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Emotional Landscapes of Living, Learning, and Teaching: A Lens Within, from Learner to Teacher-Researcher

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Abstract

This article explores experiences that have influenced my choices for becoming a teacher and then researcher. I used autoethnography as a research method to explore significant moments in my life during the years of both my primary and secondary education. The cumulative power of these life vignettes have been researched to understand the diverse emotional, complex and multilayered experiences of my formative years of childhood and how such emotions may have shaped my career choices and who I am at this very moment. This paper meticulously collected artifacts such as personal photos, newspapers, transcribed recordings of moments of intense emotions and memories as sources of data that supported a journey of growth. These data were analysed using thematic analysis and compared with my own written recollections, together with visual representations of emotions found in photographs of my life journey. Findings of this study revealed a journey of “self” that has explored and documented an understanding of the motivations of myself as a teacher-researcher to become the person I am. Today, my intrinsic interest in emotional intelligence area of research motivated me to explore the genesis of my own experiences and successes. In this autoethnography I become a learner, analysing my life data searching for themes such as self-awareness, perseverance, resilience, empathy, motivation and social skills, all found in the repertoire of a person’s emotional intelligence.

Keywords

Emotional Intelligence (EI), Emotional Growth, Perseverance, Resilience

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Emotional Landscapes of Living, Learning, and Teaching: A Lens Within, from Learner to Teacher-Researcher

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This article explores experiences that have influenced my choices for becoming a teacher and then researcher. I used autoethnography as a research method to explore significant moments in my life during the years of both my primary and secondary education. The cumulative power of these life vignettes have been researched to understand the diverse emotional, complex and multilayered experiences of my formative years of childhood and how such emotions may have shaped my career choices and who I am at this very moment. This paper meticulously collected artifacts such as personal photos, newspapers, transcribed recordings of moments of intense emotions and memories as sources of data that supported a journey of growth. These data were analysed using thematic analysis and compared with my own written recollections, together with visual representations of emotions found in photographs of my life journey. Findings of this study revealed a journey of “self” that has explored and documented an understanding of the motivations of myself as a teacher-researcher to become the person I am. Today, my intrinsic interest in emotional intelligence area of research motivated me to explore the genesis of my own experiences and successes. In this autoethnography I become a learner, analysing my life data searching for themes such as self-awareness, perseverance, resilience, empathy, motivation and social skills, all found in the repertoire of a person’s emotional intelligence. Keywords: Emotional Intelligence (EI), Emotional Growth, Perseverance, Resilience

Motivation

In this autoethnography, I begin a personal exploration researching what has inspired me to pursue a doctorate and to understand the motivations that led me to become a teacher and researcher. My journey will be presented in the following structure: Part one “Resilience” will describe my childhood’s disrupted education and the varied and diverse schools I attended. Part two “Perseverance” will describe my studies at university. Part three “Self-awareness” will describe my life as a professional teacher, studies abroad and my pursuit of a doctoral degree. All three sections will navigate the reader across landscapes of emotional awakenings in my journey from learner to teacher to researcher and the Emotional Intelligence (EI) skills that collectively accompanied my journey of emotional growth. For the purpose of this article, Emotional Intelligence (EI) involves the ability to perceive appraise, and express emotion. The skills involved include the ability to access and, or generate feelings when they facilitate thought(s); the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). As a researcher this definition is both detailed and precise as it also includes the complex “expression” of emotions and how by understanding our own emotions we are propelled towards becoming a reflective and often more self-aware individual.

About the Researcher

I am a Chilean teacher completing a doctoral degree at an Australian university. I am 11,000 kilometres from home in another continent pursuing a dream that was inconceivable to me as a young girl at school in Chile. I decided to investigate and write my autoethnography as a testimonial for students who like me experience a roller-coaster of emotions in their pursuit of “learning.” I describe events in my past in a bid to explore and understand what has motivated me to become a teacher and a researcher. During this journey, it is important to state that my doctoral supervisor has been my critical friend. She was my experienced “other” my challenge partner during the writing of this paper. Artefacts and memories were collected, challenged and sorted, foci and research methods were rigorously discussed. This is my story...

Over my own life experience and cultural context, I have witnessed and thought deeply about how society pays attention and highly rewards cognitive and intellectual academic achievements. In schools this is reflected in the importance attributed to grades students are given. There is little discussion, rewards or importance offered on aspects that include a learner’s confidence, security, feelings of connectedness and personal value whilst learning. For me, such skills are related to learning and are inherent and visible in classroom environments where the teacher is a facilitator, not only of knowledge, but more importantly the creator of a safe and secure environment and a positive classroom climate (Dewey, 2001). This is the environment and space I explored, initially a blank space, one that slowly conjured up strong emotional memories linked to my primary and secondary education experiences.

I discovered during the analysis of artifacts and journal entries of this autoethnography that my life lacked teachers who made me feel important and understood my emotional needs as a learner. This I now understand emotionally marked me negatively in many ways. It is due to these experiences I became aware of why I hold the belief that as a teacher I should have skills and strategies to engage, help and guide my students, particularly those who come from diverse backgrounds, cultures and family contexts. Such students, like myself are the “invisible” often a minority, the outliers in a homogenous group of learners. They disrupt, challenge and reframe classroom relationships such as those of teacher-student and between student to student. In turn, when the skill or need for differentiating teaching is not present, learning becomes harder for both teacher and students. From my experiences as a learner in school, I was never supported. During my studies as a pre-service teacher seeking to learn how to support minority children, children who were similar to myself, I became disappointed with teacher education. My courses offered little if no answers or explicit teaching strategies. I identified students in my classrooms needing emotional assistance to optimise their academic learning, yet I had no resources, no knowledge of how to accomplish this. I witnessed colleagues who for me lacked emotions such as empathy or sensitivity in the face of diverse and sometimes challenging learners. The lack of these teaching skills, I know from my personal experiences, can drive learners to leave school or live a life of minimised opportunities. Students often leave school holding onto the emotional belief that they cannot learn or achieve. My autoethnography describes my own story and explores the success as a learner I achieved despite my teachers, not because of them.

About the Method

It is necessary to define the term autoethnography for the purpose of this paper. According to Ellis and Adams (2014), Autoethnography is written by an author to “retroactively and selectively write about past experiences” (p. 595). Despite the critiques regarding autoethnographies for being less formal or professional (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) it is believed that it is great opportunity to share thoughts, stories and to give detailed descriptions

of experiences. As a method, an autoethnography can be academic, rigorous, and “emotionally therapeutic” (Ellis & Adams, 2014, p. 280). This is especially so if one digs deeply into understanding the reasons and motives behind who they are today and the work they choose to do.

The intention of this autoethnography is to highlight an emotional journey and of my inspiration to pursue research of the importance of Emotional Intelligence (EI) with pre-service teachers. As Denzin (2014) emphasises, writers must keep the focus on the significance of the words chosen successfully describing their inspirations of life.

Autoethnography is also defined in this paper as the form of an autobiographical process of thinking which draws upon personal narrative and the exploration of the author’s experience of life (Mallet, 2011). This research describes personal lived experiences (Morse, 1994; Van Mannen, 2006) through autoethnography (Heewon, 2008). Autoethnography as a genre can be best described as the research method that links the personal experiences with cultural aspects, placing oneself in the centre of a social context (Reed-Danahay, 1997). In this study, I explore and interrogate a possible list of emotions and skills that I believe assisted me to become a teacher then researcher.

This autoethnography was undertaken to collect and analyse emotions that emerged in my memories, knowledge and understandings of school life and pedagogical experiences. I collected a range of photos from a young age representing me as a child to now as an adult, partner and mother. I then, with as much detail, I placed a time year and possible months against each photo. To check these dates, I interviewed both my mother and father extrapolating their memory, time and place for each specific photo. During these discussions, I recorded not only the memory and time, but also their description and events around the photo. These were transcribed and used as data for thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), to finally be compared with my own written recollections. The last question I asked my family was how they remembered my feelings, emotions and behaviour during the photoshoot or before and after. I then spend much time looking at any physical evidence in each photo that gave more information against my memories of emotions during the time being explored. In this way, I developed a list and emotions that could have attributed to my journey to teacher-researcher.

As an educational process, my self-awareness, self-knowledge and personal development were extended and enhanced (Britzman, 1998). The journey of self-exploration can be linked to identity construction, the process of finding the self, the exploration of how we transform ourselves in the search of finding who we want to become. (Roberts, 2004, p. 3). Identity is constructed as a process that changes with time (Eakin, 2008). For this reason, autoethnography is the most appropriate method for this study as I discuss my own identity growth from teacher to researcher and how it links to emotional skills. Abraham (2018), argues that the search for identity and resilience enables people to stand up for themselves and supports them in exploring traumatic experiences such as domestic violence. In my study, I describe how experiencing difficulties allowed me to demonstrate perseverance in the face of frustrations such as feeling never good enough as a student or being validated by my teachers.

Autoethnography involves “research questions pertaining to one’s own professional practice or personal experience that clearly require the researcher to study themselves” (Tenni, Smyth, & Boucher, 2003 p. 2). It is in an autoethnography our opinions and feelings are directly related to how we understand, believe and interpret experiences (Mezirow, 2000). In this paper, I reflect on the quality of a reflective voice in comparison to that of the voice of the narrative. As a “critical reflective practitioner” (Quicke, 2010, p. 239), the method of autoethnography I have employed in this study I believe appropriate to explore and reveal possible reasons for the emotional resiliency I believe I demonstrate as an adult today. The questions I have often asked myself are why did I succeed as a learner against all odds? Was my journey one that came to be because of a strong EI? Based on this paper’s findings collected from my own childhood

school experiences and pre-service teaching courses, I explore the importance of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in teacher education. Currently in much of the media there are studies pointing to an attrition of graduate teachers leaving the profession due to high levels of stress and health issues (Weldon & Ingvarson, 2016). Similar data in OECD studies has emerged for school leaders (OECD, 2019). EI even in the corporate world has been seen has a factor for success (Desti & Shanthi, 2015). This study whilst an autoethnography responds to a growing interest of the place of EI as a skillset for school and, or personal success.

For this study, I gathered information from personal journals, newspapers, photographs and information collected by talking to family members and ex-classmates. Tenni et al. (2003) pointed out that in an autobiographical enquiry we have to commit ourselves to writing about uncomfortable things, memories and events in our life that can at times be hurtful. To increase the validity and trustworthiness of this research, I used a variety of strategies to collect and interpret the data. I followed several steps to achieve this. First, I arranged an important photo chosen across my life's journey from 5 to 33 years old. After this, I interviewed and verified time and place with my mother, father and ex-classmates. The next step was to the discussions transcribing each discussion with the photo as the key point of recollection asking each to identify or remember my emotions and behaviour during the time before or after the actual photo. Finally, I used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the transcriptions and journal entries.

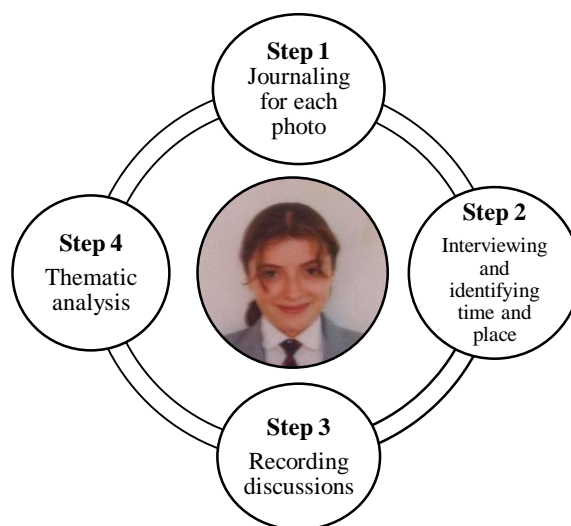


Figure 1: Data analysis summary

For me, writing this autoethnography was a difficult journey. I felt uncomfortable visiting these emotional landscapes of the past. It was hard to talk over some emotions I faced as a student, however the findings of this study presented in the final part of this paper provided me with some valuable insights about what emotional skills shaped my professional practice as well as the motives I have of following a career as a researcher.

In the following section of this autoethnography, I describe the emotional journeys that have shaped my life. I present three sections; each section explains part of my story of life, paying attention to emotional aspects that uncovered happy and unfortunate moments during my childhood.

My Childhood Journey: Resilience

The beginning of this autoethnography allowed me to use a number of photos as a reflection of my life from the age of five to my current reality as a PHD student, partner and mother. The following excerpts are from an extensive journal I kept during this process. My story begins in the city of Puerto Montt located in the south of Chile. I lived here until the age of 3 when my mother decided to leave my father in search of a better life for myself and my two brothers and sister. I am the youngest of four. My siblings were much older than I was. After my mother left my father we lived in the central suburbs of Chile, however, we had to move a lot within the region because of my brothers' studies at the University. I remember arriving in a new school, finally finding friends, only to say goodbye and start again after a few years. This happened repeatedly until I finished high school. I really struggled moving from one place to another. My life had become an emotional rollercoaster of friendship, farewells and sadness.



Figure 2. My sister and I walking around Puerto Montt, Chile (1988)

As a context it is important to describe the education system in Chile. The different types of schools are divided by social classes, according to Matear (2008) in Chile educational quality is distributed depending on the ability parents have to pay for school expenses. Chile has stratified social classes; upper, middle and lower classes. My family was positioned in the middle social class, as my father worked independently and my mother stayed at home looking after us. My parents tried to raise us with a good education, however, due to the number of siblings I have, it was difficult to access a quality education.

My first school was quite underprivileged; we had a tiny classroom with few materials for young learners. The place was surrounded by houses, in a tiny town in the central part of Chile. Even though the school was poorly resourced, I enjoyed chasing stray dogs and playing outside the classrooms. Luciana, my older sister, was enrolled at the same school and used to

bring me food secretly passing me morsels through the gates during break times. During class time, I remember we used stones as tactile materials to learn about maths. My memories at this time involved a vivid recall of the restroom. I remember clearly that it was the darkest place I had ever witnessed in my young life. It was full of moss, I can still in my mind's eye smell the mustiness of moss growing in the gaps of the floor and feel the coolness of the dark. It is not a place I would want my own child to experience at school today, yet for me even that memory was still joyful as I remember that all I ever wanted to do was start school. I stayed at this school for two years before we had to move to another city.

My next school was located in Valparaiso city, a touristy and colourful place. The big attraction for tourism were the hills looking out to the sea. I lived on one of those hills. My school was around the corner, it was quite modest; however, the students often had serious challenges at home and sometimes did not have anything to eat the whole day. My teachers were relatively nice, however there were a few teachers who I describe in my journal as - emotionally toxic. An example of this toxicity was when one day one of my classmates asked for permission to go to the toilet, the teacher emphatically replied with a loud "no." To her great embarrassment and fear of leaving her chair, she accidentally urinated sitting in her chair in the middle of the class. We were only seven years old. I felt so sorry for her; she looked so shocked, embarrassed and infinitely sad. I cannot imagine how learning in this school could be viewed positively after such an experience, yet I was still happy to be at school, learning.



Figure 3. Chasing stray dogs at Kindergarten (1991).

Two years later, we moved again. This time the reason was my sister's school. The distance between Valparaiso city and her school was quite far, for this reason my parents decided to move closer to where her school was located. The school was highly ranked with awards for being one of the best in the region. However, I could not enrol here, as there were no vacancies available. My mother found a new school for me closer to our new home and one where one of my friends also attended. I remember thinking very passively that it was a good idea to go there. On my first day, I was introduced to the class and remember feeling embarrassed. My experiences were good until a couple of weeks into the term when a new teacher arrived. I thought she was just terrible. Her teaching was emotionally traumatising for me. One day I forgot my pencil at home and asked to borrow one of hers (pencils were funded by the school). I was working on a task when suddenly she approached me and found me biting the tiny rubber

eraser found on the top of the pencil. She yelled: “Why are you biting the pencil!” She became furious and sent me off to the toilet to wash my mouth with soap (using a large soap bar), I was in shock! I remember her towering over me actually supervising me doing this. She stood over me; I can still feel her ominous presence when I recall this memory so many decades after. I felt my sweaty palms as I looked at my photo, I could hear her voice in my head (journal entry 1.7)

I feel and reacquaint myself with emotions of anxiety looking into the mirror of my past. I remember feeling this punishment was cruel, I cried a lot after that. I started to develop a horrible fear and anxiety and did not want to go to school anymore. I told my parents, they thought I was overreacting. My memory of feeling anxious and fearful during this time was both overwhelming and clear. Things continued until one day one of my classmates, so distraught and desperate with the experiences this teacher was inflicting on us, brought a gun to class (we were only 8 years old). That was the final straw for my parents who decided to find me another school.

This time the school was a quiet private school subsidised by the government. I still remember the first day, everything was so new, shiny and freshly painted, I can recall the smell of cleanliness and newness. I was in heaven. The teachers were different; their teaching skills were more motivating. I began to look forward to this different approach to learning. Their strategies were amazingly varied. Learning became for me a collection of positive experiences.

The students there belonged to a higher socio-economic status and seemed to be happier in the classroom. My favourite subject was English, for the first time in a long time I felt happy while learning. My teacher had travelled around the world and often described all the different places she had experienced. Yet, at this time, my journaled memories centred not on her, but the “book.” It was in colour! Colour! It was the first time I had seen a book illustrated with magnificent images in colours that described places from all over the world. It is at this crucial point like the crescendo of a piece of music I clearly experience the full force of the birth of my desire for learning. I found myself immersed in a class where I could be understood, where I could dream! I felt motivated about learning and started developing a passion for learning. I was only 9 years old. Learning became a kaleidoscope of colours!



Figure 4: Very happy starting at the new school in Villa Alemana city (1998).

I developed a passion for learning, especially English. During the same period of time, I began to listen to music in English and began writing the lyrics in my notebook. This is how I learnt words and sentences in this second language. On reflection, this school made me very happy, I felt understood, I felt the teachers had a passion for teaching. I stayed there for three and a half years, until my sister enrolled at the university in the south of Chile.



Figure 5: Moving down south to Concepcion city, Chile (2000).

Once again, we were moving, searching for a new school. This time it was only my mother, sister and me. My brothers had married and stayed with their new families. My father was no longer with us. It was April when we arrived in Concepción city, located in the central-south of Chile. I found the city physically beautiful and larger than our last city. I arrived in the middle of the school year. We found a school that accepted me without requiring high academic grades. This school was modest. My classmates were curious about my accent, I felt quite different and observed even though I was Chilean, I was an outsider from a different region. My new classmates viewed me as different due to my “accent.” I had lost my identity for the first time and was overwhelmed by emotions.

My new teacher felt quite threatening to me; she was tough on everyone but definitely tougher on me. I was the new student in the class. She often made references to the differences between myself and my classmates. One day I was told to finish a math exercise in front of the class, but I could not understand the instructions. She took me by the arm quite firmly and humiliated me in front of everyone because I did not understand what I was supposed to do. I felt horrible about myself, I felt sad, useless and incapable because I could not understand instructions. She sent me to the corner of the classroom facing the wall; I stayed there for half an hour. This situation taught me once again the emotional impact that a teacher can have on a child’s learning experience. Teachers can mark us in a positive or negative way. As I reflect, this experience influenced me becoming a teacher. I wanted to change the way students were taught, to help the quiet voices (like mine) believe that learning is not like that, it should not be like that. I became extremely shy, I did not want to speak up, never participated in class and sat silently hoping not to be picked to answer any question. I was terrified and remember thinking every day when will this day finish, when would I feel confident about myself. I questioned whether I would ever enjoy learning again as I used to do in the previous school.

I only stayed at this school for eight months as it was a primary school and I needed to find a high school for the next year. What I did not know as a child was that all students who wanted to apply for high school needed to present good grades to be given a place. I again

experienced feeling totally desperate, I did not have good academic grades. I applied to quite a few high schools in the city and sadly, because of my low grades, I was accepted in a not so well regarded girl's high school. When I found out this was my only choice, I cried. I knew of this school and as it had been my least preferred option. I was devastated. What I knew of this school was from my teacher who had stated to us: "Only prostitutes go there, and you do not want to be one of them, do you?" It was just after she had said this, I found out I was going to "that school." I felt so embarrassed and told no-one about it. My life in these various schools I had attended was an emotional rollercoaster of experiences.

In 2001, I started high school. The school was large, unpleasant and cold. There was nothing good about it, or at least that is what I can recall. My first day was a shock. My classmates talked and thought about going out with boys, wearing makeup all day and not paying attention to any of the teachers. I felt I did not fit in at all. In each of the classrooms were approximately 47 students. In total, we were around 3000 girls. I was just one more number.

Life became to be very difficult for me as my parents decided to separate forever. Previously my mother had left my father, but they had reconciled. I remember it was very sad for me to realise my parents would not be together anymore and that my family was now broken. There was something inside me that did not let me spiral down and I kept fighting against getting emotionally stuck. Resilience. It would have been easy to take drugs, stop school or leave home as I started to have lot of issues with my mother after my father left. My classmates were not a good influence; the girl next to me was a drug addict and used to get high while in class. Instead of choosing any of those roads, I found the best of friends I could have asked for, and they like me were "outsiders" they had come from another city. I also joined a choir, which was a lifesaver as I met new people. I finished high school, not loving it at all, wanting every day to finish as fast as possible. I became emotionally stronger; I learnt how to speak up for myself. I now consider that these experiences shaped me as a resilient and an emotionally strong person.

On reflection, I had a difficult time during my primary and secondary school years, but I managed to survive without becoming influenced by my classmates and I learnt how to forgive those teachers who I believe made me suffer. I had only experienced three and a half years of quality education with the rest of the time in vulnerable and underprivileged schools. I benefitted from the experiences and all the changes. My learning experiences strengthened by emotional resilience. After all these experiences, I realised that these skills used to confront adversity had a name: Emotional Intelligence.

My Professional Journey: Persistence

I have persisted and followed my dreams because I was determined to fight against conforming to a reality imposed on me. I wanted to study, and although I was not a great student, not having achieved the required grades, it was never too late to give my best. I gained entry to a university course.

I interrupted my university studies and lived in Australia and New Zealand (on a working holiday visa) for two years. I finally returned to my homeland Chile to pursue what I left behind, my career as a teacher. I began university again, this time in another institution due to my husband's job. It often feels that I am destined like a nomad to move from place to place. I had experienced such an amazing time travelling for two years, I now appreciated this renewed learning opportunity.

I had had so many different personal learning experiences from private, public and subsidised school institutions, that I had developed my own subjective snapshot of the educational system in Chile. Common public assumptions to view private education as the

“quality” choice and public schools as being “mediocre” are a common thread in conversations among Chileans today.

One of my first schools as a teacher had a challenging context in terms of its socio-economic identity. It was a school, where people with disrupted schooling could complete their studies at an accelerated pace. I volunteered; I wanted to see how I could help disadvantaged adults learn English. It was shocking to hear their stories of life, from getting out of jail, living homeless on the streets and surviving. I clearly remember one woman who inspired me; she was nearly 50 years old and finishing high school. She was studious, methodical and responsible. She managed any competing family issues to not affect her classroom studies. She seemed confident and at peace while learning; she personified emotional intelligence for me because despite the parallel environments, of the classroom and her home, she managed to complete her studies and achieve her dream of a high school education. Her greatest motivation was to break the cycle of poverty she had become a victim of. Teaching in this school offered me the chance to keep learning and understanding the impact that an education has for each person. She embodied persistence at the highest level.

During my last semester at university, I began to work at a subsidised institution for my final placement. I taught a grade 8 and 11 English class. I had the chance to know my students, to explain to them the value of having the opportunity of a quality education. I persevered to motivate them to pursue new paths in their lives and to push away from their comfort zone. I worked hard that semester and I endeavoured to learn from every experience I was afforded. At the end of this placement, I received an invitation to apply for a vacancy to work as a teacher in the English teaching program. It felt like my first achievement in my professional life, to have gained a position at this prestigious yet strict school.

Whilst working at this school I became motivated to find ways to teach English in more effective ways. For this reason, I began searching for scholarships to study abroad. I applied to different universities in Canada, Australia and New Zealand and was accepted at some of them. However, I decided to accept the offer from Australia. Another journey began of travel and uprooting to a new country. I prepared all the required documentation, forms, certificates, transcripts, and applied for a scholarship. My nerves were stretched waiting for the response. Two months later as I was finishing my day at work, I received a phone call from my husband saying that I had been conferred the scholarship. I could not believe it! I was thrilled! I had been selected from 1,737 applications, and only 408 received a scholarship. I was now one of them. All my efforts had again brought positive results. I could not be more grateful and also proud of myself for this enormous achievement. I had persevered and succeeded.

A Journey of Growth: Self-Awareness

In Australia, I was again immersed in a different city, country, and culture. This opportunity allowed me to discover myself as a student again. I learnt from my classmates, their backgrounds, culture, religion and teaching expertise. I felt capable and empowered to learn anything I committed to. While studying for my Master’s degree, I discovered a desire for researching. I studied culture, language, bilingualism. I interacted with diverse social contexts and compared the different curricula of Australian and Chilean schools. I became more aware of wanting to teach English back home but also elsewhere. Having the chance to rigorously question my own practice as a teacher and open my mind to diverse contexts, actively listening to my peer’s experiences was priceless. To become a reflective practitioner to question teaching practices, policies, curricula gave me permission to think about ways I could collaborate in the field.

I wanted to pursue a Ph.D. I remember thinking why not? Again, I was scared. Fears of learning from the past questioned this commitment. Yet here I am at this moment writing this

autoethnography, reliving moments, documenting memories and pursuing this new journey in search of answers that will continue to shape me become a more effective teacher, a person who and can possibly share knowledge with future teachers. My motivation centres on understanding students who struggle when feeling not “good enough” because they do not know how good they are just “yet.” After all my disrupted and varied school experiences, I am now more acutely aware that it was the emotional skills of effort, responsibility, perseverance, patience and resilience, that supported my journey of “growth.”



Figure 6: Master of TESOL graduation 2016, Monash University, Australia.

Discussion

My awareness and understanding of how I learn differently and adapt learning to those unique needs is what has motivated me to want to teach. I have experienced like most people the life-changing influence that a classroom teacher can have “teachers could better help their students and themselves if they learned to look at teaching from students’ point of view” (Gregory, 2001, p. 77). My journeys studying in different cultural and socio-economic contexts gave me an awareness of the power of having a positive attitude and how to resiliently cope when faced with life’s toughest challenges. Exploring and discovering my own repertoire of emotional skills such as resilience and persistence, helped me to understand and view “the learning process” from another perspective. This perspective included social emotional competencies and understanding that education can help anyone to succeed, but not only in terms of academic achievement, what was equally important was identifying and responding to the emotional states of mind.

I explored memories and artifacts and discovered and reflected on what I now understand is a Growth Mindset (Dweck, 2010). According to Dweck (2010) “individuals with a growth mindset believe that they can develop their intelligence over time” (p. 16). I believe that with a growth mindset we believe that with concerted effort we can succeed. Our intelligence is not fixed. I collected data and documented my childhood journey, starting with when I began excitedly in a poorly resourced Kindergarten, and then remembering experiences during my primary and secondary education. With my collection of artifacts and documented memories, the analysis process saw themes emerge that related to the emotional journey I had experienced in my life. These themes also linked to how my teachers were intertwined

emotionally, scaffolding me as a student in stressful learning situations, or coping with overcrowded classes and managing challenging classroom environments. Affective factors such as motivation, anxiety, attitude and self-confidence influence the way students learn (Krashen, 1981). Educators need a range of social and emotional skills to cope with complex challenges that require critical thinking to manage emotions in both themselves and their students. Success with learning is acquired by students when they experience emotionally positive social interactions with their teacher and peers (Chomsky, 2009). As a researcher, I discovered from collecting personal data, documenting and analysing my autoethnography that the teachers who were unable to understand my emotional needs as a learner, impacted me negatively in many ways. I now believe that a teacher needs to have more than content knowledge of their teaching discipline. Teachers need a skillset that include emotional and socio-competencies, abilities and strategies to engage, help and guide their students, particularly those students who come from diverse backgrounds, cultures and family contexts (Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013). Classrooms are emotional places. At different times they can experience such states as joy, enthusiasm and irritation. The teacher's skill in working with emotional conditions and adapting their students' emotions affects what and how children learn. Findings from this paper brought forth more questions,

What emotional skills and strategies do teachers need for today's classrooms? Are they explicitly taught in pre-service teacher education? Should such skills and strategies be categorised or defined as "emotional" competencies or intelligence? Do we prepare pre-service teachers with practical skills for this teaching, and do pre-service teachers have the opportunity to explore emotional intelligence in various core studies during their teacher education and qualification?

A teacher needs skills to be socially and emotionally competent, to reflect and become self-aware recognising their emotions as well as recognising and understanding students' emotions of frustration, anxiety and stress (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). These competencies are often grouped in what is referred to as the Emotional Intelligence (EI) theory. "Emotional Intelligence involves the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 35).

In this autoethnography, I began to understand "the learning process" from another perspective. I harnessed strong emotive responses to documented memories and interviews with classmates and family, reflecting on my new understanding that any school success I had achieved was not due to academic achievement. What was more important I discovered was the ways I had navigated and become aware of my emotional state of mind. Motivation plays an essential role in a students' learning. Students who find activities interesting, fun and useful will want to participate more in the classroom (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This motivation, positive attitude, persistence and resilience brought me to where I am today, learning every day from others and with others in order to become an effective reflective practitioner. I am aware of my motivation to keep persisting and working hard to achieve desires. I am currently researching the role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in pre-service teacher education to possibly help future teachers to manage, understand harness and use emotions such as anger, self-esteem, motivation and embarrassment to build resilience and persistence for learning.

Conclusion: Not there “yet”

This autoethnography has helped me to identify and to describe the journey of my self-awakening of my identity, and passion for teaching; It supports my contention of the “emotional” importance of being a teacher in the life of a child. I draw upon both the great teachers who inspired me to become a teacher and to emulate them as well as the ones who left me with bitter emotions and memories and who in turn inspired me to want to change the way students are emotionally scaffolded to learn.

In this autoethnography, I have explored experiences that have attempted to provide an explanation for the emotional skillset that has shaped who I am today. I have shared and reflected on my childhood, digging deeply to uncover different sometimes sad or unfortunate, happy and valuable experiences I lived during my formative childhood years. I described how these journeys changed me inwardly, how I reconstructed myself, my motivations, my emotions and emotional skills and directed my life towards becoming a more informed and effective professional teacher.

Finally, I described how challenging it was for me to succeed at university, how hard I had to work to achieve everything I have today. As Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) argue, “writing can give people a voice that, before writing they may not have felt they had” (p. 280). While writing this paper, I felt empowered re-telling my past experiences, which whilst personal and unique, were for me both meaningful and powerful. Writing this paper helped me reconsider where I am. It has been a journey of reflection to discover the reasons behind the decisions I have taken this lifetime.

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