)Visible Gay in Academic Leadership: Implications for Reimagining Inclusion and Transformation in South Africa.

I found Balfour's contribution very clear, his arguments persuasive and the most challenging of the contributions. I found myself challenged not because of his cultural location of his autoethnography within the South African Constitution but because of his advocacy of the need for identity assertion by LGBTTIQ South Africans, when this was the first time that I had encountered the addition of TIQ to LGBT identities:

 The South African Constitution (1996) recognizes historical and structural inequalities pertaining to groups "based on perceived or 'real' differences (de Vos, 2004, p. 185). Law thus has an important role to play "in reordering … power relations in ways which strive to ensure that all individuals are treated as if they have the same moral worth" (de Vos, 2004, p. 185). Rothmann (2014, p.84) noted that "though decriminalization (of homosexuality has occurred, this does not) … ensure an eradication of homophobia" through legal or constitutional provisions. Ranciere argued that "the rights of (people) and of the citizen are the rights of those who make them a reality. They were won through democratic action and are … guaranteed through such action (2006, p.74). Ndashe (2010, p.6) echoed this statement to suggest that LGBTTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexucal, transsexual, transgender, intersex, and queer) South Africans much engage in "identity assertion".

In his autoethnography, Balfour shows how contextual factors and what he terms totemic examples (as public occasions or experience that not only represented the values of the institution, but also its characteristics, which might now always seem commensurate with the values), can modify a subjective understanding of leadership as transformation in relation to expectations and institutional values. Balfour draws four implications for a leader who identifies as LGBTTIQ in higher education:

First political, social or institutional support (sought through an essentialised loyalty to, or understanding of, race or language or religion) is not, and should not become, assumed. Second the leader has instead to rely more, in persuading the institution, on the intellectual and academic merits of arguments about, or perspectives on, issues – particularly those relating to transformation and diversity. Third, leaders are effective because of the support they secure in moving institutions forward; these allegiances should not be automatic, 'natural', or static; the leader has actively to see out those most marginal to power, or most vulnerable to its abuse, and seek redress and improved access for these groups. This requires a reflexive sensitivity (awareness of the complex laying and exchange of power to enable

some and disable others). Fourth, the leader has activity to create forums to safe spaces where the views of such people my come to be expressed and, more than that, has to create an awareness among other, more powerful groups, of the legitimacy, and indeed necessary inclusion, of such views as may come from such groups in higher education. LGBTTIQ people do bring experiences and understandings of difference that interrogate, context, as well as nuance contemporary understandings of transformation from the perspective of inclusion. Such insights can be used to better develop intellectual, social, economic, and indeed political leadership for all South Africans, and not just some. (p.145)

Bert Olivier - Information Conceptual Mediation of Experience in Higher Education.

Olivier's autoethnography focuses on the cultural influence of language as a system of meaning and power relations, drawing on Lacan's notion of the symbolic realm. The use-value of Olivier's contribution for Living Theory research is firstly in his warning that one should not make the mistake of thinking that, if narrative is a privileged category for anyone's self-understanding, then the human world comprises of countless personal narratives as its basic building blocks, atomistically interacting when the occasion requires and allows. Secondly it is in the way that Olivier draws insights into his autoethnography from the theoretical ideas of others as he draws attention to the African axiological principle of Ubuntu:

> After all, for an individual to become an individual, she or he has to become socialized – that is, be taken up into kinship relations of a symbolic nature, primarily by being given a name signifying her or his place in society, as Lacan, following Freud and Levi-Strauss in this regard, has argued (Lee, 1990, pp18-21). This is a truism, but no less true because of it, and it resonates with the African axiological principle of Ubuntu (I am because others are).) (p.152)

Olivier's text is worthy of detailed study by Living Theory researchers because of his claim that personal narratives, or living-educational-theories, are less fundamental than language as a system of meaning and power relations:

> It should therefore be clear that an individual narrative, or for that matter a narrative or story like the ones I used to tell the students in my English classes at high school, is less fundamental than language as a system of meaning and power relations, or what Lacan called the symbolic realm (also known as discourse). This is important to realise, lest the impression be created that personal narratives are somehow free floating; they are not, and always presupposes the encompassing matrix of the symbolic, which, in its turn, is the repository of culture or cultural values. Only if this is grasped, can one understand how it is possible for students (or any other subject) to identify with a character in a narrative that exceeds the own particular place(s) in society, for example, the character of the humble rabbit leader, Hazel, in Richard Adams' wonderful allegory, Watership Down (2014) or of the Egyptian Queen or Pharaoh, Cleopatra, in the story of her and the Roman Emperor, Julius Caesar. (p.153)

Olivier's believes that teaching philosophy can furnish students with the imaginary as well as the symbolic means for situating their own subject positions somewhere on the

spectrum of self-understanding made possible by the novel and the theory in question. Drawing on Gadamer's terms, Olivier claims that it takes them:

> …from implicit understanding via explicit interpretation to the point of application as far as their own lives are concerned – it enables the "fusion of horizons" between their own culturally specific positions, and the meanings opened up by the texts concerned.

In the creation of a living-educational-theory it is indeed important to understand one's own culturally specific position whilst, most significantly, questioning and transcending Olivier's claim through recognizing the importance of each individual's creativity in responding to the possibilities that life itself permits in engaging with and creating meanings and power relations.

Rose Richards - Subject to Interpretation: Autoethnography and the Ethics of Writing about the Embodied Self.

Richards describes how she used autoethnography for her doctoral research and had to overcome the feeling of being muzzled by other people's narratives of how my life should be. For nearly 20 years Richards remained silent because there was an epistemic break between what she experienced and what she was told her story was.

Richards' autoethnography includes her learning from her work in academic development where she helped students to learn the discourse of academic language. Richards describes taking part in educational biography research where she heard people tell their stories of how they came to academia. Richards researched story telling and narrative tropes. Her discovery of the use writing as a methodology and a form of discovery resonates with Living Theory research, especially as it opened her eyes to the embodied nature of research ethics (p. 163) – a crucial understanding in the creation of any living-educational-theory – as is a focus on educational responsibility:

> As an autoethnographic researcher I have the following responsibilities to my readers: I must ensure that the reader understands how I am using the methodology, how I am using narrative, how I am using artefacts – and why. The subjective emotional quality of autoethnography can open a door for unethical behavior. Hence I must be as transparent as possible and my research must be above ethical report.

Claudia Mitchell - Autoethnography as a Wide-Angle Lens on Looking (Inward and Outward): What Difference Can This Make to Our Teaching?

The editors give special recognition to the influence of Claudia Mitchell in their autoethnographical research. Mitchell considers six propositions about the contributions of autoethnography:

> But what can be gained by trying to connect the personal to the cultural and cultural critique? And why is it important that we draw on this self-directed work that draws on memory, history, literature, and so on? Organised around a series of propositions and

drawing specifically on "Etude" and several related autoethnographic projects, this section considers the so-what? Of autoethnography in relation to contributing to six main areas which I would argue, have a great deal to do with teaching: (1) creativity and doing something different, (2) collaboration, (3) positionality, (4) ethics, (5) addressing social justice, and (6) advocacy. These are all points of culture and cultural critique that are taken up in the growing number of books articles and conference sessions on autoethnography. (p. 180)

The use-value of Academic Autobiographies to Living Theory research is the focus on ensuring that cultural influences are recognized and understood in whatever context one is working and researching in. The use-value of the individual contributions to Academic Autobiographies in the creation of living-educational-theories is that there is something within each of the autoethnographies that could resonate with each individual's cultural experiences and can help to develop an understanding of these influences and of how to research them.

I do recommend this text to all researchers who are exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' in generating their living-educational-theory and contributing to Living Theory research.