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# Evaluating the use of a *Teacher's Diary* to illuminate the moral dimensions of a teacher educator's everyday work.

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Key words: ethical research practice; moral education; teacher training; auto-ethnography; teacher's diaries.

## Abstract

This paper aims to evaluate my early attempts at using my *Teacher's Diary* as a method (Aleskewski 2006, Holly & Altrichter 2011, Bold 2012) to gain a deeper insight into the moral dimensions of my day to day practice as a teacher educator in the tertiary sector in the UK. I chose this method of data collection firstly for its potential to be authentic, trustworthy and systematic due the very nature of the *researcher as participant* (Ellis 2004, 2009; Piper & Simons 2011) and secondly as a genuine method to interpret my everyday actions as moral ones. This evaluation aims to highlight the extent to which I was able to reach these aims as a novice auto-ethnographical researcher. Much of the literature reflecting upon the use of diaries and narratives in research is able to demonstrate the rich data that can emerge from the text that is then analysed and interpreted by both researcher and reader (Ellis 2004; Anderson 2006; Sparkes 2007; Kenton 2011; Bold 2012). This rich data is often put forward as best placed to help readers connect with the author and understand their experiences of their cultural context more fully. The first aim of this paper is to share my experiences of using this method of data collection by highlighting the contradictions and challenges and sometimes 'messy' nature of maintaining diaries (Holly & Altrichter 2011) within education research contexts as both the teacher-participant and researcher. The second aim of the paper is to reflect upon the usefulness of the diary as a way of 'seeing' practice. The third aim is to briefly draw upon literature from the work of Pring (2001), Goodlad et al (1990) and Mahony (2009) and Fallona (2000) Noddings (2010) who suggest that teaching is a moral endeavour and that teacher's morals can be visible in their practice and to analyse examples of the diary entries that show moral dimensions. The paper will add to the work of Webb & Blond (1995) and Husu & Tirri (2003) who also explore the extent to which a *Teacher's Diary* can, in a practical way, show the moral aspects that arise, and the decisions taken, on a day to day basis by one teacher educator. The paper begins to highlight the extent to which morals can be *taught* or *caught* in this context, namely teacher education (Mahoney 2009), and makes the point as Kiss and Euban (2010) do, that developing the virtues of intellect either through explicit curriculum, pedagogical choices or institutional values, cannot be separated from developing virtues of character.

## Context

I am a teacher educator for the tertiary education sector in a University in the North East of England, UK. I primarily work with educators, teachers and trainers from a wide variety of subject disciplines from the tertiary education sector and work based learning environments. Many of these students are already employed as educators in their field and are embarking upon professional teacher education qualifications and undergraduate degrees in Education and Training to further their

careers and develop their practice as educators. This paper is written from my experiences of researching into my relations and practice with these students for the purpose of my PhD study and reflects upon the pilot study to evaluate the usefulness of the data collection method that I chose – my teacher's diary.

### **Introduction – planning '*scholarly treason*'**

My decision to use diaries as a data collection method has not been taken lightly. After completing an ethnographical research dissertation for my Masters in Education I experienced a crisis of confidence in the process of more traditional methods of social research and inquiry. I began to question the processes of research that appeared to regard participants as '*impersonal "subjects" only to be mined for data...*' (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011) and began to explore auto ethnography (AE) as a potential way to alleviate some of this conflict. In contrast, many researchers appear to have 'fallen' into auto ethnographic (AE) methods as they need to answer questions about their role in the research and it emerges that other methods fail to answer it, as was the case with Maydell (2010) and Kennedy-Lewis (2012). As they describe and reflect on their use of the methods, they refer to having to deal with methodological dilemmas and crises as the epistemological view runs counter to that of their use of traditional and, largely accepted, methodological approaches. Researchers such as Polanco (2013), Spry (2001) and Muncey (2010) speak even louder about the challenges they faced when questioning the traditional forms of social inquiry as they progress through their research. Spry (2001) acutely refers to feeling like a heretic by using auto ethnography and states, '*emotion and poetics constitute scholarly treason*' (pg 709). Anderson (2006), however tempers some of this scholarly treason with an approach to AE that leans more towards the traditions of social inquiry in the form of analytical auto ethnography. Both Anderson (2006) and Maydell (2010) appear to maintain a distance between them as researchers and their participants and the 'analysis of the other' is maintained as their reflexive accounts are of them as researchers as opposed to them as participants. By using auto-ethnography, I aimed to narrow the gap between researcher and participant placing me in a paradoxical position as a researcher (Marechal, 2010) that is both an insider to the culture and community as well as an outsider but enables me to focus on, as Marachel (2010) explains, '*...relationships between self and others and a developed awareness of the reciprocal influence between [researchers], their settings and their informants...*' (pg47).

I had reflected upon the trust and openness that the participants had shown me during my Masters level research but I was now bothered by the power relations that are implicitly there between researcher and participant. The more I analysed and interpreted the participant's stories, the more I began to wonder how much they were becoming my stories and not theirs. Whilst this is not an unusual reflection for researchers working with ethnographic narrative, Coffey (1999) fully recognises that this is a conventional view of '*ethnographic practice has emphasized the other lives that are being observed, analysed and produced. The ethnographer serves as a biographer of others.*' (Coffey 1999). The process of asking them to reflect un-hindered during an open 'interview' made me reflect upon the 'truth' and reliability of interviews where participants are asked to recall far back into their experiences (Coffey 1999, Ellis et al 2011, Ellis 2004; Muncey 2010). Whilst I trusted the participants and felt that their 'stories' and remembered situations were valid, I was beginning to feel concern that the distance between researcher and participant was too great in traditional social inquiry. I needed to reflect and reconsider my ethical stance as a researcher. Becoming

conscious of what kind of ethical stance I wanted to aspire to as a researcher (Piper & Simons 2011) was essential for me to be able to move forward and feel confident to deal with the new challenges of being both an insider and an outsider in research. Establishing what I see as the basis for my practice as both a teacher and a researcher I have found is neither a deontological or Kantian viewpoint nor the utilitarian approach purely, but is more akin to Noddings' relational view of care ethics (1984) that depends not on laws or consequences but on reciprocity. As an educator and researcher, the moral decision must take into account the quality of relationships that are formed as result.

Auto ethnography appeared to narrow the distance between researcher and participants and in doing so illuminates the relationships between them. After reading Carolyn Ellis's (2004) 'Ethnographic I', I felt AE offered the opportunity for me to align my personal ethical perspective as a teacher with research ethics. Spry (2001) refers to this as being able to *have 'agency in one's personal/political/professional life.'* After initially feeling that all my questions and concerns were being answered through AE, I was then faced with a new set of challenges and dilemmas around issues of trustworthiness, ethics and truth. Viewing my personal, political and professional life through the lens of AE meant that the existing relationships and interpersonal ties I had as part of my role as a teacher educator, were about to become more complicated.

Much of the auto ethnographic research and literature describes the dual role of the participant as the researcher, as 'more' than being an insider or the reflexive researcher and the potential for conflict that such a subjective approach can promote (Coffey 1999, Ellis et al 2011, Muncey 2010, Marechal 2010). In this study there are many different roles that I needed to consider such as, my role as a Teacher, the primary participant and the researcher. Marchel (2010) refers to AE as being *'Evocative and emotional auto ethnography promotes the ethnographic project as a relational commitment to studying the ordinary practices of human life, which involves engaged self-participation, makes sense in the context of lived experience, and contributes to social criticism'*. (pg 48). In order to capture the roles within the research, I planned to keep a diary that would hopefully show my practice as teacher, but also my practice as a researcher.

As a teacher educator, I want to understand my practice more deeply. This paper and My PhD study starts from the premise that education in itself is moral, however this may also mean that it has the potential to be amoral or immoral in its practice (Ryle 1972). I believe, as Noddings 1984, 2010; Webb & Blond 1995; Fallona 2000; Husu & Tirri 2003; Sanger 2008 do, that moral education is defined by the quality of the relationships between teachers and students. This paper aims to establish the extent to which my teacher's diary, used in a pilot study, was able to show these relationships and how they developed, and to illuminate the decisions I made as a teacher educator to maintain and encourage 'good' relationships (Ellis et al 2004, 2009, 2007, 2010; Coffey 1999; Muncey 2010; Aleszewski 2006; Husu & Tirri 2003). It will also reflect upon the processes, practices and challenges to maintaining a diary as the primary data collection method in illuminating educational practice.

### **The nature of Diaries in Auto Ethnographic research - Memory and Recall**

Diaries, according to Alaszewski (2006) can be defined as *'a document created by an individual who has maintained a regular, personal and contemporaneous record* (Pg 2). The ability to be systematic

and instantaneous in capturing the data is seen as a real strength of diaries as a method and overcomes some of the problems created by memory and recall (Aleszewski, 2006, Muncey 2010) that may occur, for example, in interview situations. Traditional social inquiry researchers are critical of diaries and auto biographical approaches, seeing them as navel gazing and self-absorbed and being too personal and lacking objectivity (Muncey 2010, Marechal 2010) and would suggest that the accuracy of memory cannot be verified unless it corresponds with facts and external data (Anderson 2006, Muncey 2010). However, Carolyn Ellis (2004) would disagree and argues that even without external 'evidence', an individual's account or narrative should be valued in its own right (Bold 2011). The construction of the 'story' represents the meaning of the experience to that individual, at that point in time, in the current context and is no less a version of the truth than that of an interview (Ellis 2004, Muncey 2010, Clough, 2002, Denzin 1997). It is as much an interpretation and understanding of the past as the present and therefore stories and narratives hold their own meaning. It may be just as revealing to 'notice' in analysis, elements that are not remembered over those that are. However, Aleszewski, (2006) states that the motivation to maintain a personal diary in a systematic way and limit the time delay in recording events in an unsolicited way is the most effective and authentic. Kenten (2010) agrees that with less time to reflect upon the completion of the diary entries they may be less self-censored and more immediate in their responses as opposed to interviews that are perhaps less reliable in this nature as researchers usually ask participants to reflect back to events where they recall of the event can be edited and clouded by hindsight. Coffey (1999) attempts to reconcile this view by citing Hastrup (1995) '*Memories are placed in the time they are remembered whereas recollections are immediate*' (pg 47). Although Coffey (1999) also states that researchers are reluctant to share even their field note diaries and would likely edit or manage the raw data before presenting it, she is an advocate of AE and the use of diaries for their immediacy in capturing 'events'.

Attard (2012) expands upon this viewpoint and explains how the very act of writing encourages more focussed reflective thinking than talking and he states that he is less likely to 'wander off' while writing. The process of compiling the narratives can illuminate aspects of the experience that would have possibly gone un-noticed and highlight mismatches between what the researcher-participant believed was happening and what was actually happening (Harnett, 2012, Stuart 2012). Ellis (2004) explains that '*With a personal story you are saying "This is my experience, I present it as a true story"*' (Pg 175). It does not claim, however, to be a reproduction of reality but a constructed interpretation that challenges the view that research should be objective and commit to generalisation but to show the complexities and muddled chaos of everyday life (Muncey, 2010, Marechal 2010, Attard 2012). What is important here is the uniqueness of the individual's account and their perception of the event or experience that is presented as a 'thick description' showing multiple layers of consciousness. Geertz (2000) suggests that this enables the researcher to identify themes within the narratives and diary entries about the individual during critical analysis and reflection. During the process of the narrative construction in this study, the world is being described through the eyes of the researcher in a way that promotes self-reflexivity and aims to challenge accepted truths or claims in order to gain an awareness of my own behaviour and change beliefs and practices (Coffey 1999, Ellis 2007, Ellis et al 2011, Harnett 2012, Attard 2012).

## **Collecting the data: Search for focus and systematic reflection**

The aim of the pilot was to use the diary for two months, gaining consent from one cohort of students that would be representative of the full study's group size and analyse the content of the entries fully at the end of the two months. My decision not to use a grounded theory approach to analyse the content at this point was to limit the editing that may occur as I write the diary. I wanted the diary to be as natural as possible (Aleszewski 2006) and not being informed by conscious analysis at each entry. However, I maintained my research diary as a form of analysis to reflect upon my use and process of the diary during the pilot. In order to ensure that the entries were focussed and systematic in their approach (Aleszewski, 2006, Holly & Altrichter 2011, Anderson 2006), while not restricting the content and reflection, a set of questions as prompts to complete the diary entries were set to support the process.

- *What happened in the lesson/tutorial today where I had to make a moral decision?*
- *How did the students react?*
- *What had I planned or hoped would happen? Did it happen?*
- *How did the lesson develop your relationship with students?*
- *Did you make any moral judgements?*
- *How did you make them and what was the result of them?*

## **The Pilot – Recollections or memories?**

First few weeks

Initially, my plan was to record in the Diary after every teaching session with the identified cohort for the pilot. This plan was supported by my list of 'prompting' questions I had set and my endeavour to control the process of data collection in terms of consistency and reliability as suggested by Aleszewski (2006), Holly & Altrichter, (2011), Coffey (1999), Anderson (2006). The cohort chosen was a group that was representative of the group that would be chosen for the larger research project and we met every week. It was a group of 15 students of mixed ability and mixed employment contexts within the tertiary education sector. After the analysis of the first few weeks of diary entries I noticed that my accounts were mainly descriptive in nature. I recognised my naivety in assuming that I would be a competent and engaging diary writer and decided that I would need time and practice to move beyond the 'safe' and surface nature of my diary writing. The accounts were, in places, 'listing' the events that had happened in the session and it was difficult to synthesise or see a 'story' emerging from the two accounts due to the disconnectedness between each other. Ellis (2004) Ellis et al (2011) alluded to this and would describe them as 'messy' accounts. Trying to make the collection of data systematic but not overwhelming for the pilot study, I concluded, after the first few weeks, that only completing the diary on the teaching day with this group was limiting my ability to put the account into the context of that week or semester and potentially meant that I would miss other connections from other areas of my teaching life, culture and society. In addition, the 'prompting questions' that I had set myself were also difficult to apply fully in practice when I was restricting myself to a fixed point in time of that particular teaching session.

## Example of an entry made straight after teaching

### January 9:

*'The research methods module is always greeted with a groan. However, since I changed the assessment task, tonight there wasn't as much concern as previous years – hopefully I have cracked it! Decided to use community of enquiry to introduce the module. It works best for Jon as he is deaf and the set up of enquiry allows him to see others. It does mean he takes over the discussion though. Ellen was getting really annoyed and she talked and laughed out loud at some of Jon's comments. Even Steve and Emily were being sarcastic to Jon about him taking over but he is either ignoring them or genuinely doesn't want to. The group asked when they would get their feedback from the last module. I told them 2 more weeks. Didn't mention that I wasn't marking them though – not sure why.'*

To compound matters further, the teaching session finished late in the evening and at week two I had forgotten to complete the diary as soon as I arrived home and instead completed it the morning after. The timing of the diary entry became a focus because although the reflection was detailed, longer and more reflective than descriptive, this could be attributed to the fact I was not as tired as I may have been the night before and had more time to complete the diary as Attard (2012) would suggest is important. However, I was concerned about how different my recall would have been and whether I had romanticised anything or omitted or forgotten any part of the event (Hastrup 1995). I was surprised at how much the effect of 'missing' one systematic record could cast this much doubt into my mind and leave me wondering just how close to fully representing the event it may have been. Although the entry was more reflective in terms of making suggestions and asking questions to explore later, it was making presumptions in places about my interpretation and analysis about what was happening as Attard (2012) had also noted. In my analysis of the diary process at this point it raised more challenging questions about truth and authenticity than I had had to grapple with in my Masters study where I was interviewing others and seeing my role as researcher being a clearly defined one from that of the participants. Both Bold (2011), Stuart (2012) and Attard (2012) stress that narratives are pragmatic and existential and '*...involve reconstructing the experience.*' (Stuart 2012, pg 441). In accepting that my diary would only ever be a representation of the meaning of an event for me, my ideas about truth and authenticity took on a different role. I had to remind myself that I was not looking, nor did I believe, in one absolute truth and AE was not a methodology intended to produce this outcome (Marechal 2010, Muncey 2010, Ellis et al 2007). I decided to change the structure of the diary keeping and record in it every day and I also decided not to stipulate whether I should record on the same day but to *notice* whether it was an entry from the previous day and continue to highlight the differences in their ability to seek meaning between them (Bold 2011).

### Example of entry the next day

January 31:

*'...set the class off with a reading task while I sat outside with Paul to have a chat. I am always surprised at how un-confident he is with his academic work, he is so confident with everything else and contributing in the class. I asked him what he needed to feel more confident and he wanted to talk through his research project and feel clearer about that. He went back in to the classroom happier with a plan of action!... After the class Helen and Andrea wanted to see me about their feedback. Both started by saying how they were not good at academic work and that they always struggle. I remind them both that they are excellent teachers – how would they advise their students? I encourage them to reflect on their own advice about essay writing and how to use evidence – they were nodding and smiling (I hoped that meant they were feeling better about it all). Andrea's husband is not too well – he is waiting for the result of a scan – she has gone through quite a lot this year and we are only one semester in! Every cohort in this programme have major doubts about their ability – they want to be able to produce perfect essays straight away and don't want to develop and work on getting there. Perhaps it is because they feel they are expected to 'know' everything as teachers of their subjects? How can I help my students feel 'ok' with a lack of certainty and structure? They don't cope well with not being told exactly how to do things – I want them to be more independent with their work – I need to look at how I think I am preparing them for independent study and why they view any grade less than 70% a fail! They are so hard on themselves....'*

### Week 4-6

My decision to continue the diary entries on a daily basis was in order to get into the 'habit' of writing in the diary. My 'natural' diaries (Aleszewski 2006) that I had used in my career to date had been ad-hoc and often happened after a formal event for professional development or after a critical incident. The aim here was to have a more fluid and consistent 'voice' in the diary that meant there were no 'gaps' in recording the times between teaching sessions. The daily accounts enabled me to see the lead up to teaching sessions and fully appreciate the external impacts upon the sessions, exploring the whole cultural context (Marechel 2010). It also prevented me from

missing out on an event that would later, in analysis, connect to an event or interaction with a student as noted by Attard (2012) and Ellis et al (2011). I was aware that this would mean collecting significantly more data to interpret (Holly & Altrichter 2011) and would further open up the ethical issues as more participants would be entering my diary records and my relations with students and colleagues would be visible outside of the classroom scenario. A consideration of relational ethics as well as procedural and situational ethics was becoming more acute (Ellis 2007).

I had decided to use an A5 page per view diary, mainly for ease of carrying. I wrote in pencil, not because I wanted to rub it out but because I think I felt nervous about the permanency of the words as it is my personal diary. My PhD supervisor had suggested that I type it up, for ease in analysis but I worried about the editing that I know would occur and felt as Bolton (2010) described, *'longhand feels more comfortable because its personal'* (pg 132). However, as 'comfortable' as the process had planned to be, after two weeks the pressure of completing the daily entries began to build. It was sometimes difficult to maintain due to the pressures of my workload, and I had forgotten to complete it on some days and the entry would then begin to merge into one. The benefits of the 'naturalist' approach as Aleszewski (2006) mentioned were slipping away as I did long days that ended in late night teaching and very little energy left to reflect upon the day. The diary became a chore and the systematic and rigorous nature of the narrative was becoming limited. It was becoming increasingly difficult to actively consider the structure of practice from 'noticing a judgment to addressing the action and consequence of the practice. Although the daily entries did show more of a 'story' and linked together more fluidly, because there was not a process of structured and regular analysis, it meant that I was not able to see my actions clearly and systematically – what did I do as a result of noticing these dimensions of practice and critical incidents? When other work tasks were of a higher priority, the diary entry was pushed to the bottom of the list. Pring (2002) had noted this could sometimes be a concern with educational researchers who were also teachers as the depth of research required could be undermined by the time able to spend on it alongside their teaching work.

I had to again, reflect upon how I was to maintain regularity and contemporaneous recording without the diary adding more pressure onto timescales that were already tight in my role as a teacher. Ellis (2004) wrote that an AE researcher can potentially be including their whole lives into their data making it difficult to mark the boundary between when you are collecting data and when you are not. As it was, the pressure to 'collect the data' about my teaching was beginning to affect my time spent on my role as a teacher. I worried that if I was to spend too much time reflecting and not enough time doing the things I know were effective for my student's wellbeing (and mine for that matter) and their progress then the process of keeping the diary was conflicting with the ethical considerations of teaching and research. Adams (2008) also alludes to this when he refers to the use of typologies to aid analysis of narrative. He is concerned that when prescription is forced upon stories then it *'contradicts the dynamic qualities of ethics...every situation is different and a preformed set of principles runs the risk of doing violence to a story and its author.'* (pg 179) By week six of the pilot I was beginning to feel like I was failing already. Bold (2011) also notes that being too focussed in the narratives may mean that *'other interesting reflections will not find their way into the diary like personal feelings and attitudes.'* (pg 88). I was in turmoil about how much to write, what to write about and when best to analyse what I had written and where to record what I did next.

With conflicting literature in support of a variety of views, it was at this point I felt that I needed to begin to analyse the content of the dairies to see if there was reason to carry on.

### **How can my dairy illuminate Moral dimensions of my teaching?**

Sanger (2008) refers to a consensus, held among many researchers, that teaching is a moral endeavour by its very nature and visible in their conduct as Pring (2001) and Fenstermacher (1990) and Fallona (2000) would also advocate. However, Sanger (2008) would perhaps challenge the vagueness of this general consensus as he suggests that researchers need to be more explicit and systematic in their judgements as to what is the moral nature of teacher's work. He suggests that researchers and as I would add, teacher educators, need to explain the moral nature of their work in order to help training and developing teachers to understand their work in this way. He advocates a '*descriptive approach*' which emerges from three perspectives of understanding and thinking about moral nature of teachers work. In the first instance, he is in agreement with the consensus that teaching is moral in itself but feels explanations need to go further than this by also addressing the discourse and practice of teaching in the classroom as would Halstead & Maclaughlin (1999) and Fallona (2000) and Narvaez and Rest (2008) as well as understanding the moral disposition developed in students as a result of the practice as Ryle (1972) and Wilson (1999) placed much focus. He also appears to disagree with writers, in so far as I think he sees their view as limiting, such as Fish (2010) who play down the view that teaching is a moral practice in itself and that teachers should only be concerned with teaching students the 'processes' to think morally. Sanger (2008) echoes Fenstermacher (1990) and states that it not enough to what we are teaching but also how we are teaching it, our conduct and manner '*Whatever we [teachers] take to be good and right and caring, fails to provide a sufficient basis for the...study of the morally salient features of teachers and their classrooms..*'(pg 173)

Elements of my diary enabled me to see areas of my conduct that I had not 'noticed before'. The process of reflection on a teacher's narrative is viewed by Webb and Blond (1995). They saw teacher's knowledge as relational and involving constant reflection and this point is reinforced by Ellis et al (2011, 2007) and Attard (2012) among others who believed that '*I have experienced this internal dialogue where researcher and professional practitioner were constantly conversing.*' (Attard, 2012, pg 165) The diary allowed me to see and reflect upon the dilemmas I was wrestling with in terms of honesty and guilt with my students regarding their assessment decisions and the effect of my pedagogical decision to use an approach that allowed everyone that everyone to fully engage in the lesson when in reality, it alienated a majority.

Adams (2008) holds the view that, narratives possess elements of the good life and that '*...we can learn to live the good life and manage bad situations if we adhered to lesson learned from stories and narratives* (pg 179). The diary has enabled me to reflect upon the areas of my practice and possibly student's moral development, that I might consider good, right, caring or virtuous – or less so (Stanger 2008). Placing a focus on the relational ethics as a feature of my conduct and manner as a teacher and researcher (Ellis 2007).

At this point I am struggling to see a clear distinction between my ethical considerations in my identity as a researcher and my ethical considerations in my identity as participant and teacher educator. I am also not convinced that I should be looking for any distinction to be made. In the

same way that I hope to show care for my participants in the research, I also hope to show care for my students in my role as their teacher (Noddings 1984). The examples from the diary included here, and early analysis, are beginning to show how I foster relationships with students. I plan to use pedagogical approaches that have relational developments as their focus, for example community of enquiry. My intentions are to ensure that every student can be involved fully in the lesson, however, the group are clearly still developing and although I notice some of issues in the class it is not clear what I did or intended to do about Jon's limited awareness of others or the students lack of respect and understanding about Jon's difficulty. Due to my decision not to analyse the content of the diary until time had passed, capturing my actions in relation to this has been limited. Ellis and Bochner (2010) suggest that it the process of moving back and forth between the practice and the reflection that is a significant part of relational ethics and, it could be argued, the moral dimensions of teaching as Sanger (2008) suggests.

One surprise to me was my regular concern over assessment. I show emotions of guilt as I have to withhold information to them about who had been marking their work. I had been released from the marking in order to undertake additional duties and it is clear that I feel they wouldn't approve or that I think this could affect the relationship. Discussing their feedback on a one to one level is something that I find works more effectively and is something the students respond well to and feel they need (Noddings, 1984,2003,2010). There is a significant issue to look further into about the power of assessment in building and developing relations but also developing their trust in themselves as well as me.

In the entries, it shows me trying to consider individuals in the group and alludes to the level of detail that I might expect to know about the rest of their lives. However, I make assumptions and generalisations about their capacity and suggest that it is something that I am responsible for. This would suggest to me that I need to speak with them to find out what they need and what they see as their responsibility in this situation before I begin to change practice (Noddings 1984, 2003). What is also evident in this limited analysis is a requirement, as Husu & Tirri (2003) also suggest, for viewing the narrative accounts from a variety of perspectives. Only being able, at this point to view the teaching session from my perspective is limiting in depth and understanding about the culture and the group involved.

### **Summary and conclusions**

This paper aimed to do three things. It was to capture my early experiences of using my personal teacher's diary as a primary method of research and to illuminate how useful the methods could be in helping me 'see' moral dimensions of my practice in teacher education. Although it has been very small scale and there is still much to reflect upon and adjust, just as Harnett (2012) described the effect of narratives, it has been helpful in illuminating some differences between what I aim to do and what I think I am doing as a researcher and what happens in practice. Through reflecting on the process for this paper, it has shown me, as it did Attard (2012), that much of what I found challenging and 'uncomfortable' during the collection phase of the diary, were perhaps surfacing from hidden assumptions and beliefs that I may have had about the research process as well as my practice. In the first instance, I was naïve in thinking that I could write evocatively and in an engaging style without any 'training'. This is going to take practice; although it is already making me conscious

about what I notice to write (Bolton 2010, Ellis et al 2011) and I expect that this may mean longer and more detailed accounts which may have further impact upon an already tight workload. Although I came to auto ethnography with a resistance to believing in an absolute truth, the conflict and concern I felt about my delay in recording in the diary showed that I was still wrestling, as did Attard (2012), with the conventions required of traditional social science research and felt panic and failure when I veered away from ideas of *rigour and systematic approaches* to data collection. I now need to explore and challenge my assumptions about how, when and what a *diary* should be and what structure, if any, it should follow. Recognising that the diary, if used completely on its own, can only ever show what I see as being an event, a meaningful experience or noticeable activity, is helpful to moving forwards (Coffey 1999; Muncey 2010; Stuart 2012; Bold 2011). Muncey 2010, Coffey 1999, and Ellis 2007, all advocate that collecting artefacts that aim to corroborate, compliment, contradict or conflict such as responses by others in the situation, eg the students or other 'characters' in the narrative entry, are helpful to counter some of the naval gazing (Coffey 1999) and potentially damaging level of critique (Bold 2011) that can occur in this kind of research. In the next steps for this this research I will plan to use video/audio of the teaching sessions and systematically gather short narratives, feedback, tutorial transcripts and communications such as email and texts from students about their experiences.

Not only should the diary entries be regular and contemporaneous as Aleszewski (2006) and Bolton (2010) would suggest but the analysis should be regular and run alongside the entry. It is problematic to assume that I am more objective as Attard (2012) also reminded himself, if I leave the analysis until a specific point in time. Whilst Attard (2012) noticed that he consciously reflected upon his personal theories as he wrote, I want to try to have the best of both worlds, leaving space in the diary to write reflections and analysis in a different colour at a later date. This way, I hope the conflict between when I write is not debilitating, but simply recorded as a later reflection or a more immediate recollection. This should also alleviate the assumption that was made visible in this pilot, that I am able to understand or 'see' the impact of the decisions that I make straight away and from inside the classroom. There is much more to consider here.

Based on my experience and from the literature (Husu & Tirri 2003; Ellis et al 2011; Webb & Blond 1995; Coffey 1999; Attard 2012), then the extent to which a Teacher's Diary can show moral practice is strong so long as I sign up to certain beliefs about being a researcher and a participant at the same time. The very complex nature of holding more than one identity in the study, namely researcher, participant and teacher means that I am forced to move back and forth between the ethical implications of what I do and what is actually happening. This process as shown by Ellis et al (2011) and Attard 2012 in particular, to encourage a constant reflection on the ethical and moral actions by the researcher that is immediately reflected upon.

In short, this pilot has helped me to settle (although I felt I knew this as I started!) that trying to be 'objective' by attempting to separate the recollections (data) from the analysis is a false situation in this methodology, probably emerging from my previous understandings about 'being a researcher' and what would be expected by the wider academy. This resulted in the process having the potential to disrupt and harm the relationships that I was trying to understand more deeply. Delaying the analysis prevented me from fully 'seeing' or understanding the consequences of my, or the student's actions and reactions to events. The overwhelming nature of seeing the diary as chore and

something separate to my practice had the potential to affect relations with my students in other ways. Once I started to analyse, I began to see just how important the building of 'good' relationships is to me – I need to continue to understand how I try to do this and notice when it works well and when it works less well for me and my students.

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