Working in a Mexican Classroom: An Autoethnographic Study

Abstract: This autoethnographical study seeks to develop a deeper understanding of the challenges that are faced by the researcher in adapting to a new cultural and linguistic setting as well as describing the teaching practices that the researcher encounters in a Mexican classroom; data will be collected through the process of reflective journaling as well as the collection of pictures and artifacts.

Supporting Summary:

Statement of the problem: The problem that the research will explore relates to the experience of traveling to a new country, in this case, Mexico, and the challenges that are associated with such an experience in relation to adapting to a different culture, language, and way of life. The researcher will also document the teaching methods used in Mexico. Schoepflin (2009) notes that autoethnography views the researcher’s own experience as the topic of investigation in its own right and can be used as a representation of the social world. To elaborate, analytic autoethnographies are a subgenre; in conducting this type of study, a researcher is personally engaged in a social group, setting, or culture as a full member and active participant but retracts distinct identity as a self-aware scholar. These types of autoethnographies are committed to an analytic agenda that is grounded in self-experience (Mills, Duerpos, & Wiebe, 2009).

Research question:

1.) What challenges are associated with adapting to a new culture and language?

2.) What teaching practices are used in Mexican classrooms?
Literature Review: Autoethnographies are a qualitative method that has long been used to connect the personal experience to sociology and cultural understanding; the word itself can be broken down into auto (self), ethno (the sociocultural connection), and ography (the application of research) (Wall, 2008). There are conflicting opinions about what can constitute an autoethnography; some suggest that a simple personal narrative is sufficient while others argue that the narrative needs to be connected to pertinent literature. Muncy argues that autoethnography includes an aspect of phenomenology, which is “philosophical orientation adapted by social scientists to promote an understanding between individual states of consciousness, and social life which has undergone considerable reinterpretation and representation as it is adopted by different disciplines” (2010, p.41). Ethnography is often considered an act of memory because fieldwork and the resulting texts cannot be separated from the memories that shape them (Wall, 2008). There are many differences in formality, scope, and format when writing autoethnographies; despite the differences they share common activities such as searching the memory, self-revelation through personal stories, and self-reflection (Chang, 2008). Schoepflin provides several examples of literary forms that constitute autoethnographies, such as a short story about a family member with a medical problem, a personal account of homophobia, an essay about the realities of an academic career, or a paper examining a midlife career change (2009). There are numerous autoethnographies that pertain to the field of education as well as the acquisition of a second language. Lapidus, Kaveh, and Hirano (2013) reference an autoethnography by Canagarajah who discusses his development as a second language (L2) teacher and the development of his identity as a practitioner who does research; he writes about the necessity of
understanding the diverse needs of the community of practice. He also discusses how L2 learners who become L2 teachers develop their multicultural identity (2013). Another author, Ryan, traveled to another country to study an L2 while working on his graduate degree; in his autoethnography, he writes about the differences that exist in his experience as an L2 and some of the teaching methods used by teachers as well as his experience as a graduate student. Through this, he begins to question some of the methods used by L2 teachers (Lapidus, Kaveh, and Hirano).

Research Methodology: This research will take place for the duration of four months, from the time period of January 18\textsuperscript{th}, 2015, to May 18\textsuperscript{th}, 2015 respectively. During this time period, the researcher will travel from Florida, United States to Merida, Mexico in order to participate in a teacher assistant program. While in Mexico, the researcher will serve as an assistant to a kindergarten teacher in a local Spanish speaking Mexican school. The researcher will help to teach English as a second language to these students. As the researcher is performing these activities, the researcher will capture a variety of autoethnographic data; including daily journal entries that contain reflections about conversations with others, the researcher’s attitude towards acquiring a new language, communication with locals, and the researcher’s perception of the culture. The researcher will also collect photographs and artifacts as part of the research data. Anonymity of individuals will be protected. After returning to the United States, the researcher will connect the data collected to existing literature pertaining to different teaching methods that should be used with ELL students.
Findings and results: Findings have not yet been obtained, but will be collected for a four month period; findings and results will be compiled into a paper from the data collected. The approach used to analyze findings will be grounded theory, which was developed in the late 60’s by Anselm Strauss (Ratcliff). In using this analysis method, the researcher reviews collected data or documents, such as field notes, to identify certain categories, which are named and coded; these codes are later used to find similarities and differences. Analyzing these categories helps to form a central focus of the research (Ratcliff).

Implications for the field: This research would be beneficial to the field of education. During this process, the researcher will have the opportunity to reflect upon some methods that are used as she learns an L2; she will also have the opportunity to observe different strategies that are used within the Mexican classroom in order to teach the L2 of English to students. This will help to aid the researcher’s development in becoming a future teacher.
References:


