

Disrupting Autoethnography: Critiquing, Transforming, and Becoming Community Leader as a Border Crosser

Purpose

Education needs to be rescued from neoliberal and neoconservative practices (Apple, 2006; Baez & Boyles, 2009) by transformative educators willing to work alongside the community—parents, youths, and non-for-profits—in the re-appropriation of *their* educational system (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2011). Accepting the task as a cultural worker (Giroux, 2005), and guided by my ontological, axiological, and epistemological stance on social justice, my ethical responsibility as a researcher involves working *with* community members for a liberatory, educational practice (Freire, 1970). Liberatory, transformational practice requires, however, self-analysis as a first-step (Giroux, 2011; Freire and Horton). Through a transformative leadership framework (Miller, Brown, & Hopson, 2011), this disruptive autoethnography answers McClellan's (2010) call for doctoral students and other academics in educational leadership to engage in critical self-examination of our socially constructed identities, unpack our privileged positionality as educators, interrogate power dynamics as investigators, and re-commit to socially just research agendas. Using thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012), I de-center my identity to give room to the fluidity that my analysis demonstrates, while giving space for multiplicity of identity and becoming.

Methodology

Transformational, educational practices require the disruption of hegemonic practices, inside and outside of academia (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2011). This methodology is challenging normative research, in acting disruptively (Brown, Carducci, & Kuby, 2014) and interweaving different paradigms in an attempt to understand my identity as community member/researcher/leader. In other words, I used thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) in constructing three concurrent autoethnographies revolving around my community participation that required me to engage in challenging racist acts against Black school children and demand culturally sensitive educational spaces in our school district. Thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2011) challenges qualitative researchers to engage in methodological and philosophical conversations with the data that we collect. The impetus for this task is to allow for “dense and multi-layered treatment of the data” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2011, p. vii) while maintaining theory's importance in research.

In this manner, as I first situated myself with my community group, I engaged in a critical race autoethnography, where race—being Black (and Brown)—became a dominating factor in our communal, educational work (Hughes & Giles, 2010). Concurrently, I entered their space with my personal and leadership identities “becoming” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), attempting to capture a glimpse of my fleeing identities through a rhizomatic autoethnography. Lastly, as I wrestled with my professional identity as a researcher, and I questioned my identity as a community member/leader, I was forced to participate in a border crossing autoethnography where I negotiated power relations as a researcher/community member, community member/researcher (Anzaldúa, 2007; Giroux, 2005). I have participated in conversation with theory to unpack the knowledge produced from my experiences, not for established understanding, but simply a continuous representation of an identity in flux.

Findings

My autoethnographic journey leads me through multiple and fluid identities.

“I must also be willing to engage in my own conversation about my own agency building. The notion of my fears that have prevented me from following through with the IRB proposal for this project. Why is that? The fear stems from the gravity and heightened importance of this work. It’s not the work that I’m afraid of, it’s my lack of ability to following through with projects. I don’t want to let people down ...” (Author Journal)

Growing up thinking and believing that white skin meant wealth and dark skin signified poverty, I began an unconscious desire to associate with and be with white skin colored people.

“The fear stems from the notion that our work embraces the issue of race and racism and attempts to confront it—I have had an issue in dealing with racism. It wasn’t until working and learning from Dr. Dorian (all names besides the author’s are pseudonyms) that I was able to face and speak up against racism” (Author Journal Continued).

This specific desire began more pronounced as I saw dark skinned family and friends being constantly verbally mistreated by governmental officials or noticing that these same family and friends lived under harsh impoverished conditions. By all means possible, I inadvertently wanted either lighter skin or materials that would allow me to guise myself as of a higher class.

Aware of these sociocultural, political, and economic interplays within our cultures around the world, we must engage in the appropriate self-analysis to ensure that our work as professionals is one that is not continuing the already destructive cycle of racism and poverty in our countries (Freire, 1970).

Conclusions

Cognizant of the intermingled identities we all embody (Lumby & English, 2009), I operate under the presumption that my thoughts and actions are an ever-evolving representation of my socialization, academic experiences, and community-centered interactions within the different spaces I traverse. Specifically, my identities are intersected and multiplied when I engage in border crossing (Douglas 2013) as an ethnic minority, Mexican immigrant doctoral student, educator, and community leader, accepting the call for community research in a grassroots organization that requested my *engagement with them* in social justice work to reconstruct the public schools that are academically misaligning their Black children. Using this paper as a form of critical praxis (Pasque et al., 2011), I’m answering the call for educators, at a PK-12 and higher education level, during our educational (leadership, doctoral) training to engage in autoethnographic work to equip myself to dismantle power, privilege, and racialized systems used as oppressive tools in academia and community research.

Yesterday, today, and tomorrow’s educational needs have demanded from us, educators, to engage in transformational education (Freire, 1970). Different sectors in our world have been

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usurped by the tentacles of neoliberalism and neoconservatism, including their reach to PK-12 and higher education sector, as evident in standardized testing and curriculum (Apple, 2006), in teacher and leadership preparation (Capper & Green, 2013), and even in the standardization of knowledge production (Baez & Boyles, 2009). As an educator, I lead, teach, and research with my whole self (Douglas, 2013) with a transforming vision for “radical reconstruction of communities, schools, and organizations” (McClellan, 2010, p. 100).

EXAMPLE. DO NOT DISSEMINATE.

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