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"I done fucked up that shit too"

An autoethnographic journey into the beginnings of becoming a teacher

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”Vituiks meni sekin paska” Autoetnografinen matka aloittelevan opettajan alkuun (Hannele Hiltunen)

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Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma on autoetnografinen tutkimus, joka käsittelee opettajan uran aloitusta. Lähtöpisteenä on totuuden subjektiivisuuden tärkeys ja opinnäytteen työstäminen luovemmalla tavalla, laajentaen termiä ”akateeminen opinnäyte”. Autoetnografia liittyy viitekehukseen, tutkimuksen menetelmiin, aineiston keruun ja analyysiin, tulosten raportointiin, sekä tutkielman yleiseen struktuuriin.

Tutkielman aihe liittyy opettajana aloittamiseen, hyvässä ja pahassa. Halusin tarjota rehellisen katsauksen opettajana aloittamiseen. Monet opettajat kamppailevat alalla pysymisessä ja tällä hetkellä opettajat lakkoilevat saadakseen paremmat työolot sekä parempaa palkkaa. Tämä on ajankohtainen aihe ja toivon, että muut uudet opettajat pystyvät samaistumaan pro gradu-tutkielmaani.

Pidin päiväkirjaa ensimmäisestä lukukaudestani alakoulun opettajana. Tämän päiväkirjan pohjalta tutkin kuka minä olen ja mitä teen opettajana, selviytyäkseni aloittelevan opettajan haasteista. Tutkin aineistoa ja nostin esille tärkeimmät toistuvat teemat ja tutkin niitä tarkemmin. Nauran omille virheilleni. Olen huomannut, että pohdin paljon ja käyn läpi itsetutkiskelun vaiheita, ja teen pohdiskelua hyvin kirjoittamalla, mikä on auttanut minua. Olen kamppailut aloittelevan opettajan roolikonfliktin kanssa. Olen tiedostanut fyysisiä sekä emotionaalisia oireita opettajaksi tulemisessa. Haasteiden tiedostaminen on auttanut minua hankkimaan ammattilista apua ja olemaan avoimena ahdistuksestani työkavereille. Olen myös saanut tukea puolisoiltani ja ystäviltäni. Olen yrittänyt keskittyä opettamiseen ja luomaan turvallisen ympäristön lapsille. Olen myös pyrkinyt jalkauttamaan positiivista kasvatusta luokkahuoneeseen. Edellämäinitsemäni asiat ovat auttaneet työssäjaksamiseen ja niiden ansiosta olen vielä opetuslalla. Olen nauttinut autoetnografisen tutkielman prosessista ja haluaisin suositella sitä muillekin opettajille.

Avainsanat: aloittelevat opettajat, autoetnografia, itsetietoisuus, päiväkirjan pitäminen

University of Oulu
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”I done fucked up that shit too” An autoethnographic journey into the beginnings of becoming a teacher (Hannele Hiltunen)

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This Master’s thesis is an autoethnographic study into the beginnings of a teacher. The starting point is the importance of a subjective truth and doing a thesis in a more creative way, expanding the term “academic thesis”. Autoethnography relates to the frame of reference, research methods, data collection, data analysis, representing the results and the overall structure of the thesis.

The topic of this thesis relates to the beginnings of a teacher, the good and the bad. I wanted to give an honest account of becoming a teacher. Many teachers are struggling with staying in the field and currently teachers have been striking for better working conditions and better salary. It is a current topic and I hope other beginning teachers can relate to my writing.

I wrote a journal for my first semester as an elementary school teacher. Based on this journal I explored who am I as a teacher and what do I do to cope with some of the struggles of being a beginning teacher. I explored the data and found the most important recurring themes and explored those further. I have embraced laughing at my own mistakes. I have also found that I am self-reflective and self-aware, and I do reflection well in writing and this has helped me cope. I have struggled with the role conflict of becoming a teacher. I have been aware of the physical and emotional symptoms of becoming a teacher. Being aware has helped me reach out for professional help and I have been open about my anxiety to colleagues. I have also received support from my partner and friends. I have tried to focus on teaching and creating a safe environment for the children. I have also attempted to implement positive education into the classroom. I have found that these have helped me cope and are reasons why I am still in the field. I have enjoyed the autoethnographic thesis process and would recommend it to other teachers.

Keywords: autoethnography, beginning teachers, journaling, self-awareness

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Setting up story time

"I was on my walk today during the eerie early morning hours, it was dark and still creepy. I was comforted by the "Fajr" prayer, the early morning prayer of Islam. It gave me a sense of peace and I was less afraid of the unknown road ahead of me. While I was waiting for my brothers to be ready, I was talking to my "Yaar," my Indian best friend, studying in the United Kingdom. Hopefully I can visit England again to go see her. Later on while driving to school in my Volvo I was listening to Enrique Iglesias and singing along to it in Spanish with my mixed accent. Currently I am sitting in an international and an intercultural work environment. I am in the same room with a British man and across the hallway there is an American man. It must be a cooperative place since these two nationalities can work together. The school that I am working at includes: students, teachers and other staff from over eighty nationalities across six continents (not including penguins from Antarctica). This school is even a place where Indians and Pakistanis live side by side. Even Finns and Swedes live in peace. In a broader point of view the city of Dubai includes all of these nationalities, and the city even includes penguins at SkiDubai.

I am currently living in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Before that I spent a year in Finland. Before that I lived in the United States of America, in Wisconsin to be exact. I spent important years of my life in the States. I spend five of my early teenage years there. I gained many of the values that are important to me from there. In the States I was accepted easily, this acceptance of other people is an important value that I learned: being open-minded. Even though, I was born in Finland and spent my early childhood there in the city of Toijala. Somehow I became a multicultural young woman. I received my American high school diploma and my International Baccalaureate diploma in the spring of 2013 from Dubai. I am spending my gap year working as a teacher's assistant in Dubai American Academy, as well as helping Finnish children maintain their mother tongue. I am also tutoring other children in Spanish, English and mathematics.

When I found out about this program, I realized it is something I want to apply to at the top of my list. I hold a Finnish passport, but I do not feel completely Finnish

anymore. Out of my twenty years of life, I have spent almost half of my life abroad. I speak Finnish, but I instantly chose to write this essay in English. My English has become better than my Finnish written and even spoken skills. When I come across an unfamiliar English word, I do not look up the translation into Finnish, since that does not help me. I rather look up the English definition of the English word to help me to understand it. Most of the time I even think in English. At home I speak “Finglish” with my family and Finnish friends. I have also studied six years of Spanish in two different environments; Spanish has become my second language instead of English since English is a first language to me like Finnish. I decided to learn basic French as well starting in the States and continuing to study in Dubai to amount to three years of French. In Dubai I decided that learning languages will never be time wasted and I decided to study even a year of Arabic.

All of the terms in the first paragraph come from my intercultural background. I live in a city where many different cultures come together and form a mixture. I feel like I belong to that mixture.

I ended up becoming an intercultural young woman by opening my ears, my eyes, even my taste buds, and most importantly my heart and mind as one unit. I may have grown up in a small city. By not being afraid and by embracing different cultures, instead of shunning them, I have become who I am today.”

This essay is the beginning of my journey of becoming a teacher. This is the essay I applied with for the Intercultural Teacher Education program at the University of Oulu. Becoming a teacher was not an obvious choice to me, it has not been a childhood dream. I did not like spending time with children when I was growing up. Eventually I started enjoying time babysitting and I started enjoying being with children instead of just earning some of my own money. I realized I was good with children and I enjoyed planning activities for children. I also applied to study English and other subjects, but I realized with teaching I have the chance to utilize my versatile skillset in numerous subjects. I did not have to choose only one subject to study at university. I wrote this essay in 2014 at the start of becoming a teacher and now I am writing my Master’s thesis in 2022. I am fascinated by this journey of becoming a teacher and moving from university into working life.

Narrating connects characters and events along with eliciting emotions from the reader (Daiute, 2014). Daiute (2014) starts *Narrative inquiry: a dynamic approach* with a short 30 word narrative piece and I am automatically intrigued as a reader. Narrative power is more about the interaction in life than it being about life (Daiute, 2014). Narrating is used to interact with others and to explore yourself personally and to grow (Daiute, 2014). In terms of dynamic narrating in research, I was especially making sense of things happening around me and further exploring those on a societal level (Daiute, 2014). I want to understand myself becoming a teacher. I was drawn to autoethnography, because I could tell my story creatively and with passion. Hakala (2000, p. 67) argues that passion is even a prerequisite for creativity. At first, I became interested due to story writing. I wanted to write the results of my previous thesis as a story, and someone mentioned autoethnography to justify this. This comment led me onto a whole new thesis with autoethnography as the focus. In general, I wanted to “come at things differently.” The concluding chapter of *Emergent Methods in Social Research: Coming at Things Differently: The Need for Emergent Methods* (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, pp. 375–381) resonated with my reasons for starting my journey with autoethnography in the first place. I wanted to think outside the traditional “methods/practice box” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, pp. 2006, 376). I find the traditional methods too rigid, and I want to expand the term academic thesis with creativity. I want to make research more accessible and encourage others to do research and emphasize that doing research does not have to be extremely serious. What my friends call “humanities fluff” is as legitimate of research as any other type of quantitative or qualitative research. I am not interested in objectivity, measurability or causal relations which are linked to more traditional methods. The starting point for me is that research is subjective, and that life is too messy to be measured or to find direct links between variables. I am glad I came across autoethnography early on in my research career since I want to continue using it in future research endeavors.

My thesis is a story of my journey of becoming a teacher and focusing especially on my first moments as a teacher. It is exactly what some of my friends would call “humanities fluff” instead of the hard truth of science. I feel like truth is subjective and highly depends on the person telling the story. This is my story and I hope that you readers will be able to learn something new by me sharing my story. “Truth and story are honorable companions” (Muncey, 2010, p. 107). I wish to demonstrate a version of truth by sharing my own personal story. “First there may be those who want to include a personal story in their study or paper and want to find a theoretical justification to do so to keep some publisher or supervisor happy” (Muncey, 2010,

p. xii). While reading *Creating Autoethnographies* (Muncey, 2010) I placed a post-it note next to this quote saying “exactly!!”. I immediately got excited. People have to share their stories or otherwise we would not have any history to tell (Muncey, 2010, p. 86). I wrote in my notes while reading this book for the first time “even if my story isn’t super special, it’s worth telling?”. When I wrote this I was still questioning if it was worth sharing. Later, I realized it is worth sharing and especially connecting my story to the societal implications. Often history only records the famous people’s stories. It is important to also tell stories of the ordinary people, like myself. Who has the right to say what is ordinary and what is not, anyways. Besides, Hayler and Moriarty (2017, p. 138) argue that sharing stories is “the best way to understand how we feel and what we think” and it may be an empowering and a positive experience for both the writer and the reader. This process has at least been an empowering and a positive experience for me as the writer. Muncey (2010, p. 90) states how people have the right not to be silenced. “Telling our tales and hearing about others’ experiences can offer the opportunity that teachers need to be reflective learners and to value such moments of reflection and change” (Hayler & Moriarty, 2017, p. 9). In my notes I wrote with this quote “a goal of mine is to help,” “also reason for teaching” and “could be a reason for sharing my story?”. I have learned about myself as a teacher through being reflective and writing my thesis. Hornsby-Minor wrote to Bochner and Ellis as quoted in *Ethnographically Speaking: Autoethnography, Literature and Aesthetics* (Bocher & Ellis, 2002, p. 2). They wrote: “I am interested in researching and telling my own stories. I believe this will help others to own their stories”. I answered to this in my notes: “exactly related to my aim, sharing my story to help others”. Furthermore, Settrefield describes truth and story in the following way in their novel:

I’ve nothing against people who love truth, she says, apart from the fact that they make dull companions. My gripe is not with lovers of truth but with truth herself. What succour, what consolation is there in truth, compared to a story? ... What you need are the plump comforts of a story. (Setterfield, 2006, p. 5)

At that time, I did not know that my whole thesis would be transformed into something new, because of autoethnography. Syrjälä and Norrgrann discuss reasons why someone would write an autoethnography. These reasons include providing knowledge, raising issues which lead to discussion and possibly engaging emotions (Syrjälä & Norrgrann 2018, p. 43). I do want to provide knowledge about the experience of a beginning teacher and find out more about myself as a teacher. I do wish to provide some practical tips to ease the transition into teacherhood from being a university student. Furthermore, I do hope to engage emotions while doing so.

Also, autoethnographers may benefit themselves while uncovering their identity and moving past emotional experiences (Syrjälä & Norrgrann 2018, p. 45). This is one of my main aims in writing an autoethnographic text. I want to uncover more of my identity as a teacher and especially as a teacher in the beginning of my career. I want to learn from the struggles of starting out as a teacher. Hakala (1998, p. 38) makes this a criteria for a good thesis, someone should benefit from it. I hope that others, for example other educators, benefit from my thesis as well, but at least I will have a chance to engage in self-reflection and learn something new about myself as a teacher. I want to write an evocative autoethnography in which emotions are present. Personally, I am learning about myself as a teacher throughout this process and I am dealing with emotional issues of the future. I am worried about becoming a teacher, but I believe writing about some of those worries will help. Later on, I realized that indeed writing about them has helped. Through connecting to readers' emotions, I hope I can help make connections to a wider societal context.

Ellis et al. (2011) define autoethnography by dividing the word itself into three distinct parts: auto, ethno and graphy. They define auto as personal experience, ethno as understanding cultural experience and graphy as describing and analyzing (Ellis et al., 2011). Adams and Manning (2015, p. 350) describe the same division of words in that autoethnography “uses, and even foregrounds, a researcher’s subjectivity, reflexivity, and personal experience (auto-) in an attempt to represent (-graphy) cultural experiences (ethno-)”. The uniqueness of autoethnography is to bring these three elements together. Leavy (2018, p. 142) breaks the word into meaning “research that uses personal (“auto”) experience to create a representation (“graphy”) of cultural (“ethno”) experiences, social expectations, and shared beliefs, values, and practices”. These can be done on their own, but in the case of autoethnography the sum is greater than all of its parts. After working on finding a topic, eventually I landed on focusing on myself as a teacher and especially now as an elementary school teacher since I started working as one for the first year of my teaching career. The reasons are still the same for writing an autoethnography which Syrjälä and Norrgrann (2018), Hakala (1998) and Bochner and Ellis (2002) discuss. My aim is still to provide knowledge, open a discussion and engaging emotions even though I did not have this topic in mind right away. I want people to experience the life and the struggles of a first-year teacher while struggling with their own life. I am also myself benefiting from writing my thesis since I am trying to discover myself as a teacher and I hope also other teachers can identify themselves in my story and sharing my story can provide support for others. I am still worried about becoming a teacher and the responsibility of it brings. This writing has helped

though with dealing with those emotions, especially negative ones. I hope my emotions come across from my thesis. I also wanted to give an honest account of the life of a first-year teacher. This had been my idea already when working on my thesis earlier. I want to do all of this by engaging myself and doing my thesis in a creative way through a story.

Numerous autoethnography styles exist. I decided to look more closely at analytic and evocative autoethnography which are discussed by Syrjälä and Norrgrann (2018, p. 37). Ellis and Bochner (2006) describe analytic autoethnography as a theoretical destination, where evocative autoethnography is a journey of empathy and care. Anderson (2006) states that the emotional aspect of evocative autoethnography lacks in analytic autoethnography. I want to be able to combine the heart and the mind to produce something possibly transformative like Hayler and Moriarty (2017, p. 124). Ellis (2004, p. xvii) states how autoethnography connects to personal emotions, feelings and thoughts. By living my data and being personally invested in my thesis I wanted my thesis not to be a typical thesis described by Hakala (1998, p. 36): “irrelevant, disconnected stories, inflated with field-specific terminology, decorated with theories and obviously produced on another planet”. Syrjälä and Norrgrann (2018, p. 168) also point out that analytic autoethnography is concerned with other data to minimize subjectivity compared to evocative autoethnography. Therefore, one can say that evocative autoethnography focuses on the “auto” and analytic autoethnography focuses on the “ethno” and that evocative autoethnography does this through the evocation of feelings. From my very initial reading, it became clear that I preferred evocative autoethnography. I wanted my thesis to have an emotional impact on its readers and on myself through focusing on my own story. I wanted to be emotionally vested in the process of doing my research.

Bochner and Ellis (2002, p. 6) wrote about a conversation they had about starting a conference for ethnography they wanted to put together, titled “Ethnography for the Twenty-First Century: Alternatives and Opportunities”. In this conversation they mention key aspects of ethnography that they want to push for the conference: “ethnography as an embodied, morally engaged subject,” “ethnographers as storytellers and writing as a mode of inquiry,” “strategies for practicing reflexivity,” and “subjectivity in the research process” (Bochner & Ellis, 2002, p. 6). I wanted to focus on these key aspects out of the ones that they mention since I believe all of these fit very well within autoethnography. I want to become a storyteller and learn by the writing process while being subjective to my own embodied experiences and reflecting on these and connecting this to a morally engaged subject. Furthermore, the goal of the conference was “to bridge art and science, theories and stories, literature and social science” (Bochner & Ellis,

2002, p. 10). This summarizes well the goals of autoethnography, or at least the goals of my own personal autoethnographic journey. I wrote in my notes to remember my own story, but without forgetting the theory. I also had the intention of including some forms of art from the onset of this journey. I wanted to tell my story in an academic context. This is also why my data analysis, and the results are intertwined together in one section.

Autoethnography is a different research method from the more traditional research methods, and it can be argued that by just writing our research differently we can learn something new from our data (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 5). I wanted to embark on this journey of considering data and research in a non-traditional way (whoever decides what is traditional anyways). I wanted to combine and succeed in writing good “academic discourse and personal narrative” like Arthur Frank who was mentioned as an example by Bochner and Ellis (2002, p. 4). I wanted to be “systematic and rigorous and still be innovative, creative, and actively dynamic” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 106). Universities produce knowledge (Blair, 2016, p. 43). Who says though that knowledge cannot be produced in a fun and creative way. People are naturally creative beings, and we use creativity daily to make sense of the world (Muncey, 2010, p. 55). Unfortunately though, creativity seems to be reserved for hobbies rather than for serious work (Muncey, 2010, p. 55). Why cannot we be creative at work? Thankfully I am part of a field where creativity is encouraged in the workplace, and I am excited to include creativity in my Master’s thesis. We stop playing and in a sense being creative as adults, but for children it is a natural way of learning (Hakala, 2000, p. 60). We should play and be creative while being serious working adults. Hakala (2000, p. 34) argues that even research should be fun. Furthermore, Hakala (2000, p. 37) points out that most likely nobody has ever said that “the contents of a thesis should be as unimaginative and boring as possible and thus thoroughly dull and repetitive”. Furthermore, Hakala (2000, p. 57) argues, based on discussions, that the best theses have a creative element to them. Blair (2016, p. 6) states you may even love your thesis, and at least that writing it should be a pleasurable experience. I am aware of many people who have struggled with writing their thesis. I myself have struggled with writing it also. For me, it seemed too demanding and too massive of a project to start. Being creative with my thesis has helped me write it and to find motivation to complete it.

Muncey (2010, pp. 62–63) uses the metaphor of being a tourist compared to being a traveler in the journey of research. A tourist would have a pre-planned trip possibly organized by a travel agent, but a traveler would have some sort of plan, but also takes time to change plans and to truly get to know places and people during the journey. I wrote in my notes “I want to be a

traveler of thesis writing. I want it to change me”. Laurel in Bochner’s and Ellis’s *Ethnographically speaking: Autoethnography, literature, and aesthetics* (2002, p. 91) mentions how “the self that is writing the story is changed by the process of writing it”. This connects to Muncey’s idea and my goal of being a traveler within the thesis writing project and learning and changing throughout the process. Carolyn in the same book (Bochner & Ellis, 2002, p. 92) describes autoethnography as a process and as an inquiry and that you play with the story to determine where you end up. I enjoy the playful aspect and going with the flow of the story. I want to enjoy the thesis writing process and I believe it can be fun, like Hakala (1998, p. 34) mentions. At least you, yourself should be genuinely interested in reading your own thesis (Hakala, 1998, p. 37). Especially autoethnography should not be forced, but you need to want to produce autoethnographic research (Bochner & Ellis, 2002, p. 118). In my notes I briefly answered while reading this: “I do!”. I feel motivated by autoethnography. I am interested in the process and the final product since I am interested in my topic and the way I am conducting research. I had written in my notes while reading Blair’s (2011) *Writing a graduate thesis or dissertation*: “autoethnography does help in this”. This is in response to Blair (2016, p. xix) describing thesis writing as a “personal journey of discovery” and that it should not be a hurdle to overcome. Hakala (1998, p. 95) mentions how the researcher should be ready to enter a relationship with their thesis. I am looking forward to the whole thesis process and how I can travel on this journey, the relationship with my thesis.

I am working on combining the academic requirements of a Master’s thesis along with a story. I am exploring my data in a new way and aiming to create a story out of the data. I needed to consider both these worlds of fiction and non-fiction. Bakhtin (1981, p. 10) describes some prerequisites of a novel to be that the hero needs to also demonstrate the negative feelings and actions and that the hero is not complete, but rather they are developing throughout the novel. Muncey (2010, p. 33) states that these can also be used as a prerequisite for an autoethnography. Anderson (2006, p. 382) states that it is key in analytic autoethnography to examine your own actions and perceptions. I believe this is key in any type of autoethnography, not only in analytic. This also relates to becoming a better teacher and understanding myself as a teacher. It is important that the researcher, the hero of the autoethnography, is honest to their feelings of positive and negative aspects of their life and the researcher has hopefully learned from these and grown as a person. Along with this:

It should be dangerous. It should mess with your mind. It should open locks, provide pathways, offer a language capable of inspiring personal, social, and institutional liberation. I think it should help people think and behave differently, if they choose to. Writing that doesn't do that isn't very good writing. (Goodall, 1998, p. 5 as cited in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 204)

This is Goodall's description of autoethnography. I want to walk down a dangerous risky path while messing with my mind. Through this I hope I can have others think about themselves through sharing my story. I want to write good autoethnographic text according to this definition. Holloway and Biley (2011, p. 973 as cited in Favalli, 2019) even argue that doing something different in research may lead to something life changing.

The aim of qualitative research according to Boudah (2011, p. 12) is to “analyze language, written or oral, and actions to determine patterns, themes, or theories in order to provide insight into certain situations”. Spry (2001, p. 727) describes the world as messy due to humans. Qualitative research may be described as messy unlike quantitative research (Blair, 2016, p. 56). The study of the body is also messy (Syrjälä & Norrgrann, 2018, p. 141) and the researcher's body is naturally a part of an autoethnographic study. Autoethnography tries to analyze the self in order to understand yourself and the surrounding messy social contexts. Why should research be clean and objective when humans are complex? The aim of qualitative research is to “encapsulate the multi-dimensionality of the human experience” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 95). Ellis (1999, p. 669) states that autoethnography connects “the practices of social science with the living of life”. Autoethnography aims to research the messy complex humans. Furthermore, according to Muncey (2010, p. 100) it is almost impossible to distinguish the line between the objective and the subjective. The researcher's own views do affect the research, and these should be made clear in research (Blair, 2016, p. 57). Autoethnography is directly connected to the subjective life of the researchers: it is their life story in relation to a theoretical framework. Ellis (1999, p. 669) wishes that ethnography would include “the heart, the autobiographical and the artistic text”.

Autoethnography is one way to challenge the separation of literature, arts and social science and the way in which each explains the world (Ellis & Bochner, 1996 as cited in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 241). Autoethnography combines the creative arts to the social and cultural in order to examine the work of life (Leavy, 2018, p. 142). Based on my reading about autoethnography this thought summarizes autoethnography well. Autoethnography aims to understand the complexity of life in connection to the social and cultural in creative ways. Autoethnography

combines ethnography and life writing (Leavy, 2018, p. 142). Autoethnography is autobiographical writing with a cultural backdrop (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. xxii). Therefore to summarize, autoethnography is aiming to understand the cultural and social work of life in relation to your own complex thoughts, feelings and experiences and presenting these in a creative autobiographical mode of writing. I aim to be honest in my story. I truly want to understand myself and one key is to better myself as teacher through reflection. I want to understand myself through walking down the risky path which Goodall (1998) discusses. I am looking forward for the messy risky honest path to lead to the connection of the cultural and social aspects of life.

I can write an educational portfolio, but the “truth” about me as a teacher lies in the everyday connections with children and colleagues along with the everyday choices I make regarding teaching. While reading Muncey’s (2010) book *Creating autoethnographies* I had written a note for myself while reading page 113: “why am I the way I am as a teacher??”. This is one main motivation for writing an autoethnography to figure out more about myself as a teacher. Autoethnography requires interrogation of the self, including your thoughts and your beliefs (Ellis, 2013, p. 10 as cited in Holmes Jones et al., 2016, p. 10). I want to question myself and aim to figure out why I am like this and how could I be a better teacher. Hayler and Moriarty (2017, p. 61) emphasize the “educative value of teachers reconstructing and making meaning from their personal stories”. They (2017, p. 4) state that reflection and reflexivity are key features of being a teacher. It is a key to continue to evaluate, reflect and develop while being critically reflective in order to find your own approach (Hayler & Moriarty, 2017, p. 7). They (2017, p. 104) also advocate for the need for reflection when aiming to be a good teacher. Leavy (2018, p. 153) argues how autoethnography is naturally critical, since it “questions how the personal and the cultural intersect and provides a story ... of how those intersections influence those involved”. My aim is to reflect on myself as a teacher to understand myself better.

I want to be critical towards myself and my past to find out what has affected me. Hayler and Moriarty (2017, p. 95) discuss reflecting between experiences and ways of thinking to gather a refined understanding of the ideas and beliefs about education. I wanted to explore my past in connection to the present and the future as a teacher. Also, it is key for teachers to be aware of what they know, believe and do as teachers (Hayler & Moriarty, 2017, p. 4). According to Hayler and Moriarty (2017, p. 4) to achieve being aware of one’s own pedagogy as a teacher it is needed to explore where it came from and how we arrived at the current point. Writing can also help to connect “past experience and present mind with future plans and action” (Hayler

& Moriarty, 2017, p. 10). I want to connect my past and current ponderings as a teacher to make me a better teacher in the future. Also, I want to know who I am now. I am worried about becoming a teacher in the future, but who am I at this moment working on my thesis. Later on I decided to focus mainly on my first semester as a teacher. In the scope of this thesis, I could not fit my past and the future in great detail. This relates to Hayler's and Moriarty's (2017, p. 35) thought of how children are always asked "what do you want to be when you grow up?" not "who are you now?"

I want not only to focus on the future, but also the current state of myself through autoethnography. Writing personal stories has been described as "powerful ways of promoting teachers' professional growth towards the end of self-knowing and professional identity" (Samaras et al., 2004, p. 927). I never want to stop knowing about myself and my professional identity. I do not see this as an end, but rather I see my autoethnographic thesis as just the beginning. Conquer-good (1991, p. 185) describe identity as "a performance in process". Identity keeps on changing and I want to question and shape my beliefs throughout the years (as a teacher). The process of writing autoethnographies has been described as "soul searching" (Syrjälä & Norrgrann, 2018, p. 95). I wanted to embark on this soul-searching journey of myself. Autoethnography is done in collaboration with people, culture, and time (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 205). Autoethnography should not only focus on one of these aspects, but rather be a holistic account of all of them. Furthermore, autoethnography needs to be an honest account of yourself. I wrote in my notes "autoethnography: honest to yourself, even the "bad" parts" to remind myself of this honesty".

Autoethnography should consider the inside of oneself and also the outside of culture and society (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739 as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). An aim of autoethnography stated by Hayler and Moriarty (2017, p. 126) is "to achieve a greater sense of identity in the social world". This links to a metaphor by Samuel Beckett (Waters, 2010, p. 1 as cited in Hayler & Moriarty, 2017, p. 83) of "the author (being) the worm at the core of the apple". This connects well to autoethnography of first starting with your personal story and then connecting it to the outside culture and theory as the worm moves away from the core to the outside of the apple. Hayler and Moriarty (2017, p. 52) describe this process as critical reflexivity, a process in which people "constantly strive to become increasingly aware of how their identities are co-shaped both with culture and the historical moments they find themselves in". This summarizes also autoethnography by connecting your personal moments to the broader concept of culture.

Autoethnography is living in the field (Valtonen, 2013). It can be described as simply as “[w]riting the author into the field notes” (Silverman, 2016, p. 435). Autoethnography is more complicated than this, but this is a starting point for it. Autoethnography aims “to study the social world from the perspective of the interacting individual” (Denzin, 1997, p. xv as cited in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, pp. 188-189). The researcher is living their life while they are researching it. Naturally they are a part of the field and interacting with their surroundings. An autoethnographer is simultaneously working and writing the field (de Certeau, 1984, p. 100). Autoethnography invites others to see the world through the self in the context of the research field (Valtonen, 2013). Bochner and Ellis (2002, p. 17) mention how autoethnography includes “the actual thoughts and feelings of another person (or indeed, oneself as ethnographer)”. The autoethnographer’s body is constantly in the center of the research (Syrjälä & Norrgrann, 2018, p. 131). The distinction between the research field and the researcher's body is blurred in autoethnography (Syrjälä & Norrgrann, 2018, p. 140). Furthermore, in autoethnography, field work and life, the inside and the outside and even the past and the present become blurred (Leavy, 2018, p. 145).

In autoethnography “one becomes both an insider and an outsider — taking on a multitude of different standpoints and negotiating these identities simultaneously” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. xii). The researcher themselves is a research tool in autoethnography (Anderson, 2006; Syrjälä, 2016). This is due to the researcher being researched (Syrjälä & Norrgrann, 2018, p. 150). Autoethnography is concerned with the individual rather than with the population as a whole (Muncey, 2010, p. xi). According to Hayano (1979) it is important that the researcher is at least to some degree accepted to be a native member of the group that they are studying. Anderson (2006, p. 379) states that in some forms of autoethnography it is required to be a complete member of the group under study. This enables gaining access to the group and being able to present oneself (Syrjälä & Norrgrann, 2018, p. 160). I am living the field of a teacher who is starting out and working on finding out about their identity as a teacher. I am a native member of this group. This my own story about my experience as a first-year elementary school teacher, and I hope that by sharing my story, others can relate to my story and it resonates with a wider audience than just myself.

“In autoethnographic methods, the researcher is the epistemological and ontological nexus upon which the research process turns” (Spry, 2001, p. 711). Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006, p. 194) describe this phenomenon as “an enfolded epistemology and ontology” especially in relation to autoethnographic performance. I am at a key position in my autoethnographic thesis. Barker

and Glasinski (2006, p. 19) add that it is important to consider the personal, poetic and political rather than the epistemological justification in autoethnography. The personal, poetic and the political merge together in the epistemological justification.

I am writing my thesis in the paradigm that reality is naturally a social construct (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 206). The postmodern concept of truth is that it is socially constructed (Muncey, 2010, p. 100). In the postmodern world truth is allowed to be heard from multiple viewpoints and there is no one single truth (Muncey, 2010, p. 100). Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006, p. 204) describe finding “some truth among many, that others may also find useful”. Truths are multiple, but a key in autoethnographic truth is that others could gain something from reading someone else’s autoethnographic story. Lyotard (1984) argues that postmodernism is not about finding the truth, but trying to figure out who makes knowledge and how knowledge is made. Based on this the little stories of truth become important (Muncey, 2010, p. 101). Ellis et al. (2011) furthers the concept that autoethnography is not aiming to find the truth, but rather being a search for new insight through telling a story. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006, p. 199) describe this as truth and reality are not fixed categories. Ball (2015, p. 2) considers that three types of truths exist which are the ones told about us and the ones we tell to ourselves and those which we tell to others. Truth does not only depend on who is telling the truth, but how to the truth is told and to who.

Collins (1998, p. 229 as cited in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 277) suggests an “epistemology of empowerment”. I wrote in my notes: “empowering ECE teachers with my thesis!”. The “epistemology of empowerment” includes “dialogue, relationships, and an ethic of caring that invites expressiveness, emotions, and empathy” (Collins, 1991 as cited in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 277). I wish expressiveness, emotions and empathy were promoted more in research. I believe one can learn a great deal from empowerment and caring about yourself and others. At this point I had moved on from empowering ECE (early childhood education) teachers. I do hope to empower elementary school teachers and possible ECE teachers who are struggling at the beginning of their career. I also hope shed light on those who may be struggling with mental illness or ones who are not sure if they want to be teachers or not. I also hope to empower every single teacher to reflect on themselves as a teacher and the values behind teaching.

I did struggle with my topic throughout the thesis process. I had given up on previous thesis topics and Hakala (2000, pp. 74–75) warns that this may happen and how the topic should be

interesting enough for you to not give up on. I wrote in my notes “choose some ideas that you will not give up on! Autoethnography?”. This was reiterated while I was reading Boudah’s (2011) *Conducting educational research: Guide to completing a major project*. Boudah (2011, p. 22) also like Hakala discussed the importance of the topic being interesting to you since you will spend a significant amount of time with the topic. In relation to this I wrote in my notes: “start with self: autoethnography”. Autoethnography is not a topic, but after I found autoethnography it has been the carrying force of my thesis even though the topic itself has changed throughout my (autoethnographic) thesis process. The next step for me was to choose what about myself to write. I was struggling with finding a research topic. I was stressed about not having a clear topic and question in mind. I was missing the fixed clear square shape topic which Hakala (1998, pp. 30–31) describes Hakala (1998, p. 30) describes the topic searching project as an amoeba. The topic should be delimited from an amoeba blob shape to a fixed clear square shape (Hakala, 1998, pp. 30–31). I was relieved reading Syrjälä and Norrgrann (2018) since I realized that not having a clear topic is understandable. While I was reading Syrjälä and Norrgrann (2018, p. 93) they discussed how the topic may find you rather than looking for the topic yourself. I was bothered by not having a clear research question and topic in mind. I started writing my diary first though. I knew I wanted to focus on myself as a teacher at that point. Only throughout the process I found aspects I wanted to analyze in more detail. After working on my diary further and starting the analysis process, I was still not sure what will exactly emerge from the thesis.

The question should be interesting to the researcher and should also be current in the field (Blair, 2016, p. 24). Furthermore, the question should be specific enough for a thesis, but also significant enough to matter (Blair, 2016, p. 24). I overcame fear and aimed to be “a good enough researcher” instead of procrastinating my thesis, which I was doing in the beginning of the process (Blair, 2016, p. 25). I was also afraid of being alone without a peer group, professors and deadlines like many other students (Blair, 2016, p. 26). While reading these pages I wrote in my notes: “I know I am capable of writing a thesis! I CAN DO IT!”.

Eventually I did seek professional help and began “actually” working on my thesis. I did shift the focus from these ponderings, but the theoretical ponderings still stand. I focused on the autoethnographic process and myself as a beginning teacher. I was still waiting to analyze what part will be predominant before doing final analysis. Earlier I believed that positive education was going to be a theme, along with considering own wellbeing (especially in terms of a beginning teacher) and it seemed that support from colleagues was becoming key for me. I did also

seek professional help from the study psychologist and also eventually from student health services for mental health issues. I was still struggling with this and even now seeking help from the occupational health services. I did have the feeling that I am capable of writing a thesis and I knew I was getting close to finish even though for the longest time it felt extremely difficult.

Pollock (2005, p. 2 as cited in Leavy, 2017, p. 154) describes theorizing as a detour and through these detours it is possible to confront the unknown and therefore to position ourselves. Hefferon and Boniwell (2011, p. 67) remind the reader of the saying “it’s the journey, not the destination”. Ellis et al. (2011) state how “as a method, autoethnography is both process and product”. Autoethnography is seen as a “method of inquiry” (Richardson, 2000). Furthering this idea is Foucault (1980, p. 240, as cited in Syrjälä & Norrgrann, 2018, p. 103) by writing in order to change oneself and own thoughts. Richardson (2000, p. 923) describes writing as a way of knowing, a way to discover and analyze. Writing is also seen as a process and an outcome like autoethnography (Silverman, 2016, p. 429). Hakala (2000, p. 45) also mentions how completing a thesis is about more than just the finished thesis. I want to embrace the process as much as possible even though I am concerned about finally finishing the final product. I want my thesis journey to be more than just writing one word after another. This journey of being a traveler while taking detours and changing throughout the writing process by getting to know myself can only happen when you are lost at sea with too much information (Schon, 1971, p. 12 as cited in Hayler & Moriarty, 2017, p. 10). In the beginning I felt that this process is never ending and did not know what information I need to absorb, but I knew that this is good for me in the long run to face up to the challenge of not just writing a thesis but writing an autoethnographic thesis. I am looking forward to the transformation of my ethnographic thesis. I agree with the transformation starting my writing process and already in numerous ways the process has changed me. I have discussed with various people about how the thesis writing process has helped me set goals and write plans to achieve these. I have become more conscious of myself and my feelings. I am giving myself time to think and process. The thesis writing process helped me to receive the diagnosis of anxiety and reach out for help. Autoethnography is an adventure, starting off with a map and a compass but no certain expectations (Muncey, 2010, p. 63). The thesis process, adventure, for me has definitely been more than just writing a thesis and graduating.

The stories you write play a key role in how you are perceived by others and how you are portrayed into the world (Ellis, 2007, p. 22). How I am perceived as a teacher depends on my writings, for example this thesis, my educational portfolio, and my curriculum vitae. These play

a significant role in shaping me as a teacher for people who read them and especially if they do not know me beforehand. It is not only important to tell your story, but to “uncover and recover” your own stories to gain understanding of yourself (Hayler & Moriarty, 2017, p. 136). Creating your story is the way to find “the how, what and why of our selves, experiences, and cultures” (Leavy, 2018, p. 152). This also relates to understanding yourself.

In my Master’s thesis I am looking into the beginnings of a teacher. I will be researching what is important to a beginning teacher and how the transition from a student to a teacher can go smoothly. I am also looking at myself as a teacher. My research question will be formed throughout the process, but the starting point is to find out what is important to me as a beginning teacher in becoming a teacher. My research question ended up being simply about who I am as a teacher. I realized I did not need to complicate it further. My thesis focuses on my first semester as a teacher. I kept a diary through the fall and documented significant moments of my daily life. Furthermore, I analyzed this diary to find out the teaching aspects important to myself. I was curious to see how my actual teaching practices reflect what I say on my curriculum vitae, for example. I was also intrigued by autoethnography and that was my starting point. I had read about autoethnography before starting my research. The research topic and question were formed based on autoethnography. I tend to be a reflective person and I enjoy writing and that is a major reason to attempt an autoethnographic thesis. I also enjoyed doing my bachelor’s thesis in a more creative way and I have been enjoying the process. I am already looking forward to doing my PhD as an autoethnography.

Various governments are struggling predicting the need for teachers since it is very unpredictable and many aspects are at play (Sullivan et al., 2019, p. 1). More teachers are needed, but less teachers are available compared to earlier (Sullivan et al., 2019, p. 3). Many countries provide quick paths to become a teacher, but do not focus enough on retaining teachers (Sullivan et al., 2019, p. 5). Finland does not have a quick path to become an elementary school teacher, but still many of my classmates have started working outside elementary school education. At the moment teachers are going on strike around Finland in order to increase salary and to receive better working conditions (Luukkainen, 2022). Earlier new study places have been added to universities, but this is not enough if people are not staying in the field. Many teachers have considered leaving the field (Saavalainen, 2019). Gordon and Maxey (2000) argue that teachers are leaving due to the teaching environment and not due to themselves. One important aspect of staying in the field is the first years as a teacher (Opetusalan Ammattijärjestö OAJ, 2021). Working on this thesis has helped me to stay in the field and it has been beneficial being aware

and reflective about my experiences. I hope my thesis may help others as well to have practical tips and support for their struggles. I knew I wanted my thesis to be useful to readers from the very initial thesis topic choices. I shifted from not only focusing on myself as a beginning teacher to sharing tips on what has helped me cope partially for this reason. Also sharing tips felt like a natural progression from sharing my story. I started writing my journal before finalizing my research question, and later on I realized that I want to focus on the beginnings of a teacher's career and how to cope with the struggles. This is something I have struggled with, and I know others who have struggles as well. My coworkers remember their first years as teachers still after decades of teaching. In Finland, there is a teacher shortage at the moment and teachers are not happy with their working conditions. This is demonstrated by discussions with coworkers and by the visible strikes taking place. This is a current topic and an important one. I want to explore:

Who am I as a teacher and especially in terms of beginning my teaching career?

I want to understand myself better as a teacher. I also aim to help other struggling teachers and hopefully especially ones at the beginning of their careers. I hope to empower others by sharing my story along with helping myself by being reflective and honest about my experiences.

Change and Chance

I was at the harbor of choice:
"The coast is clear," they said;
but I heard the thunder.

I wanted to put down my anchor,
but they wanted me to cross the bridge,
to the unknown.

I was scared,
but I had hope,
therefore I carried on.

I heard the bell, it was time.
It was time to leave behind my previous life,

this was the sunset of the life I knew.

After the storm,
it was still cloudy,
but I felt serene.

I heard the music,
and I was ready to settle down.

I finally saw myself smile

I started thinking more about the specifics of my thesis once the topic started forming. I needed to consider the conceptual framework further. Grant and Osanloo (2016) compare the theoretical framework to a blueprint of a house. I believe this reference works well. I had started working on my thesis and this report helped me focus on the theoretical framework. This is fairly common practice in qualitative research to prevent forming a bias in the research (Grant & Osanloo, 2016). The theoretical framework relies on existing theories and should be considered in the beginning of your thesis and each section should connect to the theoretical framework (Grant & Osanloo, 2016). Grant and Osanloo (2016) provided examples of various theoretical frameworks and immediately “identity formation” caught my attention. My aim with my thesis is to find out who I am as a teacher and especially with a focus on being a teacher at the beginning of their career. I have noticed that recently I am wondering about my identity a great deal. I have been wondering about moving from student life to fully working life. I have wondered about my career choices within and outside of education. I have wondered about personal choices of various aspects. I feel like I am at a turmoil in my life. One of the main aims of my thesis is to at least dwell into one aspect of my identity: me as a teacher. Côté and Levine (2016) consider the transition into adulthood and the identity formation that comes with it an important step of human development. I feel like I am just at the cusp of my identity formation.

Côté and Levine (2016) bring forth Simplified Identity Formation Theory (SIFT) which is intended for newcomers to the field of identity research. I fit into this category well and I am starting to figure out my identity and my thesis is focusing on the beginnings of teacher identity formation, therefore I thought that this theory fits well as my theoretical framework. Also one aim of this theory is to create a common ground for identity researchers to discuss various

theories which Côté and Levine (2016) describe as focusing on the forest rather than the individual trees. This works as a starting point for me for my identity research, which I aim to continue beyond my Master's thesis as well.

I was intrigued by *Identity formation, youth, and development: A simplified approach* (Côté & Levine, 2016) from the moment I started reading it. I was intrigued by the history of identity research, even though I usually skip over the historical accounts. I am usually bored with history and reading about the past, especially when I am trying to read about something else. The history in this case was interesting and I felt like it was hindering my process of gathering information and writing. Côté and Levine (2016) discuss how the “who are you” question sometimes transfers to “who would you like to be”. I have a feeling this is what I am facing at the moment. I am trying to figure out who I am as a teacher, but along with that I am trying to figure out who I would want to be as a teacher. I think these do not match at the moment. I have had internal conflicts with the way I act as a teacher and the way I would like to act as a teacher. I wish I would not raise my voice significantly when I am interacting with children, but sometimes I do that especially when I am stressed. I have been reading about positive pedagogy since it seems to have at least some practices to prevent this from happening. I am growing as a teacher and I never want to stop growing and learning. Identity is not a fixed state, thankfully.

The three key principles of SIFT are integration, differentiation and continuity (Côté & Levine, 2016). Integration is a sense of belonging in a group and working cooperatively with the group and realizing that the self does not exist in a bubble (Côté & Levine, 2016). I am entering the realm of professional teachers and this is causing me to ponder about myself as a teacher and how I fit in with others. Differentiation follows from the integration principle (Côté & Levine, 2016). In order to survive humans have needed to protect themselves from other groups (Côté & Levine, 2016). Earlier these were connected to basic resources; nowadays the need is connected to psychological vulnerability (Côté & Levine, 2016). Differentiation is also key within a group, we are individuals and will feel personal pain and pleasure (Côté & Levine, 2016). I did share about my mental health struggles at my workplace, but nobody can exactly feel how I feel. I did feel supported by the group and I felt as a part of the group, but my mental health is something that makes me unique. Thirdly, it is key that you can feel a continuation of identity (Côté & Levine, 2016). Continuity means you should have “present meaning and future purpose” (Côté & Levine, 2016, p. 9). Also, integration and differentiation should be in balance to be able to feel a sense of continuity (Côté & Levine, 2016). I am a teacher, but at times I do not feel like a “real” teacher since I have not yet graduated. I want to fit in with the “real” teachers,

but at the same time I do want to find my own identity as a teacher. I find it a meaningful time to search for identity and further emphasize my desire to continue growing as a teacher. It is a fascinating point of my life to research my teacher identity. It will be interesting to look back on my thesis in a few years to see how my teacher identity may have changed and if for example key values have stayed the same.

Through finding my identity as a teacher I can pinpoint what is helping me with the struggles of beginning my journey as a teacher. I hope by sharing a part of my identity and sharing my story I may help others starting out. I believe identity is a key part of being a teacher and I have realized being able to be myself at work has been great. I enjoy showing my personality and using my strengths and having the freedom to do so. Exploring my identity as a teacher has helped me cope with the struggle of being a teacher. Côté and Levine's (2016) Simplified Identity Formation Theory (SIFT) fits well into autoethnography. SIFT's integration, differentiation and continuity are closely connected to Leavy's (2018, p. 142) definition of autoethnography which I mentioned earlier: "research that uses personal ("auto") experience to create a representation ("graphy") of cultural ("ethno") experiences, social expectations, and shared beliefs, values, and practices". I am myself a part of a cultural group, in this case teacher. I am integrated in this group, but also trying to find my differentiation from this group and therefore focusing on the auto part. I am aiming to create a representation and I hope to work on this further and continue learning about myself as a teacher.

Afterwards, I started working on the data collection. During my first semester as a teacher I started writing a journal. I would sit down after almost every day and write at least for a few minutes into a journal on Google Drive. I would write about that day and how it went. I would write about the good and the bad. I would reflect on my feelings on what had happened at work that day. I would also ponder about the future. I did not have any specific questions or guideline in mind, but I would rather let myself write freely what came to mind. I kept this journal for the fall semester of 2021. I wrote about 50 pages. Afterwards I started reading through this data. I started color coding the data into different sections to determine what are the most common and important aspects that I mention throughout the journal.

I realized that I have been applying thematic analysis even in my initial code analysis. I naturally started reading through my data and trying to color code and categorize important recurring parts of my data. I started reading applied thematic analysis (Guest et al., 2012) and it was easy and natural to follow. My aim is to make sense of my own experience through analyzing

my own diary. Are my values present in my teaching? How do I see myself as a teacher? How do I behave as a teacher? What are my core ideals as a teacher? I believe the best way to answer these questions and to understand myself as a teacher is applied thematic analysis. Alvesson and Kärreman (2011) encourage researchers to look at data in a more creative light. My data was created throughout my research process. I was writing my data and narrating became a key part of my thesis. Alvesson and Kärreman (2011, p. 5) suggest to “explore if empirical material can encourage the challenging and rethinking of established theory and thus inspire novel lines of theory development”. I believe it is important to focus on the data. From the beginning I started following an exploratory orientation rather than a confirmatory orientation while exploring the data (Guest et al., 2012). I aimed for my data to speak to me rather than having a predisposed hypothesis to confirm. Even though exploratory orientation is not testing a certain hypothesis, the research is still based on theory (Guest et al., 2012). I agree with Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012, p. 11) that research’s aim should be “trying to understand and explain the world in a rigorous, reliable, and valid fashion”. I started my data analysis with exploratory analysis which the key is the relationship between the researcher and the researched and what emerges from this according to Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012). With autoethnography I am both the researcher and the researched, therefore I need to explore further my own inner self compared to the one that I present to the rest of the world. My aim is to determine if there is a connection between what I say that I am as a teacher and who I am actually as a teacher inside the classroom. How much do I bring my values and ideas into the classroom? One key aim is to explore what are the most important themes for myself as a teacher. The end goal should be to see how “people feel, think, and behave within a particular context relative to a specific research question” (Guest et al., 2012, p. 11). In terms of autoethnography my aim is to determine how I truly feel, think and behave in terms of my research question of who am I as a teacher. Also, my aim is to provide some knowledge especially to new teachers that may be useful by sharing my story. I will also explore literature based around the themes of my data analysis as per autoethnography.

I started reading through my journal. While I was reading I wrote down comments into parts of the text that peaked my interest. I removed some parts of the original text and left that out of the analysis. I left out parts that were not relevant to my research question or parts that could identify individual students. In my initial reading I started the process of elimination and this process was continued after initial coding. I also sometimes went back and answered my own questions at a later date within the journal. I had a dialogue between my past and present self.

“Past Self: Anderson (2006) states that in some forms of autoethnography it is required to be a complete member of the group under study. This enables gaining access to the group and being able to present oneself (Anderson, 2006).

Present Self: I am living the field of a teacher who is starting out and working on finding out about their identity as a teacher. I am a native member of this group. This is an individualistic story about my own experiment as a first year elementary school teacher, but I do hope that by sharing my story, others can relate to my story and it resonates with a wider audience than just myself.”

Later on I printed out my journal with this dialogue and with other comments in the margins. I started reading this on paper. While I was reading I started color coding text with possible recurring codes. I kept on adding categories as needed. Already in the first pages I noticed that certain aspects are occurring in my journal frequently. Repetition is a common indicator of possible important codes (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012). I started adding to the color coded recurring themes when needed. After the first few pages I already had 8 initial categories: “teachers/coworkers”, “feelings”, “+”, “classroom (management/things)”, “students, belonging”, “student positivity”, “self ponderings”, and “burnout/[working capacity]/tired”. These categories were refined as I kept working on my thesis. I aimed to find connections between these codes and to form further themes and I looked into why these are the aspects present in my teaching.

In my data analysis I started with reading my data earlier and started making initial comments for myself. My supervisor also commented. I started with initial categories which were emerging. Throughout the process I kept these categories fluid and changed them when needed. I searched for key words throughout my journal to add key parts to this section. I added theory throughout and I hope it flows like a story.

For the purpose of adding parts of my journal into my final thesis, I have fixed spelling mistakes and translated terms from Finnish to English. I also have changed certain descriptions of people or places to ensure anonymity. I have marked these with []. Otherwise my aim is to keep my journal as authentic as possible. One key term that I am having difficulties finding a proper term in English is “jaksaminen.” “Jaksaminen” refers to having energy to do something. It can refer to both physical and emotional energy and motivation. I have translated it as “working capacity,” but I wanted to make a point of it not just being physical energy. I will use the date of the journal entry along with quotation marks to demonstrate my own quotes from my thesis. Some

comments I wrote to myself do not have dates, but I will use quotation marks and aim to make it clear that it is my own comments. My aim is to have the journal and the theory flow naturally in the analysis and results which have been interwoven.

Story Time

What would have helped being a beginning teacher is to not have an ongoing global pandemic happening. I started teaching in an elementary school in Finland in the fall of 2020 and that is where the journal entries are from.

24.11. “When I went into talk to [occupational health], they mentioned how I might not be having these issues if corona wasn’t here. I disagree with that and I felt like that kind of [belittled] my problems. Corona isn’t making things easier, but I think I would still be having issues.”

I did mention corona numerous times in my journal, but I will not be focusing on it in much detail since I want to make my thesis more universal in time than just focusing on specifically these years. Corona did emphasize the uncertain future. I was worried about wearing a mask in front of the kids for the first time and I was worried about the uncertainty of not knowing if we were going to go into remote teaching or not. It did stress me out, but I do think beginning teachers have struggles even without a global pandemic. It did help being prepared for many things and it has helped find out what is important in teaching for me. I have realized that I want to focus on creating a safe environment for children and for them to be able to be themselves, rather than being stressed about completing the whole math book. I will return to this later on, and I could write a whole thesis on only the effects of corona, but I will focus on other aspects of becoming a teacher.

Furthermore, finishing my thesis on time would have helped. I should have written these results during the fall of 2020. It is interesting though looking back now in 2022 and still remembering some of these moments and being glad I wrote them down. I cannot change the corona situation or the fact that I did not write my thesis right away, but I would like to share my story in terms of being a beginning teacher and hopefully I can help others regardless of a global pandemic or writing their thesis on time or not.

Foremost alluding to my thesis title, for me it has been important to laugh at myself and to learn from my mistakes.

7.10. “[I done fucked up that shit too]” I muttered this in my head after at the very end of a long Wednesday was writing on the board tomorrow's schedule and

realized I was writing with a non chalk that could not be erased. Learning by doing and by mistakes.”

8.10. “I was in the shower and I was thinking how I should start an Instagram/Facebook account of a shitty teacher and stories of things going to shit. ... I am thinking about this in the shower while accidentally washing my hair with shower gel rather than shampoo so [I done fucked up that shit too].”

20.10. “Similarly during reading lessons I reminded students that it is okay to make mistakes and still try reading out loud. Nobody is perfect, I want to instill that to students and also teachers and adults make mistakes. I am not worried about messing up my words for example and make weird sounds when I do.”

26.10. “I tried to be proactive this morning and change the time of the clock in the teacher’s lounge, but nope, it was attached to the central system. [I done fucked up that shit too]. I have a feeling that that should be my thesis title. I keep on repeating that quite often in my head. It could be seen as negative, but more I am seeing it as an opportunity to laugh at myself and thankfully nothing horrible has happened yet. I and all the kiddos that I teach have avoided major injuries and traumas. So far so good.”

14.12. “At the moment I am thinking I can do my thesis in terms of these failures, but how I am learning from failures and also how I haven’t given up or felt too bad about failures, but tried to laugh at them instead.”

I am learning from my mistakes. I am laughing at myself instead of beating myself up. I want to also instill this into children. I dressed up as “the perfect teacher” for our fairy tale character day. I discussed how a perfect teacher is a fairy tale character, since perfect teachers do not exist. I want to remind children that adults are not perfect teacher and that it is perfectly normal to make mistakes. Zager (2017, p. 56) in their book *Becoming the math teacher you wish you'd had: Ideas and strategies from vibrant classrooms* discusses how an important aspect is making mistakes. Great mathematical discoveries have been made due to mistakes (Zager, 2017). Zager (2017, p. 57) also discusses the importance of how mistakes are handled with students. Mistakes should be discussed in a positive light (Zager, 2017, p 57). I emphasized this with my students while making an example of myself. Instead of getting frustrated about my mistakes, I would

laugh at them and joke about them. I wanted to create a positive environment for making mistakes. Making mistakes is not the end of the world, but rather it is a natural part of living and learning.

Learning from mistakes happens through exploring your mistakes and possibly reasons on why you made them. This takes time and self-reflection. One main reason why I arrived at autoethnography was me being reflective and being reflective through writing. This also appeared in my journal entries. This journal and writing my thesis have helped me to be more reflective and aware of myself. I believe that on its own the whole process has helped me cope with being a teacher. I want to continue this reflection throughout my teaching career and also in my personal life. I have been called reflective before by teachers and professors and I do enjoy writing and I have been writing poems since I was a child. Crowhurst (2015) includes a reflective writing piece in teaching future teachers. This was for teachers to practice self-reflection and discussion with peers (Crowhurst, 2015). This was significant enough for Crowhurst (2015) that he edited these narratives into a book *Beginning teachers: Reviewing disastrous lessons*. Numerous times in my journal I allude to reflection and writing.

27.8. “I do consider myself a thoughtful/reflective person and in that sense autoethnography fits me. I remember when a teacher from uni mentioned how I seem thoughtful/pensive, something like that. I think it was an ECE teacher. I enjoy that quality about myself and I think I should do even more of it.”

I believe me being reflective is also fitting for autoethnography. I want to learn more about myself as a teacher. I did ponder about the importance of writing this journal for myself. I believe I do self-reflection well with writing. Through being self-reflective and writing about it in my journal other themes emerged from this. I believe self-reflection is key in becoming a teacher and writing has had a therapeutic effect on me.

19.11. “I wish to keep doing a similar journal even after my thesis and pause and reflect on myself as a teacher.”

Reflective writing has been important to me. McKeown (2019, p. xv) complains about not having the time to reflect once starting out as a teacher compared to during studies. I want to keep my reflective writing with me even in the hectic life of becoming a teacher. McKeown (2019, p. 143) discusses the connection of theory and practice in becoming a teacher. This is where

self-reflection may be helpful and I wish there was more of it in the teacher education program. I also wish there was more time for it on the job.

I have also found catharsis in simply writing.

4.9. “Now realizing that in a way this is also working as “therapy”. In some ways even writing these worries down helps. They cannot escape and I cannot forget them once I write them down.”

”Trust yourself

You can’t write the wrong thing

Give yourself the gift of this writing”

(Bolton, 1999, p. 11).

I did indeed find the therapeutic effect of writing which I described in my journal on multiple occasions. I wish writing would be even more emphasized during the teacher education program. I also hope beginning teachers would be encouraged to keep a journal with their feelings, actions, struggles and ponderings. Writing is a kind way to face whatever life brings your way (Bolton, 1999, p. 12). Writing freely can help explore deeper things from the self (Bolton, 1999, p. 16). I did not have a set structure for my journal, and I think that did help me in truly exploring myself. Some of Bolton’s (1999, pp. 16–17) reasons for writing resonate with me with writing being enjoyable, I hope to explore my feelings, writing helps me remember things and I can communicate with others through writing. Writing freely is key instead of focusing on the structure. Bolton (1999, p. 20) describes how writing in a school essay is not comparable to life, since our lives are complex and do not fit into a fixed structure. That is one reason why I am bringing creativity into thesis writing and exploring autoethnography. Writing also helps you work on things (Bolton, 1999, p. 22). I have worked on my identity as a teacher through writing. Thompson (2011, p. 24) discusses how sharing stories and writing are key needs for humans. The process is important in therapeutic journal writing (Thompson, 2011, 28). I am not looking forward to writing my journal into something, but I wrote it freely to explore my ideology as a teacher. Bolton and Thompson (1999: 2011) both discuss the process and the free writing aspects. Both (1999: 2011) also discuss the reason for writing to be reflection. This has been at a key in my writing. Writing has enabled me to explore my feelings and actions as a teacher, and for example the role conflict of becoming a teacher.

Gordon and Maxey (2000) describe “role conflict” as an issue for beginning teachers. They (2000) describe this as the conflict between being a teacher and being a young adult. Young adults will have numerous tasks to complete and worry about outside of teaching as well, like buying a car, living on their own and possibly starting a family (Gordon & Maxey, 2000). This source is from twenty years ago, but many of my friends are in this point in their lives. Many of my friends are purchasing first homes and having children. Gordon and Maxey (2000) bring forth adjusting to the teaching environment and role as one potential need for new teachers. McKeown (2011, p. 141) uses the term “your concept of yourself as a teacher”. This may be different from yourself as a teacher in the classroom compared to during your teacher education program. One motivation for this thesis was to see if my own concept matches myself in the classroom and what are truly my ideals instead of just on paper. The journal and writing my thesis has helped me adjust to this role and to find my true teacher concept. This role conflict and adjustment are something I have struggled with, and I allude to the role conflict in my diary:

24.9. “I realize one reason why I think I am looking forward to our friend gathering on Saturday is so that I can do something completely different than school and also talk about other things than school. I do enjoy this job and it has challenges, but just need to deal with those challenges and not take them personally.”

28.9. “Also there are many things I need to do, but trying to just do things one thing at a time and prioritize. I am getting more and more used to having things undone and no way am I getting everything ready. Working on finding the balance. I am doing my best, and well I am trying and not doing my best in everything, but deciding which ones I want to focus on and doing those really well. ... I am doing what I can within my own [working capacity]. That was also emphasized in the conference today: [own wellbeing] and how it is important to pay attention to it. ... Trying to find the balance and I think to a certain extent it is working. I was enjoying going for a run today right after the conference after sitting down. For about half an hour I was not thinking about school at all and had something else to focus on. I think also going to the gym will have the same effect which I am looking forward to starting. I am more than just a teacher.”

3.10. “... and me being/becoming a teacher and finding myself as a teacher and finding the healthy balance of teacher Hannele and the rest of Hannele. I am more than just a teacher.”

19.10. "I do enjoy teaching and even though being a teacher is a lot more than just teaching, I do enjoy it and it was nice being back to work actually even though it was stressing me out. Also I managed to keep my thoughts away from work during [the fall break] quite well which was good. Now need to work on doing that also during the evenings."

13.11. "Hopefully can properly chill during the weekend and relax."

One reason I have struggled finding a balance of becoming a teacher is how much other work there is beside simply teaching.

18.9. "[Another] teacher was asking me to remind them of their job and we discussed how we are nurses, and social workers, and police in the lunch hall and many other jobs."

19.10. "I did get energy from kiddos. And especially this morning I was really enjoying this job, just going with the flow. Also I realized that today was awesome, because I had a very rough plan and just went along with it for teaching. I did not read my e-mail or check Wilma for all of the other things. If I could only teach that would be awesome."

21.10. "So much other administrative shit falling on teachers' shoulders. I like teaching, but this is taking a toll, this everything else."

The amount of extra work is one major reason why teachers are striking at the moment in Finland. Some people assume since they have been at school as children that anyone can teach and how teaching is easy (McKeown, 2011, p. 3). Experienced good teachers do make teaching look very easy (McKeown, 2011, p. 3).

I was surprised like many other teachers with reality shock of what all goes into teaching (Gordon & Maxey, 2000). I did not realize how much of being a teacher is more than just teaching. I discuss many times in my journal how I enjoy teaching, but I have been stressed about the numerous other aspects of teaching. One aspect that has helped me cope is to try to focus on the teaching itself. I have struggled with the other aspects of teaching.

18.9. "It is awesome being a teacher. There is so much more though. I am getting already now better at separating free time and work and trying not to stress."

Finding the balance of teacher Hannele and free time Hannele along with the extra tasks for teacher, I am furthering the pressure with creating pressure for myself.

13.11. "I do think I still enjoy this job and really trying to lower the [bar] to really be there for the kiddos and try to not worry too much about other things."

23.11. "I do like teaching and planning is going smoothly, but having issues with the other things. I am somehow afraid of the responsibility. Scaring me."

I feel the pressure of becoming a teacher. New teachers have the pressure to be ready right away and to perform as well as experienced teachers (Sullivan et al., 2019, p. 5). There is a pressure to become a good teacher right away (McKeown, 2011, p. xiii). It would be beneficial to explicitly choose what new teachers focus on in the school. In a school setting it is not possible to give new teachers easier tasks, since right away you are responsible for your own classroom. Other teachers can help you and hopefully they are open for questions, but in the end, it is your responsibility. I also feel the pressure from social media. I follow various teacher accounts on different social media platforms. I enjoy getting ideas from these accounts, but sometimes they make me feel inadequate as a teacher. I feel as in I am not doing my best when I do not have a nicely decorated classroom with handmade paintings. I also feel bad about not trying my absolute best all the time. I came across a social media post talking about doing your absolute best makes you a good teacher. I shared it with a teacher friend and was commenting that according to that post if a teacher is not trying their absolute best all the time, does that make them a bad teacher. In my opinion it does not, and it is important to realize when you do not have the capacity to try your absolute best and that is perfectly fine. Furthermore, McKeown (2011, p. xv) discusses the connection of theory to practice. New teachers should connect theory into practice right away and find themselves as a teacher. This can be difficult without the proper time to reflect and discuss. It is key to emphasize that perfection is not the goal. I believe these pressures could be lessened. According to an online questionnaire (Tikkanen, 2018), almost all of those who answered (123) discussed about not feeling adequate and having too much on their plate. I am not alone with my struggles of feeling inadequate. I am amplifying the pressure by creating pressure for myself, but also other teachers are feeling the pressure. I am not alone.

This self-pressure and teaching has been creating a roller coaster of emotions. I am enjoying being a teacher, but I am feeling very tired at the same time.

26.10. "Sigh. I am feeling so tired and it is only Monday. I feel like I am drained. I am somewhat energetic during lessons, but definitely during every break I am ready to collapse."

7.12. "I was very very tired in the morning and still during lunch time. I felt feverish, I don't think I had a fever, but felt like it. I somehow though managed to get energy during the lessons with the kiddos."

8.12. "I am enjoying this job and I like it and I do get energy from the kiddos actually."

14.12. "I am tired and I am very much looking forward to Christmas break. I read a post how you can enjoy your job and still wait for and enjoy your break and I think that is where I am at the moment. I am enjoying my work and it was nice being back after the weekend, but also I am so ready for winter break. I am so tired, but also on the other hand I am getting energy from being with the kiddos actually."

Belkić and Savić (2013, p. 1) discuss how work is a source of meaning for many. They (2013, p. 1) also discuss how work can be a stressor for mental health. This is something I am struggling with as a beginning teacher. I find teaching to be meaningful and I highly value the fact that I find my work meaningful. At the same time, it is causing me stress though.

The role-conflict, the work life balance, the other tasks of teaching and the self-pressure have affected me physically. I have realized through self-reflection that I have physical symptoms from these. I have also been aware of the physical symptoms of being nervous. Starting out as a teacher during corona may have helped me being more aware of my physical symptoms. It was required to be on sick leave even with minor symptoms and I was sick due to this many times during the fall. This has helped me being more self-aware.

27.8. "Also my stomach is hurting and I feel like that is at least partially due to being so anxious. But also might be period, or hunger or something else."

22.9. "At about 7 pm feeling physically anxious. Someone pressing on my chest. 7:30 almost crying. Almost 8 pm. I don't want to do this if it is still difficult. Crying a bit. Sad and anxious. I did get my period though today, hopefully my [excessive] sadness is just due to that."

1.10. "At the moment I am enjoying my job, but still sometimes get very anxious like this morning. Physically I feel a pressure around my neck/chest. I want to not get rid of that, but find the tools on how to move past it. ... Aaaah! And the physical anxiety is getting to me."

5.10. "My neck is cramping, it's been [happening] for awhile."

26.10. "I am feeling tired. Also shoulders and neck are hurting and the headache is there. ... Also worried that is this physically symptoms of anxiety."

Being self-aware and honest about my emotions has helped me cope with them. I have written openly about the emotional and physical toll that teaching has taken on me.

27.11. "I have also been taking care of my [working capacity]. Took me awhile, but contacted [occupational health] finally and even before that I have been quite open about it to colleagues and asked for tips which has been helpful. Just talking has helped actually. I have been very aware of it and I have a feeling maybe that is why it hasn't gotten too bad."

10.11. "I want to have way healthier habits and I want to improve my wellbeing. I am also glad I get to talk to a psychiatric nurse again through [occupational health] and checking my blood work to make sure tiredness is not due to some serious illness. Based on questionnaires I had mild anxiety and mild depression and anxiety was 14 (8 to 15 is mild) so I think that has gone up and depression wasn't a thing in the spring. Of course these are not official diagnoses, but it seems that mental health is still suffering and I am glad I contacted them now before it gets too bad."

Me being self-aware has helped me reach for help. If I had not been so in tune with myself, maybe I would not have reached for help. I have already been aware of my mental health during my university studies and I am glad I started the process of seeking help.

I have anxiety

I made the call

Tears in my eyes

Trembling body

At lost for words

"I am not doing so well"
I was feeling nervous
But maybe it's all in my head

"Come see me"
I was nervous
But felt relieved

I was getting help
I listened to those around me
Self love... self care

I went into the nurse's office
I was scared
At lost for words... again

We talked and talked
Feeling better
Getting help

Went to see a doctor
Nervous yet again
Seeing the hope though

"You have anxiety"
Those words made it real
Not all in my head

Self love
Self care
Would recommend to anyone

Along with being self-aware I have wondered how much my mental health has affected my struggles of becoming a teacher. At first I thought that my anxiety is just related to not finishing my thesis, but now realizing that it might be affecting more aspects of my life. It has been helpful that I did seek help and that I have been aware of the possible effects of it.

24.9. “The greatest epiphany for today and partially yesterday after talking to my co teacher is that it is not about not feeling anxious. Since it seems that you will feel anxious at times, but how to deal with that anxiety. How do you get past the moments of feeling so stressed and wanting to quit. You need to find healthy outlets to vent and maybe share with someone, or then do demanding hobbies or sleep or something, but I do want to find my way to get over anxiety. ... I have been concentrating on the wrong problem of trying to not feel anxious and wondering why I feel anxious. That is not as important as moving on and dealing with anxiety. I feel very confident at the moment and hopefully I can keep this up. ... I feel like this epiphany of not getting rid of anxiety, but how to deal with it is really causing me positive vibes.”

McKeown (2011, p. 137) discusses how teaching is tiring and fatigue is a real issue even for experienced teachers. It is key in realizing this rather than beating myself up for feeling anxious and tired. This should be emphasized for beginning teachers.

28.9. “About to sleep, already in bed, put phone away already, but now having some anxiety. Worried about all of the things I [should] have done at work, but didn't and also things I need to do. It seems to be a bit difficult to fall asleep today.”

Belkić and Savić (2013, p. 186) did a case study about a teacher suffering from migraines and panic attacks. The teacher was worried about completing all of her tasks and being able to be in control at work (Belkić & Savić, 2013, p. 186). This is also related to why I am feeling anxious. I feel like I do not have the time for all of what I am supposed to do. At times I feel at a lost in the middle of everything. This teacher also suffered from the physical symptoms much like myself of chest pressure and having difficulty sleeping (Belkić & Savić, 2013, p. 186). I am not alone in my struggles. That is important to emphasize to new teachers. I have mentioned how more experienced colleagues also felt like quitting at times and that experienced teachers also feel tired. Tikkanen (2018) discusses how many teachers are struggling with mental health

in Finland. Tikkanen (2018) discusses how teaching is demanding due to interaction with people and growing demands of teachers. Both of these are something I have struggled with as well. I feel the responsibility of teaching and I discussed how that the responsibility is scary. I have also discussed the various other tasks that are not teaching. Those have also stressed me out, much like other teachers (Tikkanen, 2018). This has contributed to my anxiety. Based on an online questionnaire about a fifth of teachers who answered had been on sick leave due to mental health issues (Tikkanen, 2018). In Finland depression is the main cause of not being able to work (Tikkanen, 2018). Mental health has not been yet studied in great detail among teachers, but there is a clear need for more studies (Tikkanen, 2018). Already based on this questionnaire and discussions with colleagues, I have realized that I am not alone in my mental health struggles. I shared my thesis topic during the thesis seminar and other teacher students were excited about my thesis since many are thinking about these struggles of becoming a teacher. I hope that others are encouraged to discuss their mental health more openly in order to remove the stigma around mental health. I also hope it would be even easier seeking professional help. I have discussed my mental health with my coworkers and many other teachers find help from colleagues as well (Tikkanen, 2018). Other teachers understand the struggles of teaching. Even with the ongoing mental health struggles, I do want to be a teacher.

Much like the teacher in Belkić and Savić's (2013, p. 194) case study I do feel a calling to be a teacher. I do feel it is more than just a job and that I find great meaning in it. The work meaning is something that Belkić and Savić's (2013, p. 1) discuss in the beginning of their book. This struggle between mental health and the calling and meaning is causing the roller coaster of feelings which I discussed earlier. I am tired and stressed, but I am enjoying my job. I enjoy going to work, but I am looking forward to the weekend.

3.10. "Just not sure what to do if teaching doesn't work out. No idea where [to] start, well many ideas, but don't really know what would stick, but maybe that's a part of it. But I do hope that teaching sticks, I hope I find ways to deal with anxiety and stress and I do hope it gets at least somewhat easier. Will naturally have moments where I want to quit most likely like co teacher mentioned, but hopefully it is not meant to be this hard, because if it is then not sure can I handle this for long."

4.10. "Also need tools to get over anxiety both in personal life and also work related. I feel like most of today has gone into stressing about next week's work

and already somehow stressing about [fall break] and will it be enough to recover and fully relax.”

13.10. “I am excited about this job, but the anxiety and tiredness is feeling overwhelming at the moment.”

I want to stick to teaching since I find it meaningful. One reason why I am still in the field and what I value are my coworkers and their support network. In terms of my anxiety, I did reach out for professional help before I started teaching during my university studies. I continued this process while I was working and I am still to this day continuing this progress. It has helped me cope with my anxiety and some of the negative emotions due to my support network. I have been surrounded by my co-workers, my partner, my friends and I also sought out professional help. I was lucky in terms of my co-workers and my support system. Gordon and Maxey (2000) explore isolation as a common reason for leaving the field. I was not suffering from this, and I was taking in as a member of the teaching community at the school. I at times felt that I did not belong since I had not graduated yet, but my co-workers were not bothered by this. Gordon and Maxey (2000) list communicating with colleagues as one of twelve potential needs for beginning teacher. I have greatly benefited from my colleagues at work I was surprised at how meaningful my co-workers were to me. I used to not appreciate group work in high school or university. I was dreading having to work in a group, but it turns out I mention my co-workers and their importance numerous times in my journal. I am still in touch with my co-workers and I was invited for an end of the year picnic. Roth (2016, p. 296) goes even further in their article “Becoming and belonging: From identity to experience as developmental category in science teaching and teacher education” stating that a beginning teacher’s support network is key in their identity formation rather than just being important for a beginning teacher. We are naturally social creatures, and our identities are formed in connection with others (Roth, 2016, p. 296). I am becoming a teacher, but also my belonging is affecting my becoming (Roth, 2016, p. 296).

25.9. “I do greatly enjoy this job and I am grateful for the support from my co-workers and also parents seem to be happy with what I’m doing and especially kids.”

9.11. “I am really super thankful for support from my colleagues though. We are on the same boat and navigating together. We are supporting each other and making things work.”

12.11. "Yesterday I did tell colleagues about mental health issues and [working capacity]. And yet again people are being very supportive and some people talked/messaged me. I do feel the awesome support from colleagues. It is awesome to be able to chat and vent. ... So thankful for my colleagues at this school."

10.12. "I have support from colleagues and numerous people who have similar struggles around me and also understand the good things about the job."

22.12. "I gave a speech today and raised a toast to my awesome colleagues."

Furthermore, I have also received support from my partner and friends along with professional help. Gordon and Maxey (2000) describe receiving emotional support as another potential need for new teachers. I have received emotional support from my colleagues, partner, friends, professionally and from myself by writing about my experience. I have mentioned my partner in my journal 14 times. I am surprised that it is that many times. I tried not to vent to them as much, but it does seem that I did vent and it has helped with my coping.

3.10. "Me and my partner went for a walk and I asked if I can have a mini work rant. Ended up talking about work for pretty much whole walk, an hour or so. ... Felt good, but also seems to be stressing me maybe even more than I thought."

4.10. "Didn't stress about work while talking to my partner about other things, but the moment I was alone in the sauna for a tiny bit, I started worrying and then ended up talking to my partner about it and cried a bit."

17.10. "Also talked to my partner and how I'm running a marathon and exhausted and not sure when it's ending and at the moment I don't have a clear end goal."

27.11. "I stopped my Pomodoro for a bit and cried while talking to my partner, just somehow things got too much and wasn't even sure why I was crying..."

I did also share some good moments with my partner. I am making a conscious effort to focus on the good things about teaching. I do find energy from teaching and interacting with the children.

8.9. "Made me smile when telling this to my partner."

7.10. "Was telling [my] partner, and also want to write down here. I was just finishing in my classroom and one kid comes and says hello and is pretending to

be a ghost and tells how the ghost is gonna steal the desks. Also two other kids yell from the car goodbye while I walk away from the school. First thing I write and also the first thing I wrote was the [I done fucked up that shit as well] and only after [that] write the good moments. Thinking of yesterday and how it is so much easier to concentrate on the negative. Today a kid was very confused during the P.E. lesson and I was feeling quite hopeless and told them that they could sit for a moment and a bit later they came and mentioned they "saved" someone in the game and that made me so happy. Easier to concentrate on the frustration and helplessness, but these awesome tiny moments make teaching worth it.”

I still remember these moments which I wrote about on 7.10. I tried focusing on the teaching and I realized I did get energized by the kids and planning activities. That is something I do still genuinely enjoy about teaching. I enjoyed and tried to focus on the kids and the physical classroom and planning. Many times, in my journal while I am talking about getting energy from the kids, I am at the same time talking about being tired.

5.10. “Today ended up being quite a good day, still quite tired and felt fever-ish earlier today and super tired for most of the day, but in the end it was a pretty good day. Somehow kids give me energy even though sometimes they take so much energy.”

I want to be a teacher since I am making a difference. I get energy from children since I enjoy working with children. Children are open and easy to interact with me. They live in the moment and I value that. I enjoy the immediate feedback and I enjoy seeing children grow and learn. I tried to focus on the good parts of teaching and the teaching itself of being a teacher. I did get energy from the kids and teaching and planning started going smoother during the year. I also enjoyed that I have the freedom to decorate my classroom and my goal was to make each student feel welcomed. The starting point for me was the students. I did not realize before starting my analysis just how many times I talked about the importance of students feeling safe and comfortable in the classroom. I found numerous instances with the search word “safe” and that seems to be an extremely important value to me as a teacher. I want to be there for my students above anything else.

14.9. “I want to be there for my students. Maybe not everybody learns to read perfectly, but at least I am there for my students. I hope so at least. I hopefully everyone feels safe and that they can be themselves and are enjoying coming to

school and hopefully learning something along the way, but learning is somewhat secondary in my priorities. Maybe I shouldn't say that as a teacher, but that's how I feel."

McKeown (2011, p. 5) looked into various teacher programs and many of their goal was to produce quality teachers. What does it mean to be a good quality teacher? Good quality teachers should be able to teach concepts to students. Teachers teach children to read, write and count in various ways. Further on, more subjects and more complex matters are added to the list. What about the "soft skills"? What about being kind, respectful, environmentally conscious, active and happy? I believe these should be discussed in teacher education more. Also these should be emphasized in becoming a teacher at the beginning of your career. McKeown (2011, p. 153) also found that for students it is more important that subject teachers create meaningful relationships with students rather than being knowledgeable about the subject matter. This is interesting to know also at the higher levels. I thought this was something specific to lower grades. I hope that the importance of relationships and a safe environment was emphasized at each level and starting from teacher education. I also hope that teachers realize the impact they have like I did in November.

13.11. "I am humbled by a message from a colleague ... who wrote about their own struggles even after all of their years of teaching and how both me and them feel inadequate as a teacher and how they reminded me and probably themselves that we are doing our best and that is all we can do. While I was reading their message and answering it at school in my classroom after I finished teaching, I paused and looked at all of the artwork and our [worm] and [rewards board] etc. and it made me realize that I have done a lot with the kids and for the kids actually. I do need to also appreciate the effort I am doing. I am there for my kiddos and they seem to enjoy coming to school and I hope I am a safe adult for them. That is the most important thing for me personally as a teacher. Kiddos feel safe and can be themselves and hopefully learn something along the way, but rather learn to love learning and to be kind humans."

I still remember this moment. I had tears in my eyes when I was looking around my classroom. At times I do not give myself credit about the things I have accomplished (as a teacher), but rather just focus on the things I have not managed to accomplish.

10.12. Writing about why I enjoy being a teacher: “I am a safe adult/person for many people (hopefully at least).”

11.12. “At times I feel like a bad teacher, but at the moment that is what I feel like I can do. I am trying to just be there for my students and at least that students are happy and feel safe. It seems that students are enjoying coming to school and they seem to enjoy learning so that is key in my opinion.”

I connected the feeling of safety often to my ponderings about being a good or a bad teacher. I tried my best, but my main hope was that kids felt safe and taken care of. Mendler (2001) emphasizes the importance of connection in their book *Connecting with students*. Mendler (2001) discusses how connection is important in later years of education as well and how having a genuine connection with students could help prevent even mass shootings. They (2001) discuss how teachers are worried about the academic content and some teachers feel like they do not have the time to genuinely connect with students. I believe that true learning starts from this connection. Mendler (2001, p. 7) states how we need “warmth and nourishment for the mind and for the spirit” in education. McKeown (2011, p. 133) discusses kindness as a key feature of a good teacher. Kindness does not mean giving into everything your students want, but creating a respectful and safe environment for students to thrive (McKeown, 2011, p. 133).

Creating a safe environment for children relates to positive education. I did not realize that I am already following some aspects of positive education. Trogen (2020) describes the House of Positive Education and the bottom pillar is connection. Connection is the first and most important pillar of a positive educator and without it, it is not possible to follow other aspects of positive education (Trogen, 2020). I find this to be true and I believe that is why I emphasize it in my journal. In the beginning I thought that positive psychology/education would be a major player in my thesis, but it did not have as major of a role as I thought. It is something I did use it to help cope with beginning my career as a teacher. I allude to it numerous times in my journal. I am still learning more and more about it, and I hope it becomes a stable in my teaching and in my personal life.

24.8. “I participated in another positive psychology webinar and I am tempted to join the training.”

4.9. “I am also thinking of maybe shifting my study to be more related to beginning a teacher’s career. Possible combining anxiety and positive psychology into that.”

24.9. “I think this is also what positive psychology is about. It is not about always feeling happy, but how to deal with the negative emotions and to bounce back quicker.”

19.11. “I hope personally I can learn more about positive psychology/education and actually use it in my daily life, not just at work, but also in personal life.”

Avola and Pentikäinen (2019) do discuss how positive psychology is not all about being happy. It is about building a reservoir of positive emotions to combat the negative emotions (Avola & Pentikäinen, 2019). Humans are more prone to focus on the negativity, therefore it is important to practice focusing on the positive instead (Avola & Pentikäinen, 2019). I have attempted to do this with my positivity journal. I wrote three good things about the day in a journal. I am still doing that now at work. I do also discuss how it is easier to write about the negative aspects and sometimes I feel like it is easier to vent about the negative experiences. I want to focus more on the positive and I aim to bring this into the lives of children I teach as well.

Norrish et al. (2013) bring forth a model on implementing positive education into practice: “An applied framework for positive education”. They (2013) discuss the importance of six “wellbeing domains”. These are: positive emotions, positive engagement, positive accomplishment, positive purpose, positive relationships, and positive health (Norrish et al., 2013). I discuss in my journal many times about how I want children to feel safe and I want them to enjoy learning. This relates to positive emotions and positive engagement. I also discuss how I want to be there for my students relating to positive emotions. I was worried about not knowing yet in great detail about positive education, but it does seem that I value these values inherently. Even though I may not use the term positive psychology/education as much in my journal and in my teaching yet, I am looking forward to learning more about it. I also realized through being self-reflective and writing my thesis that many aspects of myself as a teacher are related to positive psychology. I aim to focus on the good and I find it imperative that each student feels safe and is doing well before learning can take place.

At times I felt like I just want to be done with my thesis, but I do feel like I have genuinely learned more about myself as a teacher and as a person. I also hope that I have made enough

societal connections from my own story. I feel like early childhood education makes perfect sense for me. I am also looking forward to completing my PhD at some point, since I have enjoyed the research process.

3.10. “Already thinking of doing more autoethnography regardless if it is for another Master's thesis or a PhD.”

13.11. “Also one thing I was intrigued about is teaching ECE/elementary education/education at the university level.”

Reading my journal and now doing the analysis about a year later, I do understand myself more. Now I am working in early childhood education and for me that makes sense. I was drawn to early childhood education, and I now understand why. I discuss numerous times about receiving energy from the children and being there for them and I have more time for that in early childhood education. I have more freedom with the timing of activities and more time to get to know the children.

26.10. “Lately I have been thinking about possible next year working in ECE again. There are longer days and even more presence with the kiddos, like constant presence, but then also not as detailed planning and still can do quite a lot, maybe not as much structure, but might be interesting to experience that as well “full time” for a year or so with the same group.”

So who am I as a teacher? What do I value? How do I cope? I am still a teacher. At the moment I am working as an Early Childhood Education teacher. At the moment I am enjoying my work in ECE and I am continuing next academic year. I am intrigued about doing my PhD and possibly teaching adults at some point and possibly moving to elementary or middle or high school teaching, but time will tell. I am using aspects what I have learned by writing this thesis in my current teaching and I would continue using these in any teaching or other profession I would go into.

I am continuing to laugh at my mistakes, and I try to learn from mistakes and move on. Corona is still here, but hopefully going away, therefore not worrying about corona is a great plan for going into teaching. I am still a reflective person and I enjoy exploring my way of working and I find it beneficial. I have a positivity journal for my current work as well and I do discuss moments from work with co-workers and my partner and friends. I do want to do another autoethnographic thesis still. I highly value the autoethnographic process still. I am still working

on finding the balance between teacher Hannele and non-teacher Hannele, but I have more energy for outside of work activities and I do not feel as mentally and emotionally exhausted anymore. The “role conflict” which Gordon and Maxey (2000) discuss has become easier to deal with. I am still struggling with anxiety and I am looking for a therapist to help with that. I am also dealing with the physical symptoms and anxiety and/or stress. I am still in touch with occupational health and self-awareness is helping and also the encouragement of those around me to continue seeking help. I am still grateful for my support network. I have amazing colleagues at my new workplace and my partner is still with me and I have friends who I do vent to sometimes. I do enjoy teaching and my main focus is teaching. I enjoy in ECE how I have more time to with the children. I foster a safe environment and I hope that children enjoy coming to daycare. I am still looking forward to learning more about positive education.

I realized that my tattoo works as a good summary of myself as a teacher. I notice that my free time self is much like my work self. My tattoo represents being positive with the B+ symbol. I also enjoy helping others and one way I do that is by donating blood. This is alluding to my blood type which is B+ and the red cross. The B is also not perfect, but it has a piece missing. I want to remind myself and students that nobody is perfect, but you can still be positive and spread joy to others, which I hope to do in my teaching. I hope that my students do the same and are kind to each other. I also hope to create a safe colorful environment where everyone is appreciate the way they are.



Figure 1 *Image of my B+ tattoo*

I want to continue to have moments to reflect and learn from mistakes and grow as a teacher. I also want to be aware of my emotions and my working capacity. I am looking forward to continuing to seek professional help. I hope I will have a great support network in the future as

well. I am a social teacher in that regard. I also hope I will always be a safe teacher for children and that children enjoy being around me and feel comfortable around me. I am also looking forward to learning more about positive education and hopefully one day I can call myself a positive educator. Writing this thesis has taught me a great deal about myself as a teacher and about myself as a person. I wish to end with lyrics to one of my favorite songs since my childhood. This song makes me happy, and it relates well to myself as a teacher. I want to be friendly, warm and I want to appreciate the good moments of teaching and I never want to stop learning.

Minun ystäväni on kuin villasukka – My friend is like a woollen sock

Joka talvella lämmittää – Which is warming during winter

Ja minun ystäväni on kuin niityn kukka – And my friend is like a flower in the meadow

Joka saa minut hymyilemään – Which makes me smile

Ota kädestä kiinni, tule kanssani rantaan – Take my hand, come with me to the beach

Niin vien sinut katsomaan – So I will take you to watch

Miten aurinko laskeen puiden taakse – How the sun sets behind trees

Ja saa taivaan punertamaan – And makes the sky go red

Minä olen vielä pikkuinen ja siksi tahtoisin – I am still little and that is why I would want

Oppia tän maailman paljon paremmin – To learn this world in more detail

Ja kun mä sitten joskus olen aikuinen – And when one day I become an adult

Niin toivon että oppimasta koskaan lakkaa en – I hope I never stop learning

Wrapping up story time

I found cathartic release from writing my thesis and exploring my feelings and actions. Furthermore, I hope to provide insight into the beginnings of becoming a teacher and I hope that especially other beginning teachers can find connections in their own teaching career. I aim to provide some tips on what can be done. I also hope that certain changes would happen in teacher education and in working places. It would be important to discuss how challenging teaching can be and that it is understandable that it is challenging. I have talked to experienced teachers who still sometimes think of quitting. You are not alone in wanting to quit. The challenge is not getting rid of that feeling, but rather what can you do to cope with it. For me, it helped consciously focusing on the positive, but being honest about the struggles to myself. I remind myself of wanting to be a teacher in order to help children become the best possible versions of themselves and in order to provide a safe environment for them to learn. I was also fortunate with my co-workers and finding a support group in them. I believe some sort of mentoring or support program should be implemented for new teachers and to encourage new teachers to join. If not an official program, I would recommend being open and talking to other teachers. It is also important to have friends and support outside of education. I find it refreshing and I have valued my other friendships more as I am becoming a teacher. I would also add more time to write and reflect into teacher education. I have written many lesson plans for imaginary classrooms during my teacher studies. These have been helpful, but most times they are hard to connect since I did not have experience in teaching before hand. Reflective writing about yourself will carry with you no matter where you work. It emphasizes your values and how you become a teacher. These values will be important to ponder about and to create your own teaching style and to find suitable working places and colleagues.

I did struggle with the ethics of autoethnography. I asked the principal for permission and I had to wait some time for that. I eventually received the permission in writing via e-mail. I did not ask permission separately from students or co-workers. I did my best to anonymize the data and for example the city or any specific information about the students or the class is not present at all in my thesis. Autoethnography requires special consideration for the other people involved since their story through the researcher is made public and it may be difficult to hide their identity (Muncey, 2010, p. 112). Delamont (2009) states that it is nearly impossible to write completely ethical autoethnographies in terms of asking for explicit permission, since my own story as an autoethnographer is connected to numerous others. These reasons may be related, it

is nearly impossible to write your own story without including others. It is important to remember that by doing an autoethnography, you naturally include others in your story (Ellis, 2007). Ellis (2007) discusses how during their first research project some of the research participants forgot that they were a part of the research since Ellis became friends with them. Even without an ongoing research project happening, the people around you naturally become a part of the research in autoethnography. Nobody lives in a vacuum (Muncey, 2010, p. 106). While reading Blair's (2016) *Writing a graduate thesis or dissertation*, I wrote in my notes: "one temptation for autoethnography: don't have to worry about permission (so much)". I did ask for the written permission from the principal. They were content with not asking specific permission from others. I tried to minimize any unnecessary information in regard to others in my thesis. In the future, I should focus on this more and have a more continuous process of permission asking.

"Your truth will be questioned" (Muncey, 2010, p. 86). What is truth anyways? Muncey (2010, p. 91) provides the example of writing a diary of a day and how it would be different from their husband even though they spent most of the day together. False memory syndrome (FMS) can be used to silence those with harsh realities for example abuse victims (Muncey, 2010, p. 102). It is easy to claim someone is remembering events incorrectly when it is too difficult to hear. Truth is always subjective.

The validity, generalizability and reliability are used to judge quantitative research, but it is argued that these are not valid to judge qualitative research (Horsburgh, 2003). These are the terms that came to mind for me first when starting to explore the reliability of my thesis. These should not be used in judging qualitative research. This refers to "instrumental rationality" which critiques the use of scientific and standardized thinking in relation to the study of humans (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1971 as cited in Hayler & Moriarty, 2017, p. 99). Hakala (2000, pp. 97-98) discusses internal and external reliability and these are directly linked to autoethnography. Hakala (2000, p. 97) mentions how it is imperative to ask the right questions from the sources of data and the data itself in terms of internal reliability. External reliability considers if it is possible to make generalizations based on the data (Hakala, 2000, p. 98). I am not as much concerned with external reliability in autoethnography, but rather I wish readers can make their own connections to their personal lives. It is key though that internal reliability is high. This can be difficult since I am looking into my own life in terms of memories and earlier writings. The goal is not to sum up my whole life, but rather focus on the key issues in relation to the research topic. Qualitative research should still be trustworthy, which is defined as "the degree to which others can have confidence in the authenticity, believability, and applicability

of the findings” as defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985 as cited in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, pp. 97–98). Through high internal reliability and focusing on the research question I aim to be a trustworthy source. According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006, p. 98) trustworthiness can be increased for example by including multiple ways to collect data. Boudah (2011, p. 11) mentions how trustworthy research includes detailed descriptions of data collection and analysis. Quantitative and qualitative research should not be judged on the same basis. Qualitative research does still have to be plausible and trustworthy (Muncey, 2010, p. 91). Muncey (2010, p. 91) describes this plausibility and trustworthiness as the story making sense to the reader, which they name resonance. According to Muncey (2010, pp. 91–92) “autoethnographic stories can resonate, not just by pulling at the heart strings or provoking memories but by eliciting a response to the text that, as Lacan says, ‘surprises the unconscious’” (Chaitin, 2008, p. 234 as cited in Muncey, 2010). I aimed to be transparent in telling my story and analysis. I aimed to focus on my research question when exploring data. I aimed to be a trustworthy source even though the data was collected from myself. Therefore, the transparency of data collection and analysis were key. I hope I can elicit responses from readers and hope I lead them to self-discovery.

Furthermore, one critique for autoethnography is that it is just self-promotion (Muncey, 2010, p. 93). Syrjälä and Norrgrann (2018, p. xi) mention two critical questions about autoethnography being: “How is a single researcher able to generate something new by relying on his/her own life and everyday experiences? In what ways is this type of research capable of providing something beyond the researcher and the self?”. The key in autoethnography is to go beyond just yourself and connect your experiences to theory and culture. The telling of one’s story should “take us somewhere we couldn’t otherwise get to” (Behar, 1997, pp. 13-14) and not only be told for its own sake. Crowhurst (2015) describes story telling as expression of self, but they remind us that stories always come with a cultural context. Stories cannot be told without a language and a cultural context (Crowhurst, 2015). Every story is worth telling, each individual has something unique to share with the rest of the world. I have benefited from writing about my own experience in a journal and I am enjoying sharing my story. My goal is not to promote myself though or to only share my story, but rather I hope that sharing my story can benefit other teachers and especially teachers just starting out. I hope it can help others to self-reflect and to explore aspects of it further. It is key that the story and theory are connected and therefore I have chosen to write them simultaneously in the thesis. I am benefiting from my thesis, I will not deny that, but I do genuinely hope that others may benefit as well.

According to some researchers the self is seen as a contaminant in research (Muncey, 2010, p.97). Ellis (2004, p. xvi) describes the start of a PhD research project. A PhD student came into Ellis's office and was surprised about Ellis asking about her own interest in the research topic (Ellis, 2004, p. xvi). Some argue that the goal of even qualitative research would be to find an objective truth without being subjective (Muncey, 2010, p. 97). In the academic world sometimes having an identity is seen as being subjective (Hayler & Moriarty, 2017, p. 54). I believe myself being a part of research is making my research more relatable to others. It has helped me being honest in my research and I have been able to share myself openly and in turn this helps with resonating with the readers. The identity of the researcher is attempted to be silenced by academia. Autoethnography is a way to go against the mostly "male, hierarchical and objective" academic writing (Hayler & Moriarty, 2017, p. 138). Academic writing is further described as "impersonal, nonemotional, and unrhethorically charming" according to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006, p. 201). Wall (2006, p. 2) discusses how unfortunately the self needs to be minimized while writing scientific text in traditional research. I found it fascinating writing my thesis in a way that the self is foregrounded and not seen as an issue to hide. I have aimed to be reliable, but not objective.

Despite the critique of autoethnography, I am convinced that it is a valuable way to do research. I tried to minimize the effects of the various critique points. I am looking forward to using it in the future as well, possible for my PhD.

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