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ESL Teachers / ESL Students: Looking at Autoethnography through the Lens of Personetics

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This qualitative, naturalistic study examines thoughts expressed in autoethnographies and accompanying notes written by ESL teachers/learners who are enrolled in a graduate teacher education program in the US. These data are then juxtaposed with the Freirean idea that English learners can be empowered if they analyze their personal paths critically. The authors illuminate the practical aspects of autoethnography as a method of introspective, critical analysis, where personetics (Brudny, 2003) can be defined as the process of looking at one's own identity and learning. ESL learners/teachers are thus illuminated as "personal linguacultures" (Risager, 2008, p. 3) who are unique but have something in common with L2 writers from around the world. The process of writing an ESL autoethnography helps them evaluate their own objectives and goals, we postulate, and enables them to become aware of their own ESL writing as an L2 learning and teaching tool. Specific practical ramifications for the ESL writing classroom are mentioned.

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INTRODUCTION: ESL LEARNERS / ESL TEACHERS

Second language teaching is a fascinating profession. It is steeped in tradition, and yet it thrives on new thoughts and re-examination as to what an L2 is, how it is taught, studied and learned, and who the persons who learn and teach it are. An emergent research approach and writing genre is the autoethnography, or the ethnography of self. Most recently, autoethnography has attracted the attention of teacher-scholars who see research and teaching L2, including L2 writing, as closely intertwined.

For example, in a recently published autoethnography of his development as an L2 teacher and the development of his identity as a practitioner who does research, Canagarajah (2012) writes about the necessity of understanding the diverse needs of our community of practice and how L2 learners who become L2 teachers develop their multicultural identity. Atkinson and Sohn (2013), in turn, emphasize the value of autoethnographic research that

explores how individual members in communities develop an identity, highlighting the existence of individual-specific nuances that lead to individual-specific interpretation of cultures, with practical ramifications for the L2 teaching community as a culture. Park (2013) builds on the idea that autoethnography helps understand identity in focusing on ESL writing and applying autoethnography to adult ESL learning. She sheds light on "personal narrative writing" (p. 344) by defining it as a teaching tool that was "borne out of [her] own autobiographical writing" (p. 339).

Furthermore, focusing on L2 teacher training, Evans and Esch (2013) define the "boundaries of second language teacher professional development" as "illusive" and emphasize the need to re-define it as "an ongoing and self-renewing process of critical reflection on and in locally defined practice" (p. 137). Taking a decidedly postcolonial stance, Phipps (2013), on the other hand, moves a step forward by looking at intercultural research, of which working with ESL writers can be seen as a natural example, and questions whether existing praxis empowers research participants. But if ESL learners who are ESL teachers can be defined as "personal linguacultures" (Risager, 2008, p. 3), not merely representatives of a faceless mass, then their voices should be heard.

For example, Ryan (2012) travels to another country to study an L2 while working on his graduate degree in teaching English as a Second Language, and in his autoethnography, he juxtaposes his experience as an L2 learner with his experience as both an ESL teacher and a graduate student. This juxtaposition leads him to question some of the methods that the L2 teachers use in his L2 classes. Ultimately, he re-examines his identity as an L2 learner/teacher. Similarly, looking for alternatives to traditional ESL writing teaching methods, Gagnon (2011), a graduate student and a teacher who specializes in ESL composition, highlights the importance of having ESL writing teachers go beyond the known and familiar. He focuses on autoethnography, explaining that autoethnography "can help [L2 learners] trace their personal trajectories – to ascertain who they have been, who they are, and who they might wish to become" (p. 21). This focus on identity is exemplified by Park's work (2013), as the autoethnographic projects she has guided "highlighted the students' pasts in their native countries, their present in the United States as newcomers, and their future educational and professional goals in the United States" (p. 339).

But, in order to create such opportunities for ESL students to explore their identity and interaction with communities, Park (2013) implies that one must be able to first engage in autoethnographic work himself/herself. She writes that her students "noted that they have (re)claimed their identity as legitimate academic writers and professionals" (p. 342). We find the possibility of helping ESL teachers who are ESL learners through autoethnography to be eye-opening and intriguing. Our interest is sparked, in part, by the fact that autoethnography remains a fairly new research method and writing genre, and especially so in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) (e.g., see Canagarajah, 2012; Chamcharatsri, 2009). Furthermore, on the ability of autoethnography to capture ESL teachers' attention, the significance of the problem is confirmed by Gagnon (2011), who believes that "ethnographic work" (p. 21) can support traditional L2 teaching, a sentiment that is paralleled by Ryan's (2012) critical autoethnography as an L2 learner.

Therefore, highlighting the relative scarcity of literature on the subject in our field and the need to understand what autoethnography is and does, we postulate that one's own ability to write an autoethnography has to be complemented by one's ability to analyze it – and to perform one's identity as an ESL teacher in the process. We believe that writing and analyzing an autoethnography can help ESL learners become better ESL writing teachers.

Park (2013), a multilingual ESL teacher-scholar, illuminates the significance of this combination of writing and analysis: "My realizations stemmed from my coming to understand what writing pedagogies worked for me as a new student to the United States and also from my reflections on what school practices and situations I struggled with during my first several years of US schooling" (p. 337).

Furthermore, the idea that L2 learners express the impact of their socio-historical environment in their introspective research and become more aware of their identity is often present in studies of autoethnographies produced by L2 learners/teachers (e.g., see Canagarajah, 2012, on adapting to a postcolonial environment as an L2 teacher; Park, 2013, on immigration and multicultural identity). The extent of expression and awareness, however, varies greatly from one autoethnography to another, and we will provide in this text a new twist on the concept of autoethnographic research by adding to it the dimension of personetics, defined below and adapted to the scope of this specific project.

(RE)EXAMINING AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Autoethnography, an emergent research genre, can be described as "case studies that follow the tradition of ethnographic research" that "are being acculturated into a postmodern academic world" (Duncan, 2004, p. 3). Hagan (2005) believes that autoethnography can "provide a medium for an evocative story, which may activate the reader's subjectivities and compel an emotional response," where "centering the self allows the writer to tell her story and then offer a critical analysis of her own lived experiences" (p. 401).

However, unlike an autobiography, an autoethnography is not aimed at capturing one's entire life story; instead, it focuses on a specific aspect of being, e.g., one's emotional and actual journey as an ESL learner expressed through poetry and reflection (Hanauer, 2010). Autoethnographies focus on one particular aspect of being and how it was achieved or how it evolved through interaction with the sociocultural and sociohistorical contexts in which the individual in question has found himself/herself, exploring one's "learning experience, struggles, solutions, failures and successes" (Kaveh, 2012, p. 7) as they relate to this aspect of being, e.g., literacy in one's L2 and identity as an L2 teacher.

We agree with Hagan (2005) and think "that autoethnography can provide a comprehensible, evocative, appealing, and personally significant alternative to more mainstream approaches to research" (p. 402). Identifying autoethnography as "a postmodern form of ethnography," Neville-Jan (2003, p. 89) discusses the ground-breaking work of Ellis and Bochner (2000; Bochner & Ellis, 1996), who were some of the first scholars to point out that the "'new ethnography' appealed so strongly to women, people of color, marginal voices" (Bochner & Ellis, 1996, p. 18). Similarly, looking at autoethnographies written by ESL learners who are also ESL teachers, we would like to illuminate this learning tool as a form of empowerment.

Furthermore, Freire (1993) describes literacy as a tool that can change learners' lives by helping them become critically aware of how their identities have been shaped and formed. Autoethnography, as a research method and a form of research writing, has the ability to take examination of identity and L2 acquisition in a Freirean direction (see Freire, 1993, for a more detailed presentation on liberatory education). When it is used with L2 teachers who are also L2 learners, this particular approach may help one understand the unique connections that exist between the sociocultural and the personal in these advanced English

language learners. These connections can manifest beliefs about teaching and research through these individuals' membership in a variety of imagined communities (Anderson, 2006; Kanno & Norton, 2003). From this Freirean point of view, this examination of multicultural identity allows language learners to position themselves as creators, not only consumers, of knowledge. Here, we will examine thoughts expressed in two literacy autoethnographies written by ESL teachers who are enrolled in a graduate teacher education program in the US and then juxtapose them with the Freirean idea that English learners can be empowered if they analyze their personal paths critically. This approach will allow us to discuss a few specific practical ramifications as well as ideas for future research and collaboration with the professional community.

In fact, the position that autoethnography is a legitimate vehicle for initiating the process of cognizing one's identity and claiming ownership of one's L2 is a strong theme in the works of such emergent voices in applied linguistics and TESOL as Fujieda (2008) and Liu (2010). In line with Freire's ideals of liberatory education, autoethnography has potential in ESL literacy studies as a tool of empowerment. For example, for Liu (2010), a Taiwanese ESL educator, introspective research has led to her evolution from a person who felt disenfranchised in the L2 culture and unhappy to be in what she perceived as her imagined community (Anderson, 2006; Kanno & Norton, 2003) to a person who positions herself as "a multilingual language user" and feels "valuable, competent, and confident" (p. 390). She writes, "As I worked hard to comply with the writing rules of my new academic discourse community, I felt that my home culture was diminishing and that I was losing a sense of who I was" (p. 389). Linking her own autoethnographic research with Cook's (1999, 2001) concept of multi-competence, i.e., the practical and epistemological ramifications of "the knowledge of more than one language in the same mind" (2001, p. 12), Liu (2010) works on "deconstructing [her] sense of inferiority" and realizing that her "identity as an ESL learner is empowered" (p. 391). Thus, she is empowered through the process of writing an autoethnography.

Furthermore, Fujieda (2008), a Japanese ESL professor, illuminates autoethnography as a valid research tool for advanced ESL writers and researchers. Focusing specifically on autoethnography and academic L2 literacy, he examines his own introspective research and conditioning and posits the following:

1) Autoethnographic studies may help illustrate "the challenges and complexities of developing academic literacy in English" as an approach that emphasizes "self-exploration" and "combining self with culture," which allows researchers "to interpret the living realities and experiences" (p. 76).

2) "Academic expertise" (p. 87) is closely related to struggling with "identity shift to the target academic community" (p. 86), perhaps in a neo-Vygotskian Zone of Proximal Development, which autoethnography may shed light on by helping the language learner cognize cultural differences and adapt.

3) As a learner-centered activity that works within the context of today's communicative language teaching, autoethnography can help explore the impact of "the cross-cultural environment (American academic culture) and the social group (teachers and peers)" that, in Fujieda's case, "had a strong impact on [his] development of academic literacy in English through interactions" (p. 85).

4) While awareness of autoethnography as a research method and a L2 learning tool continues to grow, i.e., the body of knowledge is somewhat limited, the necessary

shifting of the center of authority from an external and uninvolved expert to someone who, "in fact, is the insider" (Duncan, 2004, p. 3) allows the L2 learner who is also an L2 teacher to develop new schema as well as "enrich the overall knowledge of the professional area and to reflect deeply on the research issues" (Fujieda, 2008, p. 79).

Because the researcher is the subject in an autoethnography (Duncan, 2004), it must be noted that this introspective analysis lets Fujieda (2008) and Liu (2010) develop the sense of appreciation for their own struggles. According to Bochner and Ellis (1996), "if you restrict yourself to pleasurable experiences, much of autoethnography may disappoint or intimidate you" (p. 23). Specifically, introspective, critical research shows "the hidden truth and agony in a writer's heart" (Fujieda, 2008, pp. 76-77).

If the existence of many epistemologies and ways of knowing finds a practical manifestation in autoethnography (Duncan, 2004), "such interpretations in hidden truth have profound influence on resources of narrative inquiries, clarifying numerous sociocultural aspects," believes Fujieda (2008, p. 77). Not accidentally, he feels that the act of "revealing the bare truth" (p. 85) is an equivalent of letting secrets out, an experience that is as profoundly liberating as it is potentially challenging in the 21st century. From this point of view, the L2 teacher learns to practice what he/she preaches, looking for a way to help his/her students consciously examine their paths and become aware of the world around them. In other words, if ESL teachers are to teach their students to express themselves, which we believe is one of the goals of learning a language, then the teachers must be able to first learn to express themselves.

PERSONETICS AND PERSONAL LINGUACULTURES

The late Kyrgyz psycholinguist Aron Brudny (2003) defines personetics as "seeking to cognize the form in which history continues being present in human beings, in their way of understanding reality" (p. 171). Hidden behind this fairly simple definition is the quest for understanding and learning to understand. In a recent interview, Brudny describes himself as "involved in the theory of communication and understanding" (Permyakova, 2011, p. 12), and his own interest in psycholinguistics stems from observing a changing postcolonial world and an evolution of interpretation of literary materials, mass media, and intercultural communication. Among the possibilities brought about by the postmodern turn, Brudny (1998) highlights the shift from signals of "personal directedness" (p. 87), texts addressed to relatives, friends, and acquaintances, to signals of "mass directedness" (p. 87) that are addressed to no one and everyone at the same time, significantly so with technology becoming available to the masses. Both forms are, whenever a dyad is formed, communication between two individuals.

We believe that autoethnography is a hybrid form that includes a mass directedness element and a personal connectedness element. Interaction with texts, the foundation of hermeneutics, is not merely a dialogue between the author and the reader. Brudny explores personetics as "one direction of Psycholinguistics," where "the main idea of Personetics is that you can learn about people from the answers they give to questions they never ask themselves. You have to find a set of questions that a person would never ask him/herself, and by answering these, he/she would reveal their true person" (Permyakova, 2011, p. 12). Therefore, while autoethnographies are read by many people, not just the author, the

personal connectedness piece means that the authors are also readers of their own autoethnography. From the personetics' point of view, autoethnography tells the author something about the author.

From Brudny's (1998, 2003) perspective, personetics implies a certain duality, the way the person sees himself/herself versus the way other people see this person. During his thirty-four year-long study of personetics (2003), Brudny asked the same set of questions of individuals in a variety of contexts and sought to analyze the answers in order to illuminate the way the sociohistorical context influenced these persons' beliefs, ideas, and actions. Brudny's project was different from what would normally be seen as a scientific study in the Russian-speaking world, and in particular, the final product (a book) is described by the researcher as a "postmodern novel" (p. 163). Furthermore, Brudny's work (1998, 2003) is heavily influenced by literary studies and looks at humans as characters whose personas transcend their immediate surroundings. For example, he is "deeply convinced that poetry contains a certain power" (Permyakova, 2011, p. 12), echoing Hanauer's (2010) work with ESL learners writing poetry to reflect on their struggles and culture shock. From personetics' point of view, an author's ability to highlight and illuminate cultural values allows us to identify with the characters, which in turn allows for the values to be cognized and received by new waves of learners. It must be noted that the idea that culture is text is postmodern, so the presence in this text of characters that give life to it is an expected phenomenon.

But if "postmodernism posits not just one, but many possible realities," then it is possible for "members of the groups studied by ethnographers" to question "the legitimacy of the representations of their world" (Neville-Jan, 2003, p. 89). Looking at this multiplicity from the supermodern perspective (Auge, 2000), the separation of humans into who they are, as they themselves interpret their identity, and characters who are essentialized and then projected back onto the humans in question bears an element of that same duality, the-way-I-see-myself versus the-way-other-people-see-me. For example, in contrast with signals of personal directedness, signals of mass directedness (Brudny, 1998) tend to turn the characters further into entities devoid of personal nuances and instead offer a sterilized – and thus, easily controlled – manufactured reality to learners. We believe that autoethnography is an alternative to oversimplification and essentialization.

For example, Auge (2000) writes about the transformation of markets from communal centers to tourist attractions, where now the villagers, not only the tourists, are offered the same manufactured reality that one sees on TV. As these essentialized and crudely defined identities are projected onto the villagers, they question the reality that they have known since birth. Similarly, Brudny's (2003) work with humans as characters who channel the spirit of the time is saturated with doubt about the degree to which the expected matches the outcome. It could be argued that Brudny's work focuses on challenging knowledge about people. According to him, personetics implies the possibility of "changing the forms and limits of how knowledge is expressed" (2003, p. 163). From this perspective, for example, personetics allows the researcher working with qualitative data to interpret the data in his/her own way without the need to conform to the expectations as to how his/her identity is constructed by other readers.

Furthermore, individuals researching their own linguacultural identity are not dissociated from the imagined communities (Anderson, 2006; Kanno & Norton, 2003) in which they participate but transform both themselves and these communities. In particular, we argue that introspective, critical analysis can be a powerful tool in the hands of a language learner, where personetics can be viewed as the process of cognizing the difference between what

the English language learners who are ESL teachers expect and what "the significative Others" (Brudny, 2003, p. 170) expect of them. L2 textbooks, such as English as a Foreign Language textbook series, are full of characters who live, interact, and even fight for survival in stereotypical environments that have been sanitized and essentialized to that point that would allow the textbooks to be offered to the widest audience possible.

Therefore, personetics may be able to offer an alternative to this essentialization, because critical analysis leads to a re-examination of existing systems (Freire, 1993). Furthermore, we link personetics to Freire's liberatory education through the idea that meaningful cognition, the primary focus of Brudny's (1998) work, is impossible without a transverse journey across multiple levels of understanding, the goal of which is to meet oneself in the Other. Thus, a better awareness of conditioning and the role of schema can lead to change in learning methods, even if casting away the somewhat superficial level of the character is not entirely possible.

METHOD

While autoethnography is an emergent form of research, a number of studies that used this approach exist. It can be said that the possibility of experimenting with this approach is one of the things that attracts us, as methods vary from researcher to researcher.

In a study of how "preservice teachers imagine their linguistic and professional memberships," Pavlenko (2003) examines "linguistic autobiographies" (p. 254). Pavlenko is interested in the rich, ethnographic-quality data that the participants provide, where the texts they produce are more than mere opportunities to illustrate generalizations. Kanno and Norton (2003) highlight the diversity of studies that deal with participation in imagined communities and how individuals position themselves in regard to imagined communities. Norton illuminates the value of investigating the individual identity of ESL learners and listening to their stories (Norton, 2000, 2001; Kanno & Norton, 2003). More than an illustration of challenges that immigrants face, discourses created by ESL learners allow Norton to get a clearer understanding of each individual learner's struggle. She writes, "I do not propose a definitive analysis of the data, however. My purpose is to examine the data through a new theoretical lens, with a view to enhancing my understanding of the learners' stories of nonparticipation" (2001, p. 160). The research method in this case consisted of analysis of "interviews, a diary study and participant observation" (Norton, 2001, p. 161).

But Kanno (2003) writes, "In a field that still largely favors a 'scientific' mode of inquiry, first-person narratives are automatically suspect as anecdotal, soft, or just 'story telling'" (p. 11). For example, in a study that is similar to Norton's work in spirit, Kanno (2000, 2003) describes "the story of Rui, a Japanese teenager who spent two thirds of his life in English-speaking countries" (see Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 243). Kanno (2003) is particularly attracted to "the role of narrative in the meaning-making process of human experience," and her "focus is on individuals and how they live their lives" (p. 22). The question she poses is, "What do you do when what you have been longing for practically all your life turns out to be nothing but a sand castle?" (p. x). Similarly to Park's (2013) autoethnographic work, Kanno's (2003) study of narratives created by her four participants is linked, importantly, to her "gradual identity transition from a timid ESL (English as Second Language) student into a competent bilingual and bicultural adult [which] was not well reflected in the literature" (p. ix). For Kanno, "data collection and data analysis proceeded in parallel, the two processes

increasingly intertwined over time" (p. 22), where narrative becomes "a vehicle for identity" (p. 10) and data is experienced personally through empathy.

Denzin (1997) further explores this intertwining in his interpretive ethnography work. "It is necessary," he writes, "to actively pursue the conjunctural, contextual, performance-based, 'messy' approach to reading (and writing)" (p. 246). In particular, he believes that "every reading challenges or destabilizes a text, questioning its representations of reality" (p. 239). Bochner and Ellis (1996) echo this sentiment by indicating that "we ought to treat our ethnographies as partial, situated, and selective productions" (p. 21). Discussing methods appropriate for an analysis of ethnographic narratives, Denzin (1997) believes that the pluralization of how analysis of such texts is approached, i.e., specifically the process of fitting "narrative methods to their historical moment and the structures that define this moment," will be "messy, multilevel, multimethod" (p. 248). Illuminating for us this key theme in personetics by focusing on the messiness, he notes:

> This approach embraces experimental, experiential, and critical readings that are always incomplete, personal, self-reflexive, and resistant to totalizing theories. It understands that readers and writers are coproducers of the text that is being written and read. This understanding requires a move away from the "scientific" postpositivist forms of narrative inquiry […]. A text's meaning is best given in coperformances, when audience and readers-as-performers interact in and over the same text (pp. 246-247).

Thus, Denzin believes that "reading as an interpretive activity must be recovered, rescued from those analytic and storied frameworks (narratology, positivism, and postpositivism) that seek to anchor reading in a fixed text, using a closed interpretive framework" (p. 237). Specifically, when it comes to the "narratives of self" (p. 199), Denzin positions this "turning of the ethnographic gaze inward of the self (auto)" as an opportunity to discover the intertwining of oneself and the broader sociocultural context, including history (Brudny, 2003). It can be argued that our inspiration for this study comes from the possibility of interpreting autoethnographies not as simply data to be dissected and digested, but as narratives of self that can be *re-read, re-examined, and looked at* from a new angle. In doing so, we have heeded Denzin's (1997) call to embrace the messiness of autoethnographic, introspective research.

A particular role was played in our approach by Hanauer's (2010) work with English language learners writing autoethnographic poetry, as he derives from a multitude of such texts structures to examine and analyze. We wanted to create a set of rails along which to move, keeping in mind that the exploration of one identity cannot be limited to just a few simple conclusions. Especially inspirational in this context was the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985), and specifically their early work in naturalistic inquiry methods. Naturalistic inquiry's core principle is the absence of preconceived notions or structures, and Lincoln and Guba describe what they call "emergent design," i.e., the idea that a researcher "elects to allow the research design to emerge (flow, cascade, unfold) rather than to construct it preordinately (a priori) because it is inconceivable that enough could be known ahead of time about the many multiple realities to devise the design adequately" (p. 41).

In turn, the "function of the interaction between the inquirer and phenomenon is largely unpredictable in advance" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 41), which we believe to be the case with true autoethnographies. On the other hand, Lincoln and Guba believe that the emergent design cannot "absolutely persuade the skeptic that the results of the study will be

worth attending to" (p. 329). But "if the design is emergent, and its form depends ultimately on the particular interaction that the investigator has with the phenomena," they continue, "then one could not expect corroboration of one investigator by another" (p. 307), making our own attempt to draw conclusions from the autoethnographic data collected here even messier. In fact, we had to recognize that "if you resist conforming to the accepted genres of writing, you'll have a difficult time getting your work published" (Bochner & Ellis, 1996, p. 19).

Here is the procedure that we followed as the design emerged through our process of writing the autoethnographies and interacting, using Denzin's (1997) term, over them:

1) Two co-authors of what would later become this manuscript, who had read a number of autoethnographies and were familiar with this qualitative research approach, were asked to write an autoethnography. The task posited was as follows:

> An L2 autoethnography is a research method that allows you to explore an aspect of your own identity as an L2 teacher. Whereas an autobiography is normally a text that describes the many things one has done in one's life, an autoethnography focuses on one specific aspect of who the person currently is and how he/she has reached this point in his/her life. Please describe becoming bilingual and an L2 teacher and analyze this process from the point of view of your identity as an educator. (Lapidus, notes)

A few guidelines were given. The writers were asked to focus on stating the main themes clearly and to illuminate connections between them, if any existed. They were also asked to think of the audience and to create an insight into their world as L2 learners and teachers, broadly defined. In particular, the two authors were asked to visualize interacting with their audience and anticipating questions about their autoethnographies. They were also asked to use a number of artifacts in their work, weaving their description and discussion of what these artifacts meant into the fabric of their autoethnographies.

2) In the spirit of naturalistic design, the autoethnographies were written over a period of four weeks, and copies of each autoethnography were then exchanged to observe and immerse oneself in without preconceived notions as to what we were looking for beyond a reflection of the guidelines that had been given. Following Denzin's (1997) lead, we sought to absorb ourselves in these narratives of self and only then seek to identify specific qualitative data to analyze and interpret. In the process, a number of themes began to appear, and we were able to juxtapose the two autoethnographies to highlight shared themes and unique aspects of each narrative.

3) Each of the two autoethnographers presented their work in a group of graduate students, and one of them also presented her work in an undergraduate class. In doing so, we sought to implement the idea that identities are endowed with meaning as they are performed (Denzin, 1997; Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton, 2000).

4) We solicited notes and reflection on the process of writing and presenting the autoethnographies from each of the two autoethnographers, adding the level of researchers reading their own texts to cognize their own identity, and then deriving specific recommendations for their own ESL classrooms.

5) We continued to meet in order to talk about autoethnography as a research and teaching method, with the last such meeting taking place one year after the

autoethnographies were written. This period of time between the point when the texts were created and the point where we last met created an opportunity for an interview to capture the evolution of the writers' views as to the value of autoethnography. This interview also became a source of qualitative data.

6) Finally, the process of working on this manuscript was not seen as merely writing up for the three authors. Instead, the process of writing this text was conceptualized as learning about autoethnography together, and revising the original text of the manuscript created additional opportunities to focus on the practical ramifications of the study.

ESL TEACHERS EXPLORING AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Hirano comes from Japan and is bilingual in English and Japanese, and Kaveh comes from Iran and is bilingual in English and Farsi. Highly advanced speakers of ESL, they have both recently earned a master's degree in L2 literacy education and wrote the two autoethnographies, Kaveh (2012) and Hirano (2012), when they were international students in the US. Prior to coming to the US, they taught adolescent English language learners, including high school and young adult students, for a number of years. They have taught a variety of ESL levels, from pre-beginner to advanced. Lapidus was their graduate school instructor when the idea for this article was conceived, at which point the decision to collaborate on the project was made at the level of co-authorship.

Two co-authors of this manuscript, Hirano and Kaveh, are the authors of the two autoethnographies that are analyzed below, along with data from follow-up notes and an interview. Bochner and Ellis (1996) illuminate the interesting challenge this scenario presented. They write, "Ethnography is what ethnographers *do*. It's an activity. Ethnographers inscribe patterns of cultural experience; they give perspective on life. They interact, they take note, they photograph, moralize, and write" (p. 16, emphasis original). At the same time, Bochner and Ellis believe, which is very much in line with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) thoughts on naturalistic research, that we are making "the assumption that ethnographers cannot stand above and outside what they study. When we produce what we call ethnography, our product can never be an accurate map because the processes of production make transparent representation impossible" (p. 19). Nevertheless, despite the subjectivity of this method (or perhaps thanks to it), analysis of the autoethnographies reveals a number of ways in which autoethnography, examined through the lens of personetics, helps one understand the inner world of English learners who are also English teachers.

First, this inner world can be seen as a world in turmoil to which learning about autoethnography adds a level of stability. In an autoethnography written by one of the authors (Kaveh, 2012), her first introduction to the concept of autoethnography as a valid form of qualitative research is documented:

Autoethnographies may not appear of vital use in this era of calculations and exact numbers but the emic understanding they provide is always of great value in the field of humanities and to those who have had the same experience; as Fujieda's (2008) perspective on autoethnography, a narrative retrospective inquiry that deals largely with [the] subjective and reflective helped me shape a correct image of this qualitative research design. (p. 2)

Second, this acquisition of an understanding as to what autoethnography is allows learners to express themselves. Hirano (2012) focuses in her autoethnography on finding a voice as an English language learner and teacher. She writes:

> In my opinion, it can be difficult to notice a voice inside. Sometimes you may not notice what you really think about until you actually try to do that. Since I had not looked at myself in depth, it took me a while to think about which angle or aspect to start writing my autoethnography with. (p. 2)

Yet, as an ESL teacher she immediately remarks:

> -Wondering: How much can/should I correct their writing? Since this is a personal narrative, making correction only on focused grammar/vocabulary or vague sentences you want to clarify the meanings would be better? (Too much error correction can ruin their motivation and feelings.). (Hirano, notes)

Third, Vygotsky (2008) describes learning as a process besprent with obstacles. The theme of movement through the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as a self-designed obstacle course suddenly becomes evident. Both Kaveh and Hirano describe issues similar to Fujieda's (2008) struggle with how much can be revealed; but equally important was the fact that, and this is valid from personetics' point of view, the two sides in the competing dichotomy "self" versus "character" frequently collaborated and competed in illuminating the various sides of the author's self. Hirano found the following:

> Once I decided the theme and began writing, I was able to focus on what to write even though I at first had some difficulties understanding who I am [because] identifying oneself can be hard and easy at times and at the same time. For some parts, I know myself better than anyone else; however, for other parts, people around me can notice how different I am from what I was before, for example. (notes)

Hirano, in particular, was at first puzzled by autoethnography as a concept, and her solution in this case was to start thinking about who she was and who she used to be, employing brainstorming as the first step. Moving through her ZPD, she writes, "I looked at myself from different angles from my personality to my job as an English teacher" in order "to carefully think about how to connect my identity with being a 'literate person'" (notes). To her, exploration of L2 teaching experience would necessarily include the description of herself as a literate person; she also sought to define the term "literacy" (as more than only verbal literacy) and "what one is as a literate person" (Hirano, notes), using this definition as a guide for further reflection.

Fourth, autoethnography relies, in part, on interpretation of artifacts. For example, visualizing teaching a college class and writing an autoethnography, Ellis (2004) looks at the many pictures representing her experiences as an instructor and a writer that are physically in front of her, and she notes down, "My picture board makes me smile; it represents what's important in my chaotic life" (p. 162). In turn, in perhaps one of the most vivid examples of autoethnography as a tool of self-empowerment, Hirano presents and describes two pictures of her and her students in Japan. One was taken on their graduation day, and the other one

on a school trip. She describes "these two events" as "especially unforgettable" (notes). Earlier in her autoethnography, she writes about being shy and not willing to be in a picture:

> My personality, which I could say is introversive, was already seen in my childhood. I did not like to be in a picture, and because of this fact, it was not expected that I would want to be an English teacher. (Hirano, 2012, p. 2)

From the personetics point of view (Brudny, 2003), this reluctance to be photographed can be linked to discursive practices, as described by Hirano:

> I preferred being alone at times and playing with a small number of my friends. I still have this preference, and I am aware that I was/am not very sociable. So being one of the members in the large classroom (usually over 30 students in one class) made me feel somewhat overwhelmed when I was at school. Speaking up in front of the class was usually a scary moment because I did not want to be embarrassed by making mistakes. However, when a teacher asked a question that I was able to find the answer of in the text, I felt more secure; free discussion was rarely done in the classroom especially at a high school. (notes)

This introversion is in sharp contrast with the two pictures of her as a novice high school teacher. She refers to these photographs as "impressive pictures of my working years," symbolizing her progress from being shy and not enjoying having her picture taken to now being at the point in her life where should could be prominently featured (notes):

> Probably, choosing the pictures was done subconsciously, but I think that using the pictures was important for me to write an autoethnography. That is, I thanked my students for encouraging me to challenge a new journey of studying in the United States to be a better teacher.

In fact, the theme of seeking opportunities to become a better ESL teacher so as to help one's students benefit is present in both autoethnographies. Looking at her photographs, Hirano (2012) explains her desire to make a difference in English language learners' lives: "When I helped students in need, I was just glad that I could do something for them. It seems that I was looking for the place where someone would need and accept me" (p. 3).

Building on the idea that cross-cultural contact triggers the process of critical self-analysis and exploring alternatives to what the person already knows and can do, despite shyness and introversion, Hirano writes:

> I was looking at the reasons why I became a teacher and am studying education at [this university], and then I noticed that there were influential encounters in my life which took me to the paths creating my current situation. They are the teachers I met in Maine more than 10 years ago and my students in Japan. It was interesting to look at myself from outside, which helped me identify myself and recognize my goal again with a clear object. (notes)

For Hirano, immersion in this new environment in the US as a teenager fundamentally defined her own career choice. She writes about challenges associated with teaching ESL in

Japan but insists that this immersion has given her a push in the right direction. In turn, this immersion shaped her identity as an advanced English language learner seeking membership in the imagined community of ESL educators:

> At that time, I went to see classes in elementary, middle, and high schools, where I met great teachers. Their ways of teaching and attitudes to students impressed and inspired me. Above all, the students enjoyed school, which showed that the students and teachers trusted each other, and teaching seemed to be a wonderful profession. The first turning point could have been this. Subsequently, I was determined to be a teacher and started to work at high school in Japan. (Hirano, 2012, p. 2)

Relating this personal aspect of the narrative to her life as an ESL writer, she explains:

> My personal experience would be home stay in Maine (more than 10 years ago), and the goals/themes of my life would be studying education, learning English, and teaching English. The reason why I did home stay in Maine is that I became interested in learning English when the English subject was first taught at a middle school (as well as I had some friends in Maine). The teachers I met in Maine, the US, are middle school teachers. I really liked how they interacted with students. I felt that the students enjoyed learning and that the teachers also enjoyed working with their students. This experience (I would say "a successful experience," as I did well in the English class) made me want to continue studying English at college. Eventually, that took me to Maine to feel and learn real life English, where I met great teachers. The encounter with those enthusiastic teachers made me decide to become an English teacher in Japan. (notes)

In contrast, for Kaveh, it was her mother who played a key role in her development as an ESL learner and then an ESL teacher. She writes:

> My first motivation was someone who loved learning English her whole life but the ups and downs of life never let her gain what she wished for. Like every other mother in this world she wanted to give what she hadn't had a chance to, to her beloved child. She enrolled me in English language institutes from the very first years of elementary school and has always encouraged me for further studies in English since then. (notes)

On the other hand, Hirano's artifacts (e.g., photographs) remind her of a different path toward becoming an ESL teacher. Unlike Kaveh, she "decided to become a teacher when [she] was in college." She writes, "Until then, I think I did not really think, 'I want to be an English teacher like Ms./Mr. X'" (Hirano, notes). However, recalling her first experiences as a learner, she recalls the more traditional discursive practices counter-balanced by role models who did things differently – which would ultimately motivate her to become an ESL teacher:

> My major was English, and I wanted to improve as an English learner, so the Japanese professors at my college were a role model whom I wanted to be like. They were, of course, very fluent and looked omniscient. I was always inspired as an English learner who wanted to be successful. However, the classroom teacher at my first/second grade at an elementary school is one of the greatest teachers I respect. He took us outside for a walk, and we enjoyed exploring the world (such as feeling nature and the real world).

Looking back at this moment, real life experience and exploration of the world are very important for younger students as well as learners at all the ages. (notes)

Next, looking at the evolution of Kaveh's identity and going from being an ESL learner to an ESL teacher, and then on to becoming a graduate student who specializes in teaching ESL, Kaveh describes the set of artifacts she sees in front of her. Looking at a photograph of these items on her desk, from left to right, they are: 1) a phone with a built-in keyboard, which allows her to respond to messages quickly; 2) a laptop with icons completely covering the desktop, illustrating her heavy workload; 3) a coffee tumbler, which is a manifestation of her commitment to meeting deadlines despite the pressure (interview, personal communication); and 4) a stack of textbooks and printouts of required readings which "were really difficult for [her] to figure out and some […] took [her] a whole day to come up with an outlined summary [for]" (2012, p. 5). Looking at the picture of her workspace and recognizing the shock to which the items in her workspace are a reaction, Kaveh concludes, "The experience, to some extent, seems not to be atypical for international students" (2012, p. 5).

Fifth, the theme of adventure is discussed by both Kaveh and Hirano. It could be argued that an ESL teacher is a person who is willing to take risks, especially if we define language as a sociocultural phenomenon, where teaching a language effectively means having experienced culture shock and learned how to negotiate culture. Writing about the challenges of being a novice teacher, Kaveh believes that the initial culture shock in the field and overcoming adversity has helped her "discover [her] great passion for teaching, gave [her] the urge to apply for universities overseas to save myself from being a traditional repetitive teacher" (2012, p. 3). Similarly, Hirano describes her decision to continue building on the foundation reinforced by seeing herself in a picture, among students who were not always easy to work with but "thanked [her] on their graduation day," as "their words made [her] want to challenge what [she] did not achieve in teaching in Japan" (2012, p. 4). She explains:

> Subconsciously, I might have been looking for something exciting to happen in my life, like an adventure, so studying in the United States could be attributed to such a subconscious mind. Actually, going to a foreign country was really adventurous for me. Probably, I needed a balance between being stable and different from what I used to be. (2012, p. 3)

> Studying in the US is very adventurous and something that I have wanted to realize. Living in a foreign country has been challenging at times, but this gave me precious time and invaluable experience that I would not have in my home country. (In specific, meeting people from all over the world and knowing different cultures) Especially, the encounter with kind people, good friends, and great teachers and professors in Maine has been by far the best. (Hirano, notes)

In turn, Kaveh's adventure was motivated by bilingualism; she describes English as having "always been an integral part of [her] personal and academic life" (2012, p. 2). She continues, focusing on a very difficult and dangerous journey to the United States that took more than a year:

This motivation was strong enough for initiation of my English studies and continuously learning it with purposefulness and great intent for more than fifteen years and for persuading me to leave everything 7000 miles far away and come to the U.S. to be a professional English scholar. (2012, p. 2)

This state of being attracted to something different, which we saw in both autoethnographies, notes, and the follow-up interview, is expressed well by Hirano, who writes:

In my country, Japan, an adventurous moment was definitely when I went to music concerts. It was totally a different world with every excitement and passion. Music is invisible but it brings such a moving moment that I cannot fully explain with words. Traveling to foreign countries is very adventurous, and I think I have always welcomed those exciting events. I longed for an adventure because I wanted to discover different aspects of myself. However, ELL students can be immigrants or refugees, and many of them must have faced challenges in their adventure, which they might not have wanted to experience. The fact that students are learning English shows that they are *a member of the imagined community where people all learn English and hope to communicate/meet one day using English*. I hope this idea gives them motivation and hope in English learning. (This can be related to adventure for English learners.). (notes)

Sixth, the cross-cultural identity of an L2 learner-teacher is further explored when Hirano mentions that "a new life may also bring suffering to newcomers" (2012, p. 3). Suffering, in a variety of forms, is described in both autoethnographies. For instance, Kaveh "had to deal with a huge cultural gap and lifestyle differences in the new environment which really bothered [her] and made [her] regret [her] decision at times" (2012, p. 6). Hirano looks at suffering as a fundamentally Vygotskian principle (Vygotsky, 2008) in the process of learning:

Even if they have a thought that they may face a dilemma between acculturating and identifying themselves, newcomers are hoping for a dramatic change, like me. This could be how people from different countries feel. (Hirano, 2012, p. 3)

Kaveh, citing Fujieda (2008) and then exploring his thoughts as they relate to her own context, continues the theme of adventure that is closely linked to the challenges, including having to deal with readings, journals, and a variety of other assignments. She continues, "It was really overwhelming and I began to lose my confidence as my American peers seemed to be working effortlessly on the tasks" (Kaveh, 2012, p. 5). In addition to these challenges, Kaveh describes the academic environment as different from what she was used to, a notion also shared by Hirano.

Seventh, for both of the authors whose work is discussed here, the autoethnography was an opportunity to look back, asking questions they had not asked before (the main principle in Brudny's personetics, 2003), and then to visualize their futures. Kaveh, writing about her first few months in the US, "this fairly young multi-dimensional culture" (2012, p. 7), explains that conscious, careful analysis of her L2 abilities and rapidly improving academic ESL skills were enhanced through feedback she received from colleagues and teachers. She believes that autoethnographic studies are "worth conducting and studying" (p. 7) because

they help turn this fusion of personal and academic life into something that can be explored and understood. In turn, both Kaveh and Hirano remain optimistic about their future as English language learners, teachers, and scholars. Indeed, while all research narratives reduce participants' personas to the level of characters to some extent, Kaveh believes that she is empowered enough to be able to make it and be a person who knows she can be recognized as a multi-competent, successful ESL scholar:

> Academic improvements along with nice and helpful people of this country who never underestimated me because of my ethnicity or religion have made me change my way of considering this experience. I got to know that studying in this country is not as frightful as it seemed at first sight. It can be a place where dreams come true, where a new door of luck can be opened for assiduous people like young Iranians who have learned how to do the best with the least facilities their whole life, where you can work hard and be sure there are always people who accredit you, your thoughts, and your hard work regardless of how you look, where you come from and what you believe in (2012, p. 7).

DISCUSSION AND PRACTICAL RAMIFICATIONS

While we are exploring autoethnography and becoming more familiar with it, we hope to "encourage ethnographers to open their imaginations and take risks" (Bochner & Ellis, 1996, p. 28). An autoethnography is a true research text in which one explores his/her identity as a literate person (more specifically, an ESL learner and teacher) and examines the path toward who one is today. We believe that qualitative research of this type allows us to better understand our students because before we can ask them to look at their identity introspectively we have to be able to do this ourselves. In essence, qualitative research and, in our case, introspective, autoethnographic research allows us to go beyond simply looking at the artifacts or just the surface and to focus much more on the personal, the hidden, and the less obvious.

On the one hand, autoethnography relies on the fundamental principles associated with personetics, including asking questions to raise participants' awareness of their identity and conditioning. On the other hand, it creates opportunities for the sociocultural and the sociohistorical to sublimate itself, bringing with it hidden desires and suppressed memories (Brudny, 1998). Furthermore, personetics can be interpreted as a journey that takes us beyond the simplistic idea that human beings are merely reflections of their roots, and autoethnography allows us to make this idea concrete and specific to contexts in which we work (in our case, L2 teaching). From our perspective as applied linguistics specialists who work with actual students, not abstract entities, it is particularly important to be able to dig deeper and to uncover the hidden.

Autoethnographies examined here describe one's identity as a multi-competent (Cook, 1999, 2001), literate person, but both Hirano and Kaveh also dig deeper and give us a unique understanding of what it is like to be a multilingual person like us. As they look at their personal, subjective experience, their introspective research becomes the foundation for a case study, in which the participant has to look at himself/herself from a number of vantage points. In qualitative research, triangulation is an important concept (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Specifically, you have to look at the phenomenon you are studying from a number of perspectives so as to create a more accurate representation of that phenomenon. An

autoethnography alone cannot perhaps capture a phenomenon in its entirety, but it is a good starting point.

Furthermore, knowledge is disseminated among the members of our community of practice. In other words, in both autoethnographies, as we look at the artifacts and meditate on the experience of doing so, and as the authors of the two autoethnographies connect their own experience to current thought in our community of practice (e.g., Bochner and Ellis, 1996; Cook, 1999, 2001; Denzin, 1997; Hanauer, 2010), Kaveh and Hirano weave these multiple perspectives into the fabric of their introspective research. This weaving allows them to illuminate things that are inaccessible to those who are not familiar with the participants in their study, Kaveh and Hirano themselves, not as mere representatives of a group of people, but as unique human beings.

First, in our opinion, this introspective (if brief) immersion in the world of multi-competent ELLs who are also ESL teachers is of value to our community of practice. An autoethnography is a case study, where one looks at oneself as one's own subject. This process is remarkable especially because it is hard to look at oneself from within and to look at oneself from the outside at the same time, which is how personetics helps individuals understand the spirit of the time and their conditioning (Brudny, 1998, 2003). In other words, when one looks at oneself from a number of angles, it becomes possible to highlight the postmodern validity of one's claims – this voice that both Hirano and Kaveh write about augments the right to have a say in the direction their lives take.

Second, it can sometimes be easier to look at other people critically than it is to look within first. By agreeing to write these introspective research texts as a foundation for this project, Hirano and Kaveh also agreed to make a step forward as researchers, indicating emotional and intellectual investment. As a result they are now more able to see in their future research participants the actual human beings that they are. *This is the personal dimension that is sometimes hidden behind the numbers and statistics* (Hirano and Kaveh, notes, interview).

Third, although both Kaveh and Hirano focus on themselves as their research participants, their autoethnographic studies have practical ramifications for our profession. Specifically, they are adding a new piece to the puzzle that we are collectively trying to put together as a community of practice, as linguists and teachers. In other words, on the one hand, their personal experiences are unique. They cannot be typical simply because they are unique persons, with aspects of their linguacultural identity that are based specifically on their personal experience growing up in different countries, immersing themselves in the discourse of academic English and then teaching English as a foreign language, and expanding their horizons by going overseas in order to continue growing as an applied linguistics specialists.

On the other hand, and this reflects Brudny's (2003) thoughts on personetics, their experiences are also not atypical because they do, in fact, represent a diverse group of English language learners and educators. They mirror in a variety of ways the experiences of those of us who were born overseas and chose applied linguistics and teaching English to speakers of other languages as a career. Brudny would probably interpret this choice as an impact of the spirit of the time, and it is true that English is a very popular language, thanks to specific sociohistorical circumstances. It is an international language which speakers of many backgrounds own (Crystal, 1997). Therein lies the ability and potential to bring together the experiences of many people and also to find in them those things that unite us, connect us, and propel us all forward as a community of ESL teachers. Furthermore, beyond

being ambassadors for English language teachers from their respective cultures, the autoethnographers are also helping those of us in our professional community whose experiences have been different from theirs make the connection between their contexts and ours. Both Kaveh and Hirano go beyond simply talking about their subjective experience and imply that this connection can be made.

Fourth, in their autoethnographies and follow-up interview, both Kaveh and Hirano define themselves as teacher-scholars. In addition to this connection to being an educator who is willing to learn, there is a very strong multicultural theme that is evident in both cases. For Hirano, it is quite remarkable that her decision to become an ESL teacher in Japan was influenced by visits to American schools in Maine. For Kaveh, transitioning from the status of an ESL student to that of an ESL teacher was natural and based on the degree to which she sees English as inseparable from her identity. We think it can be argued that, from the start, Hirano has sought to conquer her own fears by translating the impression American schools made on her into something that her students in Japan could benefit from. Similarly, Kaveh's lifelong passion for English resulted in the decision to advance her career because her experience as a learner allowed her to critically analyze existing teaching methods, leading her to believe that alternatives exist.

In this context, both Hirano and Kaveh have become a bridge between cultures, and this is something that will have a positive impact on their ability to help English language learners succeed. Both write about the joy of helping students learn, achieve what they need to achieve in order to move forward, and conquer their own fears. In our opinion, there is nothing more important than having in an ESL teacher as a role model who can actually show a path to a better future. That is why, even though the autoethnographies show that the students tested both Kaveh and Hirano, they have also rewarded them with respect and love. The personal connection is very important. A teacher, especially in K-12, is also a mentor, so both Hirano and Kaveh are also those role models who actually understand their students.

Fifth, one must also say a couple words about the theme of adventure which is so prominently featured in the two introspective research texts. If one is a role model to one's students, one cannot expect them to do amazing things in their lives if the role model has not done amazing, fantastic things in his/her own life. Learning to understand these amazing things and how this understanding can lead to a plan for a better future is a key feature of both personetics as a study of the spirit of the time and identity and autoethnography that facilitates it. Most people would be afraid to leave the environment they were raised in, the environment they are familiar with and feel comfortable in, and travel across the world to immerse themselves in a completely new sociocultural environment. However, before this new world can be discovered by one's students, someone needs to pave the way. Therefore, as individuals who have had to overcome obstacles, culture shock, language barriers, being tested by students, and dealing with the challenges associated with being graduate students in an L2 culture, as English language learners and teachers, Hirano and Kaveh are empowering themselves by looking critically at what they need to do in order to continue growing as persons who are L2 writers. They are "engaging in dialogic practices with themselves, their texts, and each other as they continue to reflect upon their academic and professional goals" (Park, 2013, p. 344).

Sixth, we found it noteworthy that the autoethnographies approached the question of the relevance of sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 2008) to learning ESL from a personal angle in a way that has allowed them to link the linguistic to the cultural and vice versa. An

important aspect of these autoethnographic texts was their focus on the affective, which is something that cannot be ignored if we accept that the spirit of the time, from the point of view of personetics (Brudny, 2003), demands recognition of human subjectivity and nuances. This focus is clearly demonstrated by Hanauer's (2010) work with ESL writers who were asked to position themselves as researchers expressing emotions and feelings through such unorthodox, introspective research methods as poetry writing. From this perspective, introspective research is a platform where, "through writing, ELLs may understand themselves better and their goals in coming to learn English in the United States and similar contexts" (Park, 2013, p. 343-344).

For instance, Kaveh describes translating her husband's first book and what it meant to her not simply as a multi-competent ESL writer, but as a human being. The emotional, affective connection is evident in both autoethnographies, and it is not an insignificant fact that Kaveh explicitly states that the sociocultural environment at the time did not allow the book to become particularly popular. Similarly, writing about culture shock, both Kaveh and Hirano go beyond simply talking about language and the difficulties associated with living in an L2 environment; they add a cultural component to it and link it directly to the affective experience. We believe that the process of becoming literate in one's L2 is more than simply learning to read and write, and the autoethnographies successfully illuminate this notion. Therefore, because Kaveh and Hirano have had this *affective* experience with both language and culture, they are now becoming more *effective* ESL teachers. This introspective analysis of their identities and aspirations as well as all the contexts in which they arise, coupled with the acute awareness of the affective, is what will help them develop the skills they need in order to grow as ESL learners and teachers.

For these reasons, we believe that writing an ESL autoethnography is a powerful ESL learning tool. Capturing the essence of autoethnography, Hirano believes that writing one "allowed [her] to 'analyze' and 'recognize'" herself, making it possible to express herself in ESL writing (notes):

> First, English learners can express themselves through writing even when some have difficulty talking about their thoughts in speaking. I felt this way because I myself was having a hard time speaking up in English. Although I can describe what I am thinking through writing, it was tough to express my opinions in speaking because during the conversation or discussion, I always had pressures of choosing right English expressions with right timings. This was not easy at all. On the other hand, I can express my opinions in writing more freely because I have more time to think about what to say. For this reason, writing could greatly help English learners as they can have their place to express themselves, which is writing.

But the most important aspect of autoethnography as a project that can be adapted to a number of ESL levels is that "writing can be effective for learners to think about who they are" because "writing can make invisible ideas visible and more stable" (Hirano, notes). We feel that such writing would allow L2 learners, including advanced ESL writers who are ESL teachers, set goals that are specific to their needs. Because these needs cannot be separated from the cultural aspects of language as more than just the code itself, autoethnography provides an opportunity to capitalize on the dualistic nature of personetics (every person is unique but also a product of the sociocultural). The researcher becomes the study participant and has to learn about himself/herself by looking at himself/herself as a character in a

discourse and then penetrating this level to uncover his/her real self. This process will then liberate him/her from stereotypes and feelings of inferiority, and offer an alternative that could potentially be life-changing and lead to multi-competence.

OUTCOMES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR THE ESL WRITING CLASSROOM

Looking at autoethnography as a learning tool, based on the autoethnographies the ESL learners/ESL teachers have created, reflective writing we have shared with each other, and the follow-up interview, we feel that it is also an excellent *teaching* tool that can be used by L2 writing teachers in the classroom. The essence of our belief is based on the following:

1) Individuals researching their own linguacultural identity are not dissociated from their imagined communities (Anderson, 2006; Kanno & Norton, 2003), and thus, L2 writers become able to put down in writing what membership in these communities means to them.
2) Autoethnography can "provide a medium for an evocative story, which may activate the reader's subjectivities and compel an emotional response," where "centering the self allows the writer to tell her story and then offer a critical analysis of her own lived experiences" (Hagan, 2005, p. 401).
3) It improves our ability teach the L2 because we become more aware of cultural nuances and culture shock (Fujieda, 2008).
4) The L2 teacher learns to practice what he/she preaches, looking for a way to help his/her students consciously examine their paths and become aware of the world around them.
5) It allows the ESL teacher to use empathy as a tool in the classroom, thus enabling students to relate to others with the same issues.
6) It motivates students and illuminates for them the possibility of success.
7) It helps the ESL teacher to begin with simple personal writing and then add a scholarly angle to it, especially with more advanced students.
8) Autoethnography in the classroom provides an opportunity for students to open up and express themselves, e.g., to talk about their problems, which is a good match for communicative language teaching and related philosophies of teaching.
9) Autoethnographies written by ESL teachers help ESL students relate to their teachers (especially if the teacher is a non-native English speaker).
10) And, finally, autoethnographies in the classroom may help students become more fluent speakers and better writers because the personal can be related to the sociocultural, e.g., students can do basic discourse analysis with their autoethnographies.

In turn, we postulate that one of the immediate outcomes of this short study is a confirmation of the value that autoethnography has as a form of L2 writing:

1) It helps one understand the inner world of English language learners, and it helps the English language learners themselves to cognize their actual and metaphorical journey.
2) It creates an opportunity to discover one's voice and make it heard.

3) It embodies movement though the Zone of Proximal Development, allowing L2 writers to understand what the challenges are and how they can be dealt with.
4) It teaches the importance of identifying and interpreting data, starting with artifacts.
5) It turns the process of analyzing the data introspectively into reliving an adventure.
6) It allows ESL writers to ask questions about the future and visualize it, where imagination is a Vygotskian key to learning (Vygotsky, 2008).
7) It helps alleviate their suffering and legitimizes the affective side of learning.

Thus, for instance, Hirano seconds Yashima's (2006) and Pavlenko's (2002) views on the affective and believes that "having students try to best describe how they feel about a specific aspect of their life in English will promote their vocabulary development as well as their thinking skills in L2" (Hirano, notes). In turn, as ELLs "lack the meditational tool which is the language (Knox, 1999; Roy, 1989)," they can be motivated "by modeling the joy of learning a new language" (Kaveh, notes, citing Cambourne, 1995, and Miller, 2009).

Specific activities that are based on the conclusions we have reached will vary, depending on the ESL writers' levels of proficiency in ESL and other factors (such as the ESL standards specific to the locale where the ESL teacher works, e.g., a state in the US). But a key conclusion we have reached is that, while personetics implies an imprint of the spirit of the time, i.e., a connection between what an individual says and the environment in which the individual exists, personal linguacultures never quite fit into this mold, which the messy nature of interpretive ethnography confirms. Are autoethnographies written by ESL teachers who are also ESL learners, texts that we have defined as hybrid in that they are both texts of personal and mass directedness (Brudny, 1998), a clear manifestation of the socio-historical context? This exploration of ESL autoethnography confirms this for us only partially.

From the practical perspective, the blurring of lines between personal writing and research writing that Bochner and Ellis (1996) highlight in regard to "narratives of self" (Denzin, 1997, p. 199) can be explored in the L2 writing classroom in a variety of forms, and even elicit such connections between socio-historical contexts of the macro type. Students can be specifically directed to write about their place of origin, schooling, values demanded by the society, or professional goals (as ESL teachers) mandated by the state. But perhaps equally important to us is the conclusion that autoethnography creates an opportunity to express one's own personal linguaculture as it exists in its unique form. For example:

> Having students write an autoethnography can be therapeutic, as students can express themselves and a teacher will be able to support them. Also, for students who are afraid of taking risks by speaking or adult ELLs, writing will be a place where students can express their thoughts freely and where they can see what they think/want to do more objectively. (Hirano, notes)

This conclusion opens up a number of opportunities. For example, in her notes, Hirano presents the idea of positioning autoethnographic writing as a double-entry journal, where introspective research is fueled by interaction with the instructor. Having experienced this approach both as learners and teachers, we feel that this approach works equally well with K-12 and college ESL learners as well as ESL learners who are ESL teachers. This approach adds a strong communicative language teaching aspect to the process, and the product created in the process is never final:

> Autoethnography as a dialogue journal: You can give students a topic or they can write whatever they want to write, and having students write a journal on regular basis will help you understand students more. A teacher makes comments on their journal, and students will feel encouraged, relieved, or motivated, as they will know that a teacher always cares about them. This dialogue can motivate students to write more in English. (Hirano, notes)

Kaveh, in turn, believes that autoethnography can help "familiarize native English speakers with the challenges ESL students face when learning a language and transitioning into a new culture" (notes). This familiarity is especially important in contexts such as the typical US mainstream classroom, where native and non-native English speakers are expected to work together. In the process of this investigation, we have uncovered and identified a number of themes that were present in the work of both autoethnographers. We argue that that reflections of socio-historical contexts, as they are personally experienced, are matched – and perhaps overshadowed – by thoughts on finding one's voice, overcoming obstacles in the Zone of Proximal Development, interpreting personally meaningful artifacts, exploring adventure, experiencing suffering and the affective as newcomers, and visualizing one's future. Indeed, these are themes that can be understood and related to by local students and their teachers, creating opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue. For example, all students in a class can be asked to write an autoethnography, discuss it with their partners in a pair, and then do a presentation in front of the entire class. For less experienced writers, this can be supplemented with visual literacy activities, such as drawing a visual narrative to illustrate one's journey. For more experienced writers, and especially teachers-in-training, this can be enhanced by shaping the project as a panel presentation for a local teachers' conference.

Furthermore, we have found that the notes in which we reflected on the process of writing the autoethnographies as well as the brief follow-up interview were themselves sources of data. We feel that this finding reinforces the assumption that metacognitive thinking is an essential part of the learning process. The importance of metacognition is illustrated by Bochner and Ellis (1996), who experiment with qualitative research by revisiting what has been written and physically sitting down to discuss their notes and thoughts on the ethnographies they have read. An activity we have found to work well in the classroom consists of having groups of four or five students gather around a table to re-read quietly and then discuss their own autoethnographies. In doing so, they perform their identity as autoethnographers while also taking notes at the same time.

The duality that Brudny (1998) writes about, where we learn about a culture (a personal linguaculture, in this case) by immersing ourselves in it step-by-step and learning to see ourselves in the Other, thus becoming able to examine our own socio-historical identity, is present in such an activity. As we have pointed out earlier, from the personetics' perspective, autoethnography tells the ESL writer something about the ESL writer, and this activity creates an opportunity to do precisely this. For example, emphasizing the imagining-the-future theme, Hirano explores in her notes the possibility of having students write an alternative ending for their autoethnography, focus selectively on obstacles and successes, or even re-imagine something that has already taken place and offer a fictional alternative (see Bochner & Ellis, 1996, for more on the role of fiction in alternative ethnography).

In conclusion, autoethnography is clearly an emergent research genre, and our short study was an attempt to illuminate just one piece of this puzzle. In line with our epistemological positioning as ESL educators doing interpretive ethnography, we value every

single voice from the field, including, of course, individual case studies and sets of case studies. On the other hand, we recognize the limitations imposed on us by this approach and believe that more studies are needed to illuminate autoethnography as a valid ESL writing research, learning, and teaching tool. Our contribution to this process does not define this emergent genre in its entirety, and we are firm in our desire to continue exploring it further together with our colleagues in the professional community. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that we are inspired by autoethnography as a way of bringing personal linguacultures to the forefront of what takes place in the classroom and hope to have shown that it is of value to ESL learners and ESL teachers alike.

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