

Auto/Biographical Work as *Bildung*

Abstract

Bildung is a concept central to auto/biography. It can best be translated as 'educative self-formation' and describes the importance of the life-narrative as a vehicle for self-discovery, self-understanding and self-development. Although, since its emergence in the German Enlightenment, the concept has received wide attention in the social philosophy literature it has not had extensive consideration in contemporary auto/biographical work. In this article I wish to i) introduce the concept of *Bildung*; ii) apply the concept to historical figures from my own doctoral research; iii) reflect upon my own educative self-formation as a result of exploring *Bildung* and offer some discussion of the relationship between studying the life stories of others and one's own development.

Introduction

Autobiography is a form of qualitative investigation. Coming from a background in Physiotherapy where the research genre was primarily quantitative, I had a lot of unlearning to do when I undertook my Doctorate in Education. Completing my thesis entitled 'An auto/biographical study of family and history with reference to the concept of *Bildung*' turned out to be a very different educational experience for me. One in which I not only learnt a lot biographically about my ancestors but also about myself. In this paper I will explore the notion of *Bildung* and illustrate how undertaking auto/biographical research is an educational process of self-discovery, understanding and development.

Education is defined as a process of acquiring knowledge and understanding by applying analysis and reasoning to form reasonable judgements about the society in which we participate. It presupposes actions that contribute to or challenge the established culture (Biesta, 2009). Oftentimes, however, driven by the need for bureaucratic 'transparency' and fiscal accountability, learning is predetermined and standardised in order that the learner is acculturated to the prevailing norms of the group. Can a lecturer/teacher be viewed as

responsible in allowing students the freedom to learn what they want to learn when 'knowing what they don't know' makes it important to bring the learner around to an imposed agenda (Rossiter, 1999)? In post-graduate education, there is more freedom for students to explore knowledge that will satisfy their own learning needs. That knowledge includes epistemological knowledge but perhaps more importantly, ontological knowledge, that will have an impact on moral development. An investigator researching auto/biographical narratives does so by applying their analytic skills to corroborate authenticity. This will involve protocols connected to empirical justification and grounded imagination (Erben, 1998). Indeed, the process incurred in undertaking auto/biographical research is a process that is akin to *Bildung*.

What is *Bildung*?

Bildung concerns the idea of self-education transforming an individual to an increased personal understanding (Gadamer, 2004; Biesta, 2002). It is a process that changes a person's view of the world and conceptions of the value, purpose and meaning of life (Carr, 1991). This acuity is linked with a very broad expectation of a better society (Horlacher, 2004). Plato, illuminating Socrates, used the allegory of the Cave to record the notion of self-enlightenment. A person is bound by their own ignorance. It is not until a person is able to shed the bonds of that ignorance, that they can experience a different view of reality. Einstein (2006) echoes this sentiment in the following quote "The true value of a human being can be found in the degree to which he has attained liberation from the self".

At the heart of *Bildung* is the personal responsibility for learning and self-edification. The most explicit work on *Bildung* is in the Enlightenment and Romantic periods. Here Kant (1781) and later Kierkegaard (1847) postulated that people's raw experience influence their view on the world, shaping all perceptions and judgements. Most recently, an important debate has arisen about the place of *Bildung* for modern education in practice (Biesta, 2007; Biesta, 2010; Wahlstrom, 2010). The self-formation emphasis of *Bildung* is eminently suited to the emergent processes of qualitative research which has no prearranged expectations or over-determined conclusions. Auto/biographical research is one such process.

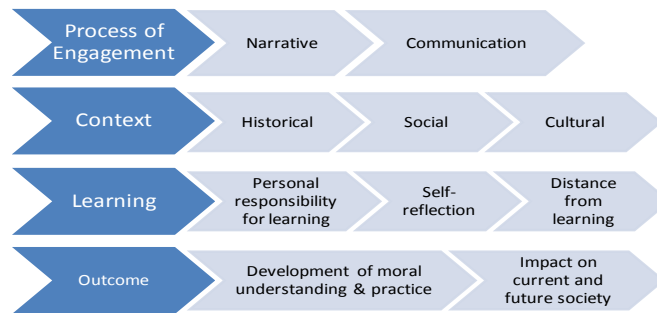
In my research to understand the *Bildung* process better, I studied concepts associated with it when undertaking auto/biographical research on the lives of four of my female ancestors. In the recursive process, meaning and revelations about my own life emerged. I will describe how my ongoing engagement with this educative process has altered perceptions of my identity and my place in society. The expectation is that these insights may help readers to understand what a profound effect auto/biographical research may have on them.

Relationship of Auto/Biography and *Bildung*

“The purpose of auto/biographical writing is to explore and make sense of lives” (Erben, 2000). Exploring the life of another changes the way we see and think about things. Auto/biographical research leads us through an educative process that enables us to understand ourselves better. Exploring the social, historical or cultural influences on a subject’s life, puts us in mind of how these factors influence our own life. The self influences the approach to any research, as personal biases, views and preconceptions invariably seep into the process. Whereas quantitative and experimental research approaches seek to control and put aside personal biases, qualitative researchers generally acknowledge and actively seek to make these characteristics transparent (Wall, 2006). That critical self-reflection is a fundamental component of the educative experience of *Bildung*.

During my auto/biographical research and exploration of *Bildung*, theoretical concepts emerged, which I have captured in the following diagram. The figure does not portray the interrelatedness of the parts nor does it capture the cyclical and interactive nature of the continuous educative process. However, it identifies elements that are not unfamiliar to those who have undertaken auto/biographical research (Erben, 1998).

Concepts associated with *Bildung*



I have structured the rest of this paper according to these subsections though overlap and duplication will be evident. I will discuss how, in undertaking auto/biographical research, these concepts emerged and influenced my learning.

I selected four of my female ancestors who had left differing accounts of their lives, but who had been insignificant, invisible or ignored by the family. These four women were Maria Stella, Lady Newborough (1773-1843) 3 x great grandmother; Charlotte Morritt (1836-1861) 2 x great grandmother; Dorothy Wynn (1878-1974) grandmother, and Alice Chapman (1910-2013) aunt.

My Auto/Biographical Research



Maria Stella was born in Modigliana, Italy. At 13 she was married to a Welsh Baron, Thomas, the 1st Lord Newborough and returned with him to his estate in North Wales, where she bore him two sons. When she was 40 she nursed her dying father in Italy and discovered that she had been changed at birth for his son. Maria Stella spent the rest of her life (she lived to 70) and all her money trying to prove her birthright to the Royal French family. Louis Philippe, Duc d'Orléans, the child with whom she claimed she was changed, became the last King of the French (Citizen King), reigning from 1830-1848. Maria Stella left evidence of her life in a published autobiographical account.

Charlotte Morritt married at the age of 16 and immediately travelled to Washington with her diplomatic husband. She was there for two years (1852-1854) shortly before Abraham Lincoln became president. There her first child, my great-grandmother, was born. Charlotte and Edwin travelled extensively through Europe in his ambassadorial role. They had five children in eight years and Charlotte died in childbirth in Stockholm at the age of 25. Charlotte's legacy was a large number of regular letters written to her devoted mother in Paris.

Dorothy Wynn was the sister of the 4th Lord Newborough (Maria Stella's two sons were 2nd and 3rd respectively) and, through her mother, a granddaughter of Charlotte's. Dorothy's father died when she was one and the family then lived mostly on the Continent, where Dorothy was brought up in the convent run by Charlotte's second daughter. In 1898, when Dorothy was 21, she and her brother, Willie went in his Steam Yacht, 'The Fedora' to the Far East to visit their sister who was married to a police officer in Burma. On the trip home in 1899, Dorothy recounted details of their voyage in a diary.

Alice Chapman is Dorothy's youngest daughter and my father's sister. In 1938 she married her cousin, a serving officer, who was stationed in South and East Africa for the majority of WWII. They returned to England in 1945 so that he could join the war on the Continent; however he was killed-in-action just as the war ended. Alice's life, I would suggest, was dislocated at this time as "the present is not what the past was supposed to lead to" (Frank, 1997:60). Alice's son was born six months after her husband died. Alice never married again.

Unable to live financially independently, Alice moved to her mother's home where she resided until Dorothy's death at the age of 95. Alice herself was still living independently at the time of my interviews with her. She died recently at the age of 102 ½.

As I researched each life I considered all the elements of *Bildung* outlined above and particularly deliberated on how my ancestors lives affected me and how the auto/biographical research approach transformed my learning.

Process of Engagement

Narrative

Narratives are expressions of life experiences, linked sometimes to interpretations and consequences, that enable people to have an enhanced knowledge of themselves and their relationship to the world they inhabit. Narrative is being used widely in social research to explore different social constructions both contemporaneously and historically (Tamboukou, 2008).

With access to two day-to-day accounts of parts of a life and two life histories, I had opportunities to reflect circumspectly on Erben's (2000:383) statement that "Lives are lived through time but made intelligible through narrative". Life is lived sequentially but understood retrospectively, cumulatively & cyclically. Links to cause or sequence of subsequent life events are not necessarily understood at the time of the experience of an event. Prior and subsequent life experience will alter interpretations of critical incidents and learning (Ricoeur, 1991; MacIntyre, 2007). Life is brought together in cohesive meaning by narrative. In telling their story, a person has the opportunity to see connections and begin to make sense of their life. They also come to recognize their learning and potential for (moral) development (Ricoeur, 1991; Taylor, 1989).

In reviewing my ancestral stories, I witnessed both the documented chaos of life as it was being lived and the more unified stories told by the older women. Charlotte and Dorothy wrote chronologically in letters and diaries about daily events, emphasising the disorder and uncertainty of living. Maria-Stella and Alice, benefiting from hindsight, crafted their life stories retrospectively, cohesively recalling events that had happened over the previous fifty

years. I will take examples from my research to exemplify some central points related to narrative.

The difference between living life and recounting it retrospectively was particularly evident in the day-to-day accounts in Charlotte's letters. They clearly expressed the complexity and unpredictability of life (Bruford, 1975). Through reading her letters, I lived two years of Charlotte's life vicariously as it unfolded. This accelerated experience of living through a life provided me with a clear understanding how living life is different from a recounted life (MacIntyre, 2007; Simmons and Usher, 2000; Erben, 1998; Ricoeur, 1992). I recognised the complexity and disorder that besets living, for her daily accounts provided no indication of who or what was to be significant in her future. Had Charlotte summarised her time in Washington after her return to Europe, the significance of events would alter as she sifted through the memories and details of what to recount. Many of the perceptions of events she described, her attitudes and actions would alter as a result of what happened subsequently. Recollections would fade, perceptions distort and the current context in which she was telling her story would alter what Charlotte had captured on the written page as she lived her life.

Charlotte's own reflection after an event illustrates another important concept of the lived life. Even at the age of 17, she acknowledges how with foresight a person might alter the way in which they subsequently led their life. "Placidie's (her French maid) death – It is altogether a sad sad business and I have never ceased regretting I ever brought her to America, but no one could foresee the result" (Corbett, 124 ^{14/11/1853}).

This evidence of re-evaluating and reinterpreting life as it is lived is lost in retold life stories, especially end-of-life narratives. Maria Stella wrote retrospectively about her life at the age of 58. She demonstrated how writing about a life can be different given the vantage of age. She described an orderly, sequenced pattern to her life and demonstrated recognition of significant life events and how those contributed to the development of her identity. She was also able to attribute causes to subsequent life experiences. For instance, from the start of her autobiography, Maria Stella informs that she was changed at birth for a baby boy. When recounting her childhood story, she infuses her memories with the recognition of

privilege and hardship that would be attributable to her changed birth status. However, she only discovered her birth status when she was 40 and without that knowledge at the time of her childhood experiences, would have interpreted events that happened in a completely different light. Her stories were beset with examples of how, with hindsight, there was a different explanation for the intent of an action, given subsequent events that placed that action in a different context than was appreciated at the time. Additionally, at a later stage in life there is more likely a need to portray a life well lived, so some intentions and subsequent actions may be hidden.

A parallel for these examples when undertaking auto/biographical research is to consider the age or life stage of the individual subject. Where does the narrative fit with the life story? How long is it since the life experience that is being described? What part is memory playing in that account? Which subsequent events have influenced or caused a reinterpretation of the life? What is the subject anticipating will happen around this story in the future?

The lesson for me in my research was recognising the continual reconstruction of self and identity that occurs throughout life and the prominence of narrative in this restorative process. I am 64 and much of my life story is embedded as I can look retrospectively at events and analyse their subsequent effects. However, I did realise that even now I can change my perception of my life. Maria Stella's story in particular, brought changes to my thinking of my childhood as 'unhappy'. Her childhood could be perceived to be unhappy (especially with her later insights about her parents), but they were not seen that way at the time, given the influence of the prevailing social culture when a daughter was a chattel. I have long interpreted my childhood with the current attitudes towards children and deemed it 'unhappy'. However, I am now at liberty to think of the social norms of the time (1950-60's) and take myself back to remembering the joys I experienced as a child, over the hardships.

Communication

In narrative, understanding of life stories is always emerging and changing (Taylor, 1989).

This is recognised by researchers of auto/biography as well as being a fundamental concept

in the educative process of *Bildung*. Integral to both is the acceptance of the need for an audience.

Communicating to and getting feedback from another is an integral part of narrative. In narrating a life to another, the scrambled life story is told in a synthesised, coherent, sequenced, accessible way. Maria-Stella's autobiography is a classic example of a person's ability to organise their life into a coherent whole with a plot, theme, characters and trajectory aimed at engaging a reader.

In the exchange of narratives with others, ideas are clarified; the responsibility for human actions reinforced and a sense of (moral) purpose is imbued (MacIntyre, 2007). This is the purpose of the educative process, *Bildung*. The teller makes sense of their life; remembers, interprets, constructs, reconstructs events in the outside world, which have been subjectively experienced (Sclater, 1998). It is in the self-scrutiny that accompanies another's reaction to us (to our story) that we develop our self-awareness (Findlay, 2003). This underlines the importance of the reader or listener in the process. Gadamer (2004:26) calls the interface between a life story teller and the audience a "fusion of horizons". The experience of the narrator and the expectations of the audience merge the interpretation of personal identity being revealed by the story. As participants in auto/biographical research, it is evident that another's life story will have an impact on the interpretation and development of understanding of one's own life. A "finding of a self in the other" (Roberts, 2002:54). Through the recounting of life events (joys and particularly hardships) and reactions to them (acting and suffering) listeners and readers can learn about living ethical lives more powerfully than interpreting a list of instructions.

In my experience with the ancestral stories I found my own beliefs and values being constantly challenged. I found I had to review imbued judgements about motherhood, class structure and women's roles. I was particularly struck by exploring Dorothy's story. I researched her 1899 diary entries for the month that she spent in Kenya. Having been born and brought up myself in Kenya, her story, written some 110 years previously, gave me the opportunity to review my life growing up there and I came to understandings of myself that had been elusive prior to the merging of our stories. I was challenged to review my

experience as a colonial child when I found myself angry at the way in which Dorothy and her brother treated the local people and wildlife. Again I realised the prevailing social norms of the time conflicted with contemporary opinion. She and her brother were from a privileged family and were used to servants and hunting and shooting was their way of life. Can I judge their actions in Kenya as aberrant? The shame that I harbour having been a privileged colonial child has recently been modified by co-constructing my grandmother's story and recognising the pioneering independence of her travels and my own colonial life. This illustrates the potent education that engaging in auto/biographical work can provide.

Ellis (2004) indicates that the interview situation is a more compelling medium for evoking a researcher's reaction to a story. I found that when listening to my aunt, Alice, I could sense emotions that were less evident in the written accounts of my other ancestors. Her stories provoked many contradictory responses in me. Because she was a live relative with a shared history, I found myself challenging her explanations and analysis given my own perceptions and memories of joint experiences. *Bildung* indicates that the learning created by sharing stories can move one to a higher level of understanding. Indeed, in this biographical dialogue with my aunt I was required to re-evaluate my earlier childhood and adolescent perceptions of her. I also came to terms with the stress that she was under having lost her husband in WWII and the subsequent anger that was often taken out on those around her. Recognising the motivation behind prior actions has helped put closure on resentments I harboured that had impacted negatively on me. This release is particularly important as my aunt died earlier this year.

In auto/biographical research the type and quality of the data collected is influenced by this communicative process. It is also influenced by the ontological knowledge possessed by the researcher for this impacts the questions asked and the interpretation of the data. Stories are influenced by the attention and expectations of the listener/reader. The researcher needs to be aware that the ability to present a coherent story supersedes the chaos of lived life, so parts of stories maybe hidden as their place in the pattern of the events is not fully recognised or understood. Narratives are normally communicated by written or verbal language, but may be conveyed by art, dance, music and other means of expression.

Context

A life is linked inextricably to historical time and culture. These contexts influence the telling and reception of a life story. It is a person's ability to discover their narrative identity in relation to their culture that makes the telling of their story meaningful, not just a narcissistic endeavour (Ricoeur, 1991; Hamilton, 2007).

Historical Context

A theme that is constant throughout the writings on *Bildung* is the place of history in any undertaking.

“There is no other way for a human being to make the most of himself than by learning to recognize himself in the mirror of (his) inheritance” Løvlie and Standish (2002:331)

An individual is a historic personality. Tacit knowledge is inborn and generationally acquired (Løvlie and Standish, 2002). Even without researching their lives, my ancestors (collectively) have had an impact on how I conduct and view my life. That is, ‘handed down’ values, attitudes and behaviours. Auto/biographical research provides opportunities for the exploration of predecessors grounded in historical and socio-cultural mores of the time. Gadamer (2004) emphasises the importance of considering any perceived phenomena in the context of its unique historical moment as well as the hermeneutic process of using our cultural past to enlighten our self-understanding in relation to the lives of others. Gadamer encourages us to explore tradition, that which is handed to us from the past, in an active, engaged way, so that we embrace our heritage with discernment and from it take both the capability and the personal limitations it provides (Weinsheimer and Marshall, 2004).

However, as opposed to being simply the product of inherited traits, knowledge also is acquired through *personal* historical reflection. Mortensen (2002) demonstrates the radical change in thinking experienced at the time of the emergence of the concepts of *Bildung* two hundred years ago. Beliefs that a person was simply a product of customs handed down to him by his parents and ancestors were commonplace. In Europe, Kant's philosophy of rational autonomy stressed the universal potential of all human beings to independent thought free of traditional customs and beliefs (Biesta, 2009). In England, “Wordsworth

actually turns traditional, patriarchal genealogy upside down and takes human identity out of the realm of heredity” (Mortensen, 2002:439). In these post-modern times, the practice of personal analysis is widespread and insights derived from explorations of the unconscious, more frequently steer the shaping of individual identity. How that individual interprets and acts on experiences allows for maturity (Barnett, 2009). In this quote, Goethe clearly illustrates the concept of individuality created by paired historical incidents and their impact on the lived life.

“So, I had the great advantage of being born at a time that was ripe for earth-shaking events which continued throughout my long life, so that I witnessed the Seven Years War...the French Revolution, and the whole Napoleonic era down to the defeat of the hero and what followed after him. As a result I have attained completely different insights and conclusions than will ever be possible for people who are born now” ...

Goethe (1749–1832)

It is common in life that the historical impact often goes unnoticed and it is only retrospectively, as Goethe observed, that the influence is recognised. As a researcher, it was important for me to investigate the historical, political and the socio-cultural events, in order to better understand the ancestors’ lives.

I learnt two important concepts from researching inter-generational connections. The first, the humbling recognition that there is a historical continuum and my life is but a “Blip on the radar” of forbears and continuing on in my children. Also, I acquired a deeper understanding of MacIntyre’s (2007: 220) thesis that the starting point of our moral life is inherited from the collective of our past – “a variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations” that enables us cope with growing up within the new historical time; adjust to shifting socio-cultural influences, manage joy and adversity and continue to emerge to a more integrated, ethically conscious identity.

The importance of this in auto/biographical research is to explore how the subjects came by their views and opinions. Particularly if they are a different age from the researcher, there is a need to use the history of the time to complement their story.

Socio-Cultural Context

“What he had learnt specifically from the actors, together with their aristocratic patrons, was to become more fully conscious than he had been instinctively since early manhood of the human limitations of the section of society to which he belonged by birth, the commercial middle class”.

(Bruford, 1975:33 - discussing Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Lehrjahre*)

In the educative process of *Bildung*, particular consideration is paid to the socio-cultural effects influencing learning. In examining the prevailing social, and cultural aspects of the lives of my ancestors, I recognised not only how that impacted on their lives but I started to appreciate how past socio-cultural understanding alters current awareness. For instance, I learnt how travelling influenced the cultural maturity of my ancestors. Each woman temporarily integrated with different societies, which changed the way in which they viewed their life and subsequent attitudes and actions. Charlotte’s letters provoked an extensive exploration of the socio-cultural context of Washington in the early 1850s, immediately before the American Civil War. Because her letters were numerous, detailed and chronological, I could follow the emergence of a confident, self-assured, and politically aware woman. Recognition of socio-cultural influences has helped me understand why having grown up in Kenya, my opinions, views and attitudes would have differed from my English contemporaries. This was a positive realisation as, when I was younger, I felt confused that I had difficulty relating to my peers. However, I also recognised that the wider perspective I gained by living in a different country gave me insights that advantaged me.

In auto/biographical research the socio-cultural milieu in which the researcher was brought up and currently lives may be very different from their subjects. This will require careful interpretation of the acquired story. As mentioned, I regularly found myself judging the lives of my ancestors from a twenty first century perspective.

Learning

Self-Responsibility for Learning

Education is a transforming process of individual personal growth which is intimately linked with cultural identity and social integration; a search for meaningful existence within society. Within this concept of 'liberal education', Gadamer (2001; 2004) stresses the importance of personal responsibility for this self-education. He reflected the views of Hegel and Kant whose philosophies emphasised the 'duty' one has to educate or cultivate oneself. The auto/biographical genre afforded me extensive opportunities for self-education and enabled me to assume personal responsibility for learning with ease.

At the beginning of my research I had four autobiographical accounts of four female ancestors. They consisted of one auto/biography written in 1830; Six photocopied letters from 1852-1861; A diary written in pencil in 1899 and verbal stories of my 97 year-old aunt. Seeking to authenticate their stories, I accessed documents in the Caernarvon, Durham and Winchester archives; I explored French history of the period 1783-1830 and American History in the 1850s, as well as colonial history at the turn of the 20th century. I found literature and artefacts that corroborated evidence from the written accounts.

In trying to source the six letters, I discovered a hitherto unknown cousin who actually had the originals of every letter written from Charlotte to her mother for a period of nine years. In seeking to find more information about Dorothy's 1899 journey to the Far East, I met the great-grandson of the ship's captain, who had a copy of his diary, written the same year. It was a fascinating verification of my grandmother's story. Comparing the two versions illustrated the individuality of life experiences, showing how two people living in the same setting by the reference to time and place, wrote such different accounts, in view of their backgrounds and intentions.

Recognising the important learning that comes from visiting the locations where a research subject has lived, I visited several of the family homes in North Wales, County Durham, Hampshire, Berkshire and Kent, the last being the house in which Alice and my father were born some 101 years previously. I travelled back to Kenya and explored that part of the railway line from Mombasa to Voi on which my grandmother, Dorothy travelled. The impact of time and place on a person's life was so well illustrated by these visits, even though my interpretations were individual and may vary from the truth because of differences in the

lived time and culture (Brady, 2005). Auto/biographical research affords individuals extraordinary opportunities for personal responsibility for learning.

Self-Reflection

Laing (1972:55) presents the conundrum of self-knowledge. “If I don’t know I don’t know - I think I know. If I don’t know I know - I think I don’t know”. In order to aspire towards Socrates’ call to ‘know thyself’, self-reflection is an integral part of learning. Gaining an understanding of the quality implied in *Bildung* cannot be achieved without the experience of *critical* self-reflection. The journey towards self-possession and self-mastery is accomplished by this fundamental process (Birk, 2006; Løvlie and Standish, 2002; Mortensen, 2002; Standish, 2003; Hader, 1996). However, the process of gaining that insight is enigmatic (Peshkin, 1988). There is a need to make explicit the tacit knowledge possessed by an individual. Reflective thinking is a dialogue of thinking and doing that includes moral questions about ethical practice and the worthwhile nature of activities (Schon, 1987)

Most personal exploration occurs as a result of uncertainty (Bradby-Jones et al., 2009). Uncertainty is often a precursor to or highlighted by a significant event. Enlightenment, where lives are altered, tends to occur around ‘epiphanies’ (Denzin, 1989). *Bildung* is comprised of these instances, but, as it is an ongoing process by which moral values are cultivated and established more than a single event, there is no completion to the process (Cleary and Hogan, 2001). In trying to make explicit the tacit knowledge of myself, I recognised the complexity and ongoing nature of learning. Elbaz (1987:13) identifies auto/biography as “an act of ceaseless renewal: the story is never ‘told’ finally, exhaustively, completely”. And part of that ongoing process is the need to distance the self from the learning in order to know that it has occurred. Each time a piece of auto/biographical research or writing is undertaken, the person develops with it and implicitly there is a recognition that he/she will not be the same person at the end of it as they were at the beginning.

Distance from Learning

In this extract from Eliot’s *Four Quartets* (1942),

“We shall not cease from exploration

And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time”

he deftly encapsulates this process of distancing from the self. Distancing is underpinned by memory. It is by forgetting that we can return and view a concept or situation with new eyes. These lost memories sink into the unconscious and become unobtrusively present in everything we do. Frequently a person can act in a particularly sensitive way that defies explanation. Tacit knowledge is embedded from previous experience. It is a way of knowing that comes from an aesthetic and historical understanding of others in relation to oneself (Gadamer, 2004).

As well as learning being a source of joy, it can accompany mourning or loss, but in the terms discussed, it is always a progressive process. Through language, literature, theatre, art, conversation or deep love, a willing individual can distance themselves from themselves. They can view as an outsider, yet personal meaning may emerge from the medium and so the individual gains insight into themselves, who they are and what they could be. This distancing is not necessarily a conscious process, and often it is in the realisation of the return to the self that the individual recognises that learning has occurred. “Thus it is clear that it is not alienation as such, but the return to oneself which presupposes a prior alienation that constitutes the essence of *Bildung*” (Cleary and Hogan, 2001:526).

Outcome

Development of moral understanding & practice

Studying the lives of my ancestors based in their historical past has helped me recognise those forces that have already moulded my life and choices. My research subjects are my forebears, with whom I have a temporal relationship and they have had a direct impact on how I have evolved and now come to view my life. Their values were unknowingly entrenched in my formative years. The family ethos was absorbed. Importantly therefore, the educative opportunity afforded me in this research reinforced, moulded or altered those views. It gave me the opportunity to think more critically about the values that I have absorbed. The learning either complemented and enhanced or completely or radically altered those fundamental views. Ideally I would like to see myself continuing to develop

and build on the rich heritage that I have, but I recognise that I have also been given the opportunity to alter the way that legacy has influenced my life.

In a broader sense, anyone undertaking auto/biographical research is able to reflect on the values and beliefs exposed in other's lives and through that greater understanding can also make choices about their ideals and ethics which contribute to the evolution of themselves as moral human beings.

Impact on present and future society

I return to the socio-cultural discussion by pointing out that not only do both the auto/biographical and *Bildung* processes draw from the socio-cultural environment but both have a necessary function to subsequently influence Society. Erben (1998) demonstrates how auto/biographical research enriches the understanding of a wider society. The umbrella of society forms the continuity that a finite life cannot provide. Society evolves slowly, building on the past and recognising a future far beyond the reaches of an individual life. *Bildung* reflects this understanding as it affirms that the educative process does not stop with the individual but has an impact on future generations (Biesta, 2002). Society was there before we were born and will be there after we die and provides a sense of continuity in which a finite life can nest.

In my auto/biographical research I realised that I have acquired qualities, aptitudes, foibles and values from my ancestors and recognise the accountability I have to enhance and use these in conjunction with my own experiences to the benefit of the society in which I live and pass on opportunities to future generations. This is not a static concept and I shall continue to experience, understand and evolve, in the true spirit of *Bildung*.

Conclusion

As Charlotte wrote to her mother at the end of a long letter, "The inexorable clock warns me that I must finish" (Corbett, 45. 13/02/1853).

Examining the process of researching my ancestors' lives in the context of my own learning brought about the important revelation that *Bildung* and auto/biographical research are similar processes. Undertaking auto/biographical research automatically involves the researcher/author in an educative endeavour because all the principles are common to each.

In this paper I have outlined the concepts extrapolated from the process of *Bildung* and using examples from my own auto/biographical research I have illustrated how, in undertaking any auto/biographical endeavour, transformative learning should occur that inevitably results in moral development with an impact on present and future socialization.

“The result of *Bildung* is not achieved in the manner of a technical construction, but grows out of an inner process of formation and cultivation, and therefore constantly remains in a state of continual *Bildung*’. ‘Like nature, it has no goals outside of itself”.

Gadamer (2004:10)

References

- Barnett, R., 2009. Knowing and becoming in the higher education curriculum. *Studies in Higher Education*, 34(4), 429-440.
- Biesta, G., 2002. How general can *Bildung* be? Reflections on the future of a modern educational ideal. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 36(3), 377-390.
- Biesta, G., 2007. The education-socialisation conundrum or 'who is afraid of education?' *Utbildning & Demokrati*, 16(3), 25-36.
- Biesta, G.J.J., 2010. *Good education in an age of measurement. Ethics, politics, democracy*. London: Paradigm.
- Brady, I., 2005. Politics for a planet: Discourse on some problems of being-in-place. In: Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S., eds. *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. 3rd edition. London: Sage, 979-1026.
- Bruford, W.H., 1975. Goethe: Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre (1795-6) In: Bruford W.H., ed. *The German tradition of self-cultivation. 'Bildung' from Humboldt to Thomas Mann*. London: Cambridge University Press, 29-57.
- Carr, D., 1991. *Time, narrative and history*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Cleary, J. and Hogan, P., 2001. The reciprocal character of self-education: Introductory comments on Hans-Georg Gadamer's address 'education is self-education'. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 35(4), 519-527.
- Denzin, N.K., 1989. *Interpretive biography*. London: Sage.
- Einstein, A., 2006. *The world as I see it*. New York: Citadel Press.
- Elbaz, R., 1987. The changing nature of the self: A critical study of autobiographical discourse. In: Denzin, N.K., ed. 1989 *Interpretive Biography*. London: Sage, 19.
- Erben, M., 1998. Biography and research method. In: Erben, M., ed. *Biography and education. A reader*. London: Falmer Press, 1-17.
- Erben, M., 2000. Ethics, education, narrative communication and biography. *Educational Studies*, 26 (3), 379-390.
- Ellis, C., 2004. *The ethnographic I. A methodological novel about autoethnography*. Oxford: Alta Mira Press.
- Findlay, L., 2003. Through the looking glass: Intersubjectivity and the hermeneutic reflection. In: Findlay, L. and Gough, B., eds. *Reflexivity: A practical guide for researchers in health and social sciences*. Oxford: Blackwell, 105-132.
- Gadamer, H.G., 2001. Education is self-education. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 35(4), 529-538.
- Gadamer, H.G., 2004. *Truth and method*. 3rd edition. London: Continuum.
- Hader, S., 1996. *The Bildungsroman genre: Great expectations*. London: Aurora Leigh and Waterland.
- Hansen, K.H., 2008. Rewriting *Bildung* for post modernity: Books on educational philosophy, classroom practice, and reflective teaching. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 38(1), 93-115.
- Hamilton, N., 2007. *Biography. A brief history*. London: Harvard University Press.

- Horlacher, R., 2004. *Bildung* – A construction of a history of philosophy of education. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 23, 409-427.
- Løvlie, L. and Standish, P., 2002. Introduction: *Bildung* and the idea of a liberal education. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 36(3), 317-340.
- MacIntyre, A., 2007. *After Virtue: A study in moral theory*, 3rd edition. London: Duckworth.
- Mortensen, K.P., 2002. The double call: On *Bildung* in a literary and reflective perspective. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 36(3), 437-456.
- Peshkin, A., 1988. 'In search of subjectivity – One's own.' *Educational Research*, 7, 17 – 22.
- Ricoeur, P., 1991. Life in quest of narrative. In: Wood D., ed. *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and interpretation*. London: Routledge, 20-34.
- Ricoeur, P., 1992. *Oneself as another*. London: University of Chicago Press.
- Schama, S., 2008. *The American future. A history*. London: The Bodley Head.
- Schön, D.S., 1983. *The Reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. London: Maurice Temple Smith Ltd.
- Sclater, S.D., 1998. Creating the self: Stories as transitional phenomena. *Auto/Biography*, 6(1&2), 85-92.
- Standish, P., 2003. Preface. In: Løvlie, L., Mortensen, K.P. and Nordenbo, S.E., eds. *Educating humanity. Bildung in postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Taylor, C., 1989. *Sources of the self: The making of the modern identity*. Cambridge: The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge.
- Simmonds, H. and Usher, R., 2000. *Situated ethics in educational research*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Steinem, G., 1970. 'Women's liberation' aims to free men too. *The Washington Post*, 7 June, 1970, 192.
- Tamboukou, M., 2008. A Foucauldian approach to narratives. In: Andrews, M., Squire, M. and Tamboukou, M., eds. *Doing narrative research*. London: Sage, 102-120.
- Wahlstrom, N., 2010. Do we need to talk to each other? How the concept of experience can contribute to an understanding of *Bildung* and democracy. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 4 (3), 293-309.
- Wall, S., 2006. An autoethnography on learning about autoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(2), 1-12.
- Weinsheimer, J. and Marshall, D.G., 2004. Translator's Preface. In: Gadamer, H.G. *Truth and method*. 3rd edition. London: Continuum.

Documents relating to Ancestors

Corbett, C., 1852-1854. Travels with Charlotte, to Washington and beyond. The letters of Charlotte Morrill 1852-8154. Macclesfield: *Travis Books*.

Newborough, M-S. Baronne de Sternberg née de Joinville (Circa 1830) *Maria Stella: or the criminal exchange of a young lady of the highest rank for a boy of the lowe estate*. Typewritten autobiographical manuscript.

Wynn, D.B., 1899. *Letts's pocket diary with almanac for 1899*. London: Cassell and Company Limited.