Chapter 12
Using Autoethnography to Engage in Critical Inquiry in TESOL:
A Tool for Teacher Learning and Reflection

Qinghua Liu
USC, USA

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the author proposes using the qualitative research method of autoethnography to improve one's practice in teaching English to students of other languages (TESOL). This chapter first includes an overview of autoethnography followed by discussion of evidence-based practices and learning activities that apply the methodology. The chapter then explores the method through a case study involving the author and her son. Through this autoethnography account, the author demonstrates the process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting autobiographical data to gain a deeper understanding of ourselves and our students. The case demonstrates how intersectionalities, including race and gender, have an impact on the learning experiences. In this way, this protocol has methodological and pedagogical implications for TESOL praxis. This chapter finally discusses the implications of this methodology in TESOL as a viable qualitative research methodology to gain new insights and understandings for TESOL educators.

INTRODUCTION

The number of both students and teachers within the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Language (TESOL) field continues to grow around the world. Educators and scholars in TESOL are in constant pursuit of more robust research and teaching methodologies to serve a widening array of students. For example, Cumming (1994) proposed applying descriptive, interpretive, and ideological orientations as alternative methodologies in TESOL research; and Eisenhart (2001) suggested that educators needed more critical methodologies and research protocols to address teaching and learning environments, including multi-layered social, cultural, and political contexts. Anderson (2006) argued that autoethnography is

an important element in a complete qualitative social research agenda. Chang (2008) further claimed that through autoethnography, educators could collect, analyze, and interpret their own autobiographical data to gain a cultural understanding of the connectivity between self and others. These and other works show the potential benefit of applying autoethnography as educational professionals. The questions then become, how can TESOL graduate students or educators apply the autoethnography method in TESOL teaching and research? Are there accessible protocols to guide the use of this method? And, how can autoethnography help to deepen educators' understandings of themselves and their students?

This chapter reviews autoethnography and the related concepts of positionality, intersectionality, and reflexivity. Next, the chapter introduces a protocol for how to conduct autoethnographic research for a novice English Language Teacher (ELT) with no previous knowledge of autoethnography. Then a portrait of practice describes two research experiences, and how the author's intersectionality, including race and gender roles, mutually impacted her positionality, as a Chinese, female graduate student, mother, and minoritized woman. This chapter employs intersectionality as an overarching interpretive framework to make sense of the author's autoethnographic research experiences as a TESOL female graduate student and Chinese mother in the United States. Commonly, sources of discrimination and oppression in society, education, and the workplace involve combinations of two or more social identities, such as race and gender (Crenshaw, 1991). This chapter also explores how the different positionalities from the author impact teaching and student learning. Finally, it also explores critical praxis within TESOL by connecting internal and personal experiences with outward social and cultural experiences and exposing one's vulnerable self and "multiple layers of consciousness" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). In this way, this chapter has personal and pedagogical implications for other ELT.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Anthropologists and sociologists have been writing and using autoethnography since colonial periods. The term *ethnography* comes from the Greek words *ethnos,* which means people and *graphei,* which means to write. As one kind of qualitative method, ethnography differs from positivistic inquiry, which often tests hypotheses to find them true or false, as it does not require a hypothesis to begin the research. As Hughes (1992) stated, ethnography can provide comprehensive insights about the cultures, interactions, lives, families, and perspectives of a particular group of people. Ethnography grew from anthropology, when researchers such as Malinowski and Boas were "immersing" themselves in fieldwork for a long period and getting a comprehensive understanding of the culture and interaction between people. These early ethnographies often focused on people and cultures subjugated under colonialism.

Autoethnography adds to the root terms of *ethno* and *graph auto,* which refers to self (Canagarajah, 2012). Chang (2008) also points out that autoethnography is grounded in ethnography and, as a self-narrative, has "self-transformative potential" (Chang, 2008, p. 54) to support a deeper cultural understanding of both self and others. The major difference between ethnography and autoethnography is that the researcher is the insider in the research in an autoethnography, instead of "trying to become an insider" as in an ethnography (Duncan, 2004, p. 3).

Autoethnography has proliferated and used within various fields to explore diverse topics, such as cultural identity, health, nursing, and education (Chang, 2008). Specifically, scholars have published various works to conceptualize autoethnography within education. Amongst the scholarship, there are extensive discussions about the theoretical and methodological perspectives of educational autoethnogra-

Related Content

Social Media Support and the Need of Counselling From Experts in Autonomous Language Learning: Challenges and Strategies for the 21st Century
María Elena Gómez-Parraand Cristina A. Huertas-Abril (2020). *International Approaches to Bridging the Language Gap (pp. 135-150).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/social-media-support-and-the-need-of-counselling-from-experts-in-autonomous-language-learning/242302

Cultural Diversity: Misconceptions, Misinterpretations, and Misunderstandings in the Classroom
Donna M. Velliarisand Janine M. Pierce (2017). *Intercultural Responsiveness in the Second Language Learning Classroom (pp. 84-105).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/cultural-diversity/174544

Looking Into Foreign Languages and Multimodal Creativity as a Tool for Pedagogical Innovation in Higher Education: The JASM Project – Open Window Onto the World
Ana Costa Lopes, Cristina Amaro Costa, Emila Coutinho, Isabel Oliveira, José Pereira, Romain Gillain, Susana Amante, Susana Fidalgo, Susana Soares da Silva Rocha Relvasand Véronique Delplancq (2023). *New Approaches to the Investigation of Language Teaching and Literature (pp. 141-153).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/looking-into-foreign-languages-and-multimodal-creativity-as-a-tool-for-pedagogical-innovation-in-higher-education/321817

In Other Words: What's Happened to Metaphors in the Translation of Political Texts
Yiqing Liuand Caiwen Wang (2021). *International Journal of Translation, Interpretation, and Applied Linguistics (pp. 16-30).*
www.irma-international.org/article/in-other-words/281670

How Much "Translation" Is in Localization and Global Adaptation?: Exploring Complex Intersemiotic Action on the Grounds of Skopos Theory as a Conceptual Framework
Olaf Immanuel Seel (2021). *International Journal of Translation, Interpretation, and Applied Linguistics (pp. 1-15).*
www.irma-international.org/article/how-much-translation-is-in-localization-and-global-adaptation/281669