CHAPTER FOUR

FINDING MY VOICE

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Abstract

Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding. *Proverbs*, IV, 7.

The writer employs auto-ethnographic methods in her critical re-viewing of personal and professional voice in her research publications over 2 decades. Exploring representations of self, place, space and time in those writings, the author reflects on the emergence of a choral yet individual voice that presents a document of her journey in learning yet functions also as the place of germination for her personal and professional growth and conscientisation. The author extends from this personal journey to consider the importance of writing as a means for shaping and honouring the changing personal and professional identity of educators, leaders and researchers in broader and transnational contexts.

Introduction

In this chapter I use a selection of my written work as a way of sharing my struggle to find a unique and authentic voice throughout my career. I trace key themes drawn from selected writings published between 1987 and 2010. My intention is to explore through a new narrative within this chapter the emergence of voice and with it confidence in auto-ethnographic methodologies and the cyclical development of key ideas relating to place, space, multiple selves, identity and professional learning. Whilst looking back, now, forward and beyond I provide insights into my 'river of life', including stories of 'selves' in teaching and researching,

professional learning and leading, working individually and collaboratively.

This weaving of words will create new insights into my writing *as* research and of writing research to communicate with others.

Fundamentally this chapter is about the emergence of 'voice', not just as the spoken word with which I have never felt anything but confident, but through the post hoc investigation of the written words of my own published work – an example of auto-ethnography. It is also about the beginning of this journey, its progress and conclusion – from the writings of students in the previous chapter to my sense of self now.

The beginning

Notes made in preparing this chapter: In the beginning, as I start to write this chapter I am framing a number of questions that I hope will help me reflect on how best to construct my writing. For example, how do I construct a narrative that is unique and authentic? Should I try to write differently – this is a chapter of an edited book not a journal article? Is this writing as research and/or research writing?

The beginning as described here has resonances with the narrative of deconstruction and reconstruction as told by Yvonne Findlay and Janice Jones in Chapter 2. This is not surprising as these writers are both close friends and colleagues. We share experiences crossing borders between countries and between educational roles. Our relationships also include that of supervisor-research student and, in the past, as performance manager. Conversations with both led to further clarity about the specific instances that I would explore - the particular points in my river of life that I felt were critical to my development. However, the reasons for selecting these remained tacit for some time and it is only now in the re-visioning or perhaps 're-voicing' of this chapter that I recognise the assumptions that have underpinned my selection of 'critical incidents' (Tripp, 1993) as a mechanism for writing about my river of life and the journey I have taken over the last 25 years (and more).

These narratives are presented as a series of chronological 'incidents' or places within my river of life, ordered from past to present. I have always thought about my development as a writer in this way, although intriguingly one of my reviewers suggested that it might be interesting to break the chronological sequence, moving back and forward without temporal progression. Whilst this is an approach I will use in the future to

disrupt my assumptions, this is how I saw the river as I began my writing here.

The idea of critical incidents as described by Tripp is intended to help teachers draw on their own classroom experience to develop professional judgment, to improve their own practice and to pass on their expertise to others. I translate this approach to enable me to study the written products of my research, drawing on my experience of doing and writing about research to develop a research identity, and improving my practice of writing *as* research and research writing to pass on my 'expertise' to others. To do this I write 'around' several pieces of my published written work, providing the context of the writing *as* research and research writing and therefore find a way to show through this writing aspects of my river of life that were central to 'finding my voice'; and to develop key ideas relating to place, space, multiple selves, identity and professional learning.

This translation of the use of critical incidents aligns well with the suggestion that the focus of auto-ethnographic research can be on the *auto* (the self – the finding of my voice); on the *ethnos* (the culture or social context, that is the insights and significance of this research writing for others) and/or the *graphy* (the research process or in this case the writing *as* research) (Reed-Danahay, 1997).

My research practice is, therefore, located within a qualitative paradigm, drawing from the ethnographic tradition. Here the role of the researcher is to remain deeply embedded within the research. The personal voice is essential to reflect how the researcher as 'ethnographer' interacts with the cultural or social context being researched. Thus auto-ethnography is a genre of writing *and* research that connects the personal to the cultural or social context.

In so doing I am inserting myself into this writing as a major character, and as noted by others (Charmaz & Mitchell, 1997; Holt, 2003) I challenge accepted views about silent authorship, where the researcher's voice is not included in the presentation of findings. Embracing this methodology has been a critical part of finding my voice. As part of this methodological concern is that the need to find my voice is indicative of the lack of value placed on the self within research particularly at the time when I first engaged in educational research in 1970 as a post-graduate Certificate of Education student in Leicester.

In order to frame this next section as 'research' the autobiographical and reflective writing surrounding the 'critical incidents' that follow is designed to address the following questions:

- When was the beginning of my journey?

- When did I start to have an emerging awareness of writing as research?
- When did it become explicit?
- When did I begin to understand the significance of my writing *as* research?
- In what ways has 'writing as research' impacted on my research and research writing?
- Where might these understandings lead now?

From this beginning I follow the flow of the river through time to where I am now. In the next section I consider the characteristics of where and when I am now and crystallize key themes and ideas that emerged through my research writing over this period. As I name and consider emerging ideas I look forward. Finally, the understandings and insights from writing this chapter *as* research are set within a broader theoretical and professional context in the final section – looking beyond. These perspectives constitute the warp of the fabric of the narrative constructed through the weaving of words. The weft of this chapter is about *auto* (self), *ethno* (social/cultural dimensions) and *graphy* (the research process).

Looking back – tributaries in writing my 'river of life'

Critical incident -1987 Being creative – in writing and in life

This is the year that I have named many times as one of the most creative and productive years of my life. It was the year my son was born and also the year I submitted my thesis. It is also the year I made two trips from Australia to England: the first to submit my thesis and the second following the birth of my son to have my viva.

If I was to characterise this point in my river of life it would be a broad, but shallow river where the waters flow with energy but smoothly over the rocks beneath. It is very like the River Don in Aberdeenshire near the farms where I spent my childhood holidays and where I was born. The order of the events in this critical incident is deliberate. It highlights the importance of both my professional and personal 'creativity' at this time and the synergies that emerged. I was pregnant, I was healthy, sailing every weekend, focused on full-time work and part-time writing. The imperative of finishing the thesis as a new life in my life came closer

meant my physical, emotional, intellectual, creative and spiritual elements were aligned, working synchronously and the river of my life was flowing seemingly effortlessly. It was a productive year.

At this point I am reminded of the poem by Erin Pearl Buchner (Chapter 3). This poem speaks to me not only of becoming a mother enjoying such moments with my son, but as a daughter when my mother passed away finally after a period of fading away with Alzheimer's. But in that end there was also a new beginning as I waited for the birth of my first grandchild who arrived six months later. Like this poem which spans years, the narrative of the development and completion of my thesis (Jasman, 1987) is a long one. The first part of the thesis was a correlation study to identify the reliability and validity of teachers' assessments of pupil performance in areas other than the basic skills. During this time I became aware of my difficulty with research writing. This was evident after about two years working on the Observational Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation project (ORACLE) (Galton & Simon, 1980; Galton, Simon, & Croll, 1980; Willcocks & Jasman, 1980). I struggled with the genre, had writer's block for six months and finally was able to develop an appropriately 'academic research' writing style. This experience framed the first half of my doctorate. I then began teaching at a College of Higher Education immediately following my time as researcher in the ORACLE project team.

At this point I put my thesis in a cupboard, closed the door and placed a chest of drawers in front of the cupboard door. It was there almost two years. In terms of the place of writing research in my river of life, I was in stagnant waters – a quagmire where there was little flow. In 1982 I was preparing to leave to work on exchange in the United States for a year. I rented my house and I had to make a decision about my doctoral work – did I own it – would I finish it? I did take it with me and worked on the first half of the thesis whilst in the United States and re-engaged with the data. This research writing was familiar and built on my learning about writing research in the ORACLE project. I learnt a lot about academic writing that I still use today in supervising research students but it was a report, with minimal interpretation and 'I' was absent from the text. There was so much more that I could have communicated from this time of being an educational researcher.

Some four years later as I worked on the second section of my doctoral thesis in 1986, I found I had to write differently. The second section involved a self-evaluation study of my own teaching practices. The evidence used to evaluate my practice involved documenting the professional learning outcomes of teachers studying assessment and

evaluation full-time in an In-service Bachelor of Education (Hons) fourth year qualification. However, as it was a self-evaluation, I also made explicit my intentions, aims, planning and implementation of the course. This was to be my first experience of writing in the first person within a research context.

I was no longer research writing, instead I was writing *as* research. I was using the first person as I wrote about my intentions, beliefs and anticipated outcomes. I reported through writing what I actually did and included my responses to the assessment and evaluation of the students' learning as part of my research. There are many instances within the text of my self-evaluation in the thesis which provide evidence of both a sense of conflict being both a 'teacher' and 'researcher' and the use of my voice in reflecting my interpretation of the significance of our dialogues. For example, I commented that the following statement was a 'turning point' for me and supported the suggestion that the identification of the learner's needs through the close observation and reflection on events could provide a more appropriate way of confronting any discrepancies between my own espoused theories and theories-in-use and that this might also applied to the teachers' professional learning.

> I'm having to review and reappraise what I'm doing in the light of things which come up during the sessions. I'm suggesting that you might like to do that too …. Have a try in the light of that reflection on my part. I do understand what it feels like, the conflict, should I really be doing this (the self-evaluation) or should I discontinue. I believe I ought to be doing it. I've reworked the (teaching) plan for the term, if you'd like to have a look at these and see if there are any comments you would like to make. (Jasman, 1987, p.283)

This narrative is also important to the idea of multiple selves and how these were visible in my writing. This understanding has also emerged through writing this chapter, and has led to an unanticipated new understanding which is revealed later in this chapter. In 1987, I was making the transition from writing in the third person as required within my first university writing using scientific, biological and systems' perspectives; through a period of uncertainty to having confidence in my own thinking, critical reflection and professional learning relevant to understanding my teaching and research praxis and being able to write 'I'. My river of life was gaining momentum. I(t) was cutting a new path through the landscape, narrow and deep.

This was the first time I could publicly own my writing *as* research and was a first step towards finding my voice. However, the significance of

this was hidden to me at the time as I did not initially see my doctoral research as the start, thinking that the articulation of the issue of finding my voice appeared later in my research trajectory as detailed below.

Critical incident -1992 Finding my voice

This is the year that I named 'Finding a voice' as an issue for me in a paper. It was written a month before my son started school, following completion of a six month Outside Study Program in England. I was also taking up university positions, being elected to Senate, appointed to the admissions committee of Academic Council. My sphere of influence was extending beyond the School of Education and Iwas expected to speak not only about my research but also influence other areas of work: in teaching and in leading and supporting other leaders within the university. My river of life was changing to a delta as the tributaries spread out across the landscape.

The need to find my voice was first publicly expressed in a paper *Women's work: finding a voice* (Jasman, 1992) presented at a conference on Women in Leadership in Perth, Western Australia. The abstract I submitted for the conference was a 'traditional' abstract explaining how the paper would describe aspects of the research and consultancy work conducted over the previous four years into self-appraisal and performance management systems. In addition, the paper was to draw on more recent research during study leave in the UK into teacher self-appraisal as part of a process leading to personal and professional development. However, the paper that I wrote was not that outlined in the abstract – it started with the following statement:

> As I sat down to write this paper I was confronted with a dilemma - between the time of submitting my abstract and sitting down in front of the word processor my way of looking at the world changed and is still changing. I intend, therefore, to use this opportunity, first, to tell my own story to see if I can tease out some of the conflicts, dilemmas and issues which were brought into sharp relief by this change. Second, in telling my story I shall explore how I see the process of self-appraisal informing my own professional development and helping me to better understand the process which I am encouraging others to engage in. Third, I want to draw comparisons between the kind of learning I have done with the way in which a group of teachers involved in self-appraisal have articulated their concerns and the professional development outcomes they have talked about in relation to engaging in this process. (Jasman, 1992, p. 1)

At this time and place there were few, if any, avenues open within academic research to use auto-ethnographic techniques. However, this is what I decided to do. I can recall the physical location, the feelings and thoughts circling in me as well as my uncertainty with taking the path that was emerging through my writing. I still am surprised and wonder about how this paper came into being – but it did. The story of its writing is included here since it was so different to my previous experiences of writing research; it was rather 'writing as research'.

> I was sitting at my Mac Classic surrounded by various schemes of teacher performance management and appraisal for professional development trying to work out how to make this article interesting and reflect the research and my professional learning that was the outcome of my recent outside study program. I started writing and continued to do so for about four to five hours. I typed the words into the 'word processor'. I did not re-read, nor edit, nor reference the writing. At the end I went back and read from the beginning and made few changes to the text.

'Women's work: finding a voice' is both an exploration of my writing process and a narrative of the tensions of being an academic. I write of the challenges of fitting into the academic mould when the reality of my lived experience then encompassed so much more.

> Like many other women I conceive of my role/work/job as a teacher and perhaps more now as a learner, in a more holistic way, the tasks I perform are all permeated by a belief that I have chosen to facilitate learning and that learning is my central concern. I would not call myself a manager or an administrator since both terms have negative connotations for me. This is consistent with research on women in educational management and leaderships (Jasman, 1992, p.4)

This is a recurrent theme throughout the paper, particularly in respect to whether I am being a teacher and/or researcher and/or a learner and/or a leader first and foremost. Using the metaphor of my river of life, this was losing direction, lots of tributaries were moving out from the river, dissipating the flow and force of the river. It was a time of uncertainty and confusion regarding my identity as researcher, teacher, learner and leader as well as raising issues about being a mother and woman within the academic world.

> I feel the need somehow to justify departing from the norm of an academic paper, and the temptation to move away from disclosure and finding my voice through this conference, yet I know too that to avoid this disclosure

will limit my potential to learn from doing this – to learn from taking a risk, to do something in a different way from the accepted patterns and expectations which I had not questioned until very recently. (Jasman, 1992, p. 1)

I also write about being concerned as to my capacity to communicate effectively with my audience, in ways that were unfamiliar, of breaking out of the academic genre. I am also interested in how to best represent the 'messiness' of my thinking in prose that is linear. I found myself using different typefaces – their form representing the degree of certainty I felt, whether I was trying to give 'voice' to a factual, reflective, interpretive or evaluative stance.

I finished the paper and presented this at the conference. As I started to present I became aware that I didn't know how to present this writing as research. For the first time ever I began to read the paper verbatim. There was no summarising or framing of the content with other messages. Within the time it took to read the first paragraph I realised that I had actually said what I wanted to say, creating a piece of written work that was as true to the narrative I wished to share as it would ever be. As a result I stopped reading the paper, and shared this realisation with my audience. I asked if they would be willing to read the paper for themselves which they did.

As I reflected on the fact that I had actually written what I wanted to say I realised that this was the point at which I found my voice. From this paper I was able to distil the opportunities arising from the critical incident to explore my continuing development as an academic but also to understand this through writing about my lived experience (Denzin, 1991) in an authentic voice.

Critical Incident: Changing place, space and pace in a new millennium (2000-3)

During the period 2000-3 I made four career moves, from Perth to the University of Melbourne, taking up a DEST research fellowship in Canberra the following year and on completion of this moving to the University of Sydney. I progressed from a Level B position in Perth to Level D at the University of Sydney. Due to changes in my parents' health I then relocated to the UK a year later and moved outside of the university sector into a senior policy advisory role with the General Teaching Council for England (GTCE).

The third paper explored here is that on 'Initial Teacher Education: changing curriculum, pedagogies and assessment' (Jasman, 2003). The paper was begun some ten years after 'Women's work: finding a voice'. The abstract states that the 'paper draws on the author's experiences within a number of professional development projects, teacher education programs and the development of professional teaching standards in Australia' (2003, p.1).

I drew heavily on my own experiences and practices in relation to a range of professional and academic activities over the previous ten years. For example, I was actively involved in the design of professional learning experiences for teachers working in schools, the development of initial teacher education programs, the federally funded National Professional Development program, and also collaborative research with teachers and peers into the nature of professional learning and identity (Grundy et al., 1999) that were part of the Innovative Links research program (Yeatman & Sachs, 1995). In addition, as a Department of Education, Science and Training, Commenwealth of Australia (DEST) Research Fellow I undertook an investigation of teacher professional expertise, what it is, how it develops and how it is assessed for recognition and reward.

'Initial teacher education: changing curriculum, pedagogies and assessment' was a sole authored paper. One of my first since re-engaging with research and securing research funding during the previous ten years. I also had built a state, national and to some extent an international reputation for my work on the Level 3 Classroom teacher career pathway and writing in the field of professional standards. My profile was more like that of a traditional academic, including writing of programs and courses, scholarship in teaching and learning, research funding from competitive grants, research and development projects in teacher career paths and professional standards. The tributaries were beginning to realign, to create synergies across my research and other activities and again to build momentum in my river of life.

In this paper my research was ethnographic, tracing policy and research trajectories in initial teacher education over the previous 10-15 years. Much of the knowledge that is reflected in this paper was derived from my personal involvement in the events described and I offered my interpretation of this period as a time of 'benign' neglect. I was able to draw on my 'self' to create the data. I do not remember the circumstances surrounding the writing of this paper only that I presented the first version in 2002 at the first AustralianTeacher Education Association (ATEA) conference for over eighteen months. I completed the published paper in England, when working at the GTCE. I had again drawn on my lived

experience as the foundation for the paper. Another significant element of the content of this paper was to focus on the changes necessary to transform education and with it teacher education suitable for the 21st Century.

Now some ten years later this paper is being read more than ever before, accessible through online searches because of its title: 'Initial teacher education'. I was confident then and reassured now that I had made a contribution to knowledge, based not only on the rigourous analysis of policy and research but also through reflection on my own lived experience as I looked back over the previous ten years. Yet there are very few 'I' statements, although my perspective and lived experience permeates the paper. In the conclusion, I stated that

> I suggest we can begin to construct new knowledge and understandings from our own professional practices and our practical knowledge about teacher education. In the same way as we urge teachers to become researchers we can research our own practices in similar ways (Jasman, 2003, p.22).

I was now confident as a researcher and as a teacher educator to write for myself but also to recommend what I believed to be a way forward, creating new knowledge, changing practices and developing policy to improve the outcomes for all those within the education system. This confidence was soon to be translated into my policy work for the GTCE and I began writing not as research but writing as policy. The transformations resulting from this change in role are not described in detail here as this experience and the professional learning involved require much greater depth of consideration than I would be able to include here.

Critical incidents – 2008-10

I left the General Teaching Council for England (GTCE) in April 2008, my father had passed away in 2005 and my mother in January 2008. I also knew that my work in regard to initial and continuing teacher professional learning and development policy was nearing completion. In fact the GTCE no longer exists following legislation enacted by the new UK coalition government in 2010. I moved back into the academic world where I could again write for myself, as an academic, rather than as an officer of the GTCE. I no longer was negotiating my own knowledge and views with the Director and Council. There was no requirement to stay on message nor did my writing go through five iterations including

acceptance by the 40+ Council before it was sent to the Secretary of State. I also became a grandmother.

The final paper that I consider in this chapter is one that went through many iterations between 2002-2010 when it was finally published (A Jasman, 2010). I see this paper as the culmination of 25 years of writing *as* research beginning with my doctoral research. In this paper, I note that

> I examine my own involvement and that of teachers and teacher educators in five practice-based research studies in terms of our professional learning and border pedagogy. I played a key role in each project and offer an 'insider' perspective through autobiographical self-study. (p.307)

In this paper I explicitly present an 'autobiographical self-study' on professional learning journeys and border pedagogy. This methodology had by now achieved status and recognition particularly in relation to the work of teacher educators (Loughran & Russell, 2002), although the main focus of this research is into the practice of teaching, not the practice of research and the professional learning that takes place as a result of this.

Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) developed criteria to judge the quality of auto-biographical 'self-study'. They include that they 'ring true', 'enable connection', 'promote insight and interpretation' (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). They also note that the focus of the self-study is on problems and issues that make someone an educator and that authentic voice is a necessary but not sufficient condition for scholarly standing. In addition, they suggest that quality studies 'attend carefully to persons in context or setting' and that they 'offer fresh perspectives on established truths' (p.108).

> Reflection on the legitimacy of auto-ethnography: Unlike my earlier work in my PhD there was now a name for and acceptance of alternative approaches to research that value the self, the socio-cultural context and the research process.

In writing this paper *as* research, I created a narrative about my own professional learning journey – 'my river of life' and the journeys of others with whom I travelled at different times and in different places. I tell the story of five research projects and through these narratives conclude that

> ....in this exploration of border-crossing for professional learning the metaphors have included types of traveller, the passports and visas they travel under, their luggage and the territories through which they travel.

This analysis captures in part the role of border-crossing between different professional knowledge contexts in enabling professional learning journeys. However, it also highlights the importance of the degree of difference between personal practical knowledge and/or professional knowledge contexts for learning to occur. Thus if we are to learn about the working lives of the other (and ourselves), it is necessary to cross the border between the 'academy' and the 'school'...The learning that has been described here has resulted from such opportunities to cross borders (Jasman, 2010, p. 321).

In the next section through writing *as* research I reflect on where my river of life has led. I crystallize key themes and ideas that emerged through my research writing over this period. I also begin to clarify emerging ideas as I write the following section.

Looking now – the same river or a new beginning?

From the beginning of this chapter I follow the flow of the river of my life through time to where I am now. In this section I consider the characteristics of where I am now and then how this may impact on my future writing as research in the next section - looking forward. Writing the previous section has illustrated how two tributaries, starting from the well springs of the completion of my doctoral thesis and the birth of my son, have contributed to my river of life. These wellsprings were of great significant in this journey of finding my voice. My thesis opened the door to a new way of researching and writing. It was the beginning of what has become the focus of much of my research, teaching, learning and policy work during my professional life.

Like the 'Women's work: finding a voice' paper I did not end up writing from 'knowing' what I wanted to say at the start of the writing process. The abstract for the chapter was constructed from tentative ideas about how my understanding might inform the ideas embedded within this book around the significance of writing *as* research, in order to conduct auto-ethnographic research and to communicate this research *through* writing. The reality of constructing this chapter has meant a number of iterations that has changed the content and order of sections as each in turn is written, re-written, re-positioned and edited. This is a fundamentally important part of writing as research and the voice that is associated with published work, as I create the research writing. The focus of this chapter - finding my voice comes to the forefront again – what is it that I really want to communicate through this text, what do I want to give voice to?

The birth of my son, the significant transition points of his life and of other members of my family (and therefore having significance for me) have shaped decisions about place, space and 'selves' within my river of life. However, there is new learning emergent through the construction of this chapter is an example of writing *as* research. It was also shaped by the previous chapter where through writing poetry the authors were able to tap into the emotional, physical, creative and spiritual as well as presenting an intellectual perspective. It is also linked to the authors of the following chapter. So as a result this chapter not only mentions my professional life and experiences but also elements of my personal and social context as part of each critical incident.

I have not balanced the intellectual with these other elements well but it is where I now wish to go – to write as a writer not as a teacher, researcher, leader, or learner. I also realised as I concluded the previous section on looking back that I have almost closed the door on life as an academic – constrained by the conventions of peer review, rankings of journals, and meeting the needs of the university and government. I have no regrets about what I have done and achieved. I have made contributions to knowledge and practice of which I am proud and have made a difference, but an 'ending' is approaching or rather a new 'beginning' as a writer.

Looking forward – becoming a writer

This conclusion to this chapter is totally unexpected but that is the thrill and joy of writing and through that process finding my voice – being able to say what I really value and want to share with others. My river of life has taken me to a unexpected place. I imagine that I will continue to write in many genres, for research, as research, for teaching and learning, as a journal to help me learn, to gather data and to represent data. I can see occasions where I will write for fun, write to tell a story, to share something I value with others. Whatever kind of writing it is it will now be something of importance, that I value and care about and which I hope will make a difference. For as I wrote before 'there seems little point of finding a voice if no one is listening; little point in writing if no-one reads the text.' (1992, p.12).

Looking beyond – the getting of wisdom

This chapter is an attempt to write as one person, referencing the 'multiple selves' through the teaching, researching, leading and learning I have been part of throughout my career. To use multiple voices to convey some of the messiness of the writing process, its backwards and forwards motions, the re-ordering and re-figuring of the narrative to communicate meaning. The understandings and insights from writing this chapter *as* research are set within this final section – looking beyond. As noted earlier the weft of this chapter is my writing about auto-ethnography, through the lens of *auto* (self), *ethno* (social/cultural dimensions) and *graphy* (the research process) and warp is the focus on position and perspectives in time.

As I linked the two underlying frameworks that emerged from my thinking and from my reading I recognised that I could weave – through warp and weft – these two frameworks to create this chapter so that the reader could follow the twists and turns of finding my voice. The warp of the chapter is in the heuristic of looking back, looking now, looking forward and looking beyond (Hamman et al., 2012). First I look back over my 'river of life' tracing this to the source – when I first recognised the need to find my voice and the beginnings of my struggle to find and use my voice. What followed is my attempt to convey the complexity and also the simplicity that emerge from some of my writing over 25 years. The unexpected outcome to this chapter is that I am embarking on a new beginning recognising that I am becoming a writer and that I can be this as one person – the processes of integration are evident in all spheres of my life and as a way forward it may be time for the 'getting of wisdom' (Richardson, 1910).   My river of life has returned to that broad and shallow mass of water flowing smoothly towards the sea that I experienced with the completion of my thesis and the birth of my son. I am grateful that the authors of chapter 4 explore through their writing what I have kept hidden beneath the factual reporting of the impact of my son and family as I have navigated my river of life. This has helped focus my writing as research on the ideas of auto-ethnography, and most importantly given me a new door to go through and begin being a writer.

Acknowledgements

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