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Abstract: In this paper I reflect autoethnographically on my experiences of writing as part of a professional doctorate. I draw on the research journals that I kept during a particularly challenging time in the dissertation process and in particular on the method of journal writing that I used to help me through this time. This storied account offers an insight into the experience of being trína chéile, or all over the place, in the border country of adult learning. The discovery of negative capability and metaphoric sensibility emerge as significant supports on the journey. Encountering the work of Cixous during the dissertation and the work of Milner after its completion were key aspects of the thinking process. In this way writing is seen as a method of self-support in the border country of dissertation writing, one that supports emergent learning and that acts as an epistemological resource in using writing processes that are congruent with the discipline of adult education. [ABSTRACT FROM AUTHOR]

Trína chéile: Reflections on journaling in the border country of doctoral research

In this paper I reflect autoethnographically on my experiences of writing as part of a professional doctorate. I draw on the research journals that I kept during a particularly challenging time in the

dissertation process and in particular on the method of journal writing that I used to help me through this time. This storied account offers an insight into the experience of being trína chéile, or all over the place, in the border country of adult learning. The discovery of negative capability and metaphoric sensibility emerge as significant supports on the journey. Encountering the work of Cixous during the dissertation and the work of Milner after its completion were key aspects of the thinking process. In this way writing is seen as a method of self-support in the border country of dissertation writing, one that supports emergent learning and that acts as an epistemological resource in using writing processes that are congruent with the discipline of adult education.

Introduction

Thus write I, while I doubt to write, and wreak My harm in ink's poor loss (Philip Sidney, sonnet xxxiv)

Take your pen and a fresh page in your journal. Allow yourself to begin writing; putting pen to paper without knowing what it is you want to write. Let your writing hand go, just let it go, paying no attention to sense-making, grammar, form, content. If you are blank, then write about how that feels. If you become aware of bodily sensations or feelings, then write them. If you think this is a ridiculous exercise, then write about that. The only rule is that you keep writing until our allocated time is up.

This article tells the story of how this simple writing exercise, which I have used daily in my own reflective practice (Bolton, 2010) and in my work to empower adult learners to write and think (Elbow, 1981), supported me through a particularly challenging time in my doctoral dissertation. I tell an autoethnographic story of my writing process during this time, drawing on my research journals and some research conversations and through these articulate my own learning and its implications for adult learners and adult educators. In doing so I draw on the notion that writing is not just a method of communicating inquiry, but is in itself a method of inquiry (Richardson, 1997; Neilsen et al., 2001; Pelias, 2004, 2011; Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005; Speedy, 2005, 2008). More specifically, autoethnography is a genre of writing as inquiry that uses the subjective experience of the inquirer as a strategy to evoke and excavate the cultural (Chang, 2008; Muncey, 2010; Ellis et al., 2011; Pelias, 2011; Spry, 2011). Autoethnographers 'propose to understand a self or some aspect of a life as it intersects with a cultural context, connect to other participants as co-researchers, and invite readers to enter the author's world and to use what they learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives' (Ellis et al., 2011, para 4.1).

For my own part I have been teaching in a setting where notions of transformative learning are constant. Hoult (2012a, b) sees that traditional methods of academic research and writing are incongruent with processes of change in transformative adult learning. These processes include the recognition of the emotional dimension of teaching and learning (Salzberger-Wittenberg et al., 1983) often in the form of disorientation (Mezirow, 1990, 1996, 2006), confusion (Claxton, 1999) and disjuncture (Jarvis, 2006). However, Green's (2012) view of adult learning as a passage across a liminal zone of loss and anxiety seems much closer to the lived experience of adult learners I work with, and now to my own lived experience during doctoral studies. Hunt and West (2006) identify adult education as opening into a border country between education and therapy. It is exactly this territory that I wish to evoke and excavate in this autoethnographic story.

The dissertation

I have used the free writing (Elbow, 1981) method for many years. It is variously called six-minute writing (Bolton, 2010), morning pages (Cameron, 1995), sinking to the bottom of the now (Cixous, 1997), and writing the bare bones (Goldberg, 2005); but all commentators see it as an important part of allowing writers to connect with passion and emotion, to bypass inner critics, to release creativity and flow. For

my part I stumbled upon this writing method, much like Milner (2011) did, as a result of a vague impulse. Strengthened by the work of Elbow and Bolton, it has become a key resource for me in working with adult learners who are engaged in learning from their lives by reflecting on their own personal and professional experiences (Dominice, 2000). It is also a constant for me in my own reflective practice and, in particular, a resource in helping me in what I have come to think of as the border country of adult learning - that very place of doubt and confusion that can often accompany the challenges of adult education.

Writing as an approach to reflective practice and learning has been a part of my life for the past three decades. So when I was choosing a subject for my doctoral thesis I decided to try to make sense of these practices, to see what they were all about, and what use they might be to myself and to other adult educators and learners. I situated my research as a self-study (Samaras, 2011) using autoethnographic writing as inquiry into my own practice (Humphreys, 2005; Warren, 2011). The research question was formulated as: In what way is writing a reflexive resource for adult educators in the border country of adult education?

I set about addressing this question by means of an autoethnographic inquiry, a consideration of vignettes drawn from my writing practices and a reflexive consideration of their place in the context of my pedagogic life. However, as I went about my inquiry I got caught up in an almost unbearable circularity. I was writing and journaling about my reflections on writing and journaling. I was trying to theorise a practice by using that practice. Like the poet Philip Sidney, I wrote myself into doubt and confusion, wreaking 'my harm in ink's poor loss' (Bullett, 1947, p. 185).

But I also had another experience - the sense of being driven relentlessly to discover more and more about that doubt and confusion, the struggles with writing, with scholarship, with trying to make sense of the dislocated place I found myself in. Bollas wrote, 'I often find that although I am working on an idea without knowing exactly what it is that I think, I am engaged in thinking an idea struggling to have me think it' (1987, p. 10).

What emerged from the process that was of most value to me was the challenge I met in the writing process itself - the visit I took to the 'border country' - a place of risk and confusion that was visible, often painfully so, in my research journals. Colyar talks of how 'most writing, when we encounter it, is revised, polished, not only product, but complete' but that in reality 'writing puts on its trousers one leg at a time, but we rarely see it in a state of undress' (2009, p. 424). In this autoethnography I will draw on extracts from my research journals where I was, as Cixous puts it, writing 'naked life' (1997, p. 3). I will delve into key aspects of the experience of writing and thinking, in order to undress the writing and thinking process, discerning what may be of relevance there for us as adult educators working with learners in the border country.

Trína chéile: Falling apart

The thing that is most evident from my research journals is that I found the whole process extraordinarily challenging. The journals talk constantly of being stuck, exhausted, feeling useless, confused - a time of challenge that dissertation writers will be likely to experience at some point in their studies. The thesis seemed like a massive personal risk. Working as I do in a university department of adult education, could I keep doing what I do if I fail - either to produce a thesis or to produce one that could pass? I felt under scrutiny from all around - family, friends, colleagues, students, myself. I felt a threat to the very epistemology I had been working out of for most of my professional life, wherein the source of true knowledge emerged from critical reflection on our own experience and stories.

I felt all over the place, in bits: trína chéile1 as we call it in Irish: not knowing how to be at once a competent adult educator in a university setting, course coordinator, research supervisor, and be also a

doer of a thesis, a supervisee, an adult learner in need of help.

My research journals talk of lost sleep, nightmares in which I got all tied up in twisted sheets. They talk of the tension in my body, heart racing too fast for comfort, back pain, pains in the neck in more ways than one. For example, on Wednesday 18 August 2010 I wrote:

I am in my office and the rain is starting up outside. I move room. Away from the room, the clutter, the stacks of half-read books. I hear voices on the stairs and want to go out to talk to them. Anything but sit here and write, sit here and not write. I become utterly aware of the tension I carry about with me. That my body holds. It is utterly powerful. A rigour, a rictus. The impulse to run away, to distract, is intense. And yet it is not just about writing. The tension must be there all the time too in my teaching self. It is here in me all of the time. I cannot keep distracting myself from this very tension.

I need to begin to inhabit it. To feel. My body.

Borbarygmy starts up. Busy tummy, busy self. The tight, invisible collar around my neck begins its clench. I sit and allow myself to settle. My thoughts to race. I am trying not to try. The collar squeezes my breath shallow. I read. Take notes. Try to reach into that clear place of knowing. I cannot seem to be the self that knows things clearly. No wonder my office is a mess, my thesis undone, my earnest attempts to think clearly caught in spidery blue and red ink.

Just now my mind speeds up. I begin to connect things. I remember that night in 1983. Sitting trying desperately to marshal ideas for my BA thesis. I couldn't get it to work. A night of reading. Transcribing quotes. Performing scholar badly. Trying to sound clever. Tried again. Failed again.

I rolled some cigarettes. The box I put them in glowed orange in the sodium light. I walked home, my mind a riot of other people's ideas.

I realise now, right here and now, that I have often wondered was getting knocked down that night a punishment for being preoccupied by an irrelevant thesis. For not being able to write it. Would I have heard the car coming from behind had I not been a head-clogged, busy-minded, thesis-writing self?

Such was the impact of thesis writing that it recalled the impact 22 years previously of a painful accident, a revisiting of an earlier trauma that came alive again in my present distress. Hunt and West (2006) say that the border country of adult learning is a territory where the discourses of learning and of therapy converge, where ghosts from the past are reawakened, where identities are questioned and risked, where anxiety is a constant threat. This border country often involves the 'cracking up' of an old self (Bollas, 1995) as a necessary step in the creative birth of the new, expanded awareness of self and selfhood. Green (2012) describes it as a liminal zone of depression, anxiety, grief and loss on the road to transformation.

Though my own daily practice of mindfulness and a consideration of its place in adult learning (Hyland, 2011) encouraged me to stay present to my experiences of being trína chéile, there were few resources to help me to see how this stance could be useful in the knowledge-making process. Encountering the work of Cixous (1993, 1997), however, offered me just that - a vision of writing as a method of embodied and emotional knowing. Cixous calls this experience 'entredeux'; a moment of eviction from familiar and solid selfhood (1997, p. 9). For Cixous, writing is important at such moments of uncertainty and vulnerability and strangeness. It is an 'inexplicable grace' (1997, p. 38) in such times, a method of staying close to the feelings in this place as an alternative to ignoring or not recognising their worth and value. 'This is my material', Cixous says. 'Where do I find it? In me and around me. What sets me writing is that lava, that blood, those tears; they are in all of us' (1997, p. 12). So, with Cixous, I used my journal

to 'sink to the bottom of the now' (1997, p. 41), to write into my feelings not about them, to mine them for emergent meaning making.

Negative capability

Though I took permission from Cixous to sink to the bottom of the now and to use journal writing to find its meaning, there is, it seems to me, a cultural bias against engaging this experience of anxiety fully. We prefer capability and knowing to confusion and unknowing. To position adult learners as vulnerable and needing support can be viewed as somehow constructing them as diminished (Ecclestone, 2004; Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009); the consequent rise of a therapeutic ethos in adult education critiqued for seeing issues of self-esteem and vulnerability as located in individual psyches rather than in wider social and political forces. On the contrary, as Hunt (2013) says, writing is a way to exercise agency: by writing into my experiences of the disorientation and confusion of learning, I was able to gain a purchase and a foothold in the quagmire.2

Pelias talks of the autoethnographer as being 'willing to let his (sic) vulnerable self be used as a strategy for intervention' (2011, p. 12). Why is it I would expose this vulnerable self and what am I trying to intervene in? As a reflexive part of my inquiry I wrote up my journals in the form of an evocative autoethnography, that is, a personal narrative in which the emotional aspects of my experience over this challenging period (May to November 2010) were made visible and open to the consideration of others. I agree with Spry (2011) that all autoethnographies are performative in that they reflexively perform, in my case in the medium of language, a process of meaning made from experience. But also with Spry I thought that the autoethnography was incomplete without an audience: 'it is in the coperformativity of meaning with others that I find myself as a performative autoethnographer' (2011, p. 39).

And so I undertook a series of performative readings of the autoethnography, followed by research conversations as responses to the text, which I then considered as data for my study. These conversations I positioned as interactive interviews, that is:

conversation[s] in which the researcher and the research participants engage in joint sense making and emergent understanding by mutual disclosure, sharing personal feelings and social experiences with each other. (Davis and Ellis, 2008, p. 293)

Davis and Ellis talk of the limitations of the single-voiced autoethnographic text and of a shift towards multivocality (2008, p. 287). Interactive interviewing is a process by which we 'closely examine interactive events and at the same time deal with the issue of reflexivity, subjectivity, emotional expression, modes of description and narrativity' (David and Ellis, 2008, p. 289).

The narrative made challenging reading, but I still thought that to share it with readers would be a useful aspect of the inquiry. I felt that the account raised issues about writing and thinking processes that could be relevant to people engaged in writing and thinking reflexively both about writing and about adult learning. I felt that generating the possibilities of meaningful perspectives and useful knowledge would be maximised by engaging in face-to-face readings and organised this where possible, followed by tape-recorded interviews. Where it was not feasible to do this I engaged in one-to-one conversations and e-mail correspondence.

During one of the research conversations that followed, one interviewee, Frances,3 said:

'Well, to be honest, I hope you don't mind me saying this but at times I was sitting there thinking "why the fuck is he banging on about this, we all go through it as writers - just shut up and get on with it!" I'm sorry now, but you did ask.'

Later, in a more considered place, Frances e mailed me the following:

I've been thinking a bit more about this and have realised that for me the 'secret' of getting through the awful turmoil-y times when one wonders if anything will ever come of the writing project is this: to try to sit with the feelings, rather than in them. In other words, if I can observe them and give them plenty of attention and acceptance, that is helpful. But if I let myself drown in them, that leads to the downward spiral we spoke of. The turmoil for me often has some kind of physical symptom, as you too mentioned that b-word in your stomach, as a sort of messenger. So I attend to the physical 'symptom', of the me-in-turmoil, but at the same time try to hang onto the knowledge that it is not all of me, just a part. It needs attention, but I don't want to go into it, rather, I want to observe it with kindness.

I fought internally with this advice to skirt around the difficulty, but, bolstered by Cixous's passion for writing into the flesh and blood of experience, I chose to immerse myself in it. I am glad I persisted, not least for the rediscovery of negative capability, a concept I had previously encountered as an English literature student, that re-emerged during the inquiry and that supported me to negotiate my way through my impasse. Another quotation from my diary:

I re-read what I have written. Despondent, I give in and take out my memory stick. I look at what I wrote months ago sitting at my desk in the middle of a busy life I sit and sit. I cut and paste. I cut again. The anxiety grows. I become undone, I unravel. I feel despair, a moment of true desperation. In this place I wonder am I able for this, will it end in failure, will I have to revert to giving up my own voice and relying, as I so often have, on the voices of authoritative others.

I know enough to sit with it, not to try to trouble it too much, not to try and write my way out of it, though I do that too. I need to sit and look at the lake and let the writing emerge. Let my writing self emerge. Perform negative capability.

Keats's notion of negative capability describes the facility 'of being in un-certainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason' (quoted in Romanyshyn, 2007, p. 149). Romanyshyn thinks of it as the 'capacity to remain open to experience without judging whether it is true or false', it is 'the practice of attending to experience as experienced without judgement about its truth or validity or even meaning' (2007, p. 149).

Romanyshyn says that 'when the researcher becomes too identified with what he or she thinks the work is about' is the point at which 'an impasse often occurs, followed by an effort to wilfully forge ahead' (2007, p. 323). But the moments when the researcher has lost ego control of the project are the very moments when we discover our vulnerability as researchers. For Romanyshyn it is crucial to embrace this vulnerability rather than avoid or observe. At this point the work is in control and its meaning will emerge through the work of the researcher: the researcher is wounded, but the meaning and significance of the inquiry is allowed to emerge from those very wounds. Again my journals say:

I have come here to this lake to allow myself to dream and write. To sit and watch the lake and allow writing to emerge. Only now do I realise that entredeux translates as literally between two. Cixous' figure of entredeux (1997) implies a liminal, between space. I exist in such a space as I write - between an academic discourse of argument and concept and an imaginal space of feeling and sensing, between the academic discourse of abstract knowledge and a practitioner discourse of embodied knowledge. Perhaps the wider purpose of this research, this dissertation, is to find a way to stay in this liminal space and find a way to integrate these zones of activity in myself.

Negative capability refers, then, to the capacity to hold and contain feelings of distress and disturbance from not knowing and allowing knowing to emerge from that place. It requires the capacity to sit with not

knowing and trust the process of coming to know.

Metaphoric sensibility

This meaning-making process, Somerville says, is 'a complex pattern that I want to play with, which emerges as a tickle in my brain and gathers other images as it goes' (2007, p. 231). In processes of emergence 'the only thing I can do is play, and even playing sometimes seems too serious' (2007, p. 231). Romanyshyn (2012) talks of metaphoric sensibility, paying playful but close attention to images, as a key to complex relational processes in teaching and learning (Wang, 2012).

And so I began to take time with the many images that my research had produced: a smashed piano, a lake, writing in the dark. The most consistent and persistent image was of Lazy Ozzie, a figure taken from book I read to my children,4 one that came to hold huge significance for me as I struggled with the writing process.

Ozzie is an owl who has not yet learned how to fly and his Mom decides it is time for him to try. 'Ozzie didn't fancy flying one little bit. It seemed much too much hard work, all that wing-flapping. He just wanted to sit around all day. "I'm practising being wise", he said' (Coleman and Williamson, 2004, p. 2). His mother left him on a perch telling him if he is wise he'll be on the ground when she comes back. I liked Ozzie and identified strongly with him - all that sitting around being wise seemed much more fun than the hard work of learning. He comes up with a bright idea of getting the high horse to come over, hopping on his back and bringing him to the cowshed, then the cow took him to the pig and then, via a dog, sheep and a duck, he was on the ground. All very well, except that his Mom is hidden on every page and has been vigilantly tracking his avoidance of flying: ' but he didn't know she'd been watching all the time. "Now let me see you fly back up again", said Mother Owl' (2004, p. 24).

I vividly remember reading the book first, my identification with the little owl and my strong reaction to his mother and how she caught him out. Ozzie was me and I was Ozzie - avoiding the hard work of doctoral research but fervently longing for the wisdom (McCormack, 2009). But Ozzie was no simple metaphor. I discovered as I worked with the image that I was also his mother - patrolling myself as a researcher, requiring things of myself I was unable to deliver, working damn hard to try to get this lazy writer to do things properly. Ozzie helped me to learn the ways in which I had internalised the very epistemology I was trying to work against.

Lazy Ozzie evolved into a complex metaphor for various aspects of my own emotional experience as an adult learner. It represented the part of me that both longed for wisdom and learning, but resisted the various ways in which I was being taught. I was at once open to the response of the other - various audiences I had invited for responses, including those of my research supervisor - and I was deeply resistant to it. For Romanyshyn (2012) complex subjectivity refers to the ways in which relationships created in learning settings recall earlier relationships and therefore they can become an occasion of regression (see also Wang, 2012). The gaze of the other may have been intended as helpful and responsive but was experienced as unsupportive or detrimental to the learning process. I constructed my supervisor at the time as a figure of critical pedagogic power. He was Ozzie's Mom - setting up a learning situation for the good of the little Owl, but experienced as critical and unhelpful.

During this particularly challenging time, as I sought to end one supervisory relationship and begin another, this metaphor offered me a constant touchstone in very murky waters. Sitting with the metaphor and trying to allow it to speak to my own process I came to see that I have internalised powerful critical voices and that I wield that power negatively, requiring of myself harder and harder work which the inner critic judged more and more harshly.

From cart-horse to Pegasus

The good news is that I finished the thesis, engaging well in a robust and collegial viva. But, as Smith (2012) says, the post viva period can also be challenging, involving loss of identity and focus side by side with a sense of achievement. During this time a comment made by one of the examiners at the end of my thesis defence re-emerged and began to trouble me. We were shuffling papers and they were congratulating me when, in the manner of a light hearted aside at the end of a demanding defence, one said something like, 'You've done a good piece of work, but I'm with Frances on all that introspection - too much of that kind of thinking may not always be good for us'. I understood from my somewhat delayed emotional reaction to this throwaway remark the sense that somehow the inquiry was not over. It hurt because I was not sure enough of my own position - I had more thinking to do. It was then I took to reading the work of Marion Milner, particularly her book A Life of One's Own (2011), and found there a series of recognitions and validations that allowed the thoughts finally to fall into place.

Milner's book is an account of a seven-year experiment wherein she kept a daily journal to probe and sift through her own complex thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations, with a view to trying to learn more about how to be with her own discomforts and distresses and to finding out how to learn to live a more satisfying, purposeful life. In doing so, she made the choice to immerse herself in her difficulties, using writing as a way to guarantee her safety in the 'bog of introspection' (2011, p. 8). A Life of One's Own is a record of that immersion and the discoveries she made there, a number of which are of relevance here.

She discovered the value of writing as a resource for 'continual mindfulness' (2011, p. 147). Writing could function for her as a safe way to probe and sift through all aspects of her own self as she experienced her daily life. Key to this process is the 'internal gesture' (2011, p. 47) of allowing herself to be as she was at any time, not refusing any aspect of her own experiencing, using writing to express, to probe and to understand.

In doing so she discovered the power and virulence of her own inner taskmaster which was always requiring more and more effort, effort which was often ineffective in the end. The antidote was not to eradicate the inner taskmaster, but to experience it fully, allowing it to be expressed and explored as fully as possible. She discovered the way to overcome the taskmaster was not to fight with it, bully or control it, but to access a completely different way of being - one in which she switched the centre of her attention from the head to the body and to the emotions. Milner's work gives recognition to the body in reflexivity and learning, seeing, as she does, the traditional sense that the head is the seat of awareness as limited and limiting. Instead she talks of the importance of descending from the sealed-off tower of head-centred awareness into more vibrant contact with the body and the emotions, allowing us to participate in the world with full embodiment.

My ordinary way of looking at things seemed to be from my head, as if it were a tower in which I kept myself shut up, only looking out of the windows to watch what was going on. Now I seemed to be discovering that I could if I liked go down outside, go down and make myself part of what was happening, and only so could I experience things which could not be seen from the detached height of the tower (2011, p. 49).

She learned both to delve into her own experience and to stand aside and look at it deeply. Writing allowed her to 'come to the conclusion that my task was to become more and more aware, more and more understanding with an understanding that was not at all the same thing as intellectual comprehension' (2011, p. 164).

I came to the conclusion then that 'continual mindfulness' would certainly not mean that my little conscious self should be entirely responsible for marshalling and arranging all my thoughts, for it simply did not know enough. It must mean, not a sergeant-major-like drilling of thoughts, but a continual

readiness to look and readiness to accept whatever came. The worst sin, then, was to refuse to accept any thought, for it was only by scrutinising everything that I could wean my blind thinking away from its childish preoccupations and made it assist in real present-day problems. Certainly whenever I did so manage to win its services, I began to suspect that thought, which I had always before looked on as a cart-horse, to be driven, whipped and plodding between shafts, might be really a Pegasus, so suddenly did it alight beside me from places I had no knowledge of (2011, p. 147-8).

Reading Milner was a profound relief, where I came to see my own study in a new light. I had not become lost in the 'bog of introspection' (2011, p. 8) but had immersed myself in the very issues I was trying to theorise and clarify - the process of free writing - and discovered, with Milner, that this immersion is the very 'escape from the imprisoning island of my own self-consciousness' (2011, p. 164). Milner offered me retrospective purchase on my thesis - an understanding that had eluded me in the months after the viva. Writing was for me, as it was for Milner, exactly that process of immersion in the difficult element, a process of articulating in an embodied and emotionally and imaginally connected way, a deeper process of knowing and learning.

Conclusion

My thesis was an attempt to theorise my practice, to make that which was known and felt an object of scrutiny and thought, to articulate and theorise the felt experience of the power of writing as inquiry. Doing so, as I have shown, led to a deeply challenging circularity, which led me into the border country of adult learning. But writing as a method also led me back out again, in that I submitted and successfully defended my thesis. So, what have I learned? What thought has been working itself out in and through this inquiry?

For my part I have come to understand my writing practices more fully. The meanings that have emerged from this inquiry have left me with a conviction that these writing practices are not just a private, personal activity. Rather I see them as having disciplinary significance; my experiences of the border country are representative of the complexity of subjectivity that emerges in adult learning. Vulnerability is inevitable in learning, and writing, with its wonderful facility to hold vague, intuitive, embodied, and emotional knowing, has allowed me to process all of this inchoate material, forming it into metaphors, images, textures that distance me enough from the experience to be able to think about it. Writing has been a potent, vibrant and dynamic resource for me in that place of unknowing, allowing me to sit with unknowing, sifting its textures and nuances to see what images, thoughts, feelings emerge to be inquired into and with.

For this is what I have most deeply come to see - that writing is not just a way to see into the border country, nor is it just a survival kit in that country, though it is both of these. Rather it is the border country itself - the very thing - a way both to get lost, and paradoxically to be kept safe, in the confusion. From this visit to the border country and the safety net of my research journals I can suggest the following:

* Writing is a method of self-care for both educators and learners in the border . territory of adult learning. The border territory is a potentially disturbing and disorienting place. Writing offers a method of processing and containing the rawness of experience helping to negotiate this often messy territory. It offers learners and educators alike a resource in processing and managing complex subjectivity (Romanyshyn, 2012). It offers a way in which we can engage with our emotional and embodied ways of knowing and hold and contain them safely without acting out of them in destructive ways, allowing nuanced knowing to emerge from felt and intuited processes.

* Interrogating identity in adult learning can lead us into an experience of fragmentation. Writing can offer us an ongoing reflexive resource in grounding us in our own continuing experience of our subjectivity,

even as we are continually, and necessarily, evicted from all the familiar identities that we have depended on for our sense of self. In this way we salvage the self in teaching and learning (Hunt and West, 2009).

* In this view of adult learning, reflexivity involves processes of unknowing for . both educator and learner. Writing acts as a resource for practising negative capability, the process of holding and containing the uncomfortable, often messy, experience of waiting for insight and meaning to emerge (Somerville, 2007, 2008). Writing is a way of allowing meaning to emerge. In this way it allows embodied, emotional and intuitive knowledge. Imaginative and aesthetic ways of knowing are of huge value when we concern ourselves with delicate processes of emergence. Writing is a way to facilitate that emergence, a way to cope with the tensions and anxieties of unknowing.

* Writing offers a form of resistance to dominant discourses of learning in which . emotional life is relegated or completely muted (Hoult, 2012a). Writing offers adult educators and learners a way to honour the experience of vulnerability and emotionality in transformative adult learning. It offers a method of recognising, inquiring into and representing, to self and other, the intense feelings attaching to moments, and indeed protracted times, of insight. Writing allows us to inquire further into those epiphany moments where strangeness and unfamiliarity prompt troubling questions, a way to unhook from restricted functional discourses of everyday communication. Language is a rich resource by which we constitute the world and evocative and imaginative writing offers a rich resource of image, symbol, and metaphor by means of which complex subjectivity can be expressed and considered.

* Above all, writing is itself a learning process. Writing creates transitional space . (Hunt, 2013). It allows us to be fragmented, to be adrift in the relational world but offers us ways of playfully, tenderly and empathically expressing new aspects of selfhood that emerge from our encounters and the meaning we make of them.

And so, for now, I arrive at a resting place on this journey of transformation. I am truly grateful for the refuge, and yet, despite myself, I miss the tussle of writing, the familiar identity of dissertation writer. This resting place is itself a threshold, a border country that I will write myself into and out of over and over again; a country I invite you to visit too.

Notes
1. A Gaelic phrase denoting the experience of being 'all over the place'. It is a curious phrase that is easily understood by anyone with a smattering of the language, but is difficult to translate literally. 'Chéile' is usually used to denote togetherness - 'a chéile' means together, 'luí le chéile' means to lie together. If we want to say someone has cracked up we would say 'thit sé as a chéile' (literally he fell out of his togetherness). If we want to say that we are confused or all over the place, we would say we are 'trína chéile'. In this context I am conceiving of my experiences as being 'all over the place', a 'falling out of myself or selves'. I am grateful to Irish language scholar Eamonn Ó Donaill for his help in understanding the Gaelic connotations of the phrase.

2. See West (2009) and Hunt (2013) for further critique of the notion of the recognition of vulnerability constituting a diminishment of the learning subject.

3. I have changed all names referred to in this paper to protect confidentiality. In the case of each of the people referred to in the text I have sought both permission for the reference and feedback on my interpretation of events. I have incorporated this feedback into the text. I am grateful to all concerned for their feedback.

4. The children's story referred to is Coleman, M. and Williamson, G. (2004) Lazy Ozzie. London: Little

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