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Chapter 8

PROFESSIONAL GROWTH THROUGH GUIDED AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL REFLECTION: A CASE STUDY FROM PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

*Joachim Broecher¹, Janet F. Painter², Joyce H. Davis³
and Arwed Williams¹*

¹University of Flensburg, Flensburg, Germany

²Lenoir-Rhyne University, Hickory, NC, US

³University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, NC, US

ABSTRACT

Using qualitative documentation and analysis methods this case study explores the endeavor to support a student in pre-service teacher education who failed his first attempt to write a master's thesis on the theories of experiential education. Because he had not assimilated recollections from his own problematic family life, he was overwhelmed. When invited by his advisor, the student revealed that he had performed Rap since he was 14 years old. A new experience-based master's thesis was designed collaboratively, focusing on autobiographical reflection and the Hip Hop world. Extensive interviews and e-mail correspondence between university professor and student followed. The key finding of this study is that university advisors can contribute to the professional growth of a struggling student through the following components:

relation-building, collaboratively reconstructing and reflecting the student's life history and cultural activities, and working on the interconnection of autobiographical reconstruction and acquisition of theoretical knowledge. The article concludes by pointing to limitations of the applied approach, beginning with the necessity to provide university staff with time resources and training so that they can act as advisors in the subject-centered and culture-oriented sense. The authors make suggestions regarding how this approach in higher education can be applied more systematically.

Keywords: autobiographical reflection, experiential education, diversity, Hip Hop and Rap pedagogies, multicultural education, narrative inquiry, pre-service teacher education, teaching children and youth with emotional, social, and behavioral needs, teaching for social justice

1. INTRODUCTION

“Becoming a teacher is a life-long process of growth rooted in the personal. Making sense of current or prior life experiences and understanding personal-professional connections is the essence of professional development. We come to know our teaching selves through explorations of elements of personal histories” (Cole and Knowles, 2000, p. 27; cited after Braun and Crumpler, 2004, pp. 70-71).

Students in pre-service teacher education find themselves in a transitional time between their earlier family and school lives, and their lives within cultural and peer communities and their imagined future lives. In some cases, students may voice their wish to reflect upon their own biographical background during their time at the university. A growing body of theoretical, anecdotal, and empirical research describes the transformative power of autobiographical reflection in the context of pre-service teacher education. This case study centers around a male student, whom we call Ray, who had failed his first attempt of writing his master's thesis. The topic of his initial thesis was the significance of experiential education for children and youth with emotional and social needs. At the beginning of this process the young man delved into the literature and started to review pedagogical theories and models which have been developed to benefit children and youth with emotional and behavioral needs and challenging socialization experiences. Ray confessed in a letter to his professor that while he tried to design and accomplish his thesis, he had been overwhelmed by stressful emotions and

recollections from his own childhood and youth. The situation ultimately resulted in a real crisis, which lasted for a period of five months, and as a result, the thesis could not be completed. In fact, it was not even started.

What Ray needed, and also voiced, was the opportunity to come to terms with his own challenging biographical experiences. This young man of 27 years also announced the news that he had been involved in Rap music for the last thirteen years, and was still performing, using a screen name. Because his advisor at the university advocated for an experience-based pedagogy which referred to the lifeworld and cultural practices of children and youth with emotional and social needs, it was more than natural for him to offer this young man the same kind of learning experience. The advisor and this student started from the assumption that offering opportunities for autobiographical reflection and reviews of pre-service students' own cultural talents and creative activities may contain resources, which when brought to the surface collaboratively, serve as a bridge to the regular study curriculum and can be a life-changing experience.

Thus, the advisor suggested the following title for Ray's new master's thesis: "Hip Hop-based autobiographical reconstructions and reflections of a pre-service teacher education student and embedding the results in the theoretical framework of an experiential, hands-on pedagogy for children and youth with emotional, social and behavioral needs." Ray embraced this new topic, and to foreclose the outcome, this time he was able to submit a successful master's thesis, although there were some limitations, which we will discuss later. This study examines this case as illustrative of a person-centered and culture-oriented approach in higher education. The article looks at the way in which a university professor may interact with a student in such a context. This case study offers documentation and pragmatic analysis of the whole process and argues for the need to pay attention to the life history and cultural living context and the creative or cultural orientations and productions of students. Such considerations may have the potential to turn around a life trajectory of struggling students in a significant and positive way. The following is a recount and reconstruction of Ray's journey.

2. GOAL, RESEARCH METHOD AND PROCEDURES

In this work the authors used a case study design (Bassey, 1999; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Flyvbjerg, 2011; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009). Data collection took place through a series of six semi-structured in-depth

individual interviews extending over three to six hours, and extensive email correspondence between the student and advisor (first author). Both methods, in-depth interviews and email correspondence, were closely intertwined. During these interviews the first author used Erikson's (1994) "stages of psychosocial development" and Havighurst's (1972) "developmental tasks" as a guiding structure. He did not work with pre-determined questions (Aleandri and Russo, 2015) but worked more flexibly and freely through the giving of impulses, feedback and posing questions on that basis. Additionally, writings were collected that had been independently composed by the student while reconstructing his own biography and while archiving his work and history as a rapper. With regard to the data-analysis, all written documents comprised of ca. 800 pages, along with other diverse material like photos, graffiti, videos from Hip Hop and Rap performances, as well as ca. 50 song texts, etc. were subjected to a qualitative content analysis (Patton, 2002). During this process we reduced the data and identified emerging themes and patterns by reading the transcripts and e-mails several times. It was essential to preserve Ray's perspective in order to capture his sense-making of the connections between his own life experiences and the cultural or creative expression of these experiences and the emotions in his songs and performances.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Research holds that "past experiences shape not just individuals as literate beings, but also as literate actors and educators" (Bokhorst-Heng, Flagg-Williams, and West, 2014, p. 360). Also Bukor (2015, p. 322) found in her research that "childhood experiences made a considerable impact on future instructional practice and the development of teacher identity" and that "the integrated autobiographical reflective process uncovered a substantial interconnectedness between personal and professional lives." Bukor (*ibid.*, p. 323) further argues that teacher identity reflects "the imprints of the complex interconnectedness of one's cumulative life experiences as a human being." Thus the "process of reflecting on past learning experiences opens up the possibility of... transformative learning" (Bokhorst-Heng, Flagg-Williams, and West, *ibid.*).

On that basis, a long series of studies suggest that when pre-service teacher education students reflect on their own socialization as part of their professional development, it is beneficial (Hoadley and Ensor, 2009; Kuzmic, 1994). Additional studies point to benefits resulting from engagement by pre-

service teachers in autoethnographic exploration (Richards, 2015), self-study, autobiographical reflection or a life history approach in pre-service teacher education (Ambler, 2012; Betourne and Richards, 2015; Choi, 2013; Collay, 1998; Guillory, 2012; Le Fevre, 2011; Lima, Rebelo, and Barreira, 2014; Koster and van den Berg, 2014; Souza, 2015). Some studies advocate for the combination of narrative and ethnographic writing (Hale, Snow-Gerono, and Morales, 2008). Much of this research is built on Dewey's (1997a,b) concept of reflection, including the critical analysis of knowledge, beliefs etc. The learning process as defined by this study is performed through the sharing of personal narratives, through narrative inquiry, and exploring their own identities as future teachers (Bukor, 2015; Hirsch, 1993; Huber et al., 2014; Kelchtermans, 2014; McVee, 2004; Pisto et al., 2016; Skerrett, 2008, 2011) and through autobiographical reflection as adults in a general sense (Aleandri, 2015; Aleandri and Checci, 2015; Arthur, 2014).

This case study may also help to clarify and explain teachers' own patterns of perception, thinking and acting as teaching professionals in the classroom when responding to children's behavior. To know the psychodynamic concept of transference is of great value for teachers (Weiss, 2002a,b), otherwise the biographical experiences of pre-service teachers, as well as the patterns of perception, thinking and acting they have shaped, might have a problematic impact on teachers' classroom behavior. Autobiographical reflections of pre-service teachers thus will not only lead to a more reflective pedagogy, through discovering one's own patterns of perception, thinking and acting, but also may be regarded as a contribution to resilience-building with pre-service teachers (Mansfield et al., 2016).

When this kind of reflective work is started with students in higher education it is important to be aware that childhood and adolescence, with all their challenges and undercurrents, will emerge. A growing body of research describes the psycho-social development of children and adolescents, the tasks they have to solve, and the steps they have to take (Blos, 1962; Erikson, 1994; Havighurst, 1972). With regard to Ray's specific case, one part of this literature deals with the crucial role of fathers for the development of children and youth (Louv, 1993), particularly when they are boys (Blos, 1985). Drawing from this literature, university advisors gain orientation. This theoretical background will enable them to understand the deeper meaning of the shared biographical episodes, to recognize themes and issues, and also to show them the way to proceed most effectively with an individual student.

With regard to the migration background, the precarious socio-economic situation of his family, and the cultural orientation of Ray, the student in the

case; this study has also been informed through the literature which focuses on the preparation of teachers for multicultural classrooms (Barry and Lechner, 1995; Greenleaf, Hull, and Reilly, 1994; Hale, Snow-Geron, and Morales, 2008; Noordhoff and Kleinfeld, 1993; Seidl et al., 2015), and on a teacher education for equity and social justice (Adams and Bell, 2016; Adams et al., 2013; Ayers, Quinn, and Stovall, 2008; Bigelow and Peterson, 2002; Boyan and Woolsey, 2015; Brown, Gorski, and Lazaridis, 2015; Hanley et al., 2013; Kaur, 2012; Kelly-Jackson, 2015; Lam, 2015; Liu and Milman, 2014; Martinez, 2015; North, 2009; Smyth, 2011; Zygmunt, 2016). Also informative to this study are the literature of critical literacy pedagogies, the teaching of poetry for social justice (Christensen and Watson, 2015; Morrell, 2008) and the teaching of youth culture as a bridge to teaching the curriculum (Mahiri, 1996). These studies illuminate key elements of the documented approach in pre-service teacher education as it has been employed in this case study.

With regard to the particular cultural orientations and practices in this case, the literature suggests considering Hip Hop as a culturally relevant resource in education (Alridge, Stewart, and Franklin, 2010; Alverman, Moon, and Hagood, 1999; Dickens and Lonie, 2013; Dimitriadis, 2009; Emdin, 2013; Hall, 2009; Hill, 2009; Hill and Petchauer, 2013; Huq, 2006; Kim, 2015; Land and Stovall, 2009; Low, 2011; Porfilio and Viola, 2012; Prier, 2012), while acknowledging possible challenges (mainly the sometimes insulting or violent language, which of course must be evaluated and reflected upon critically) when implementing Hip Hop in school (Low, 2010). A part of the research literature also analyzed the role of Hip-Hop culture in college students' lives (Petchauer, 2012). Other studies explore working with literacy autobiographies of pre-service teachers (Bokhorst-Heng, Flagg-Williams, and West, 2014), which can be rooted in Hip Hop, but of course can also be connected with other cultural practices.

The role of university staff in this whole process is a crucial one. Advisors must practice a student-centered approach (Bara, 2014; Tangney, 2014) and engage in an intensified pedagogy of care (Huber, 2010; Walker and Gleaves, 2016; Webb and Blond, 1995). The experiential interactions between advisor and student turn out to be essential moments of learning (Conle et al., 2000). To make this connection possible, the first author in his role as university advisor established a close, respectful, trusting and supportive relationship with Ray, the student in the case study, drawing from the humanist, client-centered approach (Maslow, 2014; Rogers, 1942, 1951, 1961). The next chapter will show how these theoretical backgrounds informed and underpinned the interactions between Ray and his advisor.

4. RESULTS

In the results chapter three major topics are discussed. In the first section the biographical data are analyzed. The second section examines Ray's approach to dealing with life problems in the world of Rap and Hip Hop. The third section explores the advisor's input and his interaction with the student.

4.1. Biographical Data

When looking at the biographical data as a whole, it becomes obvious that Ray's relationship with his father is of vital importance for a deeper understanding of his socialization and personal development. About 85% of the collected family-related data are centered around the relationship between father and son. For this reason, this issue is given much space in the results area of this article. Secondly, Ray's relationship with the other family members is examined.

Relationship between Father and Son

Ray's reflections revolved about the relationship with his father and, as the following chapter explains, this theme is very much connected with his own music production as a rapper: "Anyway, I remember when I proudly presented to him my first independently compiled recording with tracks from various years. I went to see him regularly in his flat in ...street. At first I hesitated to hand over to him the compact disk, until then I had only told him about my music production, but I had never shown him concrete examples of songs. Even if I had trodden the boards in and around the city now for ten years, I had difficulty to offer my dad this musical product. Rather I should have liked that he had witnessed one of my performances. This never was the case before he passed away."

Ray describes his father as a man with social anxieties, a man who shied away from public appearance: "My father in front of a stage among foreign people? Unthinkable! At the most he went to his 'colleagues', who met in a private setting, where they mutually voiced their distress, how difficult their life was... It was not realistic that he would get up from his sofa, where he always hung out, drunken or stoned... Somehow I preferred him smoking a joint. At least he was more relaxed then. With alcohol, in contrast, he often lost control, and started to hug me, although he was hardly able to do that when he was sober.... I still smell the scent of alcohol on my father, it makes

me sick. Each time when he hugged me and he stank of beer, it was too much for me... On the one hand I could actually smell how he was controlled by the drug, and how the alcohol shaped his thinking and communicating with me, words that he never could say when he was dry. On the other hand it was too much for me that the man who hurt my mother and threatened her with murder was hugging me. The same body which was the generator of violence would be affectionate with me?... when these hands wanted to clench my mother's face... the hands at her throat shortly before press shut? These hands of my father, at the end of these arms, which were dragging my body toward himself? He never respected that I was against his drinking, he dismissed my concern and said that he would be in control and that he knew what he was doing... the smell of alcohol, my father, a physical wreck, his long hair and long beard, he looked like the wizard Gandalf in 'Lord of the Rings'. I was ashamed of him... In spite of this I went with him out on the streets several times, which made me feel good. I overcame my scruples; I was strong. He also drank in the public, ordered several times Irish coffee in a café. I was embarrassed because he obviously could not do without drinking. In retrospect I do not feel embarrassed when I talk or write about, it only makes me sad... I still remember when we went back to our flat, I felt my palpitations. My father had drunk several glasses of beer and obviously they affected his mood. He started to behave open-mindedly, perhaps even boisterously, and then put one of his arms around me... I could not assess how the alcohol would influence his mood and behavior and took fright. More concrete I was afraid that he might do harm to my mother later in the evening. Usually he then turned up the loudspeakers of his stereo, and my mother had to calm him, as she always did. I don't remember what happened during that night."

The following chapter gives us an idea how crucial emotions were in that relationship between father and son: "I don't know if I really have told him that I love him, if I really have said this personally to him. Once I sent him a short text message from a music festival which I attended together with my girlfriend... N.'s performance, particularly her song 'Heartbeat' overwhelmed me emotionally, so that I burst into tears. Thereupon I wrote him that I would love him. Perhaps I will still find out, if I actually have said it to him. Anyway, I definitely know that he has listened to my song 'Fidelity' very carefully. Afterwards he told me that he, however, had taken care of me, in thought, within his heart. He did not appreciate when I brought up the issue of his drinking. I hit him with this. Somehow this also was my intention."

As the next passage shows the father was proud of his son's creative production: "... driven by his pride that his son made Rap, he started to design

CD covers and distributed several copies in his own circle of friends... This was the first time that I, at least indirectly, experienced the pride of my father... a good feeling, now... Up to now I only always had the circles of drunkards in mind where he had presented my music CD.”

The pride of the father for his son is also expressed in a general, overarching form: “I know that I am a planned child. The night of my procreation, as my father told me, was star-filled. He always looked at this circumstance as something unique and talked proudly about it, always with the attitude that I should regard myself as a gift and a very particular human being... I believe that he acknowledged a lot what I did, that I enrolled at the university and at the same time produced emotionally touching music. And without wanting to sound arrogant, actually I sometimes feel by hindsight that he also has looked up to me and that he admired me.”

As is learned from the interviews with Ray, the son takes care of his father, who lived alone, after his wife with the two children had left him: “Often I went shopping for him, right before I saw him or directly after my arrival. I went alone, without him. He always gave me a well prepared grocery list, so that I only had to run down the corridors of the supermarket without searching for the items so much. Often he gave me the money which I needed, and sometimes I advanced it to him from my student grant. Somehow I liked the idea to do that, in a way I was proud to take care of my dad and do him good. In a way he survived through my commitment in spite of his many physical ailments. At least he did not want that I donate one of my kidneys to him, when he got the diagnosis that one of his kidneys did not work well enough any longer. Nevertheless he continued drinking, a little bit less, but he continued. But he did not want my own kidney. To realize this he was still responsible enough. It took a load off my mind.”

During his reconstructive autobiographic work Ray recollects harmonious situations with his father: “I remember that we had this harmonious get-together, at least a little bit, when we had lunch in his small flat. Before I got there he asked me via phone if I had already eaten. Even if we only had simple ready-made meals I thankfully ate together with him.”

Ray recollects also the following scenes from his earlier childhood: “In the past my father and I used to grapple with each other in his studio. One of my friends and I used to plan an ‘attack’ on my dad. We ran towards him and tested our physical strength while wrestling with him in a loving way... He decided when the game was over. Sometimes these situations were too short for me, but I accepted it when it became too much for him. I was always open-

minded and always tried to overcome the spatial distance between us through affectionate hugging.”

What the son later wanted was to interact with his father on an artistic level: “I always wished to encounter with my father from artist to artist. Perhaps this would have been a level on which we could have built something for a common future, despite our particular family circumstances. He acknowledged what I did in the field of music and recommended it to his friends. I also did graffiti and he knew that. Suddenly this question comes to my mind: Why did you never paint together with him? Graffiti meets oil painting.... He asked me to spray a graffiti at his balcony, but I did not do that, because I was not sure if it would have been legal, after all my father lived in a rented flat. I should have liked that my father would have come my way with the proposal of an artistic cooperation.”

However, as the father withdrew in his own world he served, at least partly, as role-model for his son and he also inspired him in particular fields: “My father’s own career had come to an abrupt end, when he left college and withdrew completely and no longer pursued a target outside of his studio... he was not accepted for their free painting class, even if they accepted him in another class, the professor had told him, when he applied, that he needed some more exercise, I still have the college’s written notice of rejection... My father described a situation, when he came late to class, and the lecturer admonished him, and she told him that he should leave again, he slammed the classroom door and never returned to college, for all that he had not been accepted for his desired area of study, the lecturer’s critique of his unpunctuality capped it all. This is how my father proudly told me this story. My father the rebel. Now he studied independently through reading his books, he had this small library in the living room in ... street. For instance he did a lot of reading about Greek mythology. I would claim that he substantially shaped my preference for metaphors. Perhaps I should have liked to write a text directly in his presence or together with him. I should have liked to encounter with him as the son of an artist, whom he had taken furthermore under his wing. I always wanted for a father who would be a positive role model for me. He never showed me how to assert myself in society, how to find my place as an active element in society. He always stayed out of everything, a hermit crab... He left his smoke-room probably only to get something to eat or to buy ahead alcohol, cigarettes, and cannabis. I am always sympathetic to people who feel marginalized. Besides my fellow students I always had friends from the music scene without a high school degree and with a migration background, in the first or second generation, or people who

acted at the margin of legality. I condemned none of them... In this respect my father's attitude probably shaped my own attitude ... that he, however, with regard to liberality, tolerance, and openness, has been a role model for me. He taught me not to evaluate people from their external appearance. As a result I very often feel no fear to communicate with foreigners, and to approach them frankly, benevolently, and honestly, when a situation requires this. Many people which I know resemble my father on various points, e.g., withdrawal from society, societal critique, creativity, spirituality (he said he was a Buddhist) and intellectual level. Basically, my father was bright-eyed and educated. Unfortunately his intellect fell into decline over the years more and more through his heavy drinking... My father tried to teach himself to play the electric guitar. He always has been a fan of Jimi Hendrix. During the last years before he passed away he gave me three guitars, two acoustic guitars and one electric guitar, and a small amplifier... Now they find themselves in my flat, rarely used until now... I should learn it one day, and take lessons with a professional musician... I myself discovered Hip Hop culture during my musical socialization and checked out all elements, which are connected with that: Breakdance, Djing, Beatbox, Graffiti, Rap. Perhaps my father inspired me to engage in this autodidactic, learning by doing style. My father showed me how to paint bricks and how to make them 3D on the paper. Already early in my life I had the opportunity to explore my creative and artistic abilities, there is this one painting, a portrait my father painted of myself, it shows me as a small boy with a brush in my hand. My mother told me that he often painted, also kneaded with me during these early years. Possibly my interest in Urban Art, Graffiti, etc. is rooted in my father's artistic inspiration."

But Ray was also longing for more paternal presence. The following chapter presents a different picture: "I never had the impression that my father felt responsible for us. I wished that he would have squirmed out of his swamp and instead undertake things with us. Though he was so fascinated with art... why did he not take us to the city's art museum?... Joint adventures, with the two of us, I wished for this kind of paternal presence... I would have been proud when he had come to one of my performances... it would have been beautiful when he had been directly in front of the stage, so that we would have had eye contact, so that I directly could witness his reaction, his facial expression, perhaps his proud smile. Possibly he also would have closed his eyes and completely immerse in my music... To know that he is there perhaps would have provided me with more energy and inner calmness... I would have felt more complete and also would have greeted him from the stage, using his

name, as an acknowledging gesture... my heart would have experienced absolute joy..."

Nor had the father visited his son in his university town and Ray became angry: "Again and again he promised to visit me in the city where I studied and that he would like to see how I lived there... This promise never became true... Always my hope, that he would keep his word. He always left it at empty phrases. Very often I lost my temper about the fact that he only talked and actually abandoned me. Did he have no interest to see me or did he not have the financial means to travel? Again and again he apologized. I could not hear it any more. Actually he was never there for me in the way he wished to be. Perhaps he just could not. My recurring disappointments turned into grief... I might use a punching bag now, honestly, to act out... I feel angry on my father when writing this..."

Ray experienced his father's perfectionism as very challenging: "His basic mood required a lot of consideration, we had to handle him with kid gloves, you had to make everything right for him. Here is my personal sticking point, the reason for my own perfectionism. Often he expected from me to solve additional school-related tasks, when I already had finished the regular package. He wanted me to attend a special school for gifted students and asked me to stay in his studio to achieve this goal. He always controlled my tasks there in the studio. When I had finished my tasks he wanted me to knock at the door and show him what I had accomplished. Consequently I spent plenty of time in his smoke-room."

Ray distances himself from his father: "Unreliable and not authentic, not real, my own musical motto on the contrary was: 'Keep it real!'... Today I interpret this as contrast to my father. To keep one's word, to care for each other, to cater to the needs of the other, to take into account the wishes of the other. I really wanted him to do this. I would have wished for a father who soberly stands up straightly for his own actions and who would campaign for me and not only talks about himself and his own problems. 'Keep it real' also means for me to set myself realistic goals and strive for them. But my father did not do this. He produced only empty phrases..."

Ray's father also practiced corporal punishments: "I experienced physical violence through my father when he punished me with a dark green rod made from plastic, giving short blows on my behind, because I had committed 'stupidities', how he called it. Perhaps these blows were not so strong, but I used to experience them as painful and humiliating... When my sister and I had quarreled and she cried, my father left his studio. He always blamed me for her mood and punished me in a rigorous manner. I remember his rigid,

earnest gaze and his jagged, critical tone of voice... Sometimes he grabbed my arm and dragged me into his studio, or I had to walk in front of him. I detested these kinds of situations and the emotions connected with them... The studio was composed of two parts, at first there was a vestibule with materials... in this vestibule the punishments were performed... sometimes the blows came down on my naked behind... sometimes I could leave my trousers on... there is a taped record from my childhood, with me and my sister talking... you can hear me cry loudly 'no', to escape from such a punishment..."

The father also became violent towards his wife: "My mother told me that she was my father's second wife. He had been married before and had already hit his earlier wife so that they had to take her to hospital. Despite this bad omen my mother had married him... My father did not want a second child, so that my younger sister initially was not welcome for him. It always was a heavy burden for me that he had shared these circumstances and this knowledge with me... My mother said that my father was overstrained with the new situation... One night I was lying in my bed and suddenly noticed that something was going on in the living room. My mother wept, actually she whimpered... She beseeched my father to stop... I did not dare to enter the living room... Perhaps I have seen something... I am not sure today... I know that my sister was also in the room, in my mother's arm, perhaps as a protecting shield, as an appeal to his reason, that he might calm down... From that point I know many details from what my mother told me. My father had laid his hands on my mother's face and throat and threatened to push firmly... My mother told me that my father almost had killed her... I wonder how my sister experienced this..."

Ray was scared that his father, after their escape from their former flat, would turn up at their new apartment: "When I still lived there I had this uneasy feeling from time to time. I was afraid that he would look for us and that he suddenly would show up in front of our door. At least he had threatened to do that right after our escape ... through phone calls ... he also terrorized us with phone calls during the night... I also experienced my father as a threat for the three of us... His drinking, his unpredictability, the verbal threats, the terror at the phone, he would find out where we hid... I never felt safe during that time."

Ray also dealt with his father through writing to him: "I composed several texts concerning the relationship between us. More precisely, you are the subject of three songs. You only know one of them, because I wanted to spare you with the sharp words of an adolescent, who was not yet able to reflect his life situation well enough and be wiser. You do not make any effort to show

more consideration for us. I have grown beyond you! As time goes by I did everything differently than you did. Unfortunately, for the most part, I had you in my mind as a bad role model, your career as a drug addict, your discontinuing the contact to your family, your behavior towards mum. I always tried to understand you, not to blame you for all that happened. In retrospect I tried to understand what was going on in you, at any time of our joint past and the following debris field of grief, hate, fear, guilt and insecurity. Unfortunately I never understood you completely.”

As a result Ray experiences the relationship with his father as rather ambivalent to the present day: “During my entire adolescence I tried to take a clear position towards my father. Actually I was not successful with this because he played with my emotions. On the one hand he told me that he would love me and on the other hand he blamed me and my sister for having abandoned him... I listen to my mailbox and hear my father saying: ‘You and your sister, don’t you feel responsible?’... I should have liked a predictable and affectionate father, without causing fear in me... I felt harassed and simultaneously left alone... that I always felt a fear of loss concerning my father when I saw his lifestyle... how he lived in his one room apartment... how he had degraded himself through his drinking... that he was no longer able to hold his feces... In his camping-like cooking zone stood a rusty pot without coating... He washed himself in the shower with a bucket... He would not buy toilet paper... His lifestyle was extremely Spartan... He was happy when he successfully made ‘small transactions’, e.g., when he could give me a second-hand jacket or an old computer. It would have been better when he had cared for himself... He died after he had heard that his mother had passed away... He was in hospital many times, had broken his arms or legs, had problems with his kidneys and lungs... When I saw him for the last time... three of his front teeth were missing... I always worried about him, after all he was my father.”

Ray’s Relationship with the Other Family Members

In contrast to his relationship with his father Ray experienced the relationship with his mother as supportive, clear, reliable and encouraging, even if the maternal recommendations were perceived sometimes as a little bit too much for the son: “My mother was the only parent who stood at my side during my whole life and who supported me with my plans and projects. When I did not want to take ancient Greek as a third compulsory foreign language she supported me with a change to another high school. She understood my situation. She also let me travel to France in..., where I worked as counselor in

summer camps, so that I could expand my... horizon. She supported me morally, emotionally and financially, according to her own resources... Down to the present day I attach value to her opinion, even if her views sometimes bother me because she can thwart me with my plans and projects. She appeals to my reason that I should take care of myself, my body and soul and that I provide myself with sufficient resting phases... Because I am aware of this issue in the past I felt myself a little bit too much mothered by her... I also explained this to her... Today I... can act pretty well without my mother's advice."

Thought-provoking with respect to Ray's relationship with his mother is the following chapter from his written reflections: "In the small front pocket of my school bag I let the whole grain sandwiches go moldy countless times, which my mother had prepared for me with sausage or cheese which I did not like... Very often I got in trouble because I had not eaten these sandwiches. On the other hand I would have felt guilty for throwing them away myself, so I left this to my mother..."

Ray describes his relationship with his younger sister as a very positive one. On closer inspection and when looking at the childhood years ambivalent undercurrents also become visible: "Towards my sister I was mainly affectionate and supportive. Between my 6th and 11th year of life I realized the differences between our... interests and lifeworlds. I recollect a situation in which I kicked my sister with my foot... she started to cry... and I adjured her not to report this to our father, because I was afraid of being punished... My father very often protected my sister and blamed me when she wept... When he retired to his studio during the day after smoking a joint he expected that I would take care of my sister... But this early responsibility overcharged me... after all her crying could lead to new punishments... Thus my relationship to her during these years was rather tense... Her acting influenced my father's mood and attitude towards me..."

Against this background it was quite challenging to help the girl with her school work: "Because my mother had asked me I tried to help my sister with her school work. Unfortunately I was very impatient with her... I knew this impatience from my father. I urgently must ask my sister how she experienced this at that time."

As part of his autobiographical work Ray also analyzed film recordings concerning his own family's life: "I realized that at that time I called for a high extent of attention in front of the camera because apparently my sister was in focus more and more. As a result I tried to gain attention through my direct asking ('Will you film me as well?') or I made humorous remarks... Dressed

up with feathers, sun glasses and Clown's nose I was sitting in front of the camera on a small children's sofa, playing alternating harmonica and saxophone, I do everything all at once to call for attention."

While Ray's relationships with his maternal family are affectionate and supportive, all relationships to the paternal side are shaped through coldness and distance: "My father's mother had the same reproachful attitude that he had. Perhaps she was the origin for his grief. He had cut off contact with her after she had brought me a rod for Santa Claus. This was too much for him... When my sister wanted to visit her paternal grandmother she asked her: 'What are you doing here?... Actually you don't need to show your face here anymore.'... My father never has forgiven his mother. Until he passed away he had no more contact with his parents or siblings neither to his grandmother whom my mother and I visited regularly, until she died. To her funeral we went alone, without my father. I did not feel... accepted at the funeral... I don't remember if the people there noticed us at all. We were like aliens..."

Ray describes his paternal grandmother as a controlling person. She had a key of his family's flat, which she later, after severe conflicts, gave back. She and her husband finally had rejected their own son, Ray's father, because of his unstable lifestyle. Physical confrontations between grandfather and his drunken son are documented. Later the paternal grandmother would say at the phone to her own son: 'I don't know you.' This grandfather had come from Portugal to Germany, after the Second World War, Ray describes him as a witty storyteller jumping back and forth between Portuguese to German, and that he transported so much soul and enthusiasm in his stories, that he had always listened captivated and amused by him. Skype-sessions between Ray and his mother, who in the present lives with a new partner in Belgium, became another informative resource in his autobiographical endeavor, particularly with regard to family secrets: "My father once had told me that his own mother had deceived her husband sexually with a sailor. As my mother told me my father and his brother witnessed my mother kissing the foreign seaman, but the grandfather must not find out about this, and perhaps he never did... probably a heavy burden on my own father's shoulders... Repeatedly he was involved in his mother's secrets, her pregnancy and the affair with the seaman... My mother also revealed to me that my own father had caught his first wife in the act with another man."

Ray tries to understand how these experiences formed his father's feelings, his thinking and finally his behavior: "To what extent did all these experiences, particularly the infidelity of the women in his life, influence my father and shape his need for fidelity? Once my mother told me that he became

jealous when she was offered the position of a head secretary in the insurance company where she worked. And I remember how my father had told me that my mother once had said to him that he should care more for her and that at the insurance company there were several colleagues who were courting her. My father obviously became jealous, perhaps this is the origin of his violent outbursts. Jealousy and the fear of losing his wife to a more successful man, despite having joint children. My mother once told me: ‘He was disappointed by the women, the mean, mean women.’”

4.2. Dealing with the Life Problems in the World of Hip Hop

Ray entered the world of Hip Hop and Rap early in his life. Here he found ways and means to deal with his life problems. His university advisor opened the dialogue about this field of experience: “Now you are 27 years old; Hip Hop and Rap are a central theme in your life down to the present day. You started at the age of 14. You definitely are a rapper now for 13 years?” Ray confirmed this: “This is correct, to be precise, I started... practicing Breakdance and Djing. My recollections go back to a summer afternoon when I rode with my bike to a youth center in... to see the group R.... I hoped to learn some dancing steps, so far I had used some moves from my time as a Taekwondo student, to create some of my own motion sequences... The ‘Breaker’ K. showed me the basic ‘Sixstep’ and recommended me to practice with that for a while... I tried it several times, but I felt uncomfortable to exercise in the presence of these professionals, I also lacked courage to let me show this step several times. Perhaps I thought that I must have been able to perform the step right away. Anyway, from this day on I lost my motivation to be committed in Breakdance. Simultaneously I tried to ‘scratch’ and ‘cut’ with an old record player from a friend of my mother and a borrowed mixing console. My old childhood friend ‘DJ F.’ also tried to move forward in this field and he made more progress than I did... Because of my verbal eloquence he encouraged me to start with Rap... and I let go of my DJ ambitions... In... I invited several friends to a freestyle session in my room at home. The driver for this was my longing for community. Two further meetings followed. These meetings were recorded on audio tape... These sessions... a meeting of creative individuals... led to a first Rap formation...”

During organized youth travel Ray experiences how euphorigenic it can be to perform a freestyle in front of other adolescents: “I knew from a youth camp in Portugal that after one or two beers you were able to address highly

philosophical themes. The setting sun, the long beach, the warm wind, a good friend who feels what you feel. I already knew O. from another trip, organized by the church's youth center... we had deep discussions together... inspiring... then my first public freestyle on a balcony of the apartment complex where we lived... the others shouted some words and I picked them up, creating meaningful sentences from them, I was in a flow, the phrases spouted out of me. I was able to entertain all the other people without having prepared anything. I was 14 at that time."

Ray describes his personal philosophy in the world of Hip Hop and Rap. It is centered around the concept of unity: "Basically I always was a team player. From the start of my musical career I tried to assert myself in several new formations that originated... and I always tried to provide joint experiences and represent my own team on stage. My ideal always was unity, as a key concept of Hip Hop, and how it was expressed during the 'Jams', where Breakdance, Graffiti, Rap, Djing, and Beatbox came together and where everybody showed his respect for the others. I always tried to transfer the idea of unity to my own musical projects in the various formations."

Ray also invited his family members to experience his Rap performances: "I begin with a freestyle to break through my listeners' reserve... they applaud... Besides my girlfriend and my mother also my brother-in-law and a niece are among the audience and enjoy my performance." Ray evaluates his own musical production during his reflective work: "For me it was always important to... try out my personal facets and new things... I look at my music as a piece of personal freedom... to follow thoughts, ideas, emotions, until a song originates, and as a milestone then characterizes a certain period of my life." He describes his method when performing Rap as follows: "Usually I use a lot of images and metaphors. Freestyle means for me to fall in a kind of trance, to immerse completely in what I am doing, to be in the 'zone'. Often I just give vent to the words and through this associating chains of rhymes emerge... I let my own thoughts and ideas bubble. I also like to refer to situations and circumstances and to address political and social issues, with regard to myself, I practice a kind of understatement. I don't like to give myself airs... Too many rappers play macho, but what they actually produce is hot air. Perhaps I do not have this huge craving for recognition... Often my own perfectionism prevents me from being satisfied too soon with my results..."

Ray defines his own message as a rapper as follows: "I wanted to tell my story, my family history, my view of society, to illuminate the social problems. My music always should be personal, honest, authentic, open-minded, socially

critical and emotionally touching. I sensed my own goose skin when I wrote songs like 'Fidelity', 'Fear of Loss' or 'Without Self Doubts'. Subsequently I wanted to find out if also others would sense and experience these emotions. Actually I received the highest amount of positive resonance for these songs... The basic needs of the people to receive love, recognition, appreciation, sympathy, and respect, always were my lyrical focus... I gained many 'props' for my fast rapping, for the breathlessness, the energy on the stage, also for my emotionally touching song texts. I always had difficulties dealing with this praise, mostly I took a bow, without priding myself on it. I did not want to take off... I would like to be a model for those out there, who don't have the power or the courage to voice something about their own misery... K.'s song 'Rock in the Waves' touches me, because it describes a parental ideal and awakes a longing, I also wish to awake longings in my listeners... I want to motivate people to follow their dreams... like I myself drew power and hope from the music I would like to provide this resource for others..."

Ray dealt with his life problems when writing and singing his songs, above all with regard to his relationship with his father: "This new entry is a chance to open a new chapter during my reflections. While I earlier reconstructed my family background I will now look at my musical production as a creative coping strategy regarding my emotionally stressful relationship with my father. Earlier diary entries already discussed a series of song texts which are dedicated to the conflict between my father and me... I was always missing attention and encouragement from a male person, a father figure..."

But also his relationships with his peers, including his girlfriends, appear in Ray's songs: "These two songs mark a kind of turning point in my life. After these two relationships with girlfriends had come to an end, I wrote these songs, to process my emotions and understand them." The world of Rap served as a counter-world to the conflict-charged family life: "... that the musical scene in which I live down to the present day actually always has been a counter-world to my familial world... Here I could gain recognition and respect, already as a young adolescent, from older male peers, a community I had chosen on my own... At the weekends we traveled to... because there we could practice freestyle sessions deep into the night... We also watched Hip Hop films or we made sketches, drew or did graffiti. I shared a room with L. and P.... and before we fell asleep we talked a little bit. Thus a feeling of cohesion emerged."

From the beginning of his career as a rapper Ray processes his life problems and life-changing events through his song writing and his musical performances: "My songs always were dealing with incidents that took place

in my family life, very often extreme situations like the night of our escape... We came from a visit to my aunt, I remember that she suggested to leave the board games that we had brought with us there... my mother went to a phone booth and called a women's shelter... Someone came to pick us up, I think it was a woman... During the night of our escape I wept continuously... My mother could hardly calm me... I did not really understand what was going on... I was 10 years old... Somehow I have the feeling that I tried to be strong from that moment on. I wanted to be there for my mother and my sister..."

Another theme is how Ray dealt with transitions, e.g., after he left his home town and moved to another city for his university studies: "The Rap song 'Fidelity' is dealing with my farewell from my home town... This song should reflect my connectedness with... all the people that were part of my life at that time, friends and family. I included them all in my song, but I started with my mother and my father in the form of 'Shoutouts': 'Dad, don't drink so much, this will only make you sad, have the courage! Make yourself heard, write a letter from time to time. Stay present at least now, because you haven't been all these years, when I needed you. Despite all this you must know that I love you!'"

Right in the middle of his first unsuccessful attempt to write a master's thesis Ray began to archive and systematize his musical works on Facebook using his artist's name: "At the beginning of this year I started to create an artistic profile on Facebook, after all I had stayed in the background for 13 years. Thus I am active as graffiti artist and rapper, respectively as 'Mcee', that is 'Master of Ceremony' or 'Mic Checker', hence someone who is in control of the situation, with the microphone in his hands, he provides content and motivates the audience to move, to listen, to laugh, to cry... My artistic profile on Facebook is a valuable resource in the context of my master's thesis, to reconstruct my history as a musician..." Ray also has collected materials beyond this digital platform and made entries in a diary: "Once in my younger days I acquired a black book with white pages, originally I wanted to use it as textbook. Later I used it as a book of remembrance and collected flyers, stickers, sketches or collages in it... This book helped me a lot when I reconstructed the stages of my history as a musician..."

4.3. The Advisor's Input and Interaction between Advisor and Student

The following analysis builds mainly on the extended email correspondence between university advisor and Ray. The material which had been voiced and discussed during the in-depth interviews is contained here indirectly, or even directly, because the thoughts, emotions and issues which filled the verbal dialogue between advisor and student also appear in their extensive email correspondence. The personal conversations between advisor and student and their writings were very much interconnected. The documented material was read and re-read several times and then categorized from the advisor's perspective using the following parameters: signaling interest, achieving a deeper exploration of events, giving positive feedback and acknowledging abilities and resources, expressing empathy, exploring emotions, exploring needs and desired states, looking for correlations and finding a red thread, opening a broader genealogic perspective, validation of the advisor's assumptions, considering a specific trauma therapy, and meta-reflection with regard to situation and context.

Signalizing Interest

The following chapters demonstrate how the university advisor signalizes interest in Ray's social and cultural world: "Your biographical and familial background, and your self-created cultural world start to live in my own internal world..." The mentoring professor also did some research through the internet and then mirrored back to the student what he discovered: "I see this boy or young man, perhaps he just started with his university studies, as a bachelor's student... 'Street Shot TV'... a video... I watched captivated... this bold, mischievous smile, self-confident, natural, showing pretty teeth, behind these safety glasses, disappearing a little bit under a 'Hoodie', you call it 'Freestyle Action', this lots of talking, rapid talking, rhythmic talking..."

Achieving a Deeper Exploration of Events

What was found consequently in the material is the advisor's attempt to achieve a deeper exploration of events in Ray's life, e.g.,: "Your own work, your music production, your Rap songs and performances on stage: To do all this you need a personal vision and mission, a message: What is this for you?" "And you put all this in relation to your physical father: Do you want him to acknowledge your artistic work? Would you like to share your artistic world with your father and communicate with him about the details of that world?"

“Father and step-father both stay outside of your personal and artistic world. You call this the ‘passive presence of the fathers’. What would an active paternal presence, that you longed for during these years, look like?” “Your wish that your father had come to one of your Rap performances: How would you have experienced this? Where exactly did you wish your father to be then? Close to the stage? And would you have been aware of your father’s presence during the whole performance? Where in your body would you have sensed his presence? What would have been different in comparison with a performance without your father’s attendance?” “To what extent was your father physically abusive? What did he do to your mother? What did he do to you? Did your mother try to hide the abuses to hold the family together?” “His lack of control when your father was drunk: Suddenly physical closeness to which he was not capable without his drinking. Could you describe such a situation in detail? What did your father do then? And what did you do? And how did you experience this emotionally?” “How did you experience it to stand on the balcony and doing this spontaneous Rap? How did you feel in this situation? Do you recall some of the sentences, words or even fragments that the others voiced and what you then made up of these elements?” “Your assumption is that your father might have had fear when you met him. Why? What would support this assumption?” “You never read the books of Karl May, you only dragged them with you all these years. Would an in-depth reading arouse a longing in you that might have increased your despair that you must live in such a depressing situation? Can it be that you were so much involved in dealing with your life situation and life problems that you did not have the energy, the time and either the leisure for such an in-depth, relaxed reading?” “I still ponder about the molded sandwiches in your schoolbag which you have not eaten and which you dragged around for days. Your mother did not find out what you liked to eat?” “It seems that your Rap performances always were and still are a kind of trance, perhaps through hyperventilation?... Are you entering a deeper state of consciousness when you are doing Rap? Is it possible that you then gain access to a preconscious material, and that associations are circulating more freely in this area?”

Giving Positive Feedback and Acknowledging Abilities and Resources

The advisor systematically gives positive feedback to Ray and acknowledges his abilities and resources as the following examples may demonstrate: “You need courage when you want to be on stage: You have it.” “Your vision and mission is to connect people, to show them that they have similarities, emotionally; I can tell you that you live this philosophy truly and

that I can experience it through our communication, and personally spoken, I like that kind of philosophy.” “You received positive resonance from your audience, particularly for the songs ‘Fidelity’, ‘Fear of Loss’ and ‘Without Self Doubts’. I myself was also touched emotionally when I listened to these songs, so I would confirm your assumptions regarding the emotional potential of these songs ... The crucial role of these songs for your own life...” “The lyrical focus of your songs, your idea to reflect upon the basic human needs to obtain love and acknowledgement, and reveal your intention to encourage people. You truly live this philosophy, through this philosophy you can give a lot to others, through all this you are a likable person, from my point of view...” “An awesome piece of music, your song ‘Fidelity’, I probably listened to it seven times now, and I read the text, a lovely, soulful sound, even if the message is ambivalent... so that joy and pain just balance out one another... to leave your hometown, to deal with the transition, to be emotionally agitated... fear of loss and confidence...” “I could sense your power when I listened to this song... You have a very likable voice which I like to listen to...”

Expressing Empathy

When analyzing the advisor’s inputs another key element of these comments is expressing empathy, e.g.,: “When I read these lines I can sense the fear, the pain, the lack of confidence, also a little anger (?) of the young Ray of the summer 1996; I was emotionally touched when I read your entries...” “All this proves your emotional depth, your sensitivity for human relationships, your acknowledgment of the people in your life, your distinctive sense of responsibility for others, for your sister, your friends, your appeals to your father that he solves his problems, your gratitude to those who have helped you to overcome barriers, your eternal faithfulness for your mother, who finally always was your safe harbor, ‘when there is nobody else left...’, your emotional sensitivity and vulnerability...” “The boy’s wish to lead a life without sorrows and young Ray’s longing for a world which just is ‘in order’; how understandable this is, because this is so fundamental for a child, and how irritating and incriminating it must be when a life situation provides the opposite of all this.” “Later, you looked after your father, you went to the supermarket for him, and sometimes you even took money from your student account for this, when your father was out of money. Thus you had a crucial role for the survival of your father, after his family had left him...” “The rejection you and your sister experienced through your paternal grandmother at the door must have been very painful...” “14 years old Ray on the balcony

of a hotel facility in Portugal, performing a Rap freestyle and turning in a flow, it all sounds like a real ecstasy and that you enjoyed the moment and felt part of the social community that surrounded you, and that you were the one who held all the reins in his hands..." "You were not able to speak again with your father, because he then passed away quickly. About which issues would you have liked to talk with him? What would you have liked to ask him? What would you have liked to tell him?" "The desolate images of decay in the paternal flat, and in spite of all this, your father offered you small gifts, he tried to keep your relationship going by providing you with attention, affection, and warmth, at least as well as he could."

The university advisor also combined the voicing of empathy with posing questions and new impulses which required deeper exploration by Ray: "Appeals to your father to stay with you in life, in the form of 'shoutouts'; you tried to appeal to his reason: 'Father, please stay with me, because I need you!' Thus you expressed your love for your father. Anyway, you could not ignore the predictors of vainness. How did you experience this emotionally? Did you feel fear, pain, despair, or anger that your father did not want to stay alive? What might be the backgrounds that let him struggle? What do you know about his own growing up?" "Your father is proud because his son is a rapper. He is talking about your music production with his friends. He designs a CD cover for one of your samples. You mention the year 2010 when you sensed the pride of your father. At the same time you don't want to be acknowledged as a rapper by this 'circle of drunkards', how you described your father's social network. A father who is not integrated in the middle of our society, either in the artistic world, was this the problem? ... and that he could not show you how to find your own way to establish yourself in this society? How did you experience this emotionally?" "The protecting figure of your mother. Particularly she was the one who provided you and your sister with safety in your life. Down to the present day you have an excellent relationship with your mother. Can it also be difficult for a young man to become independent from his mother regarding this specific family history?" "Drenched in sweat, in the middle of the night, the traumatized sister, and you yourself: Would you reclaim for yourself that there might be an untreated trauma?" "You create impressive, poetic, emotionally touching images: the father 'shipwrecked, without any anchor in life...' and 'I myself, this sad being', and what you longed for from your father's side, 'an older man who would give me a perspective for my life', but nevertheless he showed you the way in the world of art, at least in a certain sense..." "Always sensing this fear, this queasy feeling, how did you deal with this?" "How depressing this scene, it was

Easter 1996, when you, your mother and your sister wanted to travel to visit your maternal grandparents, so dreary, so absurd: ‘You all stay here!’ the father commanded. How authoritarian, how determinative, how non-empathic! How sad for you as children, because you had to give up your travel plan. Even if the train tickets were already bought, you had to let go your endeavor from one minute to the next, your pleasant anticipation probably turned into despair and grief. Now you had to arrange yourself with your father and his moods on Easter. What kind of reason did he give for his intervention? Do you remember this?”

Exploring Emotions

Another crucial element of the advisor’s interaction with Ray is a more critical exploration of his emotions, e.g.,: “Is it possible that you feel guilty, down to the present day, that you as children and your mother actually have abandoned your father? Can it be that this guilt is overloading your shoulders?” “This is a good question”, Ray replied. And the advisor continued: “You expressed your anger, and at the same time your strong affection with regard to your father... Would it also be possible that you only release your anger, and your disappointment, without compensating it right away through the voicing of affection? When you are performing Rap you definitely can be very massive and passionate, how about letting go with this anger, all gates open... Like you say the term ‘street shit’, even with a smile, during one of your earlier performances, you could say ‘family shit, father shit’, and whatever... By acknowledging your anger and disappointment your deep affection for your father is not negated at all...”

Exploring Needs and Desired States

In some situations the advisor gives impulses with the intention that Ray explore his real needs and desired states, e.g.,: “Would you like to describe what you yearned for? How had a different life situation looked like? What had an ‘ideal father’ done and what had you done? How had you experienced this emotionally?” “When watching this video I can also sense the vulnerability of this young man, ... he creates images, strong images like ‘stoning’... biographical issues, e.g., the parental separation, shine through... he thematizes internal conflicts: ‘Look at me, I must go into a mental institution’, this adolescent says... and he is talking about being schizophrenic... and slitting open his arms... Is it only a provocative play with words or is there also some seriousness in this?”

Looking for Correlations and Finding a Red Thread

Another category of interventions is inspired by the advisor's attempt to look at things in a broader context, how the details might be put together, and look for correlations to find a red thread. On the one hand the advisor addresses Ray's family background: "A broader image of the paternal grandmother arises; it is an ambivalent image; on the one hand close attachment, confidence between your father and his mother, practical support for the young family, but also control, distance, finally: emotional coldness." "Family secrets are revealed, an unplanned pregnancy of your paternal grandmother, her affair with a sailor, your father knew this secret. Your interpretation is that this knowledge of was a burden for him." "The unfaithfulness of the women in his life could have destabilized your father; perhaps this was the reason why he hit his wife, who was your mother, and that his own mother had had the affair with the sailor seemed to support his assumption that women are unfaithful, this might have been the deeper root for his violent outbursts. At least this might be a logical explanation to understand his behavior..." "Your father's difficult childhood, his physical weaknesses, his difficulties to be accepted by the arts college, his difficulties to arrange himself with the academy's procedures, finally his complete falling out of institutionalized educational settings. Some of these issues also appeared in your life, but you compensate them with your communicative and reflective talent, you stay in close contact with the institutional gatekeepers, and where possible, you even intensify this contact..." "Who developed the idea that you go to a special school for gifted kids? Your father? How did he come to this conclusion? And why did this plan not work? Had your father big plans for you and with you? Is it possible that you should become somebody very particular, actually representing him? Did you get your second name, which means 'God's judgment' and your third name, which means 'king' for this reason? Through this name-giving high expectations have been connected with your birth. Your birth might have been charged and inflated with mythical meaning, I assume it was your father who had this kind of aspirations. In addition your father's tale that in the night of your procreation there were shooting stars in the night sky, and that there was a certain constellation of stars... I certainly know that it is good for a boy when his father believes in him and when he describes him as a very particular human being, but when he puts a child in such a titanic context, is this really appropriate and helpful? How can the boy meet these paternal expectations? Of course you are someone very particular, Ray, but: What was your father's mission and vision? Was all this the reason that you had to do all these extra work and assignments that

you had to present him in his studio? Did you have to fulfil his own unfulfilled megalomania?”

On the other hand the advisor connects family background, cultural practices and the challenges Ray has experienced during his first attempt to write a master’s thesis: “The issue of excessive demands and the problem to burn yourself out come up. You connect your very fast, sometimes breathless Rap-style with the not accomplished first master’s thesis. To bear up something is the connecting link between both, to hold on with what you are doing... You are very strict with yourself and your own creative productions. You say a particular Rap is not good enough, that the performance is too fast, and not clear enough, that there is not enough power in your voice, and for these reasons you did not present the result to your father. There was fear of being critiqued, you were afraid of receiving negative feedback. I ask myself, if this fear came up again, when you submitted your first master’s thesis, or were you sure that I would react differently?” Ray answered: “I have always been very critical with myself. There always was my wish to move forward, faster, higher, further.... My first master’s thesis should become perfect. I used too much time to research data bases and read the literature, but I did not start writing. I tried to integrate all this content, but I was not able to select and then create a structure. I also tried to meet your expectations, also on the basis that you graded my last paper with an A. On the other hand, I knew, that against your particular professional background and educational experiences (e.g., Broecher 2000; 2015) you would read my introduction with other eyes than most other university staff would do. But I had no clear expectation towards you at that moment when I explained my failure in this introducing chapter. Above all it had a liberating effect to confess my failure in this introduction of my thesis. Actually I am afraid of offending criticism and reprimand, of consequently negative feedback without seeing positive elements of what I did.”

Opening a Broader, Genealogic Perspective

One very particular intervention draws from the advisor’s assumption that it might be helpful for Ray to look beyond his own father and consider the long line of his paternal ancestors and that he particularly integrate his paternal grandfather as a role model in his thinking: “Portuguese blood is flowing in your veins! ...I imagine the long line of your ancestors going back to the 11th or 12th century, or even farther. And your paternal grandfather who came from Portugal to Germany, this grand, bilingual storyteller, an outstanding, ensouled figure! ... Perhaps you can zoom your paternal grandfather, as a direct

ancestor, closer to you. This might complete and broaden your personal image of paternal derivation... perhaps you can also gain some further elements of identification from him, your grandfather, through looking beyond your father... so that many things, that you have experienced or that you have missed with your father, might relativize a little bit over time..."

Validation of the Advisor's Assumptions

The material for chapters and lines that might validate the advisor's assumptions from Ray's perspective were also analyzed. The following are examples from Ray's emails: "Here you grasp the reasons for my anger pretty well." "You grasp my internal conflict very precisely. Today I would assert that I have ignored and pushed it away because I thought that I could solve my life problems exclusively through my musical production, using my own resources." When the advisor said "You shed many tears, during the night of your flight, without interruption, and for your mother it was hardly possible to calm you. After this you wanted to be strong, you consequently chased away tears and sadness, you wanted to embody the male part for your mother and your sister, for 'my women', as you called it. Is it possible that these repressed tears now came to the surface when you were working on your master's thesis?" Ray answered "Definitely. I realized that I had overstrained myself. My... perfectionism confined me... and led to doubts about my abilities to accomplish this work... Now it is completely different..."

The advisor said: "Your soul and your body claimed something else, not what you had started with. What you were longing for was an autobiographical reflection, a systematic analysis of your music production with regard to the life themes and life issues and underlying emotions that they deal with. You have good reasons to be angry with your father, now you express your anger, at least a little bit, you are hammering the words on the keyboard of your computer, and before you close the sentence you wish to understand your father, and express your deep affection for him." Ray replied "You describe my internal conflicts and my ambivalent acting concerning my father very precisely..."

However, Ray does not agree with his advisor's assumptions or deflects them in his response. When the advisor said "The song 'Fidelity' touched him, you write; thus he could not be without any emotions. On the other hand he blamed you, his children, and your mother, for leaving him. A stranded man. Can it be that he despaired of his own mother who later was so cold and unfeeling with him?" Ray answered: "I cannot exclude this. At the moment I see no necessity to think about this question." When the advisor said "The

‘shallows of my external hard disc’, and find something therein, a wonderful image, here the biographical material rests, as carrier of emotions, recollections, first attempts to assimilate all this... Down there, the shallows, the emotions, the forgotten and suppressed things, also fear-producing things and bad dreams?” Ray replied: “First of all I find there pieces of music, photographs..., texts and many small impulses that might help me to reconstruct my personal, artistic trajectory. I don’t see how this search should contain anxiety and fear, I neither expect bad dreams. In spite of this I think that searching this data chaos will provide me with many helpful details and fragments to move forward with my biographical puzzle work.”

Considering a Specific Trauma Therapy

At one point the advisor encourages Ray to consider a specific trauma therapy: “The surely traumatic experience with your father, who sat on your mother’s chest and tried to strangle her, your fear that he could do harm to your mother, your feeling helpless and powerless in that situation, and that you and your mother could not directly get out of this situation... There might come the day when you wish to talk about this to a professional trauma therapist or psychoanalytic therapist who is trained for this kind of work. Now, after your father has passed away, he no longer can threaten you or your mother, but the internal script is moving on and on, on the other hand these images will fade over the years... Perhaps what we are doing here now can help a little bit on this path...”

Meta-Reflection with Regard to Situation and Context

The following sections demonstrate how the university advisor involves Ray in meta-reflection: “I had to smile when I read this line: ‘who keeps his ears acute for my verses and all my writings’, that is to say: Listen to what concerns me, what depresses me, what I have to say... I thought that this is exactly what I am doing at the moment... my role in all this here, but I cannot bring in balance what happened or did not happen back then..., after all the father is the father...” “‘Slight palpitations on my way to your office, on Saturday’, you write; a slight tension in you when you knocked at my office door. Did you perhaps recall situations when you had to come to your father’s studio to present him the completed tasks? Will my professor acknowledge what I have accomplished, similar to your father who always controlled and evaluated what you had done?” Ray said with regard to this: “My father was not always satisfied with my achievements. When he theoretically had been contented with what I had accomplished he gave me additional tasks to

challenge me cognitively. A never-ending game. When he was not satisfied he demonstrated this verbally, and also made me feel it physically.”

Or the advisor said: “I hope that you relax more and more in what we are doing right here in the present. You have the freedom to say: ‘This time I wrote only these two sentences.’ Or: ‘During the last days I could not write at all, because I wanted to think and read.’ It is all ok like this. My affection for you does not depend on what you achieve or accomplish, it is exactly built on what you already are, the human being you are, this human being with a particular mind set, soul life and emotional life that you, Ray, communicate and share with me. My acknowledgment and my affection are rooted in deeper grounds, they do not depend on things or goals that you accomplish or do not accomplish. Neither do you have to meet any kind of factual or assumed expectations from my side.” “But one thing has become obvious: Rap has a central role for assigning themes and assimilating your life issues and life conflicts! Four and a half months ago, I noticed, you started to document and communicate your works, on Facebook, in a systematic way... And we talked hours about experiential learning in summer camps to develop a master’s thesis, while at the same time your heart was beating for the world of Rap and Hip Hop...” “Imagine you had come to me half a year ago and confessed that you are a passionate rapper and at the same time talked about pedagogies that connect life and the real world to the curriculum. This exchange would have provided an excellent introduction and we might have had a wonderful start for talking about a master’s thesis. All the things that have happened now make sense, and have brought crucial learning experiences with them; so we both agree to look at your first attempt to write a master’s thesis, not as a failure, but as a highly productive and meaningful process. Through this process we reached a much deeper level of communication and reflection; Kierkegaard and Sartre surely would have appreciated what we have done so far and what we are still doing. On first glance this is about the writing of a master’s thesis, but what we actually did is more fundamental.” “Why does all this stay outside from the regular university studies, I asked myself. Why do these cultural productions and thematic analyses not find their way into the university courses?” “Ray answered directly: Perhaps I separated the world of the university, which I had experienced mainly as curriculum-orientated, and my Rap and Hip Hop world, perhaps I wanted to protect it as a retreat, as something holy. I had no idea how to connect both worlds. I always felt that it was not possible. I also feared to give away too much personal information about me, my inner life and my family history.”

Another input from the advisor's side was this one: "The systematic documentation of your works on Facebook, using your stage name, happened exactly while your first master's thesis was officially scheduled. But you were not able to accomplish the official thesis about experiential education in summer camps because of all these unresolved issues from your past that came to the surface. Thus, your Rap works, all the songs and verses, which describe and reflect your personal biographical experiences, emotions and crises, are of a much higher significance than the regular university studies. This virtual documentation of your productions in the world of Rap and Hip Hop can be understood as autobiographical reflection, as an inquiry of your own history and identity. These activities became more and more a counter master's thesis, finally they turned out to be the real master's thesis, at least as the beginning of such. This new subject for a master's thesis is deeply rooted in your own biography and life history, in your complex socialization, embracing all the experiences in your family, your peer world, and the many layers of emotions, fear and pain, hope and sadness, anger and rage. All this is performed on a back stage of the official university program and the typical award of formal qualifications which follows rigorous rules and procedures. But your body and soul despaired and refused to function in this system. You burst into tears, and experienced a blockade that prevented you from delving into the literature about experiential education or produce an intelligent, factual text about summer camps for marginalized youth. What you needed instead was to start with your own experiences, your own emotions, your own attempts to deal with your life issues, and to not start with mere theoretical models and concepts." Ray answered directly to this: "Exactly. My personal approach to deal with challenges always has been an active one, 'learning-by-doing', 'hands-on'..."

And when Ray said: "In the retrospective I always have been afraid to be open with others. There was my apprehension that people would not show comprehension for me and my particular situation and if I would ever be able to share my family history with somebody else. I was afraid to overcharge the others with my internal world... Thus most people around me had the impression that things in my life were going on pretty well. I did not want to charge someone else. On the other hand I accepted that the others charged me with their problems. I always was a dedicated and empathic listener, but did not have the courage to talk myself. Often I only talked about selected small fragments from my own biography. My fear was too big that it would be too much for the others. Now I... learn to manage my time resources better, so that I am no longer there for everyone" the advisor replied: "Your fear to be

open with others, your apprehension to overcharge the others with your internal world... It is good that you talk here extensively about your life issues... you definitely do not overcharge me with that... just stay relaxed, you don't have to match with any kind of ideal I might have in my mind, whatever it would be, you can be sad and you can be happy, I accept you like you are..."

5. DISCUSSION

An analysis of this case found that it was definitely possible to give the struggling student, who had failed with his first master's thesis, new and effective guidance and support through engaging him in autobiographical reflection and narrative inquiry. Insofar what was found is consistent with the research about the benefits of autobiographical reflection, autoethnographic exploration and narrative inquiry that are cited in the description of the theoretical framework. It became possible to "frame" (Arthur, 2014) Ray's life through "tracing, remembering and giving meaning" to his life (Aleandri and Checci, 2015). The whole process turned out to be a transformative learning experience (Mezirow, 2000; Taylor, 2009) for Ray.

It was observed that Ray delved with passion and stamina into this reconstructing autobiographical collaborative work and that he demonstrated extraordinary motivation to recollect the events of his own childhood and adolescence and to share and reflect upon his findings with his university advisor. Also the theoretical and methodological orientations of the advising professor, including his humanist philosophy in shaping the educational relationship, turned out to be helpful and effective. This finding is also consistent with previous research that underlines the key role of relationships in the context of autobiographical or resilience-building work with pre-service teachers (Mansfield et al., 2016) and with the belief that people explore and express their experiences and emotions and are able to integrate the results of their own reconstructive work when they are supported by a benevolent and empathic listener.

In the results section, material from the first phase of the case study, which focused on the reconstruction of the family history and partly on Ray's socialization and career as a rapper, was documented. During the second phase of the study, the review and documentation of Ray's musical works, extensive qualitative data entered the stage, hundreds of pages with song texts, different versions of songs, first sketches for songs, diary entries, fragments and ideas,

pictures, collages, and additional material, which is already documented on the internet, on audio platforms, on Facebook and other places. A decision was made not to include these comprehensive visual, textual and audio materials in this article to protect the case subject's anonymity. Ray's texts are written in German and it would not be possible to translate them into English without losing a great part of their subtle meaning. Advisor and student pondered over these song texts and discussed for hours how they describe the events and circumstances in Ray's life; how they express his emotions; which creative resources reveal Ray's efforts to cope with life problems. Furthermore, the advising professor listened independently to the songs, watched and analyzed video documentations of performances, took notes, developed questions, looked for deeper meanings and communicated the results of his research back to the student, via email or face-to-face during the in-depth interviews.

The third phase indicated that connecting the autobiographical work with the acquisition of theoretical knowledge may be challenging. Ray definitely had put so much time and energy into the first two phases of his work, the reconstruction of his family history and socialization circumstances and the documentation of his extensive musical works and activities as a rapper, that there was not enough energy left to review the literature and intertwine his own biographical and cultural experiences with the theoretical knowledge, models and concepts. Even though his professor gave him detailed instructions and guidance in this respect, an overview of the relevant literature and examples of how he could connect experience and theory, Ray created only a few pages with a more general summary of a selection of this literature.

This observation must not necessarily be interpreted as a limitation of such an autobiographical approach in pre-service teacher education. One aspect that must be considered is the fact that increasing numbers of candidates enroll in pre-service teacher education with limited literacy background in the classical old school sense. Bokhorst-Heng, Flagg-Williams, and West (2014, p. 359) describe this as "narrow, traditional view of literacy". These authors distinguish "traditional print and multi-literacy practices" (ibid.). The second category best describes Ray's activities in the world of Hip Hop and Rap, the songs he wrote and performed, alone or in collaboration with others. Ray, the young man in this case study, did not often engage in reading books during his childhood and adolescence, as was noted in the results section. Ray's reluctance into fully engage with the review of literature was very much related to his particular life experience. Instead his literacy socialization was characterized more by oral and sub-cultural peer-based practices in the world of Rap and Hip Hop. Pre-service teacher education

programs must acknowledge these other paths of literacy socialization, considering the frequency and popularity of such literacy paths among youth and also cultures with strong oral literacy traditions (Souza, 2015).

6. LIMITATIONS

This single subject case study, while expanding the understanding of advising and support for a struggling master's student in a pre-service teacher education program, is characterized by several limitations. The main results are consistent with previous research, but limited sample size inhibits the ability to generalize the results. We also must take into consideration the limitation that not every university professor is prepared to engage in this kind of in-depth relation-building and autobiographic work with students. Those who are willing to move forward in this direction may lack adequate professional preparation for this type of work.

Those who already have the necessary counseling qualifications may be limited by their own subjectivities and could benefit from supervision or support from similarly trained professionals to help them clarify their own emotions and thoughts when engaging in this intensive counseling work. Student support as examined in this study is labor intensive and required resources beyond what are normally available at the university level (Taylor, 2009, p. 12). The university professor in the documented case consumed ten times of what he usually needed to counsel and guide a student in writing his or her master's thesis. Thus, this endeavor must be viewed as a kind of pilot study, and not as a model which can be applied into the field of practice in higher education without considering the time resources needed by university teachers and staff.

Other limitations include increased disciplinary or institutional focus on evidence-based practice and the exclusion or reduction of qualitative data or socio-critical approaches accepted as evidence. This limiting view is sometimes the case particularly in the field of teaching children and youth with emotional, social and behavioral difficulties, both in Germany and in the United States. In connection with such an exclusively quantitative-empirical research paradigm, which is usually taught on the basis of a behaviorist model, the application of the documented approach used in this study would likely not be possible.

7. CONCLUSION

This study has shown that it is possible to support a struggling master's student and give him guidance so that he is able to accomplish the goal of writing a master's thesis. This happened through engaging him in autobiographical reflection and narrative inquiry and through an extensive review and documentation of his creative and cultural works as a rapper. Rap definitely turned out to be a "vital means of self-expression" (Dickens and Lonie, 2013) for Ray.

There is a growing body of literature that advocates for integrating autobiographical reflection into the regular curriculum of teacher education programs. According to these studies, autobiographical reflection, i.e., in the form of autobiographical essays (Betourne and Richards, 2015) is a powerful tool. The role of teacher educators then is to support students to transform their autobiographies and socialization experiences into a deeper understanding, through guided reflection. On this basis pre-service teachers can develop effective teaching strategies for the classrooms where they will teach later. Many of these studies come from the field of literacy education (Bokhorst-Heng, Flagg-Williams, and West, 2014; Bukor, 2015; Le Fevre, 2011; McVee, 2004), others from teaching mathematics (Boylan and Woolsey, 2015), music education (Pisto et al., 2016), bilingual education (Hale, Snow-Geron, and Morales, 2008), physical education (Betourne and Richards, 2015), cross-cultural courses (Conle et al., 2000) or social studies methods courses (Braun and Crumpler, 2004).

Future research may explore how autobiographical reflection and acquisition of theoretical knowledge can be intertwined more closely with the special education or inclusive education focus of fostering the emotional and social development of children and youth. We must look for opportunities to start with the interconnection of experience-based reflection and theoretical learning from the beginning of study programs, in order to prevent a stressful experience of failure at the end of the university studies. This assumption is supported by Braun and Crumpler (2004), who used autobiographical work with undergraduates in the field of elementary education.

A deeper and more sustainable learning experience could be achieved for all pre-service teacher education students when teaching efforts in higher education are more autobiographical, reflective and experiential from the start. Thus it makes sense to integrate "experiential interactions as moments of learning" (Conle et al., 2000, p. 366) into our teaching in higher education. This surely is a crucial element of the professional development of future

teachers, not only for those in special education who study social and emotional profiles in depth. What is provided for them is exactly what they will provide for their own students in the schools. As Bokhorst-Heng, Flagg-Williams, and West (2014, p. 360) have put it: “As they (the pre-service teachers at university, additional comment by authors) reflected on the obstacles in their own journeys, they transformed their memories into pedagogical strategies that would help prevent similar struggles for their students.” These same authors continue: “As they reflected, they rewrote their stories... in reflecting and in telling their stories, one gets a sense of empowerment, renewed hope and purpose” (ibid.). According to Hale, Snow-Gerono, and Morales (2008, p. 1424) through autobiographical reflection and narrative inquiry we “help students discover the power of their own cultural origins and experiences through writing their own stories and document the stories of their ancestors.” This belief comes very close to Lam’s (2015, p. 162) claim “that education has to be a tool for liberation.” We can support this goal through “building a community of reflective practitioners” (Greenleaf, Hull, and Reilly, 1994, p. 521).

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