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Analyzing Flying Chameleons: Using Autoethnography to Explore Change in the Female Educator

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What is a chameleon in the world of education? What defines her professionally, personally, and why? In this autoethnography, I explore the chameleon metaphor for meanings and implications in my personal and professional identity as a female educator by seeking answers to questions stemming from Mitchell and Weber (2005): Just *who do I think I am? Just* who *do I think I am? Just who do* I *think I am? Just who do I* think *I am? I analyzed my own autobiographical journals using the four-part Listening Guide (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2003) coupled with theme-based family coding to examine changes by choice and changes by force particular to my personal and professional experiences. Notions of home, belonging, and change as a journey emerged as themes that served to frame my identity and highlighted the importance of self-inquiry for educators as an applied practice within the greater context of the profession. Keywords: Autoethnography, Metaphor, Educator, Change, Female*

"I am more firmly convinced of my assertion that you can't learn how to tell someone else's story until you first learn how to tell your own."
    --Johnny Saldaña, 2008

While I wrote this paper for me and where I presently am in life—a white, American, 44 year-old married woman and mother of two who is employed full-time as a public K-12 foreign language teacher and working toward a doctorate degree in education—I quickly realized that I was writing it for other educators as well. I know men and women who have spent their entire career at the same K-12 school teaching the same grade level or subject. This paper is not about them. This paper is about female educators like me. We are the chameleons in the profession. We are the ones with more than one advanced degree in more than one area. We hold multiple certifications on our teaching certificates and are proud of it. We are the ones who can fill the curricular gaps by teaching different levels in at least two different content fields across multiple years. We are the ones who will agree to change schools every 2 to 5 years when a need arises in the school system or when we feel that a change of scenery will bode well for our own professional needs and ambitions. There are not many of us out there. Not everyone can teach chemistry and art, English and Latin, or Spanish and French during the same school year like we can. Not everyone possesses pedagogical fluency across content areas or linguistic fluency across multiple languages. Not everyone wants to. Female educators like us enjoy change but we are not conventional chameleons who change to blend in to our current environment. We want environments that fit who we are professionally, so we never stay in one place for very long. We prefer to move where interests and opportunities take us, by choice and by force. We are flying chameleons. We glide through our professional careers on outstretched wings, seeking a new environment that suits our needs for change and growth and undeterred by the uncertainties and new discoveries that await us when we land. That is me—I am a flying chameleon. But what makes me that way?

I had counted on my research and educational experiences as a doctoral student to help me to find out more concretely who I was. Instead, as I reached the end of my core coursework and prepared to embark on preparations for my written comprehensive exams—the sole gatekeeper separating me from my dissertation—I still was working to formulate my topic more concretely. I had been reading and researching non-stop since beginning my program of study, hoping that my experiences in Instructional Technology would round out my professional formation, spark my interest in a topic fit for a dissertation, and leave me feeling satisfied and ready to take on technology-infused foreign language teaching with gusto. Yet there I was—the chameleon. My doctoral program experiences had turned out to be just as varied as my professional training. I had read books and articles on online learning in general, online learning related to foreign language acquisition, distributed leadership, professional development and learning, instructional technology, qualitative research, and quantitative research. I had conducted research on cognitive task analysis, professional development, professional learning models, online learning and technology within the context of foreign language acquisition, critical friends' groups, ethnotheatre, and autoethnography, and I had presented round table sessions, poster sessions, and papers at a regional conference 3 years in a row related to many of these. I never stopped reading. I never stopped researching. I vowed not to stop in order to get my bearings on a dissertation topic. But even my program resembled a flying chameleon: the research interests came and went and kept on changing—sometimes too much for someone who proclaims to like and embrace change! So how was I going to do this? How was I going to get a handle on all of this change?

I realized that I needed to know more about who I am personally and professionally. I specifically needed to find out more about who I am and why I change so much and so often professionally, so I decided to use autoethnography to generate data on myself and use the findings to provide insight into my personal and professional identities. I hoped that these findings might help other chameleons like me understand more about who they are or expose them to qualitative methodologies that they can use to examine themselves.

The Beauty and Value of an Autoethnographic Foundation

Once considered a questionable form of qualitative research, autoethnography has blossomed, flourished, and gained more acceptance as a methodology, allowing the researcher to speak to his or her own previous or present experiences through inquiry supported by theory and practice (Charmaz, 2006; Holt, 2003; McIlveen, 2008). According to Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2010), autoethnography is a research and writing approach that we use when seeking to describe and systematically analyze personal experience with the aim of understanding cultural experience. Qualitative researchers who utilize autoethnography employ an array of approaches including personal essays, personal journals or diaries, personal narratives, first-person accounts, self-ethnography, and autobiography (Creswell, 2009; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). It was crucial that this autoethnography be self-focused and feature me, the researcher, as the subject at the center of the investigation. I saw it as the only way to understand my positionality in relation to others in my personal and professional contexts. I needed to access my inner-most thoughts, treat them as tools for individual and social understanding, and use them to drive an exploration of how the personal and professional contexts surrounding me have influenced and shaped my composition of self and how my personal self has responded to, reacted to, or resisted forces innate to these contexts (Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Chang, 2010). Using personal journals and writing this paper as a first person account was the best approach for producing a body of work that would address these needs. As is the responsibility of any writer who employs autoethnography, I charged myself with working to connect my feelings and experiences to the larger social context. I

knew that my inner self would be implicated in the research process and vowed to approach writing responsibly, truthfully, and analytically to avoid putting myself as the author and research subject over the written piece itself (Atkinson, 2006).

I searched through numerous peer-reviewed journals and works and found many autoethnographic studies that spoke to the experiences of pre-service teachers (Freese, 2005; Nethsinghe, 2012; Placier, Cockrell, Burgoyne, Welch, Neville, & Eferakorho, 2005; Vasconcelos, 2011), teachers as researchers looking to improve instruction (Coia & Taylor, 2005; Feldman, 2005; Placier, Pinnegar, Hamilton, & Guilfoyle, 2005; Russell, 2005), and teachers as participant observers (Freidus, 2005: Kennedy-Lewis, 2012; Loughran, Berry, & Tudball, 2005), but none spoke directly to what I am trying to pin down: Why do I change so much and so often professionally? Why am I a chameleon?

I began by countering that question with a question: what is a chameleon? The answer to that question depends on whom you ask. In the animal kingdom, chameleons are members of the lizard family *Chamaeleonidae* that have been wowing scientists and non-scientists alike for over 300 years with their ability to change color temporarily based on environmental cues (O'Day, 2008; Rabinovich, 2013). Astrophysicists will tell you that chameleons are particles whose mass changes depending on their local environment, and they also may be responsible for the dark energy causing accelerated expansion of the universe (Brax & Zioutas, 2010; Steffen, 2010; Yurkewicz, 2010). When it comes to examining organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) of employees, the term *chameleon* identifies employees who exhibit high levels of self-monitoring (one's ability to read and respond to social cues) are more likely to perform OCBs which are other-directed, meaning they help co-workers and work with them to improve individual and group performance (Blakely, Andrews, & Fuller, 2003). Blakely et al. noted that while chameleons bring with them the disposition to perform OCB directed at others, their ability to do so depends on the degree to which degree the organization enhances or limits these capacities. Even though most of Blakely et al.'s (2003) participants were male, I believe that the chameleon behaviors that emerged have applicability to employees of both genders, particularly in light of the authors' statement that some cues in the professional environment serve to promote "a culture of 'it's every woman for herself'." As the only teacher of my subject area in my workplace setting, I have experienced this feeling often, and it left me speculating about the themes of personal and professional self that this body of research would create. The aims of this autoethnography became clear. I needed to produce a body of work that compared my own personal and professional change experiences with change concepts discussed in the literature as a means of personal and professional exploration. Within that work, I also needed to situate my change experiences within the greater context of organizational citizenship behaviors.

Setting the Stage for Creating Themes

In an effort to understand more about who I am and why I change so often professionally, I began by reading about social categories and social descriptors to learn the correct terms for race, ethnicity, and other adjectives that I would need to consider using to describe myself. In my mind, I had imagined my autoethnographic experiences playing out à la "Who Do You Think You Are?" the television show on TLC (formerly The Learning Channel) that helps celebrities trace their ancestry through familial roots and connections that uncover family stories and often link the celebrities to significant people and events in history. I purposely re-watched a few episodes to settle my mind in the context of self-discovery, self-identity, and descriptors. My qualitative professor had recommended that I read Mitchell, Weber, and O'Reilly-Scanlon's (2005) book, *Just Who Do We Think We Are? Methodologies for Autobiography and Self-Study in Teaching*, and

she insisted on loaning me her personal copy so that I could get started. The first four lines of the chapter by Mitchell and Weber (2005) turned out to be exactly what I was looking for:

> *Just* who do we think were?
> Just *who* do we think we
> are? Just who do *we* think
> we are?
> Just who do we *think* we are? (p. 1)

The simple wording and the careful placement of stress on one key word in this one question give it life in so many different contexts. I decided to frame my autoethnographic study by rephrasing these four questions from Mitchell and Weber (2005) and using them as my central questions for exploring my identity in four different contexts:

> *Just* who do I think I am?
> Just *who* do I think I am?
> Just who do *I* think I am?
> Just who do I *think* I am?

I intended for this study to provide answers to these central questions, but I also had to attune to why I need to know the answers to these questions. The questions with attunement responses to are provided below on Table 1.

With my central questions framed, the next step was to journal about my personal and professional identity. I wrote two sets of journals during the fall of 2013, one on a weekly basis during a 6-week time period as a part of the course requirements for an advanced qualitative research class, and the other that was continuous and spanned a 3-week period. The class journals centered on personal reflection related to my identity as a researcher, questions about my research as related to me, memos about the significance of my study to me and to the field of education, memos on identity and social categories, and the importance of key words in my research. The self-reflective journal documented descriptions of self-including feelings, emotions, and personal experiences from the past and the present within the context of my home, work, and learning environments. Before beginning each new journal entry, I purposely reread all previous ones to reawaken past memories and experiences. I wanted to relive and expose each emotion and use each nuance to position myself for writing as openly and as comprehensively as possible.

Listening for Emerging Themes

My journals in hand, I now had to determine the best way to examine my entries for self-identity markers. I settled on two different approaches, opting to use Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, and Bertsch's Listening Guide (2003) coupled with thematic coding to examine my journal entries for responses to the four central questions about my identity. I felt a connection with the Listening Guide the moment I read it, and it quickly became the heart o f my investigation. The Listening Guide is a four-step qualitative analysis that allows the researcher to examine self or others in the role of both the teller and the listener of the story (Gilligan et al., 2003). I used Step 1, listening for the plot, to listen to my story for the plot— the who, what, where, when, why of the events and contexts in the story. I used Step 2, the I poem, to focus on the voice of the "I" in my writing and listen to my first-person voice for distinctive cadences and rhythms and then to hear how I was speaking about myself (Gilligan

et al., 2003). Doing this allowed me to attune to my writer's voice and listen to what I know about myself (Gilligan et al., 2003). Step 3 is listening for contrapuntal voices, which served to bring analysis back into relationship with my four central questions. It allowed me to hear and develop an understanding of the different layers expressed in my experience within the context of these central questions and to listen for the counterpoint in my writing. In Step 4, composing the analysis, I revisited my writing via the first three steps, used what I learned about myself, synthesized what I learned through the entire process, and used this information to write up my findings for the Listening Guide analysis.

The next step was to upload all journal entries to Version 6 of ATLAS.ti (2011) and code the data in two rounds. The first round involved reading each journal entry for self-description markers and creating thematic codes that corresponded to each type of self-description marker I identified in the readings. I examined my thematic codes and compared them for commonalities, which generated a set of family codes. I regrouped my thematic codes by assigning each to a family code, and I examined each family code for its relevance and strength as an overall indicator of my identity and my propensities for change based on the number of thematic codes grouped under each. I then took the analysis results from Step 4 of the Listening Guide and compared them to all of the family codes in ATLAS.ti to generate common personal and professional identity themes. I examined these common themes for strength and relevance in their abilities to answer the study's four central questions about self-identity in an effort to understand more about who I am and why I change so often professionally. I used the answers to these questions to examine my own change habits and attempt to generalize findings that other female educators could use to examine their own professional change habits within the larger context of our professional field.

From Listening and Coding to Identity Unfolding

My first step on the path to the personal and professional identity was to take a creative approach to listening for the plot. I took the entire contents of my five weekly journals including title pages and reference pages included and plugged them into 10 different shapes on Tagxedo® (Leung, 2013): the world, a footprint, a ladies' high-heeled shoe (what the hell…it's a stiletto!), the Yin/Yang, the USA, a swallow, a star, a shooting star, a pear, and a cat. Tagxedo® generates word clouds based on a technique called "Stemming," which combines related words into a single word for determining the frequency of occurrence in the data (Leung, 2013). According to the Tagxedo® website, "at most one word per 'stem' will be shown, and among all possibilities, the one with the most common occurrence will be shown" (Leung, 2013). I examined the resulting word cloud for each image for the words that had the most visual prominence, a general indicator of high frequency use of the word and related words in the class journal entries. The lists of high frequency words from all 10 Tagxedo® images were then compared to identify words common to all ten images. Only words occurring in all 10 images were retained on each image list; all other words were removed from each list. Eighteen terms emerged as key words common to all 10 shapes: *context, feel, going, home, know, learn, Leslie, life, myself, need, professional, question, research, self, social, way, work,* and *writing*. These common words were then combined into a single list, and this new list was explored for enhanced meaning and connotations via a synonym search for each term on the website www.thesaurus.com. The synonym lists generated for each common term were then analyzed via meta-analysis for terms that I identified as those that spoke to me in the richest and most qualitative of ways, and at least three but no more than five synonyms for each term were selected for examination as to their relevance in helping me understand more about who I am

and why I change.

Table 1. Attuning to Central Research Questions (Mitchell & Weber, 2005)

What questions are most central to my study?	Why do I need to know this?
1. *Just* who do I think I am?	I find it paradoxical as an American that within our culture, we are both encouraged to speak to our accomplishments while at the same time take steps to downplay them by saying that we are *just* _____, whereby the space represents a profession or an accomplishment. It is as if we are required to say something about ourselves but not too much lest we want others to view us as conceited, pretentious, snobby, elitist. I need to see if these perceptions present themselves in my data. I need to know if how I view myself is how others view me.
2. Just *who* do I think I am?	French and Spanish have a very unique way of expressing profession as a description of self as related to one's identity: *Je suis professeur. Yo soy maestro.* Both languages treat profession as a personal attribute or adjective marker as a description of self. English does not have a way to do this tied up in one neat phrase. Perhaps French and Spanish are on to something. The English-speaking American in me, however, feels the need to qualify my identity more clearly and in my native tongue. I need to know who I am because I need to determine to what extent my profession defines my identity. Am I a teacher or am I person who teaches? I need to know if my professional identity is separate from my personal identity—or if it is even possible to treat them as two separate identities.
3. Just who do *I* think I am?	Within American culture, job title and job advancement are equated with success. I have worked for nearly two decades as a K-12 classroom teacher, yet I now see that I have not felt entirely satisfied on the job the entire time. Is it that I truly am dissatisfied with my vocational choice, or am I ashamed that I have not taken action to advance my career according to what my culture says and values as professional success. I need to know who *I* think I am because coming to terms with my perceptions of self is the only way to discover why I entered into public K-12 teaching, why I have chosen to stay in the classroom instead of moving into a leadership position, and where I want to go next and what I want to do next professionally. I need to know if there are indications that I am positioning myself for more change and, if so, how that is occurring.

4. Just who do I *think* I am?	Having grown up an American in American culture, I am all too aware that what others think about me as a professional and as a person is supposed to be just as important, if not more important at times, that what I think of myself. I don't bow easily to peer pressure and I don't think that what others think about me is the only thing that matters. This makes it all the more important to know because who I *think* I am is how I view myself, and it might not be an accurate representation of the reality of who I am. Exploring who I *think* I am will help me come to terms with the reality of my identity within the context of my profession. I need to know how much of what I perceive about myself is accurate.

The first step of the Listening Guide was to provide a listener's response to the writings. My listener's response was based on my analysis of the Tagxedo® images and the associated synonym exercise. In going back over the Tagxedo® images, what first struck me were the types of symbols I chose for my Tagxedo word clouds. I selected images that reflect my gender, such as the stiletto; images that carry positive connotations, such as leaving an imprint, thinking nationally and globally, and the ebb and flow between oppositional forces and making them work; and images that references positive or upward movement or advancement, such as the flying sparrow and the shooting star. I was not sure where the pear fit in, but now that I think about what I associate with pears (sweetness, texture, fragrant aroma, warm yellow color, a food that always makes me think of France), I sense that the pear serves to remind me of the things I enjoy in life and to make more of an effort to enjoy life. As for the cat, in addition to it being my favorite animal, I have come to see that I have traits in common with the feline personality: I enjoy my independence; I am particular about my food, my appearance, my reputation, and with whom others associate me. Now if only I had nine lives!

In reading over the analysis and meta-analysis of common terms to each Tagxedo® image, I surmised that I like any context to consist of a steady and reliable frame of reference for all things in life. This type of framework or context will drive the feel of any situation. When I am on the job, I move--I am alive, I am at work, and I always am in the process of doing something. I value family, home, and feeling that I am in my element. I like to be sure of things in life, and I love those moments when realization hits and I become cognizant, informed, and one step closer to mastery. In work, academic, and personal settings, others have told me that I write well, but I do not equate that with being a good writer. When it comes to learning, whatever the concept, I grasp it, master it, commit to memory, drink it in, and soak it up. This is how I learn and how I like to learn. As a person, I have learned that I can pack a sting when I want to or need to just as easily as I can be smooth. I believe that when you cease to look for reasons to grow, to extract the essence from life's experiences, to live with verve, vigor, and vitality, you die.

The next step in the Listening Guide prescribed the writing of the I poem. I constructed one I poem per class journal for a total of five I poems. When I lined up the I statements from Class Journal 1, the result was the following poem:

I am
I am me
Who I am
I have ascribed
I believe

I recognize and accept
I am unique and different
I feel very strongly pulled
I am sure
I aim to write
I am here
All I ever learned
I had the pleasure
I believe
I recognize
I embark
I will be forced to examine
Who I am
What I stand for
I equate this
I like thinking
I may have correct suspicions

In the full text of this journal, I wrote about the past and present parts of my graduate student persona that describe my understanding from my perspective of what it means to be a graduate student and a researcher with my own thoughts and ideas waiting to be tapped into, worked over, reshaped, and refined into a final product. When I listened to the I poem for this journal, I heard a narrative dominated by a theme of self-awareness my thoughts, beliefs, and aspirations, combined with anticipation of what the future holds for the academic journey that I have embarked on as a doctoral student.

I wrote the full texts for Class Journals 2 and 3 to explore] change at work in my life in two different areas. The first section of Class Journal 2 spoke to the professional ups and downs and related emotions that I experienced when I unexpectedly lost my job 3 years ago to a reduction in force initiative under my previous employer. In the second section of this journal, I talked about how change currently is at work in my life via my decision to go back to school and complete a doctoral degree. When aligned into an I poem, the I statements lined up to create two I poems in one as seen below:

Class Journal 2
Almost before I knew what had happened
What I had said
I like change
I like to change
I don't know anyone
I certainly didn't choose
I was a financial and low-man-on-the-totem-pole cut
I had to take lemons and make lemonade
I was gainfully employed again
I shared
I knew I was turning down work
I thanked him for taking time to call
While I appreciated the difficult position
I was already committed
I commit to the process
I don't waiver

I don't choke
That's the way I am
When I change

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I'm going
When I finish writing this piece
I will be going
When I wake up each Monday morning
Where I am going is to work
I am going to meet
I can take them by the horns and learn as much as possible
I have been teaching
I also feel like a part of me is missing
I have felt my wings
I cannot wait to see
I have revisited pieces and papers
I find myself reading them
I ask myself questions and make comments
Why did I write it THAT way?
What was I thinking?
I really hope
What I was trying to say
I know a much better way

Class Journal 3
I have chosen to embark on an autoethnography
I feel like I need to know myself
I matter
I am the topic

The way I wrote the first part of the I poem for Class Journal 2 communicated a strong sense of forced change, and I could hear the ways that one change threatened to undermine my ability to survive professionally and financially while implying that this same forced change paved the path for change by choice. I found that the second part of the Class Journal 2 poem aligned with the poem extracted from Class Journal 3, and they worked together to speak about me going places—literally and metaphorically. Everything that I have experienced and continue to experience becomes the springboard for moving forward to future endeavors. I heard the recurrent theme of anticipation noted in the I poem from Class Journal 1. I have changed, I am going places, I matter, and it is time to get to know myself.

Throughout Class Journals 4, 5, and 6, I described who I am as a person based on past experiences; my belief system; choices I made as an adult about my studies, my career, and my personal and family life; my struggles with perceptions that I don't fit in; and the overwhelming sadness I carry with me because I feel like I don't have a home. The I poems from these journals highlighted those points with a fierce, insistent intensity, particularly my belief system and who I am professionally, socially, and emotionally based on my past and my aspirations. The recurrent themes of anticipation and embarking on a journey remained constant; in these poems, they particularly manifested themselves in lines that attuned to the student/novice writer I am, the academic/professional writer I want and strive to be, and the

journey to discover just who I think I am. There are several places where I heard a recurrent theme of struggle or oppression: the struggle to find myself, the struggle to be recognized at work by an employer who has never acknowledged me professionally, the desire to establish a sense of home, the struggle to make others see me the way I do—that I matter and that I can and want to make a difference because of my diverse skill sets professionally, culturally, and linguistically. These poems highlighted the things that bring me joy and the things that bother me socially, professionally, and ethically. From Class Journal 4:

> I'm no Einstein
> I am far from being the one that just fell off of the turnip truck
> I love learning
> I've rediscovered my love of research and finding answers
> I have multiple degrees
> I also hold multiple certifications
>
> I am not sure
> How well I have begun
> I plan to press on
> See what else I discover
> What I truly and deeply value

These passages spoke of my love of learning, research, and discovery despite phrasing that is only somewhat complimentary of my intelligence. I heard the first passage saying that the joy I derive from learning and my diverse professional preparation background are of value to me, while the second one highlighted my desire and willingness to press on with discovery—a journey—to see what awaited me in the unknown future.

The next passage offered my first glimpse at feelings towards others, particularly with regard to people who engage in dishonest behaviors.

> I have a big problem with people who sacrifice honesty
> I have an even bigger problem with people with people who know about it
> I value being successful in work and life
> I value achieving success through honest means
> I believe that American culture becomes more superficial by the minute
> I see that as a huge tragedy in our culture
> I believe in helping others because you feel genuinely feel called to do so

I heard this passage saying that I have a low tolerance for dishonesty and certain tendencies in American culture. These lines emphasized the importance I place on honesty and sincerity in one's moral fiber.

The next two excerpts spoke to the enthusiasm that I have for taking formal steps to learn more about myself. What I first described as excitement of exploration of self would be better described as discovery, and coupled with the enthusiasm I have for going on a journey, emerged as a theme in the I poem. I heard discovery in the Class Journal 4 as a wide-open set of possibilities, but in the Class Journal 5 it became applied to a narrower field of discovery based on my choice to enter the teaching profession and my decisions thus far in my career to remain in the classroom as a teacher. I began to see choice emerging as a theme as well.

Class Journal 4

I am going to examine
just who I think I am
just *who* I think I am
just who *I* think I am
just who I *think* I am
I am excited!

Class Journal 5

Just who do I think I am?
I find it paradoxical
I want to explore this further
Just *who* do I think I am?
I need to know this
I need to determine
Just who do *I* think I am?
I need to know this
I think this is the only way to discover
Why I entered into teaching
Why I have chosen to stay in the classroom
Where I want to go next

What I want to do next
Just who do I *think* I am?
Who I think I am
Is how I view myself
The reality of who I am
Exploring who I *think* I am

The next two passages, also from Class Journal 4, attuned to my social and cultural backgrounds and experiences almost as if they were two different lives or lifetimes. I knew that the lines in the first passage referred to my identity and some of the places I lived from birth until I finished high school: "Until I finished and moved." I heard them attuning to flat facts and not much in the way of imagery or description. The second passage also spoke to what I had done and where I had been—journeyed—thus far in life, but the journey was far different from the one described in the first passage. Discovery leading to a new identity resulting from change by choice emerged as a theme. The lines that referenced everything that I have experienced in France and through French language and culture attuned to this.

Who I currently am
Who I have been thus far in life
The positions I have held
The social roles I have played
I am female
I am of northern European descent
I have not been able to substantiate
I was born in the United States
I have lived here all of my life
I was born in O***********
I lived there and in A*********
I lived from the time I started high school
Until I finished and moved

I am 44

J'ai 44 ans

Tengo 44 años

I still am a daughter, a sister, the oldest sibling

I have acquired new identities

I grew up Episcopalian

I was born into the middle class

I think my social and cultural experiences have made me more upper-middle class

I've been to formal social functions in France

I can honestly say

I felt a bit like Eliza Doolittle

I do enjoy dressing up for special occasions

I do enjoy intellectual discussion

I really had accomplished something by doing it all in French

The phrasing of each line in the second excerpt was richer and more descriptive. I heard the lines attuning to accomplishment on my part and a strong sense of pride in my new self, my new identity. I heard that I had made discoveries about myself along the way through new linguistic and cultural experiences, and their voices were saying, "Way to go! You did it! You transformed yourself and created a new identity for yourself!"

Yet for all that I heard the lines telling me that I have accomplished, I also heard them attuning to a gap in my life, a very large, raw, nasty, and gaping hole, almost like a wound on my soul and my persona. I heard them telling me that I do not have a home. Take a look at the following excerpts:

I don't have a home of my own like that

To which I have paid many visits over the years

Even as I write this

I am crying

I have adopted them in my mind as my home

I do

No wonder I am passionate

I have learned

I don't feel like I have a home

No matter how hard I try

I so often feel like a stranger

I feel like I don't fit

I feel like home is not a place

It is wherever I am with my husband and family

I hope my children never feel the way I do

I heard this I poem telling me that I don't have a home, almost mocking me for not having a home, and mocking me for having been so cowardly as to adopt someone else's home (my husband's) as my own because I couldn't get one of my own: "I don't have a home

of my own like that / to which I have paid many visits over the years / Even as I write this / I am crying / I have adopted them in my mind as my home." And I heard the I poem telling me that it sounds like I have given up trying to associate a place with home and instead have settled for telling myself that home is wherever I am with my husband and our children. But I heard the poem telling me that it's all a lie with the one line that seals the deal: "I hope my children never feel the way I do." I heard the poem saying, "See? You think you've fooled yourself, but you haven't. You still don't have a home." I heard these lines saying that I have fear of failing as related to my female gender: as a woman, as a wife, as a mother, I do not have a home and have failed to provide one.

Yet despite my lack of a home, I have not slowed down trying to spread my wings and fly. The following I poem excerpts from Class Journal 6 spoke to that:

> I intend for my autoethnography to leave an impression
> I AM a woman
> I feel like I am taking off
> I know how to shine
> I want to be noticed
>
> I conducted a synonym search
> I cannot be defined!
> It is not that I am without meaning
> I am so full of meaning
> A higher return than I expected!

I heard the strength in my identity within the context of being a woman: what I am, what I feel like, my high level of confidence in myself (I conducted a synonym search / I cannot be defined!/ It is not that I am without meaning / I am so full of meaning / A higher return than I expected!). I heard the lines telling me that I am bright and strong, a force to be reckoned with and ready for someone to take notice of it!

These last class journal excerpts, all from Class Journal 6, were the gems of that piece. The full version described the urgency with which I knew I must work to complete this autoethnography, and the I poem spoke to that urgency through lines that evoked my rise to action, my developing understanding of the writing process, and the knowledge that even things that need to be rushed for the sake of finishing sometimes simply work at their own pace and cannot be rushed for anything.

> I move
> I am alive
> I am at work
> I always am in the process of doing something
> I will have to find a way to capture the essence of the movement in my writing
> I like to be sure of things
> I love those moments when realization hits
> I become cognizant, informed, and one step closer to mastery
> As I write
> I will work equally hard
> I examine my knowing about knowing myself about knowing myself

This is how I learn

This is how I like to learn

I want the reader to feel that

I want the reader to take a firm hold of the rope, tie a contextual knot, and hang on

I need to make sure that my writing bears the fruits of my labor

I have been told that I write well

I don't think it's the same as being a good writer

I want to be a good writer, a good author…a good speaker of the written word

I have things I need to do

I need to know who I am

I need to tell my story

I need to know exactly who I am

Before I embark on my dissertation

I want to be sure that I come across as a professional in my writing

I will have to temper that

I am in search of knowledge

So that I know I am on the right track

I feel that research and questioning go hand in hand

      I heard myself speak to and acknowledge the sense of duty and urgency underlying the tasks that lay before me: finishing this piece, finally having that long sought-after understanding of self and understanding of why I change so that I can embark peacefully on my dissertation. These were my hopes, but were the realistic? Were they destined to forever remain as goals that loom on the horizon and keep me moving forward?

      Interestingly enough, both the full version of my 3-Week Journal and the I poem that I pulled from it accomplished the same goal: they described my professional journey. Johnny Saldaña (2003) referred to a play as life with all of the boring parts removed. The I poem for this journal captured just that: the essence of the piece with all of the boring parts removed. I heard myself talking again about my love of learning. I downplayed my intelligence but I didn't hesitate to play up my language skills, my multiple certification fields, and my multiple degrees. I heard more reaffirmation about my love of languages and other cultures, my beliefs in working hard to get what you want and to achieve success, and the personal pride that comes when others recognize your accomplishments or contributions. I also heard myself attuning to the opposite: family members making jabs at me for my educational endeavors, odd looks from others because I never speak just one language, feelings that I'm going nowhere fast in my job despite my levels of education and my skills, and the self-description that I'm an oddball professionally and in life that doesn't really fit in but too bad—that's just who I am, so accept me as I am or not. I heard happiness and joy, and I heard anger, frustration, and disappointment. What an opportune time to move to the next step in the Listening Guide—the contrapuntal voice.

      According to Gilligan et al. (2003), listening for contrapuntal voices offers a way to listen for counterpoint in the text(s) being analyzed so that different strands speaking to the research question(s) can be identified, specified, and sorted out. I chose to reexamine the I poems from Step 2 for contrapuntal voices. While I did not notice any strong contrapuntal voices at work in the I poem for Class Journal 1, the I poems resulting from the other class journals were contrapuntal delights. Statements by me that I like change played against statements about change being forced on me when my job was eliminated 3 years ago. At the

same time, I hear statements about forced change experiencing their own contrapuntal voice in the form of me turning down work, a re-hire opportunity from my ousting employer because I had been offered a position by my current employer and chose to take it. I wrote that I'm no Einstein but countered that with statements about having rediscovered my love of research—being in a doctoral program, meaning I didn't get to choose to enroll but had to be chosen based on academic performance and merit to be chosen for enrollment. All of the I poem lines that spoke to my life before college and my life since college were all contrapuntal voices for each other: born and raised a native speaker of English in the United States in contrast with being married to someone from another culture, speaking two languages other than English with very good fluency, and being able to teach those languages as a part of my job qualifications. There was evidence that I am proud of my academic accomplishments and want others to be proud of me because of those accomplishments, but the only ones who have demonstrated their approval of my successes are people whose achievements are the same or similar.

The final step in the Listening Guide is composing an analysis of the previous three steps. For me, the purpose of this last step was to examine what I have learned about who I think I am and attune to how I have come to know this. I examined my descriptions of self based on my origins, my social and cultural experiences, my academic experiences, and my professional training, and I found that I am more proud of who I am now as an adult than I am of who I was as a minor during the first 18 years of my life. I learned that journeys and discovery are a large part of who I am: I have made choices in life that have expanded my horizons culturally, linguistically, academically, and professionally. I learned that I am always looking to learn more so that I am in a better position to do more personally and professionally and can do so by choice or by force based on the circumstances. It was difficult to read that I feel I have failed to establish a sense of home for myself, and it troubled me greatly because I realized that I feared I had failed to establish a sense of home for my own family. I suspect that I seek out new experiences and seek to change because I am looking for professionally what I cannot provide for myself on a personal level, but I do not have enough evidence to draw this as an absolute conclusion.

Identity Unfolded: Social and Cultural Connections

With my identity unfolded, it was time to pull it all together and provide answers for my four central questions. To begin with, *just* who do I think I am? Before embarking on this autoethnography journey, I used to think that I was just a person and that it was sufficient to describe myself using a large handful of terms de rigueur based on social, ethnic, and cultural descriptors suggested by Kihlstrom (2013) and Deau (2001): woman, White, American, French, 44 years old, mother, parent, sister, aunt, daughter, wife, married, sister-in-law, oldest sibling, middle-class, Republican, a mixture of conservative and liberal, Catholic, teacher/educator, and student. I simply thought I was just supposed to look for terms that I felt best described who I currently am or who I have been thus far in life in terms of the positions I have held or the social roles I have played. I also thought I was just another 21st-century woman working a full-time job and trying to complete a doctorate degree while being everything that my family and my profession need me to be. I have found out that I am just wrong. To view myself as just anything is wrong because I need take a moment to position myself within the larger context of my profession. I wrote in one of my class journals that I was hoping to find that I was more than just a teacher. And now the realization has come full circle and hit me. I remember a time when I was in college and someone who knew that I was majoring in languages told me that if all else failed in my pursuit of a career, I could just teach. There is no just to teaching, and there is no being just a teacher. Being an educator is

not easy. It is not glamorous. You don't really get the summer off, because you spend a large part of it reviewing what you did the year before and reworking it in hopes of making it better for the upcoming year. Being an educator often requires you to put other people's children ahead of your own. I wonder just how many other professions in the world require people to give of themselves 100% every day for someone else's child. If anyone ever tells you that you are just a teacher, then they are just wrong. Based on my findings from this autoethnography, everything I do and am professionally I take personally, and everything I am personally I infuse ethically and appropriately into my teaching. That is what teachers have been trained to do for the betterment of the field of education and for the sake of preparing today's generations to take over in the world where our generation will leave off.

Just *who* do I think I am? I think I am an educator who lives and breathes what she teaches out of her professional fascination and personal love of learning other languages and learning about and from other cultures. By writing this autoethnography, I have learned that my professional identity and my personal identity cannot be fully separated from each other. I have come to realize that I think, act, and conduct myself in accordance with the expectations that I set for myself, and they are high because I know that I am a role model for every child who crosses my path, not just my own children. I realized in my answer to the first central question that I am more than just a teacher, and it has allowed me to give up the ghost of that inaccurate comment someone made to me so many years ago and embrace the fact that who I am is an educator.

Now I will ask the third question: Just who do I *think* I am? I mentioned in my introduction that I watched episodes of the program "Who Do You Think You Are?" to frame my mindset for this autoethnography. Having done so produced some interesting coincidences in trying to conceive who I am. One of the episodes that I chose to watch in its entirety was that of Jim Parsons, one of the stars of the television show "The Big Bang Theory" (Gardner, 2013). In this episode, Jim explores the family notion that he has French ancestry and indeed finds it to be true. His family search takes him from Texas and through Louisiana to France, where he visits the town of Versailles. While standing in the Chappelle de la Providence, one of the many buildings that his 6th great-grandfather designed and built during his architectural career, Jim reflects on the recurrent themes he has uncovered in his lineage: hard work, parental support of children's educational and professional endeavors, and what he called "a constant devotion to getting the job done as best you could" (Gardner, 2013). Jim notes that those same themes prevailed in the ways that his family, particularly his father, raised him to approach work and life. He says that it was not surprising to him to find that so many of his ancestors had done whatever they could to support their children in their accomplishments and in getting things done to the highest level possible (Gardner, 2013). This episode struck a chord with me intellectually and touched me deeply on an emotional level. Jim's themes resonated strongly with me for those same reasons. I was raised to believe that hard work, a strong support system, and devotion to finishing what I start are the keys to being happy with oneself and go far in instilling in one a strong sense of accomplishment and feelings of achievement and success. I am a person moved to action. I am a person who works hard to make herself better by her own standards in hopes that her efforts will inspire others to be a do their best. I am the result of the fruits of my labor, and I am very pleased with what I have achieved so far in life personally and professionally. My responses to this question go beyond the social, ethnic, and cultural descriptions that I attributed to myself from Kihlstrom (2013) and Deau (2001): woman, White, American, French, 44 years old, mother, parent, sister, aunt, daughter, wife, married, sister-in-law, oldest sibling, middle-class, Republican, a mixture of conservative and liberal, Catholic, teacher/educator, and student. Each of these aligns with what Kihlstrom (2013) described as a social group (or social stereotype), a type of situation or interaction, or a type of action in terms of trait

adjectives but do not serve to answer the question "Just who do I think I am?" Who I think I am best aligns with Kihlstrom's categorization of people based on the type of person that someone is psychologically including one's mental state. Both Kihlstrom (2013) and Deau (2001) noted that social identity goes beyond categorization, carrying with it implications for behavior that include an individual's set of beliefs, emotions, and motivational considerations. Deau (2001) surmised that social identity is an inherently social phenomenon best understood as a product of individual and contextual-historical forces, which aligns with and explains my answers to who I think I am as related to the third question in the Listening Guide (Gilligan et al, 2003).

The last question remains: Just who do I think *I* am? I think I am still both a person and a professional in the making. I think that is why I look to make changes in my personal and professional pathways. The codes that corresponded to "Who I Am" defined me as a chameleon who is contextual, feels, moves, is most at home in my own element, and embraces knowing and learning and life. My inner chameleon also values the self in writing, knows what needs to be done, is professional, asks questions, and conducts research. She (after all, my female identity is crossed up in this!) is autogenous, endogenous, and subjective all at once. She is social, finds her way, works hard even under rote conditions, and writes for herself and others in the field of education. She embraces her own cultures, appreciates those of others, and is comfortable in her own identity.

I wrote this autoethnography in an attempt to learn more about myself personally and professionally with respect to why I seek out and embrace change. I now see that it served to examine why I have never been content to settle for where I am in my personal or professional life or to settle into any one identity—in other words, to just settle for what was at hand socially, emotionally, linguistically, culturally, intellectually or professionally. The social categories used in this paper ascribe to my membership in different social identity groups including but not limited to gender, race, nationality, political views, and sexual orientation. In examining my connection to these social categories, I gained insight into the cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioral aspects that underlie them such as personality traits, social attitudes, personal feelings, and memories for identity-related events (Deau, 2001; Kihlstrom, 2013). Kihlstrom (2013) made reference to the mythology of the melting pot behind American culture and noted that for all of its efforts, America is not immune from any number of sociocultural issues revolving around classification and identity. From my perspective, from "the inside", I see that American culture likes to categorize and classify everything much like scientists approach the classification of the organisms comprising the plant and animal kingdoms. According to researchers like Deau and Kihlstrom, being a woman, White, American, French, 44 years old, mother, parent, sister, aunt, daughter, wife, married, sister-in-law, oldest sibling, middle-class, Republican, a mixture of conservative and liberal, Catholic, teacher/educator, and student means that there are definitions "out there" that say I embody the personal and professional identities naturally predisposed to someone with my social composition: living a white-collar lifestyle, having a white-collar mindset, valuing education and hard work geared toward personal and professional success, being less likely to experience prejudice based on age or race or gender, and experiencing a culturally engaging life. According to the social, behavioral, and organizational structures "out there," my behaviors, beliefs, and physical traits mean that I fit the parameters for belonging to any number of social categories or identities according to definitions and parameters "out there." At least this is what societal discourses "out there" tell me identity is, whether applied to others or to myself. But these discourses fail to attune to what is going on "in here", inside of me, where my identity feels like a prisoner restless for change but bound by chains of personal and professional upheaval. Social prescriptions from "out there" indicate that I ought to be happy "in here" personally and professionally since the

view from "out there" says my social identities and traits predispose me to a life of privilege over many others. According to them, I should have no need for change or for wanting to change. According to Deau (2001), my desires for change correlate to a natural tendency for social identities to shift slowly and over time. These shifts are not to be taken as signs of whimsy, indecisiveness or instability; instead, they serve as evidence of the ways people choose or are forced to respond to changes in their environment based on what seems most appropriate for a given setting (Deau, 2001). According to Deau (2001), a variety of factors influence the way we negotiate our identities, including one's setting and the actions and influence of other people in those settings. In short, we are seeking to make meaning and sense of our identities. Autoethnography, then, is the qualitative crossroads of making sense of change as related to social identity, its purpose being to show the "struggle, passion, embodied life, and collaborative creation of sense-making in situations in which people have to cope with dire circumstances and loss of meaning" (Ellis & Bochner, 2006). Human beings are social organisms incapable of living in constant isolation and, as such, strive to validate their existence through social dealings with the understanding that associating themselves with a group will require them to act according to the groups' structural norms and behavioral patterns (Cinoğlu & Arikan, 2012; Stets & Burke, 2003). At the same time, our value commitments produce our personal identity, and the values established by society and how individuals internalize them result in role, group, and value identities (Hitlin, 2003). Cinoğlu and Arikan (2012) stressed that identity and identity formation stem from concepts of self (the mind's interpretation of interactions between society and the individual) and identity (a collection of social statuses, each with its own identity) as related to an individual's personal values, his or her needs for group membership, and his or her willingness to assume and accept societal roles. They stressed that while groups need their own type of members in terms of same or similar goals, sources for references, leaders, ideals, environment, and to a degree, socio-economic status, the quest for aligning identities is challenging enough that groups might resort to identity formation and resocialization by choosing to undergo transformations, effectively cutting themselves off from the mainstream as a means of learning the new rules for the group that they wish to join. Stets & Burke (2000) noted that identity is the result of the self categorizing, classifying, or naming itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications. I believe that individuals looking to align themselves with others in an existing group is an extension of this based on Cinoğlu and Arikan's (2012) belief that every social status of the self has an identity attached to it that is neither set nor concrete but instead highly flexible and capable of change according to environment, context, and expectations from society, a group, or other identities just like it. I believe that my reasons for seeking change correlate to an awakening, an awareness that my identity is not flexible enough for me to conform to a given group's norms or belief system. My awareness then manifests as a loss of meaning of self and leaves me feeling isolated, abandoned by the group, and filled with the need to find my social fit by changing settings in an effort to finding social groups in my personal and professional lives that consist of members like me. The result is that my efforts at identity formation within the context of the K-12 educator group fail: I reject reciprocal interaction between self (me) and society (the K-12 educator group) because I accept the power of self over society but reject many aspects of power of society over self in this instance (Stets & Burke, 2003).

A Chameleon's Reflections

The autoethnographic study presented here served as my first foray into self-discovery through journaling. I recorded my feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and descriptions of my personal, academic, and professional responsibilities with the intent of understanding

more about how I view myself personally and professionally. I now know that I am questioning my identity because I feel rejected by past and present groups with whom I have tried to assimilate. I change work environments because I still have to find where I fit in professionally. I wanted very much to fit in with the structural norms and behavioral patterns that define the K-12 workplace because I am passionate about helping others learn and grow personally and professionally, but almost 2 decades of change have proved to me that one thing cannot change: me. Stets and Burke (2003) described self-concept as the moment where the self realizes its existence and distinction from the society. McCall and Simons (1978) noted that the prominence of one's identity is measured by three characteristics: the degree of support that self is receiving from others to shape its identity, the degree of self's commitment to the identity that he or she accepts and was given by the structure, and the degree of extrinsic and intrinsic rewards that he or she is given the structure and other identities for submitting to their norms and accepting their supremacy over his or her identity formation process. McCall and Simons (1978) also noted that successful enactment of a role is contingent upon the quality of the negotiation with others. I have learned that who I am personally and professionally does not align with the structural norms and behavioral patterns that a typical K-12 educator group expects of me, so some of the roles that I am required to occupy and enough of the beliefs and values that I am required to embrace to be a successful member of a K-12 educator group differ enough from my own that I am unable to fit in with this group. Cinoğlu and Arikan (2012) provided a wonderful identity example for teachers noting that "[a] teachers' identity and behavioral patterns are set in a class setting, and if you act against those patterns or deviate from them, you will face sanctions created by the structure (society) for violating the norms, mores, and/or folkways" (p. 1117), which means that individuals know that they cannot alter the set structural norms and behavioral patterns. They can, however, choose any behavioral options they want by using imagination and creativity while being careful to remain within the borders of the structure. My struggle with identity comes at the crossroads of what the group expects from me and what I feel that I can give to the group without sacrificing my identity. I now realize that I have spent nearly 2 decades trying to use imagination and creativity to create my own niche within the K-12 educator group, and this simply will not work. Part of the problem, as I discovered, is that others tried to define who I am on their terms, similar to the way that one individual told me so long ago that if I couldn't get a job doing anything else with my language background, I could just teach. That was his view on my reality, and I also realize that it was a clear statement that he did not value teaching as a career. I, however, know that there is much more to being an educator than teaching. I have discovered that becoming an educator was more than a choice for me and is far from being a career that, as that one person's words implied, I can do as a backup plan when all else has failed. It is a calling, a destiny, a desire to give back to one's community, culture, society, and world the same way that my teachers did when they felt called to become educators and impact me. I leave this study more focused on what I believe and what I value as an educator, as a doctoral student, and as a person: an ethic favoring hard work, an unyielding perseverance, a belief in myself, a love of educating others, and a desire to continue growing as a learner and a scholar got me this far, and they are the cornerstones for continuing my personal and professional journey to discovering an environment suited for my values. I feel better prepared to embark on my dissertation, and the flying chameleon inside me is waiting to see what lies ahead in work and in life!

Autoethnography continues to gain ground as a viable and less marginalized form of qualitative research as authors research and researchers work to achieve recognition for the body of work itself over its research subject (Atkinson, 2006; Holt, 2003), but its use is not without what some would call risks or downsides. As the researcher with self as subject, I had to come face-to-face with events from my past that were painful, private, or difficult to

discuss. At times, I felt like I was rubbing salt on purpose into an open wound. This is the first time I have dared to share many of these experiences and feelings. Initially, I felt vulnerable, exposed, and open to criticism as noted by Ngunjiri et al. (2010). I pushed those feelings aside and chose to move forward with autoethnography because I valued being able to capture the rawness of my emotions and share my story more deeply and more richly—I knew that this was the inherent beauty of autoethnography and chose to embrace it. As a result, my journey models one way for educators in K-12 public school settings to engage in self-examination of personal and professional identity and practices while leaving the door open for more research into the importance of self-study of personal and professional identity. Boyle and Parry (2007) have proposed that autoethnography holds great promise for studying organizational culture given its introspective and retrospective nature and its potential for enhancing an understanding of the link that exists between individuals and the organizations for which they work. Educators in the K-12 setting are being encouraged increasingly to engage in research tasks that help them examine their teaching practices in conjunction with student performance and achievement, and qualitative research practices such as autoethnography and self-narrative hold great potential for allowing these practitioners to understand a particular problem, answer a question, and also situate their own personal and professional identities within the cultural context of their professional setting (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Kennedy-Lewis, 2012).

I always have felt like a work in progress, not sure what is was that I was destined to do in life but wanting to play an important and meaningful role in hopes of discovering who I am along the way. I always felt pulled to connect with others and help them learn about themselves and discover themselves with my guidance. I always learn more about myself in the process, and I suspect that the other chameleons in education feel the same way. It is for them and for me that I have written this autoethnography. I examined my personal and professional self in an attempt to clarify my personal and professional identities and understand what makes me a chameleon. I found that my needs and desires for personal change are normal and, if anything, position me to better adapt to change when it is required. I also intended for this paper to shed light on the value and potential that autoethnography holds as a methodology for educators seeking to understand their personal or professional identities and how their identities contribute to the relationships between individual educators and the organizations for which they work.

This study of self in a social-cultural context (Ngunjiri et al., 2010) has taught me to embrace my identity in all of its layers and complexities, to be proud of it, to use the emotions behind my past personal and professional experiences as sources of strength for using personal and professional change as opportunities to grow. As an individual, I like to grow—personally, professionally, academically, culturally, linguistically, intellectually. This is why I seek change. This make me well-suited to being an educator—a profession that charges me with the responsibility of helping others grow—for my willingness to grow positions me well for helping others take steps to grow.

So what, do you ask, is the origin of the chameleon metaphor? Part of a past job interview included a series of question for which I was allowed to provide one-word answers only. When I was asked to use the name of an animal to describe myself, and the word "chameleon" popped out instantly without the slightest forethought. It surprised me when it did, and its accuracy was astonishingly surprising when I thought about the variety that existed in my professional skill sets and experiences. From that moment on, I identified with being a chameleon in the sense that, as demonstrated by this autoethnography, my personal and professional colors differ in so many ways from those of other people in the K-12 educational setting. Exploring my identity through autoethnography allowed me to bring the metaphor to life and extend it to that of a flying chameleon, applying it to persons who

actively seeks change by taking flight in their personal and professional lives to find an environment that fits with their own colors and traits. To that end, I would like to think the journey detailed here has encouraged the reader to take a firm hold of my contextual rope, tie his or her own contextual knot, and hang on out of a desire to read more about autoethnography, to understand its power to help us break with convention by expanding and opening up a wider lens on the world of education and offering us the opportunity to study how the people we are or perceive ourselves to be influence our professional practices (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010).

One more thing. I generally eschew online surveys because I see them as a waste of time, but one in particular grabbed my attention enough that I took it not once but twice about 2 months apart, just to see if my results came out the same. Although I cannot remember what answers I provided from the first session to the second one, the results were the same: I am someone who wants to change the world. And I firmly believe that to be true about me. For I have come to realize that I am both sides of the coin: I am a teacher and a person who teaches, and my professional and personal identities are extensions of each other. My experiences thus far as a doctoral student are the catalyst for what I will do next: I want to continue educating others, but I need to go in a different direction to do it. I also want to continue writing and researching, presenting at conferences, and pushing my own personal and professional limits to new heights. Because I read and write and because I engage in intellectual inquiry, I have discovered why I needed to know more about who I am. I have discovered that I need to give back to the world by paying forward everything my teachers, mentors, family, friends, and co-workers invested in me. I need to find a professional position that will allow me to train others to become educators in either a K-12 environment or a higher education setting while also allowing me to pursue my intellectual and scholarly interests. My inner chameleon needs to spread its wings and find the next environment that suits its needs to make a difference in society, in culture, and in the world.   I wrote my story to further my strength and resolve as an educator, a student, a researcher, and a person, and it is my hope that it will inspire present and future educators from K-12 and higher education settings to write their own stories as well.

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