



Academic Autoethnographies: Inside Teaching in Higher Education

Pillay, Daisy; Naicker, Inbanathan; and Pithouse-Morgan, Kathleen, eds.
Sense Publishers, 2016

Book Review

Tags: autoethnography | research methods | teaching with the arts

Reviewed by: Cynthia Stewart

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The editors of this book are based in a School of Education at a South African university where they teach and research in the academic specializations of Teacher Development Studies (Daisy and Kathleen) and Educational Leadership and Management (Inbanathan) (2). There are thirteen chapters that identify how each utilizes autoethnography within South African higher education. Each author discusses their personal and/or professional narrative of lived experiences as a doctoral student, researcher, or educator within South African higher education. Even though the book is written from a South African higher education viewpoint, the strength of the book is its usefulness to academics who are interested in learning how to be self-reflective, find their authentic voice, and use creative measures (photos, poems, storyboards, exhibitions, journals, metaphor drawings, and so forth) to share their experiences to a wider community within and outside of academia. The book invites 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 (14). Within the book, autoethnography is defined in multiple ways by different practitioners. However, one key definition is “autoethnography has potential to deepen and extend our understandings of lived educational experiences through the articulation and acknowledgment of how selves are sociocultural, political, and historical (14).” Each chapter’s author focuses on a lived educational experience for which they use autoethnography as their method of self-reflexive research.

Liz Harrison (chapter 2) sought to write an autoethnography “that is ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its

content orientation” (Chang 2008, 48). She focuses on how she came to give weight to her voice and the opportunities afforded her to speak for change within higher education. Lasse Reinikainen and Helene Zetterstrom Dahlqvist (chapter 5) focus on how as teachers and researchers there is a challenge to find ways to teach about issues connected to complex and abstract societal structures, especially if teachers want students to understand and make connections to their own individual experiences (70). They used the art of curating an exhibit as a form of self-reflexivity and writing about the ethical issues of the process. They explore the thought-provoking question - “Is there social change in you?” Their emphasis is on the vulnerability of teachers moving from private (personal) to public (shared) experiences with their students.

The remainder of the book is equally valuable for educators implementing autoethnography using visual art (poems, exhibits, storyboards, photography, family history, and so forth). The book accomplishes much in the short space of thirteen well-structured chapters. It is an important resource for those seeking to use autoethnography to improve their teaching.

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