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**The Emergent Researcher: One woman's journey into the Academy.**

**Author: Agli Zavros**

**University of Southern Queensland**

### **Abstract**

This paper is written from the autoethnographer's perspective. It explores my journey into the Academy. In the paper I narrate aspects of my life pathways and experiences associated with markers of identity such as race, ethnicity, language, class and gender. As a white (or a category of white) Greek-Cypriot, bilingual, working class woman I have been engaged with and have participated within the Australian education system as a student, teacher, teacher educator and educational researcher. My experiences inform: "that which I was", "that which I am", "that which I am not" and "that which I am becoming". Drawing on my experiences and observations I examine notions of efficacy, agency and care.

Experiences, meaning, self, identity and human interaction are represented through a personal narrative. I engage with narrative as a way of knowing and being. This reflects a way of life, a way of being, and a means through which I make sense of the world around me. This narrative represents a positioning of self. I believe that it is important to do this when working with pre-service teachers. Following the work of Britzman (2003) exploration of biography must give attention to the historical context of the past and present that make up our subjective selves. In doing this I concur with a social constructivist notion of identity, where identity is defined predominantly as a series of personal choices. It is these series of choices that denote the journey into the academy and which I juxtaposed in relation to Plato's allegory of the cave. For me the allegory of the cave is an educative narrative about personal choices towards a shift in consciousness or a movement to a state of "wakefulness" (Clandinin and Connelly 2000) that emerges through the comportment of the self with

"□□□□□□□□ζ□□the unhidden" (Heidegger 2002, p. 20). The significance of this is that it represents the learning journey in relation to place, space and time. Working from the autoethnographer's stance the idiosyncratic nature of narratives of comportment is significant in understanding how identity is negotiated through lived experiences. Everyone, including students, teachers, researchers and participants have stories of comportment that are associated with their personalised notions of care, efficacy and agency.

This paper represents a world view which may sit outside of others' realities. The significance of this is that in acknowledging narrative accounts of lived experiences we are able to extend essentialist constructions of care, efficacy and agency.

The metaphor of a journey often denotes movement from one place, space or time to another. For me this journey is one that has taken place on multiple levels that define my notion of care. Throughout my working life there has been an emerging notion of care or caring about, which is associated with my personal lived experiences, as a student, teacher and more recently teacher educator. Writing this paper from the vantage point of an early career researcher, making sense of my journey into the Academy, brings with it a constant comparative critical reflexivity. The emergence of my researcher identity and my journey into the Academy is also about the emergence of my critical voice that relate to transitions defining my identity in relation to race, ethnicity, language, class and gender.

Identity is negotiated from learning that arises through personal experiences. Throughout my work, I draw on social constructionist theory, and adhere to a view that identity is informed by predominantly personal choice or compartments. This means that I question the idea that identity is given, defined by fixed, supposedly objective criteria. Identity is understood in particular political, social, cultural, and spiritual contexts, which characterise individuated notions of race, ethnicity, language, class and gender. Additionally I regard identity as an implicit notion that is difficult to define empirically; we glean at aspect of identity through narrations about lived experience.

My journey into the Academy is constructed from “a metaphorical three-dimensional inquiry space” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50) and is an engagement with my “story as data” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 7). It enables me to capture and communicate the emotional nature of my lived experience as well as capturing the dynamic nature of these lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and how they have informed and broadened the conceptualisation my identity and subsequently my understanding of the teaching and

learning process. My writing in this paper is also concerned with expressing the particularities of the experiences of a Greek-Cypriot, working class woman.

For teachers, and teacher educators, such narrative or biographies may be defined according to (Britzman, 1986, p 443) as:

... the cumulative experience of school lives – which, in turn, inform their knowledge of the student’s world, of school structure, and of curriculum. All this contributes to well-worn and commonsensical images of the teacher’s work and serves as the frame of reference for prospective teachers’ self-images. But the dominant model of teacher education as vocational training does not address the hidden significance of biography in the making of a teacher...

In teacher personal narratives, role-identities are constructed as narratives that explain and provide a rationale for ways of acting given environmental context and conditions. Through this paper I enter a complex narrative web, a set of interrelated narrations that explore the peculiarities of a life lived as a series of transitions. These narrations provide a set of juxtapositions positioning of self in time and place that together represent the negotiated self that is  $\square\square\square\square\square$ /Agli. This type of identity work reflects my view of the teaching and learning process as being fluid, reflexive and constantly changing. Through my teaching of and conversations with final year pre-service teachers, I am constantly made aware of how our interactions create a zone of intersubjectivities from which we co-construct shared meaning/s. It is working within this zone that notions of care are defined. Care is defined in relation the comportment with “ $\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square$ ” the unhidden” (Heidegger, 2002, p. 20).

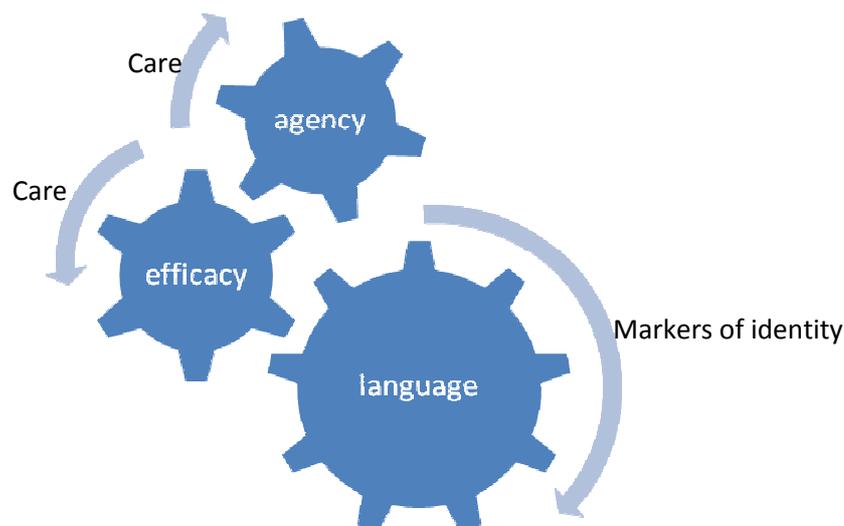
Britzman suggests that in becoming teachers, individuals find themselves confronting a set of demands and assumptions, and engage with a range of voices and discursive practices. As students entering into teacher education we bring with us our chronology negotiated throughout our cumulative classroom lives (Britzman, 2003). This transition requires a shift of consciousness. Friere in *The Politics of Education* proposed that (1985, p. 124):

Theoretical praxis is only authentic when it maintains the dialectic movement between itself and that praxis which is carried out in a particular context. These two forms of praxis are two inseparable moments of the process by which we reach critical understanding. In other words, reflection is only real when it sends us back, as Sartre insists, to the given situation in which we act.

The struggle for voice is bounded in language that makes up the internalised narratives that denotes this theoretical praxis that informs practice.

Language can mask and illuminate, and also affirm and challenge, how we understand our social conditions. It has the potential either to reproduce given realities as immutable and ubiquitous, or to produce critiques that have the potential to construct new realities (Britzman 2003, p34-35).

This relationship between language and praxis can be exemplified diagrammatically, as understood in relation to markers of identity:



As an autoethnographic narrative researcher, I am working with these internalised narratives, constantly entering this complex narrative web, as I make sense of my self's comportment with "□□□□□□□□□□the unhidden" (Heidegger 2002, p. 20). In this paper I highlight how personal narratives, in this instance my own, are connected to theoretical notions of efficacy and agency. Drawing on my PhD, I also emphasis that these notions are underpinned by notion of care or caring about. Furthermore notion of care and caring about become part of my comparative critical reflexivity and are associated with my personal comportment with markers of identity. Highlighting aspects of this complex narrative web, I draw on the work of Barone (2000) to highlight the different me-voices that interact to shape our my subjective view of the world around me. I represent these me-voices using fonts: Greek language as my mother tongue; a *handwriting font* to represent my story; *italics* in my re-storying of the allegory of the cave<sup>1</sup>; and Times New Roman as the academic voice.

As an emergent researcher my ideological stance, as I enter the Academy, reflects particular orientations, investments, beliefs, and dispositions embedded within internally persuasive narrations. These narrations conjure particular images of knowledge that inform personalised understanding of efficacy and agency. In this respect I concur with Polkinghorne's (1988) view that narratives reflect a meaning making process; a cognitive process through which we are able to bring together the personal with the social as well as accounting for consciousness, language, and the act of storying in making meaning. This can communicate the personal situated within lived experiences to a wider audience. Acknowledging that these narratives

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<sup>1</sup> Plato's allegory of the cave illustrates the importance of transcending constrained and conventional thinking in a movement towards enlightenment. Plato imagines a group of people who have lived chained in a cave all of their lives, facing a blank wall. Shadows are projected on the wall by things passing in front of a fire behind the prisoners. He explains how an individual who manages to escape from the cave sees the true breadth of the world and then struggles to share that understanding with those still shackled by their thinking.

exist with an inter-subjective zone, I also draw on the work of Ellis and Bochner (2000) and position my work within the autoethnography frame.

Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographer's gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspect of their personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations (Ellis and Bochner 2000, p. 738).

Through this stance, lived experiences emerge as a comportment of the negotiated self with

“□□□□□□□□□□the unhidden” (Heidegger, 2002, p. 20). To me the term

“comportment” captures a significant dimension of the nature of personal narratives.

Heidegger aligned to this term in his detailed exploration of Plato's allegory of the cave and the nature of being. To understand the comportment of self with

“□□□□□□□□□□the unhidden” the self is often fractured, broken into different

narrative parts that together explain something about personal motivation and the direction of energy towards desired ends.

The role of the teacher has often been viewed as an omnipotent knower. This is not dissimilar to how some researchers position themselves as a “central and omnipresent figure” (Mantzoukas, 2004, p. 1002). For me this is problematic because it ignores the intersubjective nature of knowing and being. Working from the autoethnographer's stance, this positioning is challenged as the researcher, learner and teacher gazes back and forth, both through an ethnographic wide-angle lens focusing outward and then looking inward, exposing a vulnerable self. My journey into the Academy also recognises the symbolic and metaphoric representations that are constructed as internalised narratives about self as the self moves through stages of transition, change and growth (McAdams, 1988, 1993 and 1996;

McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2001). Comportment for me is about looking back and forth in both my research and teaching as represented by Plato's allegory of the cave. The allegory of the cave to me is about Plato's prisoner's efficacy, agency and care.

In sharing my story I also share something about how my academic identity was formed. As highlighted earlier, the students that I work with often call forward stories about lived experiences as we work toward connecting theory to practices. The process of telling and listening to others stories, where individuals narratively construct and re-construct their identity (Bruner, 2002; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Kenyon & Randall, 1997; Mishler, 2004; Søreide, 2006; Watson, 2006; Wortham, 2000) forms a generative text from which we construct social understanding about processes and practices. This socially constructed generative text informs notions of efficacy and agency (Zavros, 2007).

One aspect of the work I do with pre-service teachers involves interpreting the roles of the teacher in relation to various social, political, social, ethical and legal imperatives. When doing this work we look at the spaces from which we construct our narratives. When I recount my story as a student, teacher and tertiary lecturer I explore with them how the me-voices interact to shape my negotiated self and hence my philosophy for teaching and learning in relation to these externally defined imperatives, conditions and contexts. In this instance it is the story of my personalised journey into the Academy: a journey that may or may not have similarity to the learning journey of others, which offers something about "the essence of being" (Heidegger 2002 p. 228). My narrative for this paper relates to three spaces: that occupied by the student; that occupied by the teacher; and finally that occupied

by the tertiary lecturer and researcher. These spaces do not exist in isolation from each other. They are part of the integrated self and the □□□□□□Agli story.

As a pre-service teacher my challenge was to transition from the role of student to that of teacher. This was not an easy task, for my memories of being a student were vivid and I was constantly mindful of not forgetting the challenges I faced as a student when embarking on teaching others. Each stage in my development as a student involved some very difficult periods which I remember through my emotional self and at the time did not have words to fully describe. These were times of my life I inhabited a space where the vocabulary I needed to use were foreign, different, unknown. It no surprise that my honours thesis was a comparative examination of my personal experiences to those of a number of other young adults who lived within two or more language worlds. I found myself wanting to engage with their stories and wanted to engage with and understanding the qualitative and the particular (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). My supervisor suggested the research validity of this would be questioned and so it was here that I first entered the world of quantitative research. Similarly, I conceptualised my PhD in qualitative terms, and was redirected by my first supervisor into a quantitative methodology. It was several years before I was sufficiently sure of my own academic voice that I reclaimed a qualitative paradigm. I found a poem by Susan Hawthorn captured something of the tension I felt writing my honours thesis and this has as much significance to the story I am about to tell as it did over a decade ago.

*Words on Mirrors*

I write words on mirrors,  
I begin with my blood.

My blood and words mix  
creating a new syntax.

A syntax of relationships  
Between words and the self.

Something called reality,  
Mine. Not theirs.

The reality of blood and words  
That speak of other things.

There are eggs and words and worlds  
and caves beneath the earth

The significance of this poem lies in its openness allowing the reader to make connection and draw meaning and in so doing connecting the poem to something more and something bigger, something about the “essence of being” (Heidegger, 2002, p. 228). Similarly, stories recounted to me as data for my honours thesis and PhD enabled the imagining of other possible worlds (Bruner, 1986) all interconnected within a larger narrative truth that is the story of humanity. Narrative inquiry invites interconnectedness between possible world, and alternative truths. It is through this interconnectedness that human beings make connections and develop, as Susan Hawthorn suggest, a “new syntax”. Pinnegar & Daynes (2007, p. 7), refer to this, as being a “relational” turn in narrative research. Including this poem in an otherwise quantitative honours thesis was in part acknowledging my critical voice that was bubbling up inside and for which I did not yet have my own words.

My engagement with Susan Hawthorn’s words enables me to reflect about my own story and how language, in particular words, have been a significant theme. Language and words can isolate and restrict participation and on the other hand form bridges across the particularities of lived experiences. Narrative research, from a pragmatic stance, enables the researcher to engage words as data (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 7). In my PhD, narrative research was the means by which stories connected and meanings were generated about individuated and shared understanding about efficacy, agency and care. Engaging with words enabled me to

highlight the personal and social dimensions of language, which also highlights the centrality of relationships (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 7) in the meaning making process. It is after all through word that we construct our understanding of the world around us and share it with others.

In beginning with words and working outwards, I again embraced a social constructionist view of self and my tendency to engage with heuristic logic. In doing so I endeavoured to understand social constructions of reality that individuals situate within their storied accounts.

Kelly and Sewell (1998, p. 13) state:

When people use heuristic logic, they are using words to point to realities that have wider meaning than personal or dictionary definitions, words that evoke common understanding. “Community”, “justice”, and “democracy” are evocative words which can take on both social and personal meaning because they signify shared human realities. Naming those realities helps people appreciate the importance of social context and so take action in ways that include a large number of different but associated people events and situations.

Heuristic logic is situated knowledge with reference to a variety of purposes (survival, stability, or maintenance of self in relation to place and time). This logic is represented as organised perceptions of reality exchanged as narratives about lived experiences. From personal experiences this often occurs when teachers feel at ease to talk. I explore teachers’ narratives as part of understanding the content of social network ties. Such knowing/s about constructed reality are transferred through the conduit metaphor (Reddy, 1979), through language found in stories told about lived experiences. This is summarized by Johnson (1987):

1. Thoughts exist as objects when spoken;
2. Words and sentences exist as containers for these objects; and

3. Communication consists in finding the right words-containers for such objects and sending this container along the conduit to the listener, who must take the object out of the word-container.

In this paper, the words of my story are containers representing my journey of becoming – that is also a movement to a state of “wakefulness” (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). In saying this I am reminded of Britzman (1998) referring to the work of Maxine Greene suggesting that, in living our lives we must occupy at least for periods of time a space where there is uneasiness or discomfort. My PhD highlighted for me that personalised constructions of efficacy, agency and care are situated within the temporal space that include moments of uneasiness and discomfort. My participant constructed understandings also reflect Maxine Greene’s (1967) viewpoint in *Existential Encounter for Teachers*, that our human imperative as individuals is an existentialist tendency to look from the moment into the future with consideration of the past – whilst acting in the moment.

This is significantly situated within both language and ethnicity as markers of my identity that inform: “that which I was”, “that which I am”, “that which I am not” and “that which I am becoming”. But to complicate this representation of myself: “that which I am not” may be “that which I am becoming” and subsequently “that which I am”. I begin with the shadows.

Language, ethnicity, class and gender feature within the memories I have of schooling. Looking back these seemed to be both my strengths and my shackles that bound my in space and time.

*The Shadows*

*Do they ever go away?*

*In the classrooms, I sat and looked at the shadows upon the black board. The teacher's shadow was also there as her hand moved shaping the forms that are the words which I copied – diligently, trustingly. I copied these words onto blank pages, year in year out all through primary school. I copied the words from books; I copied in hope that they would become something more. It was not until I realised the limitations of this approach that I realised – these forms were only word-containers – the content of which I had to take out – but how does one do this? How do I get to know what is inside these word-containers?*

It was not until I reached high school that one teacher's efforts and care made it possible for me to consider these words from another perspective. This teacher's shadow reaches deeply into my soul and she came to inspire me and become a role model. After overcoming a fight to learn English, I then had to fight to stay in the schooling system. My school principal's words in year 10 still ring loud in my ears: *“Why do you need to go onto year 11 and 12 – surely you will be getting married. As a Greek girl is that not what is expected. You will help your husband run a fish and chip shop.”* He said these words to me in front of my father who did not understand his meaning. I could not translate these words. He laughed and my dad laughed too. I think my dad laughed because he was embarrassed perhaps because he had not understood the joke. The principal said these words with a smirk – was he joking or was this how he truly felt about all of us Greek girls.

Lived experiences shape our critical voice. Britzman (2003) noted that pre-service teachers' view of teaching is often shaped by their own school experiences. She further highlighted that it is from these experiences that theories about teaching and learning are formed. My journey into the Academy - through high school, matriculation undergraduate studies and PhD, was a learning journey that was at times emotional, physical and spiritual.

*Throughout this journey - with the words remaining foreign - the word containers stacked higher and higher filled with information about: teaching, good or bad teaching, behaviour, good or bad behaviour, science, maths, art and so on.*

I relate to my pre-service teachers who come back from professional experience – saying “now it makes sense”. It was the same for me back then – it was within the everydayness of the classroom that I found a way to unpack the word-containers delivered during lectures and tutorial at university. This did not occur in isolation it occurred as part of my interactions with other in-service and pre-service teachers. These interactions occurred through the sharing of stories (with selected word-containers) which as a listener one unpacked, evaluated and in some cases provided another story similar yet different. As an academic I have brought this learning with me into the Academy in my work with pre-service teachers assisting them in making connections between the theory and practice.

The world around us is a story that unfolds into another story and yet another. I see myself and others linked to stories told, and stories that will be told. Through story I find that people begin to construct a story their own comportment with “□□□□□□□□ζ the □unhidden” (Heidegger 2002, p. 20). Through the construction, telling and the critical evaluation or commentary of their story by the lecturer or peers, pre-service teachers begin to see how their story is situated within their lived experiences and subsequently make connections that are emancipatory and transformative.

This process of constructing a “new syntax” can also be collaborative. For example it was with members of my network that I constructed an understanding of care and caring-about (Zavros, 2007). Through my engagement with the heuristic logic found in other’s stories, I comprehend the individuated relationship between social structure, culture and human agency. It was during my PhD, analysing narratives from the autoethnographic stance that I began to understand that care can be understood simply as an emotional engagement with both personal and external probabilities that are expressed as the effort exerted in the movement towards a desired goal or outcome. For Plato’s prisoners, this is the movement into the light and away from the shadows. Care may be used to account for personal capacity, capabilities and competencies. It also accounts for that which relates to the autonomous self and to the need for relatedness (self exist in relation to other at various level of engagement). Above all I believe it is about personalised choices about the individual’s level of engagement. This qualitative relationship between efficacy, agency and care reflects an emphasis on my movement away from categorical imperatives, discussed by Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994) in a relational construction of human agency, to an engagement with the particularities on a case by case basis.

### *The cave*

*I remember the shadow before I remember the appearance of the cave. The cave only became known to me after I started moving. Through an urge to inquire, I started to think for myself again. The cave floor was safe – a location from which to contemplate. But it is not enough to contemplate and conjecture; one must live. I move forward at each point I stop to note: Is the cave there - Is it something constructed and deconstructed by the soul in its movement forward? I stop to noting a feeling of wakefulness – the recognition that the “I” is connected to “other”. It is only when the prisoner stands up and looks around that they*

*become awakened to the reality of the cave, the other prisoners and a personal desire to leave the cave.*

As I engage with other narratives, I find myself connecting with the narrative truths that highlight life as a complex web filled with particularities that can only be explained when the researcher fully engages with the life world of the other (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In doing this the researcher turns towards and achieves a “focus on the particular” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 3), that highlights deep thoughts and feelings that pertain to one feeling efficacious or non-efficacious.

*As a teacher this did not make sense to me. Having worked within the profession I was awakened to the fact that there were many factors impacting on teachers lived experiences and subsequently how efficacious they felt.*

During my PhD, it was through my engagement with narrative truth that I was able to exploring notions of efficacy – this marked a movement away from “off-the-rack, one-size-fits-all accounts” quantitative approach to measuring teacher efficacy and a turning towards the qualitative engaging with “people, values, intentions, and actions” (Bowman, 2006, p. 13).

The autoethnographic stance also allows me to engage with my position in relation to others and hence in understanding others’ conceptualisation of their efficacy I also begin to understand my own. My journey into the Academy has highlighted the significance of engagement with voice, signature and authorship (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Just like a teacher entering into the profession, the first few years were marked with periods of doubt, uncertainty and fear. Through narrative inquiry, engagement with the “local and situated” offered me a comportment of the self to a “resistant or counter-hegemonic” (Bowman, 2006,

p. 9) □□□□□ζ□ on teacher efficacy, agency and care – that in and of itself was emancipatory. This paper is an example of this – I am writing from my voice. A voice that reflects me: Greek-Cypriot child/now a woman, a refugee, a migrant, a student, a teacher, an honours student, a PhD student, a researcher and the last one part of me which I am still struggling with; an academic. Engagement with ones particularities enables this inward-outward reflexivity in the research process. Each aspect of my biographical story holds significance to my entry into the Academy and must also be situated within understanding of race, ethnicity, language, class and gender.

*Looking back at my Greek culture women are not fully represented in education and is the case in Australia, at least my memories are of male teacher and only a few female teachers.*

*Plato's was not inclusive or respectful of women – at bit like my high school principal. This makes me feel like shouting here I am thinking and writing.*

*The allegory of the cave applies to women. Women have been prisoners of a masculine discourse about knowledge and power. It often appears that the world of knowing is very male driven – to be successful do I need to think more like a male.*

*Entering the Academy – this become another struggle. What about family, love, life...*

**As I enter the Academy, I look around and wonder if there is a place for my way of knowing; are there spaces for individuality. I realised that this was not the case in teaching – that teacher practice and individuated ways of knowing and doing were often colonised by top-**

down imperatives. The ongoing challenge of becoming an academic is one of maintaining the passion and enthusiasm that motivated me to commence postgraduate studies.

Teaching must, at least for me, occur from a constant comparative critical reflexivity. This I denotes in my work an ethic of pedagogical care that is the teachers critical voice. Doing this requires one to be fully cognisant of ones markers of identity. When I began teaching in the Bachelor of Education at the University of Southern Queensland, the students in the first year were asked to construct an autoethnographic account of their identity framed by race, gender and class. In one of the tutorials a student asked me how I would approach this task. My response, recognising the student's dilemma with the enormity of this task was to tell them part of my story:

*To look at my family you can see that they come from the Middle East - Cyprus. My brother has had some frustrating experiences at airports when travelling; people have looked at him as if he was a terrorist. My youngest brother often experienced very racist remarks - also based on the colour of his skin. But I was so different to other members of my family; I had fair hair, fair skinned and freckles, reflecting the ethnic diversity in my family's history as a microcosm of the racial and ethnic diversity of Cyprus. It was this same diversity; the conflict between Turkish and Cypriot heritage of Cyprus that led to conflict in 1976 and my displacement as a refugee. Whilst Australia is where my narrative is situated, a small village in Cyprus was where the critical learning of my early childhood occurred.*

Heidegger (2002 p20) reminds his readers that:



words and books and people who spoke as if I wasn't even there. That was then...

### *The light*

*The light is at first blinding, but also inviting. Entering into the light one either persists or turns away. How should one behave when they are faced with the hegemonic practices of an education system or society? What to do with a student at the end of a school year? What do you do with poor English expression? What do you do with a Greek woman who wants to be more than what has been put before her? Will the Academy make space for my voice? No...I see I have to make that space for myself... I see I need to...and then...ok and then...but what about that person they are doing it differently... I see different rules...time within the Academy...experience...*

The light is an important component in my story – in the moment of a lived experience it is difficult to reflect. Looking back...

*I remember my days in the classroom – the intensity of the work and the needs of my students resulted in me operating as if an automaton...do this... move here... line up...*

This is not different to the storied account of my participants, it is like being in a movie and it is only after you step out of the role that you begin to reflect. I liken this experience to the prisoner stepping into the light – the light is challenging it is confronting and so starkly different to the light of the cave that I would imagine one begins to reflect backward as they move forward into the newness of the current lived moment.

Looking back as I move forward I remembered that I was re-named, “Egli” I was no longer to write my name “□□□□□” and my protests that my name translated to Agli were brushed aside (This is something that I put right two decades later). I was then told I was to go with a woman – who did not talk to me...

*I was led to a demountable classroom at the back of a school. I was given some books. My cousins were there also... but it did not feel right.*

*That's right! We grew things on cotton wool, and with my cousin's translation of what the teacher was saying I learnt that we could eat the grass like plants growing on the cotton wool. I was taught the alphabet - some of the letters were Greek they stole them from us I said to my cousins - we laughed - and numbers - different words for the same symbols.*

*I learnt about Susan and David. I learnt the verbs, skip, run, hop, sit...*

*We moved. A new demountable, with a teacher who had purple hair and pink lips...*

*she was older than my □□□□□□. The words, translated informed me that*

*there was no teacher there to teach me. I was to come back in the New Year.*

*I cried - I don't know the reason behind the tears - perhaps it was getting to be too much for me.*

*They were talking ... what were they saying?*

*It seemed that after they talked I was to stay.*

*I was put into a classroom - there were three Greek kids there.*

They could not speak to me properly. Oh no!! What did they do to you?

I remember thinking their □□□□□□ (language) sounded funny and I wanted to laugh.

For the rest of the year I copied, I did maths, I heard people speaking making sounds I did not understand. Was I dumb, had I lost my sense of knowing, being, doing.

**To put this in context – around this period, teaching English as a second language was still about simply exposing students to the English language – a whole language approach - it was done in such a way that teachers mostly forget that these students had another language already.**

I was 10 years old when I began to make sense of the sounds that were coming out of people's mouths. I got into so much trouble. I remember a trip to the sea, putting my feet in the water and remembering the feel of the water that surrounded my island.

Three girls started walking towards me...

Egli, say after us. "fucking bird"

"fucking bird" I copied.

Say to teacher (who I found was the principal, a very strict man) – here he is.

Hello – this is a "fucking bird"

I was so proud I had constructed a sentence to identify the bird by its name – provided to me by those girls who perhaps were just out to have some fun.

*I copied the word spoken by others – I did not know better.*

The shadows, do not leave, they too become a point of reference that need to be reviewed critically time and time again. This is an imperative for educators especially as we try to bring about improvements in teaching and learning through our teaching and research. For me this has become a cycle that is: compartment, de-compartment and re-compartment. It is the complex web of interrelated concepts and stories about care (Zavros, 2007) from which I construct meaning which subsequently provide me with an energy that underpins my efficacy and agency.

As a student, in all stages of learning I kept trying. I wanted to make it work because it was expected of me – expectations which I internalised and became my own. But I could not read and I could not write. The shadows of books troubled me. I remember sitting, after receiving advice from my science teacher, looking up words in the dictionary. I spent time reading in the library and became a library monitor. But really when it came down to writing - I copied and copied trying to get to the meaning of words. It is not until I entered into University study to become a teacher that I began understand what makes someone a reader or writer – disheartened by my early experience of the same. This understanding came from actual engagement with the theories about teaching and learning. I think that doing education was as much about me understanding the system that nearly broke my self image and concept as a learner – as a desire to become a teacher to support others on their learning journey.

*...Whilst finishing my PhD, as many of us do, I took up casual teaching. I remember being asked to do some of the lectures in an English course. Often there are nervous feelings about doing this – but for me these feeling we paralysing. I*

stayed up late at nights thinking through the lectures - I read and read trying to get at what English was about. How do you teach others about the language that for most of them is a lived experience?

I distinctly remember the first lecture - I was late, I was lost and kept circling the building trying to find the entrance. I finally asked for help...the people talking to me seemed to be talking a foreign language... I repeated their words...hoping that in the repetition I would hear the words and actually understand what they were telling me. I walked into the lecture room - the first part was an introduction - so I was fine. We got my PowerPoint running, and I was ready to begin...

An incredible feeling come over me ... I had a metallic taste in my mouth this feeling was on my tongue, it travelled through my body and into my limbs...Was I going to faint?

Here I was after all these years...lecturing in the Academy ...ENGLISH!!

It felt like I was on stage in on opening night...there was a sheet of light in front of me... I had to keep looking... I moved forward...don't know how. I saw one of the students faces looking at me...was she concerned or angry...how long had I been standing there...

Finally I spoke... Hello! I told them the story of when I first came to Australia, with only about three words: hello, yes and no.

I think about the prisoner escaping the cave, moving into the light when I think about this story. But it was not the first time...I had this feeling every time I was about to speak... even to my kindergarten students. The journey to becoming a teacher was one of needing to demonstrate my proficiency with the language as much as it was about understanding the profession that I was to enter into. I left teaching at the end of 1999 and never went back. I began what I then thought was a journey into enlightenment - the journey of a postgraduate. I had been told about scholars – people who studied words and books. The acknowledgement in my thesis reads:

*Whom does one acknowledge as supporting, challenging, informing and enabling?*

*I will not name people other than to say thank you and that I dedicate this poem to all the people who have been part of this journey.*

*You were there.*

*You heard and understood the need.*

*A voice, less than... sometime more.*

*The layers and layers...*

*The spoken words: "I am alive".*

*Remembering... the tears, the sighs, and laughter,*

*...stories did unfold.*

*Attachments...friendships, foes,*

*You and I,*

*The stories we contain...remember,*

*I go forward now. I look back and feel content,*

You were there.

You heard. You know.

**Until the very end when I spoke – through a poem. I found my voice, signature and authorship.**

*Because I nominated, against all persuasion, to study French in year 7, I was not placed in a remedial year level, with all the typecasting and constrained opportunities that represented. I then made it through High school.*

*I made it through Matriculation College and past the college principal's pronouncement that my proper place was in a fish and chips shop.*

*I found my way through two years of undergraduate studies in Commerce and Economics which is what my father wanted of me and not where my heart lay at all.*

*Thanks two amazing ladies at the university, I was allowed "on probationary terms" to begin my teacher education program which I completed with honours.*

*I worked past a PhD supervisory system ...*

*I became the academic...now what do I do...*

The words "made it through" "made it past" "found my way" "stepped out" "stepped in" ring the loudest as I write this paper, a bounded version of a story so complex. The point at which the light hits the eyes this is a point of fear, what will one see, this is a time when perhaps the past, the shadows flash before my eyes. Through the process of compartment a new process - a new inquiry – a deeper level of care emerges. A compartment of the self to the unhidden

“that which is before” (Heidegger 2002 p 20) me: for me it is words, or word-containers, which I unpack. Plato’s words which I recently saw written across a wall in the State library of Brisbane, reflect the essence of our humanity. The words were:

Thinking: the talking of the soul with itself.

Plato

How true this has been for me in my life. Each of us construct and reconstruct our narrative – these are links to that which we dream, desire and ultimately aim to live. In conclusion this paper is written from my individuated notion of care.

*Doing this I bring forward the particularities of my lived experiences of a Greek-Cypriot, working class, woman who has been engaged with and has participated within the Australian education system as a student, teacher, teacher educator and educational researcher.*

As an autoethnographic researcher, I acknowledge that peoples’ offers an alternative view to “off-the-rack, one-size-fits-all accounts,” (Bowman, 2006, p. 13) of reality that is often represented within educational political imperatives. Engagement with the personal within the social in stories allows me to acknowledge the intersubjective nature of the world that I am part of. The challenge is a movement away from a research imperative that focuses on generalisation, because when we aggregate voice, signature and authorship we ignore the particular or in Maxine Greene’s terms the “trifle” (1967 p. 24-25) and...

*...treats diversity as an object to be studied rather than as a counter, resistant and resilient narrative to existing discourses that continue to ‘other’ the particular.*

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