



Citation for published version:

Clift, B & Clift, R 2017, 'Toward a "Pedagogy of Reinvention": Memory Work, Collective Biography, Self-Study, and Family', *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 23, no. 8, pp. 605-617. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800417729836>

DOI:

[10.1177/1077800417729836](https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800417729836)

Publication date:

2017

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication](#)

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Toward a “Pedagogy of Reinvention”:
Memory Work, Collective Biography, Self-Study, and Family

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Paper for Re-Submission to:
Qualitative Inquiry

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Toward a “Pedagogy of Reinvention”:

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Abstract

In this article we illustrate how we have drawn on the methodology of *collective biography* as a way to inform our teaching practices. Collective biography offers a strategy for retrieving and reworking memories/experiences that can be used to understand subjectivity. In doing so, we utilize this work on our memories, experiences, and subjectivities as we engage in the *self-study of education practice*. Seeking to incorporate embodied, familial, emotional, temporal, contextual, and cognitive interpretations of past and present, we aim to make our pasts useable for our futures. We discuss the ways in which memory, experience, and reinterpretations of both as interplays among past, present and context contribute to our reinvention of teaching practices.

Introduction

We are researchers, educators, and family members located at two different institutions. The first author, the second author’s son, is a lecturer (assistant professor) at a major university in the United Kingdom; the second author is a professor at a major university in the United States. The first author teaches social science research methods, and social and cultural understandings of sport, physical activity, and the body; he works primarily with undergraduate students. The second author teaches graduate courses in research on teaching and undergraduate courses in family and community literacy.

In 2012, we began to explore how we might use our shared family history and our different intellectual histories (as informed through different paradigmatic and theoretical orientations) to better understand ourselves and improve our pedagogical practices. This

article presents the practice, process, and products of *working* our shared family histories, memories, and experiences to understand the first author's subjectivity in relation to his pedagogical approaches and commitments.

A growing body of work recognizes the relevant and significant linkages between analytical approaches to memory and educators' study of their pedagogic selves and practices (Pithouse-Morgan, Mitchell, & Pillay, 2012). We both strive to move toward a *pedagogy of reinvention*, which Mitchell and Weber (2003) conceptualized as a process of

making both the immediate and distant pasts usable. ... of going back over something in different ways and with new perspectives, of studying one's own experience with the insight and awareness of the present for the purposes of acting on the future. (p. 8)

The effect of our work together offers three contributions. The first is a methodological contribution to *collective biography* (Davies & Gannon, 2006) in that we ask how *memory and experience* (Haug et al, 1987) is shaped and shapes the self and informs the process of writing, sharing, discussing, revising, and analyzing stories of gendered subjectification. In the second we add to the small body of work (Mitchell & Weber, 2003; O'Reilly-Scanlon, 2002; Mitchell & Pithouse-Morgan, 2014; Pithouse-Morgan, Mitchell, & Pillay, 2012; Pithouse-Morgan & van Laren, 2015) that puts memory work and collective biography in dialogue with the self-study of teaching practices. Building from the first two, the third contribution explores implications and speculations of working with collective biography with family members—son and mother who share shared memories—as we seek to better understand the construction of our subjectivities (past and present) in pursuit of improving our working with difference as scholars and teachers.

We first explain our conceptual and methodological foundations in memory work, collective biography, and self-study. Following this, we focus on the first author's discursive and embodied experience of masculinity and, in brief, how it connects to his mother's

(mis?)understanding of her son. We then turn to explore how a sense of openness and ethics developed through collective biography can inform pedagogical practices. Finally, we examine how our practice of collective biography as family members incorporates and negotiates writing with memories that are shared between collaborators.

Memory Work and Collective Biography

Haug and colleagues (1987; 2008) located experiences of how particular constructions of femininity worked in creating participants as subjects primarily through memory work. Memory work “is not only experience, but work with the experience” (Haug, 2008, p. 22). In this way, memory work does not recognize memory as truth but rather as a means of talking around, with, and through memories as technologies—sharing telling, writing, and listening—to produce knowledge about the ways individuals are “made social, are discursively constituted in particular fleshy moments” (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 4). The written product of memory work aims, in part, to create writing that evinces the production of the self as a subject, the embodiment of memory, and the process of the formation of the self (Davies, Flemmen, Gannon, Laws, & Watson 2002). The method strives to render visible the “mechanisms of power at work in oneself and on oneself” (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 11) in order to make them available for inspection. Recognizing the body as the locus of subjectification, Davies and colleagues aimed to put “flesh on the bones of the concept of subjectification” (p. 32) and produce memories that come as close as possible to providing an “embodied sense of what happened” (p. 3).

Davies’ and colleagues built from the work of Haug and colleagues (Haug et al., 1987; Haug, 2008) to produce collective biography, which takes up the dual strategy of “retrieving memories and using those memories as data that can be analyzed to produce insights into the processes of subjectification, that is, the processes through which we are

subjected, and actively take up as our own the terms of our subjectification” (Davies, Browne, Gannon, Honan, Laws, Mueller-Rockstroh, & Peterson 2004, p. 369). Collective biography writes both “with and against the original idea” of memory work advanced by Haug and colleagues in that it builds from memory work but incorporates additional theoretical insight, most notably feminist poststructuralism, and methodical practices, such as developing text through workshops and correspondence. Collective biography can involve the collaboration of a group of people who collectively *work* their memories through memory-telling, memory-writing, and reading stories (Davies & Gannon, 2006). Davies, Gannon, and colleagues have generated a substantive base of and for collective biographical projects (see for example: Davies et al. 2004; Davies, Flemmen, Gannon, Laws, & Watson 2002; Davies & Gannon, 2006; Davies & Gannon, 2012; Gannon, Walsh, Byers, & Rajiva, 2014; Gonick, Walsh, & Brown, 2011). Together, we drew on, but modified, Davies and colleagues work with Haug’s “considerations” (Haug, 2008, p. 22)ⁱ as a base for our work with one another. Our work evolved over several months and was based on individual writing for ourselves and to, for, or in response to one another. Our writing was eventually shared with others at conferences and in informal conversations with colleagues.

In our view, collective biography adapts to the task at hand, questions being asked, participants involved, context, foci, and research locations. Although memories certainly form the empirical core of our project, we did not follow a plan, procedure, or prescriptive mode of interacting with one another. Memories were developed through writing, sharing, discussing, presenting, and refining both individually and collectively. Doing so also heeds Haug’s (2008) sensibility that a prerequisite for memory work is recognizing that language is more than a communicative process we use: “Rather, in the existing of language, politics will speak through us and regulate our construction of meaning” (p. 29). As a practice of inquiry, writing in a post-structural vein hones in on language and discourse linking subjectivity,

social organization, and power (Richardson, 1994; 2000; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Appreciating language as a constitutive force, a site of exploration and struggle, and prominent in the formation of one's locally and historically situated subjectivity, writing, sharing, and discussing become ways of understanding and recognizing the positions from which one comes to know and speak. As writers and as speakers we reviewed our method and explored alternative possibilities for knowing our selves and others while recognizing these sensibilities as always in process. Like Wyatt, Gale, Gannon & Davies (2011), we did not "make a plan in order to impose what we already knew on the task" (p. 4). Rather, we sought to open and share our "memories as a way of opening up a different entry point to another's remembered moment-of-being" (p. 9). As we exchanged our thoughts and memories our collaboration began to become more focused on the relationships amongst subjectivity, memory, experience, teaching context, and our practices as teachers.

Central to our approach is our relationship to one another—son and mother. Our work is painted and sharpened by several distinctive features related to our shared family history: the prior sharing of experiences and memories to the collective biographical process; our continuously changing relations within and outside of the family; our continuously changing relations with one another; our locations within the academy in complimentary, but distinctive, academic fields; and different, but intersecting, research traditions—including the second author's immersion in the self-study of teaching practices.

Self-Study

The concept of self-study derives, in part, from John Dewey's (1938) pragmatic philosophy concerning education and experience. He argued that experience is never static, but is always in motion and that the value or meaning of any experience must be evaluated in terms of the current context. The continuity of one's experience (as a moving force) interacts

continuously with one's immediate situation. Although some meaning is always carried through from the past, it is also shaped by the present. Examination of experience—both immediate and prior—is a step toward interrogating why we do what we do at a given time, the influences on our actions as we come to understand and revise our understandings of those action, and the actions we take with our students are both a continuation and a revision of our teaching and our understanding of our teaching. As educators, we are mindful that our experiences and our students' experiences are both inconsistent—always specific to the time, place, space, and bodies around—and inextricably intertwined. Dewey wrote:

A primary responsibility of educators is that they not only be aware of the general principle of the shaping of actual experience by environing conditions, but that they also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth. (Chapter 3, section 1, para. 14)

The self-study of teaching practices originated from (primarily) teacher educators' sensitivity to learning about the surroundings they created for their students. Through more conventional forms of data collection and analysis (LaBoskey, 2004) and more innovative forms—such as arts-based methodologies (Mitchell, Weber, and O'Reilly-Scanlon, 2005), memory work (Pithouse-Morgan, Mitchell, & Pillay, 2012), and combinations of these two methods—educators sought to move beyond the search for externally derived answers or routinized inquiries. As with Schön (1983), they looked toward their own practice and away from a technical-rational view of teaching that emphasized technical problem solving and technical expertise:

Many practitioners, locked into a view of themselves as technical experts, find nothing in the world of practice to occasion reflection. ... For them, uncertainty is a threat; it is admission of a sign of weakness. Others, more inclined toward and adept at reflection-in-action, nevertheless feel profoundly uneasy because they cannot say

what they know how to do, cannot justify its quality or rigor. ... The dilemma of rigor or relevance may be dissolved if we can develop an epistemology of practice which places technical problem solving within a broader context of reflective inquiry, shows how reflection-in-action may be rigorous in its own right, and links the art of practice in uncertainty and uniqueness to the scientist's art of research. (p. 69)

Those engaged in self-study embraced (and still embrace) uncertainty. Dewey's (1938) discussions of experience as both continuous and interactive and Schön's rejection of technical rationality provided a conceptual and a practical foundation for enabling teacher candidates to work with children and adolescents. Researchers such as Grimmett & Erickson (1988) and Author (1990) documented the growing number of teacher education programs built on Schön's and Dewey's work, and teacher educators within those programs turned toward themselves as they began to document/study their own teaching practices, their students, and their institutional contexts (Clarke & Erickson, 2004).

Self-studyⁱⁱ enables researchers/educators to turn their gaze inward toward self and outward toward students and contexts, simultaneously. Loughran (2004) emphasized the notion that in self-study research methods follow, they do not lead. Any given study, "tends to be methodologically framed through the question/issue/concern under consideration so that it invokes use of a method(s) that is most appropriate for uncovering evidence in accord with the purpose/intent of the study" (p. 17). Yet, there are clear guidelines that set self-study apart from other forms of qualitative research. Labosky (2004) noted that self-study is improvement oriented, interactive with colleagues and critical others who challenge and interrogate the researcher, and formally accessible to others so that the research can receive broader examination.

Pinnegar & Hamilton's (2009) comparison of self-study with narrative, auto-ethnography, life history, phenomenology and action research methodologies concluded that

self-study's attention to *practice* involves the self as it relates to others. Samaras, Hicks & Berger's (2004) review of both the conceptual and empirical literature on the ways personal histories are necessarily linked to studying self as teacher or teacher educator emphasized the transformational nature of personal history in self-study as it informs teaching and our sense of the nature of research itself. Turning to practice does not imply a static or causal linkage, but enables differential understandings of practice and changes in practice.

Teacher educators' efforts to address problems of practice rarely result in tidy answers when such problems are viewed through the lens of self-study....underlying issues associated with change and development in teaching may well go unnoticed and this is one reason why self-study of teacher education practices is important” (Berry & Loughran, 2005, p. 177-178)

In our working with our histories, both shared and individual we seek to make those histories accessible to our present (Pithouse-Morgan, Mitchell, & Pillay, 2012), and through collective biography move from reflection to experience as an event and its numerous and perhaps unending interpretations (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008)ⁱⁱⁱ. This invokes Haug's (2008) sense of working with experiences, Davies and Davies' (2007) understanding of experience as something that accrues definition through writing, and Davies & Gannon's (2006) use of memories as data.

Accessing and Reinterpreting Experience

Our approach to writing took the form of continual response to one another's writing through sharing, discussion, and further writing. For example, when writing memories and passages about gendered responses to anger (described later in this article), the first author wrote his memories initially and shared those with the second author, who in turn responded with insights for the first author and with her own memories of encountering anger, to which

the first author responded. In this way, memories were constructed together but also individually—as was the development of the meaning of the memories. We note that had these initial exchanges *not* happened, that if the co-authors had ignored or disparaged one another’s writing and memories, this work may have ended there and this article would never have been written—something we return to in the last section. This article represents a beginning of a process of rereading (Gannon, 2011) for us.

We used several techniques or strategies for producing the written form of specific memories. The first strategy recognized the writing of memories as at least partially constitutive of the memories themselves, our experience, and our more contemporary informed understandings of that experience. Writing, language, and discourse as constitutive forces of our realities (Haug, 2008; Davies & Gannon, 2006) bring together and blur distinctions amongst the authentic, truth, narrative, fiction, past, and present. The second strategy we employed was to write in an evocative, readerly, and performative mode (Bochner, 2000; Denzin, 2003, Ellis, 2000; Richardson, 1994; 2000; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), striving to bring the reader into the memory and providing a sense of embodied experience through that memory. Third, we sought to write from the body, to create memory-texts as “lodged within the body” in order to access the body as a site and source of knowledge (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 13). We sought to place the reader into the memory to provide a more vivid, imaginable, and felt constitution. Fourth, to further embed the reader’s position within the text, we focused on specific memories rather than stories or biographies and kept the time frame of the memories extremely brief, generally occurring over no more than several minutes. Finally, we also sought to limit clichés and explanation to allow readers to corporeally feel the memory rather than come to know it through its rationalization, thus promoting bodily response as a guide for reading (Wyatt, Gale, Gannon & Davies, 2011).

Gendered Under the Lights: Embodying Anger

The first memory selected is of the first author (referred to as “the boy”) when he was nine years old playing in a game of baseball. This memory orients an occurrence of a relationship between gender, masculinity, and sport.

At first a sniffle. Watery and blurry eyes quickly follow. I try to hide by lowering the bill of my cap. The chain-link fence backstop and enclosed benches separate from me everyone watching while the black night sky and beaming lights make the whites, reds, blues, and greens glow inside the field. I am on a stage. I am the stage. The umpire calls another ball. And another. And another. I am failing. Tears pour continuously down my face. The shapes of the batter, catcher, and umpire blur from, by, and with the salty liquid flowing forth. They cease to exist. I lose sight, sense, and knowledge of where the hat’s bill is; I don’t hide the tears any more. I cannot tell if others can see my face. I do not care. The already black night sky gets darker, the crowd fades out. Silence. I am alone on the stage. I can hear my breath explode in and out of my mouth; I feel my mouth cool and heat; the air is ripping through the thin mucus clogging my nostrils. I feel and know where the catcher’s mitt is supposed to be. Angrily, my fingers grip the stitching on the ball and I throw as hard as I can. Over, and over, and over. Strikes. All of them. At some point the catcher stands up to pull his left hand out of the catcher’s mitt and fervently shakes it. It is red and he tells the umpire it hurts. The umpire pulls off his mask and calls for our coach, and someone comes from our dugout—I think it’s my dad?—to give him an extra batting-glove, or a layer of cloth to go inside his glove hand. I can’t tell. I don’t care. Coaches, parents, and players are laughing. I just stand there watching, waiting, breathing heavy, wiping snot on my

sleeve and back of my hand. Play resumes. I throw as hard as I can. Strikes. Lots of them. Inning ends, all outs are strikeouts. I walk to our bench. I am commended. Everyone is laughing and smiling. Hands pat me on the back and shoulders. I feel like I am watching myself receive praise and it is not really me. I did good. I am furious. I am confused. No one seems to care. I sit down. The next half-inning begins and play carries on.

Stepping back from and examining the narrative, we can see that the boy in the account stood alone on the field of play, in the midst of a sporting stage being watched by spectators, parents, coaches, umpires, and players. His actions controlled the actions of others; the play starts with a pitch. He was expected to perform, perceiving that he must succeed. The spatiality of the field and the observation by others created an environment that worked to construct a subject through experience (Shogan, 1999). Following Foucault (1977; 1978), subjectivities are shaped through experiences and linked to the specific contexts of discourse, power relations, disciplinary technologies, and negotiations of the self (Shogan, 1999; Markula & Pringle, 2006). In a post-World War II United States, especially for white and middle class boys, sport became an important site of achievement because it offered a perceived psychologically safe space for connecting with others (Messner, 1987). Organized sport contributed to redressing a loss of “natural superiority” over women and race- and class-subordinated groups of men (Crosset, 1990; Glover, 2007; Kimmel, 1990; McKay, 1991; Messner, 1988; Messner, 1990; Whitson, 1990).

During the performance no one spoke to the boy until the half-inning was complete. He was left to his own devices, to find a way through the act of performing. With no one to speak to, he internalized and integrated his emotive response to the scenario. Of all the options available to him—some of which might include asking to speak to someone, refusing to play, taking a break, or continuing to play—he continued to play. A fear or sense of

failure—perceiving that throwing balls and not getting players out meant that he was failing—took him over. Feelings of anger manifested. This anger led to a change in behavior, an objectively successful one. The mental, emotional, and physical dimensions of sport, especially at higher competitive levels, encourage the suppression of fear, anxiety, or other inconvenient emotions in order to control the body for the purpose of performance (Connell, 1990). Doing also rendered the boy emotionally inaccessible to others—particularly to the second author, his mother (who has no brothers and had very little engagement with masculine approaches to sport or emotion).

From the boy's perspective, no pleasure was produced through the successful performance. The change from being unsuccessful (throwing balls, which gives advantage to the opposing team) to successful (throwing strikes) could generate some form of pleasure. Quite the contrary occurs. Despite succeeding at the task of procuring outs this was accompanied with displeasure: The boy is unhappy, angry, unsettled, and confused. Messner (1987) observed that the pressure that boys put on themselves to achieve success often ends up stripping out the enjoyment and fun that sport offers. In this instance, control over the body is *exercised* (Foucault, 1977; 1978) by the unseen but physically manifest workings of power through sport, which help to produce a gendered identity (Markula & Pringle, 2006). The boy's head, eyes, cheeks, mouth, nose, and fingers fleshed out the emotive response to failure and anger. The centrality of the body in sporting practices furnishes an embodied and critical way of accessing the social construction of gender and gendered practices, identities, and subjectivities (Connell, 1987; Dworkin & Messner, 1998; Markula & Pringle, 2006).

Amidst his anger and an emotional swell, the boy actually caused pain to someone else, the catcher, his teammate and friend. The response from many of the spectators and the coach was laughter. The catcher's hurting hand from receiving thrown baseballs was an effect of success, one that is deemed appropriate and indeed commendable by some. One

central feature of sport is its normalization of violence to the self, others, and outsiders (Messner, 2002), which contributes to the characterization of masculinity with dominance and aggression (Devor, 1997). Although violence in this sporting practice was not a central aim (e.g. tackling in American football or rugby), the act of throwing in anger weaponizes the ball. Moreover, while certainly influenced by the scene and those around him, the boy was minimally consciously receptive to others (Devor, 1997). The body was transformed into a catapult that may not directly inflict harm but serves as a mechanism for doing so against the catcher and the self, both of which directly wove into success. The little source of reception he does acknowledge happened at the conclusion of the inning. Once all three outs were recorded, the boy received positive affirmation from others through cheering, clapping, further laughter, and patting on the back. Early commitment to sport that anchors masculinity within competition, strength, and skill is partially fostered by friends, peers, siblings, fathers, and coaches (Messner, 1989; 1990), as happened here.

Consistent with Messner (1990) and Connell (1990), task performance, physical competence, and goal-oriented achievement all serve bases for affirmation and conditional self-worth. The embodied senses of isolation, anger, displeasure and confusion, and infliction of pain on others and the self all become woven into that affirmative response. No one asked the boy if he was okay. The assumption was that his success eclipsed what it took to reach that success. Based solely on the task at hand (throwing a baseball and attaining outs), the setting and response from those around the boy cleaved apart any sense of a positive experience with the outcome. Rather, a negative experience was sutured to a positive outcome (at least from the perspective of the rules of the game). The body, too, bore a special relationship to the scene and its sociality. Internalizing his emotive response and sense of isolation, the boy disconnected from the people around him. What was the boy meant to learn here? That he can be successful? That failure was not an option? That he was fully capable?

That anger improves performance? Who is teaching this? No one directly helps him work through this.

Discussing this story rekindled the second author's memories of the first author and the intertwining of sport, masculinity, and anger with her desires to nurture, protect and encourage. The second author responded with her own memories of the first author and his lack of happiness or excitement:

It is summer in Central Illinois and we are all sweating—literally and figuratively. Our team is ahead by one in the final inning. My son, the athlete who competes with everyone, is pitching. I do not know who is sitting next to me. I see nothing other than him, the batter, and the umpire. I look around and every parent, every sibling, every teammate is focused on my son as he throws the first pitch. My entire body tenses. Strike One. I think, I yell, I pray. “You can do it.” The runners, on every base, are just waiting to take flight. Ball One. The coach yells. Fans are silent. Ball Two. The coach walks to the mound. The catcher pats him on the back. He looks ahead; he nods his head. I see the intensity in his body. I hold my breath. My fists clench. I hold my breath as I say silently, to anyone/anything that might be listening, “Please, don’t let him take the fall for losing.” Strike Two. Ball Three. “You can do it. You can do it.” I can hear my heart beating. I want to look away, to walk away—but I can’t. Fingernails dig into flesh. Teeth clench. I see the ball release from his hand. The umpire stands, “Strike Three!” Already out of my seat, I jump up on the metal stands yelling, “WOO-HOO!” My son is not yelling; he just stands there on the pitcher’s mound. He doesn’t react at all. The players rush from the bench, a few people throw their gloves in the air, and the coaches are all high-fiving one another but I watch him walk away, alone. He is not smiling; I do not understand why he is not celebrating, but I feel his pain. He shrugs and begins to collect his gear. In my heart and stomach I

hurt for him. I hurt for myself—how do we enjoy a happy moment? Why is presumably happy so sad? I am confused; I feel like crying. He is twelve.

The mother can be of little assistance in such scenarios—or so she perceived as we worked these memories. Grumet (1988) noted,

The achievement of masculine gender requires the male child to repress those elements of his own subjectivity that are identified with his mother.... This is another way in which boys repress relation and connection in the process of growing up. (p. 13).

Few places for embracing, soothing, or explaining culture and gender and power dynamics take shape during and even after a game—and there are even fewer social or cultural cues that doing so is important.

Like other forms of popular culture, sport, and particularly competitive sport, is far from innocuous or neutral. As a gendered and gendering institution, sport contributes to the masculinizing of male bodies and minds (Messner, 1990), which conform and contribute to a hierarchical gender order that normalizes and advances the personal attributes more traditionally associated with male and masculine characteristics such as strength, toughness, aggression, or violence. Indeed, Connell (2005) regarded sport as the leading definer of masculinity (p. 54). The memory illustrates the articulation of anger embodied and expressed through sporting performance, an early practice that shaped the first author's masculinity and sense of self. The suturing together of anger and performance, while potentially advantageous in competitive situations, nurtured an assumption that one necessitated the other. Whilst providing some semblance of positive performance in sporting endeavors such constructs of masculinity can induce quite real physical, social, and psychological problems. As within any hierarchy, one can work hard and achieve success and yet be defined or perceive oneself as less than successful (Messner, 1987). Such is the case with some masculinities fabricated

through sport. There is little empirical support for the notion that sporting success translates beyond the sporting field into other forms of success, happiness more generally, or positive interpersonal relationships (Ball, 1976; Sabo, 1985). Propelled by this unconscious disposition, the first author was obscured from learning that anger precluded him from achieving other forms of success, or even recognizing forms of success as successes. The first author had no understanding of the origin or the impact of anger—she only felt sadness, and a sense of alienation. De-coupling anger and performance, in a variety of situations and experiences, remains an undertaking in which the first author continually engages. This engagement has led him toward reorienting himself to his classroom and relating more openly to his students.

Reinventing Practice: Toward an Openness of Experiences in the Classroom

One of the features of post-structural approaches to teaching and learning is the collapse of the binary between theory and practice, which is maintained within modernist approaches to teaching. Taguchi (2007) characterized this distinction as, contaminated by the imagery of, “a visionary, rational and logical, clean and flawless theory—an ideal state or condition; and on the other hand, a messy, dirty, unorderly practice, in need of being organized, cleaned up and saturated by the rationales and visions of theory” (p. 278). Taguchi noted that at least two key problems arise in this binary: the suggestion that theory and practice are separate; and the other an issue of the operation of power within the classroom. To the former, poststructuralism posits that practice is always already theoretically informed; they are interdependent. The ways we speak and act within the classroom perform theory into (this messy) existence of practice (ibid.). To the latter, the binary sets up a relationship that privileges knowledge over practice. This is not dissimilar from Dewey’s (1938) critique of education, that all too often the many university classrooms are constituted as spaces of

hierarchical learning wherein the teacher informs students as to what they should and need to know. Such approaches rely upon notional positions of instructor mastery (knowledgeable, often masculine and dominant) and the relative student neophyte (a receptacle into which knowledge must be poured). Making visible our teaching practices as texts enables us to place them under erasure (Taguchi, 2007), to see what informs that practice and open them up for inspection.

By analyzing the past through collective biography and working to reinvent his educational practices (Mitchell & Weber, 2003), the first author has begun enacting a notion of openness that draws upon and makes visible personal experiences and, sometimes, acknowledge his own vulnerability as one pedagogical technique for understanding and discussing differences and experiences of difference. Davies (2006) argued that one of our responsibilities as educators was to work toward understanding how we—as teachers, students, and others in a classroom—contribute to one another, ourselves, and collectively constitute the classroom itself. The following passage is an interpretation of a more recent practice by the first author concerning the importance of being open to and embracing difference.

Approximately 100 first year students file in to the tiered lecture theatre. “I want to tell you three stories,” I say to the students after reviewing the basic structure of the unit, a few of the thinkers we will explore along the way, its aims, and all of the elements *required* to be addressed for the unit. “I tell you these because I think it’s important that you know why your teachers and professors do the work that they do.” Most of the eyes in the room are on me and the room is silent. My legs feels rigid and I move around to shake them out of their apprehension. “The first is about my friend Amare (pseudonym), who now works in Silicon Valley.” I change the slide to a picture of me and my youth football (soccer) team, feeling slightly guilty, indulgent,

and narcissistic. “When I was playing football in central USA, my friend Amare, whose family is emigrated from Nigeria, was one of the kindest and quietest people I knew. Despite his warm demeanor, regularly when we played he was called for an inordinate amount of fouls. Not until later in life did I begin to understand that, as a black kid in America, his skin color worked against him in a sport dominated by white, middle class families. Race, as a social construct, may not be real, but it has very real *effects*.”

“The second story,” I continue, “is about anger,” as another slide appears of me at age eight in a baseball kit. Walking around keeps my legs beneath me, moving forward in accounts. “I learned at around nine that when I became angry during sport that I performed better. Not only was I more aggressive and hard-working but I actually became sharper, smarter, and more focused. Unfortunately, while anger may have yielded some benefits while playing, once you step off of the field anger is not as useful; for example, in an academic classroom or in a relationship. Learning and unlearning this was a very difficult process for me.”

“The final story,” as the slides change to one of me as a coach, “is about beginning to coach football (soccer). While I was attending postgraduate study for my masters, and in pursuit of becoming a footy coach, I served as a volunteer assistant coach with the women’s team. While I took pleasure and pride in actually working with the players, I could not ignore how the women were treated, the pressure under which they were placed to perform and win, and the havoc playing created for some in their social and academic lives. This I chose to write about for a thesis and eventually published a paper.”

I begin to conclude, hoping they are still with me: “Understanding how some people are treated differently than others, who benefits from this treatment and who does not,

how and why this occurs, what forces are at play, and how to possibly make a difference various in conditions of inequality is why this course is important to me. It is why popular culture, physical culture, and experience are important and relevant sites of analysis. These are just some of the reasons I research in this area and teach this class.”

The room is silent. I hesitate to speak. The discomfoting silence flushes my face as my legs slightly lock up. “What I hope for is that part of this class becomes a way for you all to better understand your experiences as a way to assist you in developing research interests.”

The many and varied meanings potentially attributed to this example of practice begin to call forward interrelated understandings of experience as something we have and are had by (Davies & Davies, 2007). The narrative itself draws on experience as the verbalization and textualization of a moment in the classroom. It also features as something in our collective pasts and presents that can be opened up for examination and perpetually (re-)constructed. In doing so, this features experience as something that we are constantly in the process of creating within the classroom, thus encouraging us to be attentive to the ways in which we communicate and are present to others.

In its first instance, the account here is a textual archive of a classroom experience which illustrates an attempt to convey one way in which the first author drew upon personal experiences and vulnerability as pedagogical techniques. As Taguchi (2007) discussed, textualizing classroom experiences enables us to see how language, rather than merely representing the world “*effects or does something; sets something in motion and transformation; materializes something*” (p. 280). The account itself opens up the instructor to working with discursively inscribed subjectivity, which is multiple, contradictory, and always in the making, continuously reinscribing itself within and outside of the classroom

(Taguchi, 2007). In this sense, experience is a technology through which to explore the generation, transformation, and analyzation of the production of meaning (Davies & Davies, 2007).

The narrator, purposefully identified as the first author, here offers a speculation of openness; one that he hopes, but does not know for certain, has pedagogical value. The sharing of personal experience as an expression of openness in the passage strove to situate instructor and students' experiences as sites and sources of knowledge. Several author/teachers have noted that using personal stories or content features in creating positive, open learning environments (Goldstein & Benassi, 1994; Cayanus, 2004; Cayanus & Martin, 2008; Cayanus, Martin, & Goodboy, 2009). This, he feels, is communicated to students in a way that conveys the encouragement of placing experiences on the table for investigation, which is important for beginning to link together knowledge and experience. In doing so, he hopes those in the class can begin to examine experiences of the self and others not as facts but as ways of interrogating the constructed nature of experience as we encounter new knowledge. As Scott (2008) submitted:

When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject... becomes the bedrock of evidence upon which explanation is built. Questions about the constructed nature of experience... are left aside. The evidence of experience then becomes evidence for the fact of difference, rather than a way of exploring how difference is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who see and act in the world. (p. 273)

This passage discloses in part what the instructor hopes his classroom can become. Yet, the account also opens up its own speculative nature.

The speculation of this openness within the passage is evident by the narrator's nervousness and manifest through knees feeling heavy or cumbersome to move, flushing

cheeks, and awareness of silence. Amidst the overwhelming verbalization to students that dominated the textual passage, which functions in the narrative partly to mask that nervousness, the narrator is uncertain what students may think of him and the ways of (re)thinking their pasts, assumptions, or experiences. His private thoughts and feelings are made public against the overwhelming expressions of repositioning experiences as constructed to his students. This collapse of interior and exterior presents both a slight lack of control for the narrator and opens a space of possibility in the classroom.

A possibility opens here as experience enters the space of the classroom as something with which those in the classroom actively construct, both their past and current experiences. The performative nature of language is recognized in the passage of the classroom through the narrator's bodily responses and movements, a way of using words to come to know. The body here is not absent, static, or inert, but participates in the narrative, leaping into life (Davies & Davies, 2007). Doing so takes the narrator to the crux of sharing personal aspects of life that are not easy to share. While seeking to reign in emotion while in front of the class, the passage discloses the challenge to that attempt, a kind of bodily urging to remain instructive and pragmatic. Notional understandings of instructor mastery associated with being knowledgeable, theoretically underpinned, and masculine against the unknowing, passive student are beginning to come under challenge.

In disrupting the boundaries between student and teacher, the account recognizes the mutuality, uncertainty, unfixity, and (un)knowable multifarious relations within the classroom. Reorientation of this kind opens up the space for those in it, but with that openness comes vulnerability and the sense of uncertainty to which Schön (1983) referred. Davies (2006) drew on Butler's (2006) concept of ethical reflexivity in relation to the classroom, which goes some way toward understanding a mutual vulnerability in the relationships we form with others even in the face of what is normally expected. Davies

(2006) pointed toward the, “awareness of the emergent process of mutual formation” (p. 436), wherein we recognize the unfamiliar in oneself that does not “mark off such absolute boundaries between oneself as the known and the other as the unknown.” Parker’s (2006) strategies for listening with and across difference remind us of what this awareness might be comprised, *caution*, *humility*, and *reciprocity*. *Caution* involves moving slowly, taking care not to report everything that comes to mind, and “not denying or dismissing the validity of the speaker’s point of view or manner of talking” (p. 16). *Humility* asks us to take a point of view that our understanding is incomplete, that “the categories that I listen with as well as those I attribute to the speaker are probably faulty and, at any rate, not as solid as they seem” (p. 16). *Reciprocity* encourages us to take the perspective of someone else and privilege the other’s vantage point, recognizing that the speaker better understands her or his social position, emotions, beliefs, and interpretations.

Yet, such a notion remains speculative. Silence in the passage further complicates openness and shapes the narrator’s lack of control. It sets the teacher into a state of discomfort but it also demonstrates knowns and known unknowns to the narrator. Silence here is recognized to mark possibilities of and for something new to be accomplished, both for students and teacher. Yet, what this is exactly, who constitutes it, and how it contributes to the class is unclear^{iv}. The speculative nature of introducing the working of personal experiences as sites of and for inquiry is confirmed through silence but the value, importance (or not), or use for students is known to be unavailable to the narrator and teacher. Recognizing this limitation features as one way we might “appreciate the conditions of formation that produce the experiences the Other has and is had by” (Davies & Davies, 2007, p. 1156).

Such a positioning recognizes that power operates in a diffuse manner within the classroom. Students, teacher, and the context all shape and reshape one another. Our

responsibility as educators, noted Davies (2006), is to work toward understanding how we—as teachers, students, and others in a classroom—contribute to one another, ourselves, and constitution of the classroom itself. The deconstructive process, submitted Taguchi (2007), can contribute to the reconsideration of one’s own subjectivity as teacher or student, potentially making it possible for one to resist thinking of oneself as “a ‘good and righteous’ teacher, or as incompetent, or powerless, or authoritarian” (p. 286). In acts of calling forward our experiences and memories we are, following Davies et. al (2004), “inevitably, in those acts of remembering, constructing, and reconstructing ourselves as subjects—making ourselves as members anew in the acts of re-membering” (p. 378). In the classroom, the positioning of vulnerability expressed through the collapse of interior and exterior opens this space of possibility. In this account, experience is understood as something that we have but also something that we are had by in two senses; one suggests we are taken in by experience, and another that we are taken in to the possibilities of being (Davies & Davies, 2007, p. 1156).

Writing with Family: Embracing Openness and Vulnerability

Writing with family is, in our view, distinctive from, but related to, other forms of collaborative writing and collective biography. Working both with and against the ideas of memory work (Haug et. al, 1987) and collective biography (Davies & Gannon, 2006), our collaboration brings forward two features that contribute to the methodological multiplicity that comprises the two methods. First, collaborating with family informed our process of writing, sharing, discussing, revising, and analyzing stories of gendered subjectification. Second, our interactions around our histories and shared family histories surfaced similarities and differences between us in our shared memories of the same events.

As Fine (1994) suggested, working on the relationships amongst participants and researchers is a feature of the qualitative research process. A collective biographical process takes the relationships between or amongst participants as a central feature of that process. In our case, this relationship was intensified as we worked with shared memories of events: One of us was frequently present and involved in the other's memory. Our process of writing, of sharing memories based on similar themes (e.g. gendered subjectification), generated not just details about the person writing the memory, the forces at work, and the work that goes into recreating memory and a sense of sharing experiences between collaborators, but also directly about the other author. This would seem to suggest that each of us therefore somehow knew or understood the other's sense of a remembered moment uniquely, differently, or perhaps better. However, doing so rests on a fixed notion of experience, as truth, and can obscure the practice of sharing, writing, telling, and working those memories. Regardless of whose notion of experience or perspective we believe ourselves to work with or from, we can never perfectly or accurately communicate experience (Davies & Davies, 2007); to do so would hold each of us "captive to the story line" (p. 1141) of the other and locked in two concretized experiential perspectives. Rather than suggest that we somehow understood one another or knew one another in some unique way because of our shared histories, we instead suggest that working with shared memories produces more to work with.

In collaborative writing projects, such as collective biography, another participant's experiences can kindle a memory or experience similar to or different from that participant. Through our interactions, however, those kindlings were memories that included the other person to a varying extent. For example, in the first section, remember that the second author's memory is more than a memory tapping into something about the second author's past. It is written in response to the first author based on our shared, directly interlinked histories that also taps into the first author's past. As collective biographers aim to learn from

and share with one another to better understand the self, to bring new meaning to past and present, and utilize interactions to develop relationships amongst participants, our relationship is one that we have begun to rework diachronically and synchronically.

In our working of shared memories, and through writing as lodged within the body (Davies & Gannon, 2006), we opened our selves to share, see, and be seen from our selves and from another. The openness we collectively entered into produced both a vulnerability and intimacy in the other. Wyatt et al. (2011) drew on Deleuze to open up to the creative forces enabling collaborators to “evolve beyond the fixities and limitations of the present moment” (p. 106). Following Deleuze, they suggested that, “... we turn our attention to what we are made of, not an essence that should be realised, but our material continuity and ontological co-implication with others.” (p. 106). Wyatt et al. (2011) had the goal of writing with Deleuze, to following the writing wherever it led, to avoiding prescription or fixed format. Our goal early in our writing to one another shared similarities, especially the attention to the body.

Writing through the body within biographical collaborations produces an intimacy that simultaneously makes one vulnerable and open to rethinking or reinterpreting experiences and interpretations. Gannon (2011) noted that intimacy and difference could be produced concurrently, and we add that similarity and vulnerability could also be produced together. One of the vulnerabilities brought forward in writing with family is that the effects of doing so, whether positive or negative, reverberate into personal and professional selves and practices. Mindful of that possibility when we began writing to and talking with one another, we adopted early a process of sharing, but not judging.

When we first began to discuss the memories and stories we might explore, we commented on the relationships amongst our nuclear and broader family members, and our interpretations of their presumed intentions, emotions, and feelings, in addition to our own.

What was compelling in these scenarios was *how* we each remembered them. The second author shared, discussed, and associated a largely positive outlook on the past and on familial relations, while the first author tended to view and revisit the past through events that often brought about pause, concern, fear, anger, or stress. This is evident in the memories discussed above that are shared between the two authors. A common feature of our discussions, however, was our acknowledgement that our family seldom discussed emotional aspects of our various shared experiences, as the second author described:

You noted, correctly I think, that our family emphasized academic achievement and discussion of ideas. I think you were also correct that we very, very seldom emphasized emotions or feelings. Reading your account of the stresses our family experience engendered a flood of emotions—many happy and many unhappy. My parents and I often discussed politics and current events after dinner (as does our family, but my sisters and I are much more comfortable talking about emotions (mine and theirs) than our family).

To this, the first author responded:

I didn't know this about your sisters, and your relationships with our family.

Our discussions of relationships, feelings, and emotions within our family and making ourselves more vulnerable to one another has made that vulnerability a productive space for ourselves as family members, writers, and teachers. Davies (2009) wrote that the ethical imperative of both collective biography and pedagogy is to explore the meanings of being subjects in relation to one another, to be “responsive to each other, emergent in our encounters with one another (p. 13). The ethical imperative understood by Gannon (2011) and discussed by Wyatt et al. (2011) is reiterated here in our relation to one another as collective biographers. Our work represents one evolving form of collective biography in that

our memories are both shared at times and then reinterpreted through those shared and resultant cascading memories.

Within our family, relationships, feelings, or emotions are not openly discussed. This represents a cultural tradition, much like music, cooking, travel, or sport; not discussing emotions and feelings represents a belief that has shaped our families and our own subjectivities. Recall that the first author had no outlet for discussing his anger or confusion in the first section, and that the second author had no repertoire of options for communicating her sadness as she perceived her son to be experiencing pain. The openness with which we approached sharing, telling, and writing opened up these initial memory-stories to further interpretive understandings. Through recognizing the immediacy of our mutual formation the hegemonic position of not discussing such matters has been exposed to scrutiny between ourselves and those who learn about our work. This scrutiny is, we feel, beginning to change our interactions with and understandings of one another. The process is at once a cognitive and an emotional endeavor. At times, it has been very awkward and uncomfortable. Kasl's (2005) acknowledgement that it is "hard to be present to accounts of poverty, violence, injustice, abuse, and alienation" (p. 112) reminds us that sharing memories brings events and interpretations that are often difficult to discuss to the fore. Although our experiences with this process here are not as dire as traumatic events—such as living in war-torn areas or dealing with forms of abuse—we are mindful that sometimes we detach and withdraw in the assumption doing so is safe. As participants/researchers we encourage one another to focus intently on the ways in which we engage in the process, which merits discussion about the ways in which we are present to one another. Writing as family members, we began to develop the capacity to listen to and share with one another, and in our case, work memories that include the presence of the other. These represent steps in developing new understandings and practices of relationality (Davies & Gannon, 2009; Markula & Friend,

2005). Although these are very much unique to our family, they may have much in common with other families' stories and the dynamics and contexts out of which those emerge.

As family members who are also academics and teachers, our joint studies, writing, and teaching are informed by what each of us has studied and written separately. Writing together enables us to simultaneously be a part of our separate communities and move beyond the boundaries of those communities. In listening to one another we change—not as a result of force of argument or discussion, but in and through dialogue. As we continue to write, read, share, or argue (and maybe even share emotions) with one another we simultaneously shape and reshape our intellectual, practical, and familial pasts and presents. As we share our work more broadly and engage in dialogue with others we are also learning to guard against the certainty of any explication of experience. Our interactions throughout the ongoing process are “archives” that enable us to study the production of our discursive selves and to invite others into our interpretations or to develop their own. By inviting others—researchers, colleagues, or our students—we acknowledge and recognize our limitations as spaces through which something new and unforeseen might happen.

ⁱ Initially, Frigga Haug and colleagues intentionally left out a specific methodology of memory work, suggesting that there is no *one way* of doing memory work and that perhaps there should not be. Later in 2008, Haug offered several “considerations” for the methodology. However, she again stressed that there is no manual or guide by which one must or should proceed.

ⁱⁱ During the 1992 American Educational Researcher's Association (AERA) annual conference, a symposium entitled, *Holding up the mirror: Teacher educators reflect on their own teaching*, in which the Second Author participated, became the formal precursor to the self-study line of inquiry. The First Author was nine years old at the time.

ⁱⁱⁱ This movement is consistent with the distinction between a poststructuralist orientation, which largely shapes collective biography, and liberal humanist, which has had a significant influence in self-study. We thank an anonymous reviewer for their

comments reminding us of this, especially as we are two scholars with different orientations that at times come into conflict.

^{iv} One reviewer noted that the account of the classroom could incorporate student responses to the first author's reorientation. Doing so would require ethical approval or at least verbal approval from students, which we did not have. However, this marks an important area for us to explore further in the future as we seek to further improve teaching practices.

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