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Research Process as a Liminal Space – Blurring the Boundaries between Art and Science

This paper is an attempt to understand portals to not-knowing, namely, to shed light on the research process that exists between known and unknown – to grasp the liminal. In order to explore that I used concepts of depth psychology and created space for accepting voices of body and soul in scientific quest. During the process of writing doctoral thesis I felt that I am in a liminal space of unknown where old is impossible and new is uncertain. I have entered the tension that exists between art and science. Johannes Deimling (2014), performing artist, said that „art is something very naive, fragile and disappears at the first attempt we want to understand it“. How can we, as researchers in education, overcome positivistic paradigm of producing knowledge about reality and try to be as fragile as art and abandon economic discourse of productivity? Is it possible to embrace naivety and try to stay in unknown by valuing process instead of result? How can we embrace nonlinear route? Inconsistencies represent beginnings of research process – entrances to liminal space. I tried to explore proposed questions by using autoethnography of my own process of writing PhD thesis - *Epistemological assumptions and power relations in adult education*. I connected personal narratives with the exploration of the book *Letters to a young poet*, Rainer Maria Rilke – an artistic investigation of creative processes. I would like to suggest the idea of overcoming dualism between science and art, not only by using artistic methods in doing research, but by questioning our researchers' position and by learning from philosophy of art that advises us to stay in the unknown and to be able to contain “borderline spaces” which exists without clear answers.

Key words: research process, art and science, liminality, between, autoethnography.

Context of writing

For the purposes of PhD thesis I have decided to research in what way the epistemological assumptions create relations of power in adult education. I have applied critical discourse analysis on the conversations which I had recorded during the training, but also on the interviews with the training participants and the trainer. Feeling a strong resistance

toward text analysis that lasted several months, I've realized that before I let myself into the interpretation I have to create a space for it, respectively, I have to research the transfer relations which I have on the topic research, to understand my own anger toward relations of power which I explore so I could be more open to the analysis. I ask the question: how can I offer, at the same time, deconstruction of commonsense assumptions which produce us, and to create a relationship, that involves understanding and congruency, with the research participants and potential readers. For a long time, for months, maybe even several years, I feel that I am in a liminal space - a space of the unknown when the old is impossible, and new is uncertain.

I feel that my research is calling me, evokes me and rejects me. We are in a relationship, conflict, misunderstanding and friendship. I became critical to my own criticism and I want to explore where does the need to deconstruct the truth comes from. I am thinking in what way do I connect with the research participants, do I exploit them? They support my research, answer the questions, they are present. What do I do? Do I use their goodwill to turn it against them? Lately I feel that I am developing a certain sensitivity to the discourses. I ask the question if is it aggressive to criticize and to invalidate the truth in which people believe. Do I take the position of a distant researcher wanting to criticize a distant educator?

What the research activity primarily means to me and how that activity is being associated with the various quests that have began in my life? In the book "Art of inquiry", Coppin and Nelson (2004) compare the position of a scientist with the position of an artist and emphasize the difference *in permission* for researcher to fuse with the research topic. Both scientist and artist are investigators: artists expose their body, mind and skill to the specific phenomenon, receiving, channeling and carry out to audience their conception of reality. Opposite to that, science starts from the assumption that a scientist *must not* corrupt and distort reality with his/her involvement, but to convey it to us clean and in an intact form, using predefined rigorous methods. Following the scientific postulates the researcher-scientist remains within the frames of dualisms such as object/subject, mind/body, reality/imagination, while the researcher-artist exceeds the situated limits by entering physically into phenomenon.

Romanyshyn (2007) refers to researcher-artist as a *failed poet* - a researcher who is at the limit and who enters the area of unknown so that what was present but forgotten, could be revealed. A researcher can formulate a question, but also research problem evokes

researcher to shape it and to dwell in it. Research is, at the same time, a rationally-active process, but also a passive process of receiving questions. Viewed through the prism of depth psychology it is a process of dancing between *animus* and *anima*, the so-called feminine and masculine principle, during which we can start writing from our ego, but also continue to live it through emotional and unconscious. Research process is work, but also non-work during which we can stay in our own question and live it in isolation and imagination. It is a process that lies between progression and regression (Jung, 1971) which starts progressively (adapting to the external demands - methodological rigorousness and demands of science), and later *regresses* in searching for the answers within the inner, archetypal and hidden, so that truth could be transformed and adapted to the narratives of research participants and their truth. The scientist is a catalyzer.

If our primary method of research is an observation, we make an artificial distinction between the observer and the observed, between the world and the subject. As Coppin and Nelson (2004) say, scientist is being neutralized. However, do we really abolish the needs or do we transfer them to another level by denying them? Romanyshyn (2007) points out that researcher is in a transfer relation with his research. Our psychological question is being manifested in a research question that materializes the need to know and to be known. We learn, discover and interpret through the analysis but also open ourselves and let us be discovered and seen. The invisible becomes visible (Boukouvala, 2013) within the research and psychological plane. By analyzing and researching the phenomenon for which we are interested in, we take a double epistemological position, i.e. a scientist-researcher is parallel the creator of knowledge. Surely that the answer to the question whether it is possible that this so-called truth, processed by scientific methodology becomes knowledge, remains untouched by personal truth and issues of the researcher himself – is not. Therefore, what isn't recognized does not mean it doesn't exist. By denying the emotional, physical and mental within the researcher, it does not disappear. I think that acknowledgment of oneself in the process of analysis leads to certain neutralization, which would actually be accommodation of the research question into the context. I start from the idea that by recognition of one's own questions and the state from which the research problem has arisen, we enter the liminal space where inside and outside, past and future, and new and old merge.

It is a research challenge to stay in that space and to live in *between*. By experiencing the unknown, I start to think that only in that so-called *fertile void*, there is a space for learning and creation. If we, as researchers, stay in familiar, in logical and comfortable we

deprive ourselves of discovering new territories, thus, research processes are reduced to the form, but the shadow of unspoken haunts our thoughts and words (Romanyshyn, 2007). Neilsen (2002) considers that our belief that knowledge must be the proof, the suggestion, the mechanism of prediction and control, is inextricably linked with our Western certainty that an individual is a separate, autonomous being. The belief itself is a part of our need to tame the land, which comes from the fear of the unknown (Neilsen, 2002). By writing my own narrative, I will explore unknown space and enter my own obliviousness – I will try to transform the invisible into the visible (Boukouvala, 2013).

Conceptual exploration of liminality

Authors Meyer and Land (2003) argue that during processes of research or learning there are "portals" which lead to previously unavailable and initially painful ways of thinking. The very concept of *liminal space* is a result of the ethnographic studies of social rituals conducted by the author Van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1969). Van Gennep (1960) was the first to accept the concept of *liminality* so that he could name the middle stage of initiation: *separation, transition or liminality and aggregation*. Turner accepted the term *liminality* (Latin *limen* – limits or thresholds) so he could mark the transitional space, which is a part of the change from one state to another. He described a person who goes through the liminal phase as a *structurally invisible* because he/she does not belong to the old or the new status. What is social liminality for Turner, for Jung it is a transcendent function, which provides a number of transitional experiences that enable the transformation of attitudes and perspectives.

That transitional space often starts by loss of identity and awareness that there isn't turning back. In that process, a person gives up on non-functional meanings and enters the marginal space in which he/she has been given up on old meanings, but new ones haven't been created yet. A crisis is usually the beginning of transformation process, and that initial crisis can be clearly marked (loss of a partner, illness, relocation, etc.), but also it can be a slow awakening by losing meaning of everydayness – work and relationships become empty routines (McWhinney and Markos, 2003). In the context of depth psychology, a crisis represents an impulse to become aware of the aspects of our personality which are ignored and dismissed, and the entrance into the liminal is a slow beginning of recognition and integration of non-lived parts of self (Miller, 2004). Liminality is a phenomenon which allows us to enter the space that is *neither/nor the other* which makes a reformulation of the old to the new possible (Miller, 2004). This process is inevitably painful and

frightening. Stein (1983) believes that the liminal is filled with the sense of alienation and deflection. "Self is homeless ... It floats ... The boundaries between 'self' and 'non-self' are blurred" (Stein, 1983, p. 9).

The space *between* has an invaluable psychological purpose: it is the transition of the psyche from the conflict sets of circumstances into the one which allows us to resolve, or at least tolerate this conflict (Miller, 2004). *The liminal* is a territory in which opposites coexist and thus it becomes a space of possibilities and possible source of original and new ideas (Miller, 2004). "Death of the old coexisting with birth of the new. The liminal experience is one where psyche straddles the boundary, with both death and birth and with neither death nor birth (Miller, 2004, p. 105). The place which, at the same time, includes the polarized opposites, and in which neither one nor the other pole prevails, can be the place full of possibilities. Internal restructuring begins with chaos that allows us the creation and the birth of the new. It is a space of absurd, confusion and fear, with inexhaustible potential of creating, preceded by liberation from the past connections. Liminal spaces represent the social taboos: it is uncategorized, beyond limits and structures, and we do not feel safe in it.

If we accept that the scientific research represents the liminal space, and the doctorate contemporary ritual of transition, then the research process itself is a *tabooed reality*. Researcher is being isolated, but in contact with a teacher, a supervisor, he/she is "hidden" until the moment the results are published. Although there is a lot of literature on methodological issues, it offers questions and answers which are related to the different research procedures and approaches, but not for the scientifically-creative process. It can be assumed that research process is tabooed, due to its liminality. This is a place of unknown and uncertain in which it has been given up on the old truths, but new ideas have not yet appeared. It has been accepted that the research that is not original and does not bring innovations in science, is not actually a scientific research. The research is "discovering the hidden connection between two things - images, ideas, words - connections that, until then, no one had ever seen, noticed them and connect them means create the third world, a completely unique work" (Pressfield, 2002). The focus is at the edge of knowledge which is a transformative zone. It is a liminal space that begins by realizing the limits of our knowledge and by that it begins to move those boundaries which makes these spaces difficult to understand (Neilsen, 2002). That potential scientific contribution begins by ending the old structures of knowledge and conceptions, actually an error, which is inevitable for creation of the new and which represents the portal to the

new interpretations. Perhaps exactly that "error" represents the crisis, the beginning of creation and the re-questioning of the existing. Imperfection of what we claim that is perfect is a source of development. Cracks in knowledge and reality represent transitions from one dimension of knowledge to another, and if we accept Foucault's (1980) understanding of creative and productive role of knowledge, thus the new knowledge creates also a new reality. Therefore, exactly those non-fittings represent the beginning of the research, in the context of this work – the beginning of the liminal phase. The question remains how does the research process connects with the idea of "between"? I will try to explore these questions through the autoethnographic review of the research process. Also, I will use the book *Letters to a young poet*, by Rainer Maria Rilke, which represents the support to my research process, but also an artistic exploration of the creative activity.

Autoethnographic approach

Moustakas (1990) believes that the initial steps of self-exploration are directed to the development of researcher's self-awareness. Autoethnography is a radical reaction to realism in ethnography which "privileges the researcher toward the subjects, methods in relation to the research subject, and is being dedicated to the maintaining of the outdated conceptions of validity, truth and generalizations" (Denzin, 1992, p. 20). Writing that pretends to be autoethnographic resists toward the *Great Theorizing* and the facade of the objective research which decontextualizes the subjects in request for the only truth, and the lived body of researcher is recognized as a part of the research process (Spry, 2001).

In accordance with that, I have used autoethnography which, as a method, enables me to explore personal experience in the context of the research topic. Writing autoethnographically has allowed me to shed light on the dark places of my own experience and thoughts, which opens up for me the space to hear the stories of the participants and allow them to express themselves. I fully agree with the author Ellis (1997): "I made myself to raise the autoethnographic voice which focuses on telling personal story, so it could trigger others' narratives and added blood and tissue where there is only an abstract skeleton of theoretical discourse" (p. 117). Exposure changed my position of the detached researcher, toward the person who shares a similar experience with research participants, and cooperates with them in the creation of a common meaning. Writing a personal narrative is a risk (Ellis, 2000) because it opens the researcher's injuries in order to be assessed, and arises the hidden memories to the

surface. Self-exposing has helped me to understand the importance of empathy and sensitivity in the process of interviewing the participants.

The beginning: placing the research question

Go into yourself. Find out the reason that commands you to write; see whether it has spread its roots into the very depths of your heart; confess to yourself whether you would have to die if you were forbidden to write. This most of all: ask yourself in the most silent hour of your night: must I write? Dig into yourself for a deep answer. And if this answer rings out in assent, if you meet this solemn question with a strong, simple "I must," then build your life in accordance with this necessity; your whole life, even into its humblest and most indifferent hour, must become a sign and witness to this impulse.

R.M.R.

I did not know my research question. I sensed it. It first appeared as a discomfort, as a reaction to the various educational situations which I attended. The first experience of the research questions and the problem was emotional and bodily. It has emerged from the learning activity in which I was the participants, as well as the teacher. The question came out of nowhere. It's like it has just appeared out of me, growing underground. I cherished it by reading literature which resonated with my intuitive sense. I could not explain with what I'm about to deal with, nor did I want to do that before that question was completed. I felt that if I do not let that something grows inside of me, someone else's influence can change it while it is still being weak. The support was the freedom that the anticipated question marinated. The beginning of the research is a part of the physical, emotional and intuitive. Preparing for the birth happens in a dark space of ignorance and doubt. The space is sensitive and not for exposure, analysis and consultation. It is personal and intimate because that question is an alchemical connection of the inner experience and the external environment. At this point I do not feel that I'm thinking logically, linearly and rationally. The act reminds more of germination, rather than logical sequence of steps in designing the research.

The idea of defining the research problem was not an imperative. What was the inevitable is to live with uncertainty and in the creative block that lasted for several months. During that period I have overcome the blockage through the activity of deconstruction the blockage itself. I have read the writings of the writers about the creative process and the blockage, especially about the blockage in writing. The important sentences which helped

me to accept the current "dry" state of creativity and to live the cognitive undefined problem are the following: "Are you paralyzed with fear? It's a good sign. Fear is good. As well as the self-doubt, the fear is an indicator. Fear tells us what we need to do. Remember the rule: the more we're afraid, we can be sure that we must do that" (Pressfield, 2002). I accepted the new meaning of fear within the creative process - fear means that I must give in to something. Respectively, the resistance itself and the fear of putting words on paper meant that it was about something important for me. I started looking at the blockage as an invisible process of creativity.

Connections are made slowly, sometimes they grow underground.
You cannot tell always by looking what is happening.
More than half the tree is spread out in the soil under your feet.
Penetrate quietly as the earthworm that blows no trumpet.
Fight persistently as the creeper that brings down the tree.
Spread like the squash plant that overruns the garden.
Gnaw in the dark and use the sun to make sugar.
Marge Piercy

Subtext

How can I be both free and correct? My research is the need to create spaces of freedom, for myself and maybe through that to create it for others. The process itself had started from the anger which was directed towards the authorities for which I thought that "*possess the power*" and demonstrate it. At the same time I feel the conflicts in myself. I ask the question in which of the relations am I dominant, in what relations I act in accordance with the dominant discourse? Which are the parts of me that I've cut off, and which, by the deconstruction of reality, will be resurrected as "lived"?

Starting point of my research is the Foucault's analytics of power. Foucault deconstructed medically, psychiatrically the discourse of sexuality. His father was an authoritative surgeon, he himself was treated for depression at the clinic and he was homosexually orientated. I wondered whether he created for himself a space to express socially forbidden impulses, through the deconstruction of the ruling norms. He wrote that his role was to show "... to people that they are much more free than they feel, that people accept as a truth, as an evidence, the topics which were built throughout history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed" (Foucault, 1988, p. 10).

The flux: Confusion and enter into the liminal

... Love your solitude and try to sing out with the pain it causes you. For those who are near you are far away, you write, and this shows that the space around you is beginning to grow vast. And if what is near you is far away, then your vastness is already among the stars and is very great; be happy about your growth, and which of course you cannot take anyone with you ...

R.M.R.

After formulating the research question, I had the answer. In fact, I had the answer for everything. I've applied the discourse analysis on the educational situations in which I was in and in which I've participated. I was strong and critically oriented. I've created the identity of a young scientist who knows the answers and who wants to puzzle the hidden assumptions and disclose them. I have, in fact, demonstrated that same power through the analysis of the power relation. I have often spoken in incomprehensible, postmodern language and at the same time I was vainly sensitive and intense in my evaluation, assessment and comments. Although I didn't want to become that, although I've criticized the distant researcher who puts himself in a superior position in order to interpret the discourses by interpreting and explaining the indicators, I have become that myself. By deconstructing the power, I myself have demonstrated it. Strong and weak, I was seduced by intellectuality and certain correctness of the discourse analysts.

At the same time, I need to say out loud: "The Emperor is naked!" Adult education is not free from relations of power and placing the chairs in circle does not imply equality of the participants (Maksimović, 2012). I'm intrigued by why participants agree to perform certain practices and activities which are sometimes unpleasant, exposing? What is it that binds us to be obedient? I wanted to create small spaces of freedom, for myself, for others. In this process I've lived the paradoxes: the antagonism of need for security and freedom. Structures and commonsense assumptions make possible to stay in the familiar, allow idealized sense of belonging and security. What I wanted to create was openness to the unknown and the possibility of not to have in advanced formulated way of learning and living. With my research question and the analysis I wanted to deconstruct what was considered the truth and what creates subjectivities and identities. I find myself in the space-between, where my imagination lives in one level, and what is called reality is in commonsense assumptions of the defined truth. Woodman (1993) believes that the finality

is a part of the patriarchal heritage and by that we decline our own truth and our own body, looking for the objective answers which are provided by medicine, law, science and other highly accepted authorities of modern society. I believe that the adult education in neoliberal discourse potentially represents another channel of defining the desirable subject, active, self-directed, conscious and reflective. Releasing us, it offers us the answers that are fixating us and converting us to into the desired subjectivity.

Subtext

Sometimes I wonder if my deconstruction of the valid paradigm is a struggle with my personal paradigms created during growing up. Returning to the question of depth psychology, I wonder which of the non-living parts of me are currently in the liminal space, seeking to be born. Is it so difficult and challenging to live a paradox, or to live properly and freely? The essential question which I ask if I should, in my work, prove that the authority is wrong, that implied standards do not apply, so I could be righteous in my wrongness.

I wanted
the past to go away, I wanted
to leave it, like another country; I wanted
my life to close, and open
like a hinge, like a wing, like the part of the song
where it falls
down over the rocks: an explosion and discovery;
I wanted
to hurry into the work of my life; I wanted to know,
whoever I was, I was
alive
for a little while. "

- Mary Oliver, Dream Work

Final Remarks

The need for internal destruction and reorganization of psychic reality materializes in

external reality and in the research activities of deconstruction of existing concepts and truth. Do we, as researchers, become messengers by turning the invisible into the visible? Especially when using the method such as critical discourse analysis which recognize the obscure assumptions and values that are found in the text, maybe we enter into an act of converting culturally invisible and non-conscious in a recognizable domain.

Although the identity is being changed and spaces opened for the new, discourse analysis still remains in the space-between, because the new knowledge and truths emerge, but continue to live and change their shapes, depending on the context and the reader. Such constant "doubting" position requires that we live the liminal phase, not ever staying in the final. Do we then, by constantly disintegrating the defined, create the capacity for new and different, and by staying in the unchanged truths the reality becomes infertile because her interpretation is fixed? Do we by learning the unambiguous and determinate truths become as the GMO seed, perfect at the appearance, but essentially without the possibility of re-production?

Romanyshyn (2007) believes that the research is actually the pursuit of what we know and feel, but what has been lost in some process. He analyzes the meaning of the word *research* and indicates that the term is a complex word *re-search* and that our scientific work is a completion of the unfinished processes that lies between the intellectual and sensitive. Autoethnographic approach allows the awareness and intimate connection with the processes which have initiated the research question. By gaining an insight we open liminality in psychological plane which corresponds to the research activity.

Recognition of the *imperfect* and the *incomplete* drives us to asking the essentially important, philosophical questions and allows us to create our own answers. Liberation from the given truth opens potentially a dangerous and challenging space because it leads us from a generally accepted to the unaccepted and non-lived. Each research method, at the same time reveals, but also hides (Romanyshyn, 2007). Essentially it is incomplete in mapping of what we call reality, and the research process itself is never final, although it's completed. Romanyshin (2007) aims to create a method which should eliminate the transfer of the researcher towards the "*object*" which he explores. I do not think that the influence of the researcher should be removed. Research is like the formation of amber - the material absorbs the colors from surrounding and becomes special and valuable through its defect. Amber has the unique ability to capture and preserve the organic matters in which it encounters. The need for internal destruction and reorganization of

psychic reality materializes in outer reality and in the research activity of deconstruction of the existing concepts and truths. The inner reality is being embraced by theories and methodological procedures and together with them transformed into research results. Writing emerged from the space between action and situation, love and distance, waiting and doing, art and science.

This is basically the only courage required of us: to be brave for the most unusual, for the weirdest that can happen to us on our journey through life.

R.M.R

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