

## Abstract

This article considers the experience of walking the 850 kilometre Camino del Norte de Santiago de Compostela in Spain as a metaphor for an inner camino: an inner way of developing resilience.

Using an autoethnographic methodology, self-observations and the author's perceptions of the different approaches to individual resilience observed in other travellers, are reviewed in stories and then examined through forms and habits of mind. After further personal reflective analysis, themes are revealed from the original observations. The discussion suggests possible strategies for teacher education, which emerged from the themes that may resonate with the reader. This autoethnographic journey provided an opportunity to rethink co-constructed learning, the use of guide posts for new innovations in practice, and the importance of paring back to key essentials in teaching and in our personal and professional lives.

Keywords: Autoethnography, mindfulness, initial teacher education, Camino de Santiago de Compostela

## Highlights:

1. Author's autoethnographic experience of walking the Camino de Santiago de Compostela
2. Vignettes to illustrate individual's resilience processes
3. Correlation to initial teacher education programme practices

## Introduction

### Pilgrimages to Santiago

For centuries, Christian peregrinos (pilgrims) have walked a series of routes across Europe to where the Apostle St. James is reputedly buried in Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, north-western Spain (Perazzoli & Whitson, 2015). Over the millennium, the various caminos (ways) to Santiago have waxed and waned in popularity depending on the religiosity, politics, and motivations of the ages. 'Camino' is Spanish for 'way' but can also mean 'street, path or journey'. 'Compostela' is Latin for 'field of stars' or the Milky Way which is seen across Northern Spain at night (Digiprove, n.d.). Over the past 30 years, there has been a revival in interest in various pilgrimage routes to Santiago to the extent that an estimated 300, 000 peregrinos walked either all or part of these routes for religious purposes, the physical challenge, simply for the adventure, or just as tourists in 2017 (El camino correos forum, 13 December, 2017).

My partner and I chose to walk the northern coastal route, El Camino del Norte, a physically challenging and more scenic route than the popular, and better known, Camino Francés (French Way) further south. We began the journey on a rainy morning in Irún, Spain on the Spanish/French border, and walked 850 kilometres over 35 days (11 September -15 October 2017: 31 hiking days and four rest days on Sundays). Our daily concerns were limited to basics such as: where to go (follow the yellow arrows/waymarkers along the 'way'), what to eat, and where to sleep. Thus, the stressors were very different to every day work-related stress.

In this article, I explore my experiences and observations on the camino through an autoethnographic reflection to offer possible strategies for initial teacher educators and for the student teachers who embark on the teaching journey. An unexpected benefit during my journey was the opportunity to interact with a number of young people, of widely varying personalities, who fit the demographic profile of many students in initial teacher education. This gave me the opportunity to observe how they coped with new challenges, and their levels of resilience. Several of these peregrinos offered insights and suggestions that I have incorporated into the analysis and

conclusions. My observations of these young ones and their reflections provided a grounded, practical set of data for the article.

To complement my observations of others on the camino, my personal experience on the journey illustrates my own resilience. During the analysis of the observations and experiences, insights were revealed into how others (potential student teachers) might demonstrate resilience in their career and strategies I might use to support them in their teaching journey. I have drawn some conclusions through autoethnographic analysis to use in my own personal life and career as a teacher educator that might also be helpful to others.

### *The mindful camino*

For each of us, life is a journey, a camino, a series of experiences that can be approached mindfully or mindlessly. The Camino de Santiago was for me a daily exercise in enhancing my capacity for engaging mindfully in my daily living and my teaching. Mindfulness is present-moment focused awareness, without judgement (Kabat-Zinn, 2005; reinforced by Kornfeld, 2009) and with compassion (emphasised by Gilbert, 2009). The camino was for me an opportunity to further develop and practice resilience and compassion, and to enhance present-moment focus. These mindfulness traits were reinforced on my camino, through ongoing practice of mindfulness exercises such as breath awareness, body scan or sitting meditation which focus on:

- the physical (breath; body sensations; a body scan to start each day);
- emotions (feelings);
- the mental (mind); thoughts and
- a practice of focused awareness in the moment with non judgement and compassion (Kabat-Zinn, 2005).

Using mindfulness on the camino, I was able to notice the different surfaces under my feet, interact with others on the way in a non judgmental, compassionate way and to be aware of difficult situations and the related thoughts that filled me with anticipation or fear. I was reminded, though, that “the way is more powerful than the demons” (Rufin, 2013/2016).

As with any mindfulness exercise, walking the camino is best approached well prepared. My partner and I prepared by researching online blogs, listening to personal accounts, and reading books. We wore in our boots and became accustomed to the long distances by taking 20 kilometre walks; we consulted with an experienced hiker for the appropriate gear. We mentally and physically prepared ourselves for a five week continuous journey by foot. On the camino itself, we met individuals at different stages in their lives, different ages and different backgrounds. Each peregrino had a different purpose for setting out on the journey (spiritual, physical or simply to get a 'compostela'; a certificate received at the end of the walk). Those peregrinos who did not prepare soon became aware of how this affected their progress.

The camino experience provided me with three sources of data: self-observation, observation of others and dialogue with individuals. I summarise this data in vignettes and descriptions to illustrate different resilience practices. The habits of mind as described by Costa and Kallick (nd) and stages of adult development described by Garvey Berger (2011) are used to categorise the peregrinos' behaviours which assisted in providing insights for future themes. In analysing the data, three specific resilience strategies I had used, became apparent:

1. following alternate routes;
2. engaging with and taking advice from others, and
3. regenerating with rest days.

Through further reflection and mindfulness meditation on the data, applications to initial teacher education were revealed and are outlined in the Discussion section. A critical aspect of supporting student teachers on their journey is awareness of different ways individuals deal with stress through resilience strategies. In the Discussion section, I also re-imagine my use of co-constructed learning, reflect upon the use of guideposts for new innovative practices, and highlight the importance of paring back to essentials in teaching and simplifying our lives.

The camino revealed itself to us being more about the journey than the actual destination, with people met along the way being our central and most significant 'experience'. Reminding us of

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the universality of the Māori proverb: *He aha te mea nui o te ao*. What is the most important thing in the world...*He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata*. It is the people... (Māori Language Commission, n. d.)[and their stories].

### Autoethnography as methodology

Autoethnography requires the analysis of personal experience in order to reveal values, beliefs and interpretations in the outcomes that may or may not resonate with others (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). In autoethnography, a researcher will "describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience" (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, p. 1).

My way into this autoethnographic analysis was to approach the camino experience as a mindfulness exercise. How might the experience of the camino be integrated into or change my own teaching of initial teachers, and what might help them develop resilience to cope with the constant demands and stresses of teaching? I make the case in this article, for the use of autoethnography through storytelling and conclusions drawn, in which readers "relive the experience through the writer's or performer's eyes" (Denzin, 2000, p. 905).

I drew upon multiple sources of data for my observations and reflections including: notes written each evening, photos, conversations with others, and an electronic diary co-written with my partner. These multiple 'reminders' (sources) bring credibility to the research (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). This data and resulting stories revealed the essence of autoethnography, that I am an "actor in my own life production" (Gray, 2003, p. 265). The analysis and discussion provided opportunities to consider how the camino experience might influence my teaching and, perhaps as Gray (2003) continues, how my experience might resonate with initial teacher educators and their students, and ultimately influence their own personal and professional lives from the lessons I learned (Saldana, 2003). Humphreys (2005) extends these notions to consider our experiences as 'data' through vignettes to draw conclusions to illustrate potential contributions to research.

When engaging with autoethnography, “I start with my personal life. I pay attention to my physical feelings, thoughts and emotions...to understand an experience I have lived through” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). This is also the essence of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Thus, for me, this autoethnographic reflection began with mindfully walking the 850 kilometres of the Camino del Norte. Pelias (2003) challenges individuals using autoethnography to use experience to advance an argument or share new ideas. When composing this article, I considered these questions:

What are the consequences my story produces?  
What kind of person does it shape me into?  
What new possibilities does it introduce for living my life?  
(Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 746).

I extend these questions and ask: 'What new possibilities for initial teacher education practices might be drawn from this experience?'

The theoretical foundations for an autoethnographic approach are grounded in interpretivist thinking, where multiple perspectives are reviewed *mindfully*, and possibilities are unlimited (Bochner, 2000). In this way, I am able to show clearly the changes that the experience of the camino has brought to my professional perspectives. Mayall (2010) notes that autoethnographic research is grounded in social constructionism, which Burr (2015) defines as an analysis, and conclusions drawn from experiences highly influenced by interaction with others and the environment, to construct meaning and gain new insights. These conclusions and constructed meaning therefore change an aspect of one's life through a social constructionist paradigm (Cromby & Nightingale, 1999). In this case, my conclusions in relation to my approach to initial teacher education were influenced by individuals I met on the Camino, and particularly observations and descriptions of their resilience techniques.

### **Quality in Autoethnography**

Bochner (2000) suggests criteria for determining *quality* in autoethnographic research: abundant, concrete detail that includes feelings, past and present as well as depth of personal engagement, noting changes that have been made in personal perspectives, and a concern for

others. Pelias (2007) also suggests that the reliability of the research can be evaluated by asking whether the events could actually have happened. Validity comes from whether the experience makes sense to the reader. Generalisability is achieved when readers review their own experiences in comparison, find resonance, and are engaged in the story told (Gray, 2003). My hope is that my story and anecdotes from my camino experience, as described, is relatable, resonates with readers, and provides useful strategies for initial teacher educators.

Thus, I start with my observations on the camino, integrated with specific experiences and interactions with the environment and others to re-construct the experience. These experiences are then analysed to draw new conclusions for my teaching practices using a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) which may resonate with other teachers.

### **The observations and analysis**

While walking the Camino, I met a wide range of peregrinos undertaking the same route using a variety of strategies. Of particular interest were the university students and recent graduates who were at the same age as many initial teacher education students I teach, and who demonstrated resilience practices that might indicate how they manage stress in their daily lives.

These multiple voices reflect multiple perspectives which, Mizzi (2010) suggests, along with the 'voice within my head', are critical for autoethnographic insights. As I walked with these individuals, I also became aware of my own approach to the camino and my own levels of resilience. How resilient was I in breath, body, feelings and thoughts? How present was I in the moment, with non-judgement and compassion?

I examined the stories of my observations of these peregrinos and their resilience through adult developmental forms of mind proposed by Garvey Berger (2011):

1. Self sovereign - bases decisions on personalised rules
2. Socialised - takes into consideration the perspectives of others but has difficulty when multi-perspectives are not the same

3. Self-authored - mediates between ideas and possesses own value system, which is the basis for all decisions
4. Self-transforming-dealing with complexity; learning is exciting but not overwhelming.

Additionally I will reflect upon how the different forms of resilience correlate to Costa's *Habits of Mind* (Costa & Kallick, n.d.). The following scenarios demonstrate how individuals approach resilience and use their habits of mind. Along with my reflections, I believe they provide insights for the initial teacher educator to engage with and support their students more individually and therefore, more appropriately. All names have been changed, except for Yusuf, to acknowledge his poetic contribution.

### **Mastering the camino**

We turned a corner in Villaviciosa, and spotted Juan at an outdoor cafe having not seen him for several days. It was 2 pm and he had just completed his *Menu del Dia*, of two mains and red wine, and was ready to tuck in to his dessert. "Juan," I said, "We had expected to see you much sooner than this. We've just checked into the local peregrino albergue (hostel); where are you staying?" "I wouldn't stay there," he replied speedily. "I have heard that lots of these albergues have bedbugs." He also reminded us that he was having discomfort in his ankle and was taking it easy. We suggested he use his computer to find the shorter routes and avoid the ups and downs of the coastal route which often had diversions to picturesque chapels which, as Juan chimed in, "are usually locked anyway!"

Juan was taking time out on the camino to decompress and contemplate his future. Using his intellect, wit and quick adaptability, he used up-to-the-moment electronic tools on his Smartphone, extensive planning, and finances available to manage himself and cope with any ailments and different circumstances for a much greater time than others would have been able. He adopted Spanish eating habits with a light breakfast, large mid afternoon meal with a rest period, and light snack later in the day. He made the camino work for him. Ultimately, his injuries proved too much, and the camino proved to Juan who's the master.



In Juan's case, resilience came from short-term preparedness, research and following a very clear plan. He was looking for the most efficient way to complete a difficult task. Garvey Berger (2011) might suggest that Juan acted in a *self-authored* manner, using his own value system to make all decisions, with a touch of *self-sovereign*, as the focus was definitely on Juan himself and how he would get to Santiago. Juan was 'thinking with clarity and precision', 'gathering data', and most importantly, 'striving for accuracy'- what was the best way to complete the pilgrimage (Costa & Kallick, n.d.). Interestingly, although many of his actions indicated a mindful approach, 'non-striving' is a critical aspect of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2005).

### **Endless possibilities and finding your limits**

A second, younger peregrino was not focused on 'striving for accuracy' nor on a specific plan, rather, he tested his own abilities and learned from others.

Yusuf was walking with two other peregrinos we had met previously. He told us that his camino was a spur of the moment decision, and he was going 'where my feet take me'. After an hour of slow walking with us, Yusuf ran ahead to catch up with Sonia. Later that evening in La Isla, Yusuf sat with us sharing some cookies and listened intently. "It is very important to take rest days and pay attention to your body", we suggested. "Rather than eating things like a chocolate sandwich which we heard you had for breakfast the other day, you could try preparing some simple meals; you could even share with Sonia and the others. In fact, there are some pre-prepared meals like gazpacho in the local supermercado." "Thanks, now that you have given me some specific suggestions, I can do that tomorrow," he quickly replied. We parted with the usual "Buen camino<sup>1</sup>."

Yusuf was a very mindful person in his approach to the camino. Each night when his body told him that he had walked enough, he would stop, confident that there would be a place to stay. As covering distance was a personal challenge, (he walked 50 km one day), Yusuf completed the camino a week before we did. He was readily able to disconnect from the social world, and go into a focused meditative state observing the world around him in great detail. Yusuf had difficulty when there was too much to focus on at one time such as crowds in shops or cities or too much choice

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<sup>1</sup> Literally 'good way' both physically and spiritually as the peregrino continues the journey. Words exchanged by peregrinos as they say good bye to each other but also called out by locals to peregrinos as they pass.

anywhere. He felt the instinctive need to remove himself from those stressors. His view of the world was of endless possibility and discovery; deciding the camino would reveal itself to him as he walked. This did not always work. On a couple of occasions he literally went around in circles, as he relied solely on signposted waymarkers that sometimes led him astray.

Three of Costa and Kallick's (n.d.) habits of mind sum up Yusuf's approach to the camino and his robust resilience: 'questioning and posing problems', 'responding with wonderment and awe', and 'remaining open to continuous learning'. The camino journey was essentially a diversion from his normal life that provided a learning experience, some of which he will carry into his daily life. We, in turn, were reminded of the importance of the beginner's mind, approaching life with active, open curiosity and as Garvey Berger (2011) would express, his 'socialised' approach, taking in the perspectives of others to make decisions. Yusuf sometimes appeared to have difficulty dealing with complexity and was thus, perhaps, in this journey, not *self-transforming* as described by Garvey Berger. However, his highly developed self-awareness for someone so young, gave him the ability to be exceptionally resilient physically, emotionally and spiritually.

### **Walking together with two different perspectives**

Two other men, about the same age as Yusuf, had their own approaches to the camino which were very different. We met Tony and Javier at a large, 68 bed albergue in Guemes on the grounds of the host's family home, providing pilgrims with dinner, storytelling and songs plus breakfast the next day, at no specific cost, accepting only donations.

Walking together to the ferry to Santander, Tony soon started to flag. He hadn't had his usual size breakfast and his energy was waning; and he was having knee pain. From then on, he resolved to carry regular snacks, rest regularly, and to buy walking poles. Tony spoke of his future plans in an assured, direct, matter-of-fact way, reflecting his ability to rely on his own inner resourcefulness.

Conversely when Javier and I talked about his future and his new job; he spoke with a 'feeling' focus in a genuine caring way about others and the environment. Javier had sworn off

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social media during his journey. He focused on his feelings and emotions and sharing the journey with his walking partner and others. He recommended the book, "Sophie's World" by Jostein Gaarder (1995). I subsequently read it to learn more about Javier. The book explains philosophy for young people and has several layers of story within story to keep it interesting. There were several quotes from the book that reminded me of aspects of the camino and approaches to life:

1. "At some point, something must have come from nothing." (Gaarder, 1995, p. 1). (Refer to Yusuf's Yellow Arrow poem included later in this paper.)
2. "We can only have inexact conceptions of things we perceive with our senses. But we have true knowledge of things we understand with our reason. Body is impermanent and senses unreliable; ideas come from the soul." (Gaarder, 1995, p. 87) which reflected Javier's approach to the camino.
3. I was reminded of Yusuf's approach to the Camino: "Without really knowing why, she let her feet lead her." (Gaarder, 1995, p. 87).

The book also notes the importance of a beginner's mind which both Yusuf and Javier demonstrated in his keen interest in our discussions. Javier was open to any new adventures, including the final walk to Finisterre, trying new food, and going overseas to work for a year before attending university.

Tony followed his plan carefully and 'persisted', 'took responsible risks' and 'managed impulsivity' (Costa & Kallick, n.d.) to complete the adventure and challenge presented by the camino. Whereas, Javier demonstrated many characteristics of '*self-transformation*'; coping well with complexity, eager, but not overwhelmed with all the new learning (Garvey Berger, 2011).

### **Enquiring approaches with daily objectives**

Jeanne carefully planned each day's journey; methodically building up the number of kilometres completed each day to reach Santiago by a specific date. After several weeks of seeing her intermittently, one day we found her with a group of young French peregrinos having a break in a café. She introduced us to her new walking companions.

"This is Philippe, Francois, Richard and Nick; we have walked 15 kilometres already and will walk another 20 before the end of the day." I commented, "When you were travelling on your own, you were only doing about 15-20

per day." "I know," she replied. "I have been able to build up my confidence being in a group, and it also works well because Philippe and Francois love to cook so we are enjoying delicious meals each night." "Buen camino, Jeanne!"

Jeanne started the camino at her own pace and built self-awareness through joining a group which propelled her to longer distances per day and completing the journey when she needed to; she had to return to university. She enjoyed walking with the group especially because they would not always walk together, but would meet up for breaks and at the end of the day. Ultimately, they planned the time they would reach Santiago together.

Another peregrina, Sonia preferred the serenity of time to herself when walking the camino and meeting up with Jeanne's group at the end of the day.

One day while we were walking towards our destination of Nueva, we noticed Sonia by herself; she had been previously walking with Yusuf. She was examining the blisters on her feet. I said, "You look like you are really in pain." I cannot walk anymore. I have to stop here for today." We were surprised as we knew that she wanted to keep up with Yusuf initially. "Why don't you try this hiker's wool to ease the pain of your blisters?" my partner consoled her. "Thank you so much," she replied. (Later she would return the remaining hiker's wool thanking us profusely.)

Sonia also recommended a book, "Momo" by Michael Ende (1973/2009), a fantasy novel that describes how stress has invaded our lives, and contrasts a child's approach to life and perception of time with the rushed lifestyle of adults. Time for the adults in the story is being sucked out by stress whereas previously they had enjoyed life; had time to converse together. Perhaps the Camino was a way for Sonia to regain the time she had lost to stress?

Jeanne personified Costa and Kallick's (n.d.) description of 'persistence' and 'thinking interdependently' as she completed the journey step-by-step in her own way and worked closely together with a group of others. Alternatively, Sonia created, imagined and innovated through travelling on her own, but worked in with the group as well and accepted advice from others. Garvey Berger (2011) would suggest that these two young women were *socialised* by working with the group but also employing *self-transformation* in different ways as they explored and discovered the complexity of the camino.

These vignettes of some of the young peregrinos we met reveal different ways of approaching the camino and the resilience needed for that task. It was interesting – and unsurprising - that several had sought out or discovered for themselves various techniques to de-stress, such as: walking the camino itself, turning off cell phones, giving up social media for short periods, trying out different forms of meditation, and the ability to come in and out of a group as needed. This pattern is also reflected in many student teachers. However, while many instinctively reach for or experiment with de-stressing techniques such as mindfulness to cope with what the world throws their way, very few felt they actually managed to incorporate the benefits of these techniques into their every day, practical lives. Observing how others are resilient provides individuals an opportunity to develop, maintain, and internalise their own resilience through the inner camino.

### **My own self-awareness of resilience and personal lessons learned**

Personally, I relied heavily on my mindfulness meditations starting each day with a body scan, using breath awareness throughout the day and an evening meditation focusing on awareness of breath, body, feelings and thoughts. These meditations complemented my persistent desire to complete a task, in this case, the camino. I also relied heavily on my partner. The complexity, or rather simplicity, of focusing on the route ahead, what we were eating and where we were sleeping, and not much else, provided me an opportunity to slow down and enjoy the experience, to not allow stress to invade my life; the key message of Ende's (1973/2009) book recommended by Sonia. This important message has been refreshed in me by experiencing the simplicity of the camino and interacting with the individuals I encountered mindfully, without judgement and with compassion. As suggested earlier, it is not so much the destination, but rather the journey that matters.

Simplifying and consciously slowing down life to pay attention mindfully provides time to reflect. This personal reflection time opens up opportunities to write and review notes, photos, our daily electronic diary and conversations with others. Langer (1989, 1997) suggests that there is value in observing and applying multiple perspectives to assist in seeing things in a new way; keys to

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engaging mindfully. Multiple perspectives were analysed through this written, photographic and oral data.

Three key personal lessons were revealed: the importance of interacting with the environment such as following alternate routes; engaging with and taking advice from others; and regenerating with rest days. I believe these lessons can be applied in to my role as an initial teacher educator and can be used by others.

### *Interacting with the environment particularly trying alternate routes*

By walking the camino, I was able to utilise mindfulness to be in the moment with the environment. I noticed the different walking surfaces from concrete pathways, to trails, to roads, to sandy beaches, and the different sensations in my feet when walking over each surface. Yusuf and Jeanne, both curious enquirers, also enjoyed comparing these sensations. At the end of the day, I was aware of the effect of the different surfaces on my legs, e.g. walking on concrete pathways or sandy beaches in the moment was not difficult, but occasionally resulted in residual leg muscle pain. Blisters and other foot ailments were a constant conversation topic for all peregrinos.

We learned to avoid the heat of the day as much as possible and surprised ourselves by managing 30-35 kilometres per day. There were a few rainy days in difficult terrain (ascending mountains then descending into deep valleys) presenting two challenges: the strain of climbing and the subsequent challenge of not slipping on the downhill; 'tanto barro' (too much mud). However, these difficulties were more than compensated for by panoramic views of the Picos de Europa (Peaks of Europe) mountain range that spectacularly border the Mar Cantábrico (Cantabrian Sea), and walking through endless groves of apple, chestnut and walnut trees – all shedding their late summer/early autumn crops. Other inspirations were provided by architecture and design, ancient and modern, to uplift the eye and spirit, and pondering the lives of the Palaeolithic people who painted the cave art at Altamira 14-18,000 years ago.

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Taking alternate routes to see different environmental features brought the challenge of taking risks as pathways were not always clearly marked. This is not something that Tony or Javier would entertain, though, for their different perspectives. Their goal was to complete the camino as directly as possible. Often staying on the known path with clear outcomes provides good results, but what unexpected revelations might an alternate route provide? One alternate route we took in Basque County revealed stunning scenery and geology, along with the local method of growing beans up through corn that offered support - a graphic and practical illustration of interconnectedness and collaboration in action.

### *Engaging with and taking advice from others to enhance self management*

For several weeks, we started our day's walk around 8 am, had brief water breaks along the way and a short 15 minute lunch break, generally scoffing down empanadas, something like a meat pastry.

When we arrived in a hotel for the evening in Villapedre, Asturias, the receptionist asked us what time we would like breakfast. "We usually leave around 7.30 am", replied my partner. She laughed, "No Spanish peregrino would get up that early; we don't serve that early." She suggested that the 'Spanish way' would be a late start, a long break midday for a big meal, thus avoiding the early afternoon sun and then walking in the early evening.

We were sceptical, but followed her advice, and found the big meal in the middle of the day re-boosted our energy levels and did not finish the day as exhausted as in previous weeks. In fact, we were able to increase the number of kilometres each day and actually noticed the scenery in the afternoons.

### *Taking breaks*

At work, I often skip breaks. But, on the camino, I followed my partner's suggestion, so each Sunday was a rest day providing opportunity for recuperation from the previous week's walking, catching up on laundry, and to plan the week ahead. We did this in Bilbao, the village of Santillana del Mar, Gijón and Ribadeo. During these respites, the opportunity to meet locals was also refreshing.

Exhausted on a Saturday as we approached Santillana del Mar, an older gentleman approached me and started speaking in Spanish. As I was unsure how to find our accommodation, Rodrigo decided to accompany me to our destination, a lovely apartment to rest for the weekend. Rodrigo told me his doctor had suggested that he walk daily; possibly to lose some of the weight he had gained eating in his restaurant in the centre of the village. What an incredible meal we had there, including a lovely apple liqueur to finish. After a swim, drinks with Tony and Javier, and a tour around the village, we headed off on Monday, totally rejuvenated while Tony and Javier who stayed in the local albergue had very little sleep.

The Spaniards embodied the importance of 'taking breaks'. In every town and city every evening, families socialise and children play together, usually in central plazas. And of course, after the midday meal, all businesses were closed for siesta.

Walking through countryside, villages, and cities enabled us to see and 'feel' how the locals lived, and what inspires or affects them. Local exuberance was contagious as team Orio won the annual Basque sea rowing regatta. From a spiritual perspective, overnighing at the ancient Monasterio de Zenarruza in Basque Country, and the even older Monasterio de Santa Maria de Sobrado in Galicia and attending vespers reminded us of an older time period still persisting today. There were significant and historic landmarks, such as the Gernikako Arbola 'Tree of Gernika' - an oak tree under which both Basque and Spanish rulers have sworn to uphold ancient Basque liberties – and which survived the precision German aerial bombing during the Spanish Civil War, probably intentionally. For all of the unfamiliar, we were struck too by occasions of surprising familiarity, with the sound of bagpipes in the streets of Asturias and Galicia reminding of common Celtic origins with the Irish, Scots and Bretons.

## Discussion

On page 5, I posed these questions:

What are the consequences my story produces?

What kind of person does it shape me into?

What new possibilities does it introduce for living my life?

What new possibilities for initial teacher education practices might be drawn from this experience?



These questions could be summed up by stating, 'What are specific examples of how I can apply the personal lessons learned from the camino?' I have highlighted the experience of stress reduction through a less complex existence, taking alternate routes, engaging with and taking advice from others and regenerating with rest days. Through non-judgment and compassion for the multiple perspectives, including my own, shared throughout this paper and further reflection on themes and anecdotal experiences, possibilities for initial teacher education (and my personal life) that were revealed are the importance of co-constructed learning, the value of guide posts with new innovations and paring back to the essentials. As in the classroom, each individual may or may not touch you on the Camino: a momentary encounter can have a profound impact or not.

### **Co-constructed learning**

Co-constructed learning by valuing and sharing the ideas of lecturers and student teachers together allows all involved to take alternate routes from the traditional lecture format, and engage with and take advice from others through considering and critically analysing what others contribute. In co-constructed learning, each student "construct[s] their own learning; social processes are integral to the learning" (Duchesne, McMaugh, Bochner, & Krause, 2013, pp. 212-213) To co-construct learning and develop new understandings, Killan (2013) also suggests that students interact not only with other people, but also with the environment. Each student teacher's unique background and their experiences contribute to a valuable discussion. For example, when co-constructing ideas for the integration of technology into literacy programmes, many student teachers who are digital natives provide a number of suggestions from their personal use of Smartphones and computers but often share a range of opinions on when to use these tools. Through robust discussion, including the entire group of student teachers as well as teachers in partner primary schools, newly co-constructed ideas can be critiqued, analysed and trialled in classrooms in our partner schools. This type of learner-centred experience is central to co-constructed learning (Duchesne, McMaugh, Bochner, & Krause, 2013). In co-constructed learning,

students are engaging mindfully (focusing their awareness in the moment non-judgementally and with compassion).

Co-constructed learning would be an ideal platform for discussion of resilience strategies for stress reduction. I would start with the vignettes presented here of the peregrinos including myself, and readings from Garvey Berger and Costa on *habits of mind* to initiate sharing of student teacher's individual experiences. With each exploring their own pathway in co-constructed learning, incorporating non-judgemental and compassionate input/feedback from others (Hattie, 2009), critical analysis of one's own pathway, and the value of other perspectives, promotes progress and achievement in learning.

The interaction of people was a continuing theme on the camino, which provides opportunities to learn or alter one's plans which led to co-constructed new knowledge. I was inspired by chats with all of the young peregrinos. Each night peregrinos would gather to discuss various routes for the next day, blister management, which albergues had bedbugs, and highlights of the day. At one cafe, Jeanne outlined the rest of the pathway to Gijón which was different to what we had read. We changed our plans and found ourselves walking with Jeanne and Yusuf who animatedly philosophised about life. We unexpectedly learned about Sufism and the intersection of religion and education. Another consistent reminder of the importance of co-construction and interaction was the regular pattern of Spaniards who socialise in central plazas in the evening hours. Several of the young on the camino did not interact with the internet, deliberately choosing to declutter their minds, allowing for thinking time and thus, expanded space for growth. These peregrinos discovered that interaction on the internet for certain specific purposes can be helpful in moderate doses in daily life (e.g. Juan plotting his pathway to complete each day's camino). Many resolved, though, to limit their future online use and profiles.

### Guide posts and new innovations

Using guideposts alongside safe to fail experiments (innovations) or alternate routes, opens up possibilities for learning for our complex environment (Garvey Berger & Johnston, 2015). Garvey Berger and Johnston (2015) suggest that trialling ideas quickly in an environment where it is safe to fail, provides opportunities for learning. Guide posts provide guidance and a framework in which to try these new innovations. I could demonstrate literacy lessons for student teachers working with second language learners; brainstorm with them potential 'safe to fail' strategies to complement those lessons, and then give student teachers the opportunity to try these new ideas within their practicum classroom and obtain feedback. My lesson and feedback from their mentor teachers serves as guide posts for their development.

The yellow arrows (las flechas amarillas) were physical guideposts along the camino indicating the direction to go. An arrow simply points you in the right direction but a pointer (puente), as noted by one of the 'older' locals, provides a metaphoric guide for the camino but also perhaps in one's thinking. Sometimes these arrows were missing where needed, so you had to consider options and innovative ideas to continue the journey, based on intuition and other posted signs. An attitude many peregrinos adopted was: if there was no sign, keep moving forward. Sometimes arrows were missed because we were distracted by other things or they were not easily seen. This required a new course of action ('safe to fail' experiment) using maps, and relying on locals in the community who always had an opinion on which direction to go. There were also times where arrows in a single location pointed in different directions. This required us to make a decision about which way to go based on what we might see ahead, the trail surface or length of time it would take, and distance already covered.

The yellow arrows also provided reassurance on the camino as waymarkers can in life. One example would be to mindfully check in with breath, body sensations, feelings and thoughts. In the last province, Galicia, the yellow arrows included the number of kilometres left to go to reach Santiago; a kind of count-down to completion. This was disconcerting for some peregrinos who had

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enjoyed the freedom from measures of distance over the several weeks through Basque country, Cantabria and Asturias. Yusuf, for whom English is a second language, wrote a poem to expound on the metaphor of the yellow arrows:

The yellow arrow (gifted by Yusuf Rieger, September 2017)

They say: Just follow the yellow arrow.  
It will lead you to Santiago (your Destination).  
But is that finally true?

I think, it also might lead you to nothing,  
if you are always looking for something.  
Do it like the Moroccans: Relax the mind and learn to swim.  
We're on the coastal way to Santiago and we all swim in the Ocean of Nothingness.

Whatever happens here, it happens for no reason.  
If you want to find a reason,  
just follow the yellow arrow.  
But be careful: It might lead you to nothing,  
while you are still looking for something.

An alternate route is useful as long as you can easily find the way home. Polynesians never free ranged around the Pacific (as explorers) but constantly pushed the boundaries of their limited world while keeping a close eye on the best way home, generally through the stars, and an understanding of other natural phenomenon (Rothman, 1976).

### **Paring back to the essentials**

The 'simplicity' of the camino led to the realisation of the importance of paring back to the essentials; firstly through focusing simply on the day's journey, and then also through taking breaks and hearing the stories of how others had unnecessarily complicated their journeys. Beginning teachers can benefit from learning simple resilience strategies, such as mindfulness, to cope with the expectations of the classroom (author, xxxx). In fact, by paring back to the basics of teaching, teachers are better able to cope with classroom stressors. Knowledge of various approaches to resilience can be shared by teachers with students and are also a guide for responding to and supporting their students appropriately. In "Momo", Ende (1973/2009) confirms the importance of

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paring back. He suggests that we are all stressed out with time pressures and other demands, and “only when people get their time back does the world come to life again” (pp. 216-217).

Paring back was essential in our preparations for the camino. We carried only 10% of our bodyweight in our backpacks as recommended by the Pilgrimage Traveler blog (n. d.) to ensure we weren't overloaded and to increase the likelihood we would last the distance. Perazzoli and Whitson (2015) note: “the guiding principle is to pack light, focusing on what is absolutely necessary and cutting out everything else” (p. 31). It also showed us the importance of decluttering of physical and mental space to support resilience, and to enhance the ability to be mindful. People often reflect on 'release' or 'relief' when they've decluttered their house or work space even if a difficult process.

The importance of co-constructed learning, the use of guide posts with new innovations, and paring back to the essentials will be useful for me in my personal life as well as when working with initial teacher education students.

## Conclusion

The camino gave me the opportunity to get away from the complexities of usual work life, and to immerse myself for a concentrated time in a different space, alongside individuals similar to initial student teachers who will, hopefully, be positively affected by my focus on mindfulness. Completing the Camino de Santiago which has navigated my autoethnographic journey I have reacquainted myself with my own inner camino, as a metaphor for developing resilience. Through reflecting on self observation and observation of others on the camino, themes were developed to apply to teaching and everyday life which upon further reflections, provided conclusions for my own teaching practice.

This article, though useful for initial teacher educators, and other teachers/lecturers, may also be a vehicle for young people to relate to other young people half a world away their own experiences particularly their resilience strategies. The camino enabled me to listen, discuss and observe many young people over a five-week period (and since) as they grappled with universal issues of self-management in both a simple (day-to-day on the camino) and complex (electronic &

ever-changing) world. This confirmed the universality of basic human needs, yet also how varied young people's responses to and abilities are regarding stress management. Mindfulness traits such as focused awareness, and compassion are critical for building resilience, particularly when learning new things, making transitions and drawing conclusions.

Chatham-Carpenter (2010) reminds researchers using autoethnography of the importance of 'being on the balcony' to share the bigger picture, and of conclusions drawn by writing after the experience. This autoethnographic journey has led me to a deeper understanding of the ways my individual students demonstrate resilience and their stage of adult development as described by Garvey Berger (2011). It is important for me to mindfully support each student's development of resilience not only by teaching them mindfulness exercises as I have done in the past, but by supporting them to interact with the environment and consider alternate routes carefully, to engage with and take advice from others on ways to self manage, to intentionally take planned breaks, and to simplify whenever possible.

In my own teaching, I will continue to explore the use of co-constructivist teaching, encourage innovative teaching practices within guideposts, and pare back to the essentials student teachers need. Also I aim to pare back to the essentials of my role rather than overextending myself as many teacher educators do. I will continue supporting my students in strengthening their own inner resilience to activate their own inner camino. In "Momo", the tortoise reminds us a journey may seem endless, but "the way's inside me" (Ende, 1973/2009, p. 206), [the inner camino], my own strength and resilience.

Finally, "...the usefulness of these stories is their capacity to inspire conversation from the point of view of the readers who enter from the perspective of their own lives" (Ellis &Bochner, 2000, p. 748) and therefore I invite readers to write to let me know about their own experiences related to the Camino, resilience in teaching, or initial teacher education practices; their own inner camino. Buen camino.

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