

From a Research Checklist to *Dramaturgy*: Reflexivity of Being a Researcher and a Nobody in the Field

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ABSTRACT

Researching the field can be messy and fraught with tension, especially for novice researchers. This paper draws on reflexivity to illustrate how the field resulted in impression management when my body encountered the lived experiences of participants. Surprisingly, this field encounter shaped my body into "becoming" rather than merely "being" a researcher. I drew on verbatim field notes, to retrospectively unpack my field experience and how it impacted my identity and body. I show how reflexivity was not simply "research wallowing" but offered a third space for me to objectify my body and field experiences. This sense-making space has shifted my understanding of research as a formulaic or procedural checklist towards viewing it as a craft and theatre production. As a result, this paper highlights how my "body" was entangled, often causing moments of complication but also deep understanding when I was front stage (in the field) and backstage (when I left the field).

Keywords: Theoretical reflexivity; Methodological reflexivity; Personal reflexivity; impression management; Dramaturgy; Goffman; Bourdieu; Body and space; Staged performance; Front stage

INTRODUCTION

Researching at the postgraduate level appears to be a reasonably straightforward task judging by the proliferate literature giving advice and steps to follow [15,3,19,1]. For novice researchers, literature about the research process could be a checklist or recipe to follow. As postgraduate students, it seems easier to plan our steps, tick them off, and then set off to conduct our research in the empirical field. When doctoral students embark on research, we rely on research literature for guidance about the research process. The focus for most of us is on the approval process, such as the ethical clearance, gaining field access, data collection procedures that culminate in the thesis write-up. For this reason, our research designs can often appear formulaic, predictable, and like 'boring' qualitative research [2,5,42]. Therefore, we rarely view our research projects as a craft because we are mainly preoccupied with the methods and the "procedures (and) principles of manipulating data" [2]. Furthermore, as a novice researcher, my doctoral journey was a reminder of what I would gain, yet another degree, but when I entered the field, I pondered on knowledge for whom and what purpose? Surprisingly despite reading extensive methodological

literature, I was unprepared for the notion of body and space, an underexplored issue in the research literature [31,45,48].

When I entered the participants' world, my research journey resulted in an unforeseen inward gaze where the vantage point turned towards the self. For example, in the field, I encountered the lived experiences of my research participants that unexpectedly shaped my body into "becoming" rather than merely "being" a researcher because I often needed to manage my identities to fit in with the prevailing institutional norms [16]. To make sense of my bodily experiences in the field, I used reflexivity to describe the unexpected multiple selves that emerged when I was front stage (in the field) and backstage when I left. This masking of what I felt to be my authentic self has led to moments of complication during my fieldwork. Using reflexivity, I explored my role in the research process, ranging from my methodological preferences and the impact on knowledge production [17,32]. Through reflexivity, I became aware of the varying roles of being an actor and spectator simultaneously.

Reflexivity is "an acknowledgment of the impossibility of remaining "outside of one's subject matter while conducting

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research" [52]. However, the moments of entanglement in the field where the researcher's physical being or body becomes intimately bound with events that are generally not written about in dissertations. Most bound theses or completed dissertations appear neat and illustrate limited complications associated with body and space encounters during fieldwork. For this reason, I tried to find a narrative device that would enable me to map my field experiences developmentally to unpack the messy frictions that arose at times. Such a narrative sense-making device allowed me to foreground how my understanding of the research process altered through an analysis of the repeated acts of identity in which I engaged both on and off the research 'stage.' Even more significant is that instead of using reflexivity to describe the researched, I used it to observe my social practice as a participant in the research process. Therefore, my approach to reflexivity shifted from the "highly personalized styles and their self-absorbed mandates" towards an embodied ethnography that foregrounds the impact of the field on the self, the research process, and the write-up of my dissertation [49].

During my fieldwork, I was constantly aware of my identity as a site of struggle that required me to 'bring the body back in' [38]. For this reason, I drew on reflexivity that shifted from "who we are as ethnographers, to how we are placed in the field" [31]. Through reflexivity, I became aware of the "intellectual imaginations, traditions, and innovations (to) interact in the craft of ethnography" [2]. Additionally, reflexivity deepened my understanding of the sociological concept of *dramaturgy* which enabled me to view the research process as a staged performance [25]. In the field, we all resembled actors performing acts of identities.

As I was collecting data in the field, I was at once director, producer, and narrator with the power to decide who will say what and which evidence or props would ultimately be selected to substantiate my thesis. In my mind's eye, the research process resembled a performance: schools were my stage, teachers, learners, and I became the characters, and I was tempted to shout, Lights, camera, and action (Field notes 2011).

Dramaturgy refers to embodied gestures that communicate what words cannot do, where the presentation of the self involves opportunities for "face-saving" [26]. I reflected on the "*dramaturgy*" metaphor to illustrate the "neglected situation" and the unexpected field entanglements [27]. It was partly an attempt to find a vehicle for reflexively about the impact of the research process on the self and the impact of the self on others. However, and more importantly, it is also a means to help my intended audience understand and share my field experiences - an aspect often ignored in dissertation write-ups [53]. The purpose of this paper is thus to draw out some insights gained through reflective practice and its usefulness during fieldwork sense-making. Therefore, I pose the following question: How did reflexivity result in a shift from a research recipe towards a research craft? As a result, this paper draws on reflexivity to shed light on the moments of complication and the "aha moments or eureka experiences" that made my Ph.D. fieldwork more than a recipe to be followed [45].

I will first provide background information about my research study and the three distinct reflexivity categories that emerged in my field notes: the personal, methodological, and theoretical reflexivity when my body encountered the field. I will draw on verbatim field notes from my thesis to situate my reflections and the learning that occurred front stage (in the field) and backstage (when I left the field). As a result, my overarching aim is to highlight how reflexivity contributed to analytical lenses that made visible my field experiences and how my field experiences impacted my body and sense of self. More importantly, I want to illustrate that reflexivity can lead to "a certain kind of creativity (that) is at the very heart of the ethnographic enterprise" [2]. I conclude with a summary of the main learning experiences associated with personal, methodological, and theoretical reflexivity.

My doctoral thesis: Being the researcher

The shift to democracy impacted South African education in unexpected ways, such as rapidly changing curriculum policies and declining literacy and numeracy standards in primary and secondary schools with a ripple effect in universities. In fact, research indicators showed that for every 100 learners that start school, only fifty would make it to year twelve, of which forty would pass, and only twelve would qualify for university studies [46]. While numerous factors can affect access, redress and throughput, I was interested in academic writing because it is the predominant mode of assessments in tertiary contexts. I argued that essay writing at university has cultural, symbolic, and cultural capital that holds grave implications for South African students who are additional English language speakers (L2). For example, most disadvantaged black students (L2) aged between 20-24 lag behind their white counterparts; their success rate at universities was under 5% [43]. For this reason, my thesis investigated the writing identities constructed in two secondary schools with different legacies, material resources, cultures, and identities. As a result, the purpose of my dissertation was to shed light on the construction of writer identities at the end of schooling and the implications for academic writing at the first-year university level.

First, to engage with my data, Bourdieu's sociology of education associated with field, habitus, and capital illustrated how national curriculum policies were practiced in two diverse school contexts [8-10]. A set of rules governs the field where some fields have more power, such as the bureaucratic, science, or medical fields. The field sets up a competition where game-players struggle for positioning; those with particular forms of capital can exchange it to improve their position and chances of success. Furthermore, habitus is "the strategy-generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations" [7]. The habitus ensures a dialectical link between the past and the present. It illustrates that history is always visible in the present as an individual system of acquired dispositions that impacts practices [7,14]. Therefore, when participants have the required schemes of perception necessary to succeed in the field, they are like "a fish in water" and have a 'feel for the game' having more control than those for whom the field is unfamiliar [14]. An appropriate habitus becomes a resource and a form of capital because it elevates individuals'

position in the field. Finally, capital; economic, cultural, and social capital shed light on the two schools position in the field (school history, identity, and location), their access to different capital, and how teachers' habitus contributed to the writer identities constructed in a disadvantaged and advantaged school context. The purpose was to illustrate how post-democracy policy and curriculum shifts impacted secondary school writing pedagogy and the implications for 1st year writing habitus of L2 speakers of English. Bourdieu's concepts provided a social justice frame to foreground the role universities can play in giving epistemic access to the many L2 learners who fail during their first year of study.

Second, Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) theory has a social justice underpinning and emphasizes epistemological access for L2 learners in English medium of instruction (EMI) contexts. My study intended to illustrate the students' writing habitus related to what they bring when entering our institution and how the university should use it as a bridge when planning academic literacy courses. Therefore, it connected with the SFL social justice underpinning to counter the prevailing deficit discourse about L2 students' academic writing to provide epistemic access associated with the valued ways of being and doing in academia. SFL concepts field, tenor, and mode illustrate the connection between language choices and the situational contexts related to "what is going on, who is taking part, and the role language is playing" –describing the social context impact language [36]. Therefore, field, tenor, and mode offered a linguistic lens for analyzing the national policies, the year 12 exit examination for L2 writing, and the first-year student texts from the two school contexts. For SFL researchers, the field situates the participants (who), processes (what they are doing), and circumstances (location and practices). Then, the tenor illustrates the social relationships (social roles, positioning, and power) between participants; the mode shows how language is organized to negotiate the field and the tenor meanings that could be written, spoken, or multimodal [29].

Thirdly, ethnography as a method underpinned my research to understand the two school contexts because it allowed for the exploring of the ways that policy shifts impacted practices in local contexts. Furthermore, ethnography is uniquely context-situated in terms of time, place, and participants; thus, I could better understand two schools with different linguistic, historical, and cultural profiles [6]. However, what is considered good ethnographic research is a complex and contested issue [53]. Therefore, through reflexivity, I wanted to share moments of entanglement between the researcher, the researched, and the setting. For this reason, reflexivity offered a space for "constant learning, observing, and assessing" the reliability of my conclusions during all the stages of my research project. As a result, I wanted to illustrate my attempts to create reliability and credibility through "vividness and accuracy of description" [40].

The research sites: Becoming a researcher and being nobody

I conducted my study in two Year 10 English L2 classrooms, observing and interviewing two experienced teachers. I focused on Year 10 because it is the initiation point into the compulsory

National Senior Certificate examination that all high school learners participate in Year 12. This two-and-a-half-year ethnographic study enabled me to understand how teachers understood and practiced the national curriculum and the effects of these teacher practices in constructing sound and enabling writer identities necessary for success in university contexts. I conducted my fieldwork at two feeder schools that were racially classified under apartheid rule in South Africa. During the apartheid era, a railway track demarcated the town along racial lines. Therefore, the schools in my study were in suburbs that were unevenly resourced based on race, identity, culture, and socio-economic conditions. For example, School Alpha was located in a lush green suburb, and the school was well-resourced with symbolic and economic capital to serve the white population. In contrast, School Beta was situated in the southern part of town, with limited economic resources to serve people of color. As a result, the location of my two research sites still reflected their apartheid legacy, each possessing differential access to material resources. See, Figure one below, which vividly depicts these ongoing contradictions post-democracy.

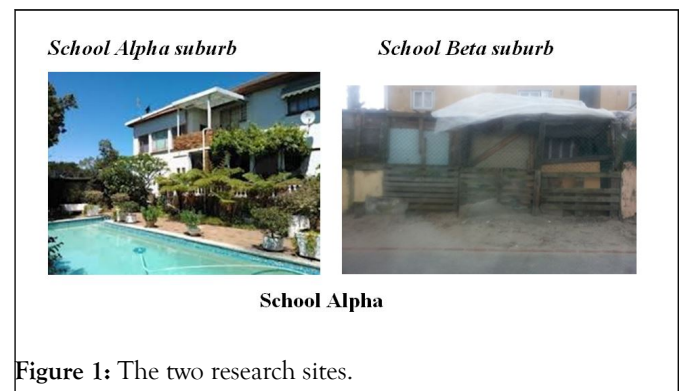


Figure 1: The two research sites.

The school opened in 1965 with English as a medium of instruction in a then predominantly Afrikaans-speaking white community. Therefore, School Alpha has pioneered English medium education in this area because it opposed the Afrikaans medium of instruction stipulated by the apartheid government at that time. Their English heritage was evident in the school name and the names of sports houses after influential British settlers. Also, the English origin was stark in the appreciation for liberal arts, theatre, literature, and classical music. During the initial phases of fieldwork, my body experienced the field as intimidating because the abundant economic and symbolic capitals such as well-resourced libraries, science laboratories, and social clubs reminded me of what I was denied during apartheid. I felt resentment which was amplified when the principal announced that "A female exchange student in Grade 12 from London has graced us with her presence. I provided her with the office next to Ms. White" and when an older white male teacher said, "Oh good, here is nobody." I was sitting alone in the staffroom, and at that moment, I realized that my body was assigned a label of being nobody [11,12].

I found my body entangled between past and present. The present brought home my almost forgotten colored body. This was the first space since democracy that reminded me of my racial identity and feelings of being the other. Nonetheless, being here and becoming a researcher often necessitated shifts

in my behavior to conform to the school's grandiose prevailing norms and values (Field notes, 2011).

School Beta

The school was inaugurated in 1981 for the colored population and has followed a culture and traditions associated with fighting against segregation, inequality, and poverty. During the apartheid era, the school was on the wrong side of the railway track based on race, and now it carries the same label due to poverty and a lack of economic capital. The surrounding neighborhood shows much evidence of unemployment, poverty, and various other socio-economic battles. For example, School Beta reminded me of how teachers had changed since I was a learner, and even though my racial identity reflected the dominant culture, I felt primarily like 'the other.' After I had taught a grade 12 English lesson, the class teacher remarked on my enthusiasm and the learners' participation "you are living in a Fanta-bubble," During an essay writing lesson, a grade 10 teacher made this sardonic remark, "don't use such big words; they will never understand you." I realized that the social justice frame and giving learners epistemic access, especially in disadvantaged contexts like School Beta, has changed [15].

My experience as a learner during apartheid was different; teachers' pedagogy was underpinned by social justice and getting us to dream beyond our borders which has become a frame that informs my teacher training discourse. However, I managed my performance by not showing my disappointment, frustration, and distress (Field notes, 2011).

Consequently, being a participant observer and becoming a researcher in the field necessitated learning about the importance of managing identities aligned to the field's disciplinary values, norms, and expectations. Furthermore, research as clinical, recipe, or steps to follow in the literature did not prepare me as a novice researcher. Therefore, my observations necessitated a gaze outward to the field and inward to the self. Reflexivity offered a space to illustrate the sense-making of my impression management during various stages of fieldwork, which resulted in my view of research as a staged performance [19-21].

In my mind's eye, I see my participants and the schools and write, 'Once upon a time there was...!' I realize that my research will be entangled with the stories that I hear and observe at schools [23]. Herein is my complication, how do I write a recipe-like dissertation with its conventions and ways of doing when my body is experiencing the two fields in different ways, and how can I capture how the empirical field impacts my scholarly body? (Field notes, 2012).

The two schools in my study were racially classified under South Africa's apartheid system. School Alpha served the white South African community, while Beta catered for the colored population. Therefore, these schools have different access to resources, and as an academic literacy lecturer who worked with first-year students from these schools, I became interested in gaining insights into how these different school contexts impact the construction of writer identities at the end of secondary schooling. Drawing on the dramaturgical lens that views human

interaction as a "performance, shaped by environment and audience," resulted in reflexivity where I was at once an actor and spectator of actions in the field [25]. Therefore, through reflexivity, while I was doing and becoming a researcher, I was reminded of identities forgotten. For instance, as the primary instrument, I had first-hand experience about my body's reactions to my encounters in the field; thus, being objective and a researcher that needs to stay 'outside of the field' was impossible. I reflected on how I was intimately entangled with my study and how being the 'other' in the field impacted how I acted and informed my findings [30,37]. Consequently, reflexivity and *dramaturgy* resulted in the conceptualization of research as a story. I reflected on my research conceptualization, such as my research question, my search for frames, a method, locations, characters, and how I consulted experienced storytellers (theories) to mediate my story; to make it meaningful and significant.

Personal reflexivity

I found that becoming a participant observer was not a given: the process was exhausting and fraught with identity construction, negotiation, and complications. My experience and qualifications did not hold much value in these contexts, and my offers of assistance were initially ignored. During this time, [25] notion of *dramaturgy* became a sense-making lens to reflect on my body when I was front stage and backstage. Goffman put forward that human beings' actions in the social world can be explained as performances on the stage of everyday life. The *dramaturgy* lens has been used to describe social actions in various settings such as teaching, gender and research ethics associated with the presentation of the digital self. Being in the field (front stage) switched my gaze onto the appropriacy of my performance based on my participants' reactions. For example, during fieldwork, I have enacted scripts that my participants would view as 'good' who, in turn, played their parts as expert "knowers" of the field.

First, school Alpha's white privilege and current position as one of the best schools in the province resulted in my researcher identity being ignored. In contrast, school Beta's position resulted in mistrust associated with research ability to transform their contextual realities. Secondly, teachers largely ignored my professional identity as a qualified teacher and a university teacher trainer at both schools. For example, at both schools, I was informed that they had marking standards and that I could only assist while sitting with one of the teachers from the English Department. Therefore, fieldwork in two spaces with diverse histories, cultures, norms, and practices called for constant identity and impression management [25,22]. My management of identities during fieldwork was situated and audience-dependent.

Flashback 1: The principal's high back vintage chair

During assemblies at Alpha, staff were seated on the stage in the fine hall while learners sat in orderly rows below. As I sat on the stage, the display and enactment of traditions associated with royalty and academia struck me.

As we enter the hall, I am surprised by the hush and orderly manner of the learners. I walk to the stage to take a seat with the rest of the staff. To my left is a high-back vintage baroque chair. It is placed at such an angle that whoever sits in it will be able to see the audience from every vantage point. Then, I hear a soft, slow melody coming from the piano to my right. Learners and teachers rise with smiling eyes wide open, arched eyebrows, and mouths curving up. I feel a quiet sense of expectation and wonder what is about to happen. Suddenly, the tempo changes; in walks the principal, his deputies, and executive management staff, all wearing academic attire. The principal frowns and stares straight ahead with lips pressed together, and the rest of the procession have similar serious, thoughtful expressions [34]. Learners turn to watch the parade. I am struck with wonder when I see most learners' smiley faces and facial expressions of delight and honor. The principal walks to the vintage chair, sits, nod his head, and with this gesture, learners and teachers sit down (Field notes, 2012).

The hall and other props were markers of the school's privileged history; it was still one of the top schools in the Western Cape. For instance, their academic results are excellent; their sports teams participate in the top leagues, and their traditions and customs have value (especially for colored and black parents). While sitting on the stage, being an actor and spectator, learners and teachers roles raise the stakes for success. Their smiling eyes, wide open, illustrated the privilege of being selected to teach or learn here because they view the school as producing "special, separate, sacred beings (where they) recognize the boundary separating them from the commonplace" [13]. Therefore, all the actors (me included) knew the importance of continuing the appropriate acts to ensure that the schools' privileged history, culture, and identity function as a form of symbolic capital. However, at Beta, my body experienced dissonance and despair when I observed the ill-discipline that seemed to go unnoticed in the routine and ritualized practices of the school where noisy classes, learners' absence, and defiance against authority were taken for granted [36].

Flashback 2: This should never have happened

As I enter the hall, I am cold when I see these young kids' grief. I see the sad, sudden death of a fellow learner etched on their vulnerable childlike, tear-streaked faces. Gone are the smirks, the sneers, the glib tongues are silent. Next to me, behind me, and in front of me are the enveloping, melancholic despondency, a cloak that wraps me so chilly and cold. How did they get here? I wonder how this school became a space of violence, fists, and knives that steadfastly gather lifeless young lives as if they do not matter. Then the minister of education walks to the podium. His face is filled with grief, a white-ashen, pale invisible ghost hauntingly, reassuringly his voice breaks. His cries echo; this should never have happened (Field notes, 2012).

Being an actor and spectator here at Beta necessitated that I had to hide my body's intense agony, that this school has become a battleground, and that the learners have odds stacked against them from the start. I wondered how or if my research would even make a difference. As a spectator, I observed a cold hall with no grandiose props, making apparent a lack of the various forms of economic, social, and cultural capital. I could see the

socio-economic conditions of the community contributing to school discipline, drug-related offenses, and high dropout rates. It was during a time of intense suffering and turmoil at this school that I found the significance in a question of a teacher from School Alpha, "How goes it over there?" (Verbatim) and the annoyance of a teacher at School Beta when she said, "you cannot compare us with them." I was humbled, sad, and despondent and understood why teachers at this school have mistrust in research to change conditions at their school [44].

METHODOLOGICAL REFLEXIVITY

I was drawn to ethnography because of the centrality it places on participants' lived experiences. A significant feature of ethnography is the researcher's immersion in the participants' world, opening up the various social, cultural, and historical layers across time and space. Therefore, ethnography provided a lens to shed light on how two schools with different linguistic, historical, and cultural profiles dealt with the rapid curriculum shifts. It contributed to interesting comparative data about the construction of writer identity post-democracy in South Africa.

In the field, researchers, participants, and space connect and become intimately interwoven. For this reason, doing fieldwork is one of the cornerstones of ethnographic research, and its complexities making fieldwork experiences an increasing issue of ethnographic discussions and reflection. Another central feature is that fieldwork can be "...a period of deep frustration, disappointment, and confusion, sometimes even bitter tears" [6]. For this reason, ethnographic lenses can be messy and fraught with moments of entanglement when researchers, participants, and field space become intimately interwoven. However, the messiness of fieldwork usually does not feature in thesis dissertations, or scholars do not foreground it in their writing. For this reason, reflexivity as a methodological tool offers a space to illustrate the contested nature of representation in qualitative, specifically in ethnographic research [24,18,41]. As a result, there is a growing interest in reflexivity in qualitative research to enhance the reliability and validity of representation [40]. Through reflexivity, I realized the importance of adding my thoughts to my field notes to reflect on my learning about the field and my body's reaction, thus shedding light on an often ignored element- the field's impact on the self.

Reflexivity became a lens to scrutinize the duality of my observer role because I was both 'outsider' (spectator) and 'insider' (actor) when I observed and participated in the field. As a result, I became more aware of the power relations between the researcher and the researched that held implications for my findings which could be distorted through my reordering and rewriting their lived reality. I became more aware that I select the dialogues from interviews, narrate what I observe, and capture all these in words. In my field notes, I wrote that, My words have power, I have power, and this scares me. Whose words will I capture in my thesis? Is it mine or theirs, or will it is a fusion of voices emerging? The research recipe did not caution that I will become entangled in this process (Field notes, 2011).

Reflexivity allowed me to see the links between my research method and Bourdieu's advice to bridge the divide between

positivist and interpretative research. His advice is that researchers objectify themselves to question how the theoretical and methodical approaches construct meaning in the field. His advice reminded me that I must be mindful of the dialectical relationship between the field, the participants, and the researcher. Accordingly, only "a reflexive method guards against an overly constructed interpretation, where the researchers' conclusions can be regarded as the uncovering of a God-given truth" [28]. I started reflecting on how *dramaturgy*, impression management, ethnographic lenses, and my epistemology impacted my field experiences and how the field impacted the body.

Bourdieu cautions me to be aware of my words and understand that they have the power to construct labels because I am at the centre of what would emerge as research findings. This knowledge created an awareness of how my personal history, life trajectory, and cultural background could impact my understanding of the data. I could represent (or misrepresent) my participants in unintended ways, which could shape my findings, and this needed to be opened up and made visible in the write-up of my thesis (Field notes, 2010).

Consequently, questioning my role as the researcher in a specific field has generated more questions about researchers' ability to represent their participants.

Is research the telling of small stories that help us to understand the more important stories? Research as neutral, objective, and presented as such is a common debate, and I wrestle with framing my research within this story metaphor. How will it be received by my supervisor, my examiners, peers, and other established scholars? (Field notes, 2010).

I tried to achieve trustworthiness and credibility through the descriptions of my field experiences rather than solely reporting on what I see in the field. I intended to provide a window into a dialectical line of inquiry and my worldview about engaging in and with the field. For this reason, in becoming a researcher, I reimagined the traditional chapters in completed dissertations as various acts and scenes to illustrate the impact of the research process on the self and the effect of the self on others.

THEORETICAL REFLEXIVITY

Producing a quality thesis requires the effective use of theory. It required that I needed to perform the role of someone with a particular discourse allegiance. Through reflexivity, I realized that the principal theories underpinning my study became my mask, my costume, and a suit of armor. Therefore, we indulge in impression management because we craft an image of ourselves through our expressions to gain credibility or a sense of belonging in the scholarly community [25].

Who am I as I write this chapter? As the story's narrator, I bring an identity and history that affect my words and labels. I wonder if my theoretical frames are also acts of whom I want to sound like or how I want to be perceived by my examiners. When I read Foucault, he cautions me that fiction can function as truth. Bourdieu warns that I must beware of words that I choose and the labels that I assign as themes (Field notes, 2011).

Again, when I reflected on my theoretical stance/s, multiple identities intersected, often causing friction. I started seeing myself developing from a novice layperson towards a researcher carving out a professional and theoretical allegiance. This friction generated questions beyond traditional concerns about why and how we choose the theories we draw on, towards whose identity I was portraying – mine, or Bourdieu's – and how to develop an original, authoritative voice.

I wonder now what makes us decide on a theory. Why are we drawn to specific thinkers? Is it their ways of telling, seeing, or believing? I cannot entirely remember how I 'stumbled' upon Bourdieu or why I first began to read him. However, I am drawn to his thinking about the social world as an engagement of individuals in practical situations. I like that he cautions me that the research encounter needs to be objectified or interrogated, that it needs to be opened up to understand the implications of power, identity, and agency (Field notes, 2011).

When I included reflexivity during each phase of the research process, I realized that weaving the literature into my plot became another enactment of identity as I, the researcher, created an impression of self, a discursive identity through my theoretical frames and my authorial stance. I realized that the literature and methodology revealed elements of my educational trajectory and view of the social world in due course. However, moments of complication arose as I tried to merge Bourdieu's sociology of education with Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). I decided to invite my theorist for dinner and dancing in my field notes.

Although I initially had two left feet and lacked theoretical rhythm, with practice, I attempted not to step on the toes of these expert dancers as I try to understand their moves while searching for my creative moves. I am learning to move like them, with them, but also making a conscious effort to be unlike them to carve my own story, which might be similar yet uniquely different. I see weaving the literature and research as my dance and work of art (Field notes, 2010).

The field necessitates the use of theoretical frames to bring credibility to a researcher's voice. As such, weaving theory and literature into my research project was another theatre performance, an act of assuming, constructing, and negotiating multiple theoretical identities. As a result, my impression management throughout the research process was subjected to rigorous sociological analysis, where my project became a scientific creation and work of art. Interestingly, reflexivity deepened my understanding of my theoretical framing; when drawing on SFL's field, tenor, and mode to analyze first-year scripts (student assignments from the two research schools). I unexpectedly saw Bourdieu's field, habitus, and capital concepts. When I examined the student assignments drawing on SFL's field concept, I noticed students struggle for a position in the university space. Then, a tenor analysis revealed students' habitus, and the mode was indicative of their symbolic capital. Therefore, reflexivity deepened my understanding of Bourdieu and SFL. For example, I could see that they view language as ideological and powerful in constructing social reality. Consequently, reflexivity opened up my gaze to look for evidence of Bourdieu's notion of the field, habitus, and capital

visible in student texts as they wrestled with varying degrees of success to control and take up appropriate academic and discursive identities [47].

REIMAGINING FIELDWORK AS CRAFT

Ethnographic research is uniquely context-situated in terms of time, place, and participants; thus, when I was in the field, I realized a need to move from a superficial gaze of "the way things are" towards reflexivity about how my body reacted to the field experiences [14]. The recipe for conducting research did not prepare me for the impact the process would have on my being and thinking in unforeseen ways. At one school, two Grade 12 learners had lost their young lives in a nonsensical way. I could not write objectively because my body experienced life at these two schools differently as a participant-observer. At the other school, my "brown" body was a complication because my habitus, my "embodied history, internalized as second nature and so forgotten as history," was unexpectedly activated [9]. Reflexivity allowed for the bracketing of the body; it brought to the surface my habitus as durable and in flux. For example, my body functioned as "a system of lasting dispositions, integrating past experiences." [7]. However, it also "functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks" [7]. Thus, through reflexivity, I was able to observe the body and became acutely aware of the moments when I saw the need to 'fit' or 'refit' my bodily practices as impression management associated with 'practical mastery' or 'feel for the game' necessary in the field [8]. Through a reflexive lens, my research became a story where my thesis resembled a staged performance with characters, and enactments of events narrated through my perspective of what I saw, heard, or deemed significant. For this reason, I started searching for a narrative device to tell my story and consequently changed the structure of my thesis from the traditional chapters to acts and scenes. As a result, reflexivity resulted in critical questions and creativity about my methodological and theoretical experiences that can occur when "drawing (oneself) into research."

First, drawing on personal reflexivity, Bourdieu's habitus concept helped turn the gaze from my participants towards my body. For example, the habitus concept brought into being an understanding of my body, attitudes, thoughts, and everyday behavior as being shaped within "the family (which) forms the basis of the reception and assimilation of the classroom message, and the habitus acquired at school conditions the level of reception and degree of assimilation" [9]. I was previously unaware of my racial habitus, and I was unprepared that my researcher identity and university lecturer status having limited value in the field. For this reason, my field notes focused on the moments of complication associated with my personal, pedagogical and institutional habitus. I began to note the moments of entanglements when the researched questioned my pedagogical and assessment knowledge; thus, reflexivity contributed to new eyes or a new gaze inward towards the self about how the field encounter shaped my being and becoming a researcher. It was humbling when I realized that I entered the field being a researcher, In addition, the notion of front stage

and impression management brought to light my bodily practices when I wanted to be accepted as an insider. I was more aware of how my body participated in the research as I noted the moment-to-moment bodily improvisations necessary for acceptance in the field. For example, I needed the participants for my research project, and even though I did not lie to them, my reflective notes showed the enormous emotional strain to manage an impression of being non-judgmental, supportive, and seeking only to understand their contexts. Therefore, I was not neutral, and my interest in writer identity was based on my history with writing and finding a voice in academic writing. Through reflexivity, I hoped to open up how my habitus of previously being a learner, teacher, and now academic writing lecturer could shape what I saw, heard, and read and its potential for shaping my research findings. As a result, I wanted my examiners to see how reflexivity brought my body into the field, how it provided rigor and enhanced my sense-making, and how it led to creativity in my research thinking.

Secondly, through methodological reflexivity, I responded to Bourdieu's call for more profound reflexivity in research. For instance, in *Reflexive Sociology*, he argues that, "People whose profession it is to objectivize the social world prove so rarely able to objectivize themselves and fail so often to realize that what their scientific discourse talks about is not the object but their relation to it" [50].

Therefore, I made visible my role during fieldwork because very often in completed theses or the finished product, "the opus operatum conceals the modus operandi" [10]. My reflective notes revealed elements of a creative research method – I started to see research as a theatre production – which as a methodological lens offered a rich source of self-knowledge when my body or habitus was out of synch with the field. In addition, I became more aware that I had entered the field with a methodological and theoretical script and reflexivity offered a new gaze to disrupt habitual academic practices. I was more mindful of the messiness of doing fieldwork. A conventional write-up would delete my field experiences and make invisible the 'artistry and craft' embedded in qualitative research [35].

Finally, while observing teachers in context with a radically new curriculum and policy fluctuations since democracy, my theoretical underpinning also offered a lens to shed light on my coping mechanisms during "unforeseen and ever-changing situations" in the field [7]. It enhanced my awareness when I was stuck with understanding his theoretical tools, I began noting the roles I performed to reproduce and modify my habitus and embodied practices. Therefore, theoretical reflexivity that drew on Bourdieu's concept shed light on my struggle for positioning in the field. For instance, I subjected my body or habitus to interrogation when I confronted the field norms and values at both schools where the self and the researcher were inextricably entangled. I observed that impression management was my body's response to act out what counts as good and legitimate practice. However, my limited symbolic capital resulted in me becoming "nobody and living in a Fanta-bubble." Consequently, reflexivity requires that researchers explore how they are intimately entangled with their study: how they have acted upon it and informed the findings or knowledge contributed

[37,6,18,30]. I critically questioned why and how I decided to use Bourdieu's theoretical tools and shaped my 'eyes' throughout the research process through reflexivity. Consequently, I reimagined the conventional binary between theories versus practice and interrogated the researcher/participants dimension deeper. More broadly, my reflexive approach attempted to challenge traditional methods that predominantly rely on researchers' interpretations of their participants' world by offering my reflexive account as a move from research as a formulaic recipe to ethnography as a research craft [51].

However, some scholars argue that research reflexivity is exaggerated, "research wallowing," and, at worst, weakens the conditions necessary for objective research [33,39]. Patai argued that researchers "who stay up nights worrying about representation" are engaging in methodological self-absorption and wasting "too much time wading in the morass of our own positionings." However, in sharing my field experiences, I argue that more conversations about researcher identity and how it can shape our gazes and research results, needs rigorous interrogation. More significantly, I showed how personal, methodological and theoretical reflexivity were not merely "research wallowing", but offered a third space for me to move from research as a formulaic recipe or checklist towards viewing our research projects as a craft [2].

CONCLUSION

For novice researchers like myself, many books and other information are available to plan and conduct research. However, it did not caution me about how the research process could impact my emotions or result in bodily dissonance when I would be "mucking around in the lives of others (or) 'how the vulnerable stories are told'. Instead of dealing with issues of power, which I have prepared before entering the field, I faced the loss of power and identity. My research participants had power because of their positioning in the field. Thus my research body has been irrevocably sensitized about how the field can shift perceptions of self and how others view my body. For this reason, I have become acutely aware of listening to and observing my body in the field. Such awareness is essential because when we tell our research stories, it should be more than a superficial following of a research tradition without reflecting on how research projects impact our participants and more so on the self. The most devastating realization was that my research findings were but a mere drop in the ocean that would not contribute much towards the changing contextual conditions for the learners at School Beta.

Nonetheless, reflexivity deepened my engagement and reflection with questions such as, 'How has the research question defined and limited my research findings? How did the study's design and analysis method lend themselves to particular findings? How could the research question have been investigated differently? Therefore, in the field, my researcher body was shaped to reflect upon my habitus and assumptions (about the world, about knowledge) that could be implicated in the labels I assign. This journey was outward and inwards as I am now aware of the dangers when novice researchers like me are 'taught' theory about the research process but not explicitly taught about

how our own social identities and histories could influence and shape our gazes. In this paper, I have argued that reflexivity offered an alternative to the research recipe during field encounters. My field experiences deepened my sense-making, and I have realized that our research contribution should "come from multiple interactions (with) the field rather than with decontextualized data" [2]. Finally, reflexivity led to deeper interrogation of my ontology and epistemology that enabled the generation of new questions about the self and existing ideas that enriched my understanding of being a researcher in the field.

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