AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF A MATURE AGED STUDENT
WITH A SCHIZOAFFECTIVE DISORDER: THE PLACE OF
EDUCATION IN MAINTAINING WELLNESS

Gayle Casselle

B.A., Macquarie University, 1980
M.A., Macquarie University, 1993
B. Teach. (Primary), University of New England, 2007

A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF A MASTER OF
EDUCATION (HONORS) OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND.

In the Faculty of Education, Health and Professional Studies

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND

April, 2011
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND

STATEMENT BY CANDIDATE

I certify that I am the sole author and that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being currently submitted for any other degree.

I certify that, to the best of my knowledge, any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

Signed: G. Casselle

Date: April 30th, 2011
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my Principal Supervisor, Associate Professor Lorraine Graham who is remembered for her expert guidance in my thesis as a Registered Disability Support Student. She has had to make allowances for my psychiatric disability overriding the presentation of all my chapters under study. Time constraints have been a problem when she has had to make provisions for extensions to my assignments in times of medical relapses in my schizoaffective disorder. On a positive note, we are both cat lovers and exchange photographs and exploits of these wonderful animals. My Co-Supervisor, Dr. David Paterson, has not had the same level of input into my thesis but he has welcomed the inclusions in my thesis preparation. On my visits to UNE he has behaved in a friendly and professional manner which has contributed to the academic quality of my thesis.

I particularly wish to thank my health professionals who have included a clinical psychologist and several psychiatrists. Their unrelenting involvement in my therapeutic relationships over the past 41 years of my mental illness have contributed to my personal and academic success. Of special mention, is my current psychiatrist who has been treating my schizoaffective disorder for the past 16 years and he has been pivotal in my personal life and my thesis presentation.

The Disability Office of The University of New England has also managed my condition since 2001 when I was first enrolled as a Registered Disability Support Student.
My husband, who looks after a mentally ill wife and manages my day-to-day existence, including technical computer support during the extended period of my enrolment in M. Ed. (Honors) degree, is acknowledged here for his role as my carer.
ABSTRACT

By discovering one’s inner strengths and aptitudes, personal and academic achievements are possible which will inspire others in procuring and maintaining wellness. The methodology utilized in this thesis is autoethnography, where the candidate is the “subject” of the research. I have a diagnosis of a schizoaffective disorder. Detrimental risk factors in living from day-to-day exacerbate the impact of having this severe mental illness. Symptomology includes the schizophrenic characteristics of hallucinations and delusions, side-by-side with the affective mood swings of a bipolar psychosis. A maintenance and protective regime is necessary, consisting of psychotherapy, psychotropic medications and, in my case, regular electroconvulsive therapy (ECT). As part of this ethnographic study, readers are asked to “relive” the happenings emotionally by referring to my diaries and journals together with individual recollections of friends, family and practitioners’. My academic achievements are also explored by investigating my performance during the Bachelor of Teaching (Primary) degree attained at the University of New England between 2001 and 2006. Research questions centre on the importance that educational experiences have on a particular individual’s ability to cope with a severe psychiatric disability.
## CONTENTS

STATEMENT BY CANDIDATE.................................................................i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.................................................................ii
ABSTRACT.................................................................................iv
LIST OF TABLES.........................................................................vii
LIST OF FIGURES.......................................................................vii
CHAPTER ONE..........................................................................1
  1.0 Significance........................................................................2
  1.0.1 Why am I doing it?..........................................................2
  1.1 Structure of the Thesis........................................................3
    1.1.1 Literature Review..........................................................3
    1.1.2 Method.........................................................................4
    1.1.3 Results and Discussion..................................................4
    1.1.4 Conclusion....................................................................5
CHAPTER TWO...........................................................................7
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE....................................................7
  2.0 Introduction.......................................................................7
  2.1 Mental Illness......................................................................8
  2.2 Forms of Mental Illness......................................................10
    2.2.1 Schizoaffective Disorder...............................................10
    2.2.2 Major Depression........................................................13
    2.2.3 Major Depressive Episode.......................................14
    2.2.4 Schizophrenia.............................................................17
    2.2.5 Bipolar Disorder.........................................................18
  2.3 Treatments for a Schizoaffective Disorder.........................20
    2.3.1 Psychotherapy.............................................................21
    2.3.2 Psychotropic medication.............................................23
    2.3.3 Hospitalisation............................................................24
    2.3.4 Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT)..............................25
  2.4 Wellness and Recovery.......................................................27
  2.5 Higher Education.............................................................31
  2.6 Mature-aged Learners.......................................................32
  2.7 Learners with Disabilities in Higher Education..................35
  2.8 Supported Education Programs in Higher Education........37
  2.9 Distance Education..........................................................40
  2.10 Conclusion.......................................................................40
CHAPTER THREE....................................................................42
METHOD....................................................................................42
  3.0 Introduction......................................................................42
  3.1 Topic................................................................................44
  3.2 Research Questions..........................................................44
  3.3 Research Sub-Questions....................................................45
  3.4 Significance of this research.............................................45
  3.5 Research design..................................................................46
  3.6 Autoethnography..............................................................47
LIST OF REFERENCES .................................................................119
APPENDIX A ...........................................................................126
   The three minute thesis inaugural competition .............................126
APPENDIX B ...........................................................................129
   What is it really like to have electroconvulsive therapy? ..........129
APPENDIX C ...........................................................................132
   Gayle’s Autoethnography and Academic Achievements Despite Having a Schizoaffective Disorder ..............................................132
APPENDIX D ...........................................................................143
   Gayle’s life history ..................................................................143
APPENDIX E ...........................................................................146
   My Perspectives on an ECT Experience ...................................146
APPENDIX F ...........................................................................149
   My Penfriend’s Reference of My Character ...............................149
APPENDIX G ...........................................................................151
   Some examples of my journal entries from 2007 – 2008 ..........151
APPENDIX H ...........................................................................165
   My comments on the journal entries displayed .......................165
APPENDIX I ...........................................................................172
   Comments of the markers and author’s responses on units studied in my B. Teach. (Primary) degree conferred on the 23/03/2007 at UNE at Armidale.…..172
APPENDIX J ...........................................................................185
   Comments of the markers and author’s responses to the Practicum Units in my B. Teach.(Primary). conferred on 23/03/2007..........................185

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Matrix of Research Questions ........................................72

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Leximancer’s Analysis of Journal Entries in Themes and Concepts ……87
Figure 2. Markers’ Comments on Units .............................................98
Figure 3. Author’s Comments on Units ..............................................99
Figure 4. Gayle’s Self-Actualization Diagram .................................108