Evocative writing and lived experience descriptions for networked learning research

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Abstract

The present paper introduces evocative writing, advocated by autoethnographies, as an effective research method to capture the subtleties of real-life networked learning experiences, enabling researchers to observe and make sense of both the beautiful and the ugly of the phenomenon. Evocative writing practice can liberate researchers from the established academic tradition that unnecessarily devalues their subjectivity and limits their creativity by imposing the problematic normality of research objectivity. Writing is a central research act that needs to be successfully performed throughout the entire research project—not only to present project outcomes but also to formulate research problems, collect data, and validate outcomes. Despite its aesthetic and communicative merits, however, evocative researchers as human beings cannot fully grasp the structural essence of the lived experiences of networked learning phenomena beyond their own frame of reference. Here, the author believes that lived experience descriptions and related methodological techniques devised by phenomenologists can provide evocative networked learning researchers with a possible breakthrough. Based on the author's own experiences, the author will demonstrate the effective use of evocative writing complemented by lived experience descriptions for networked learning research.

Keywords

Evocative writing, Lived experience descriptions, autoethnography, phenomenology, academic writing

Introduction

This paper discusses evocative writing and lived experience descriptions as effective methods for qualitative networked learning research projects that emphasise the value of thick descriptions of human (and non-human) interactions as a research outcome (Networked Learning Editorial Collective (NLEC) et al., 2021).

Academic writing is often called 'scientific' writing, following somewhat fixed formats, structures, and rules to maintain an adequate level of objectivity in it. Such pursuit of objectivity in academic writing is also sought by researchers whose aim is to develop deep(-er) understandings of a particular social phenomenon involving human-to-human interactions mediated by complex social, cultural, and technological factors. Researchers—even those who adopt qualitative research approaches that acknowledge the subjectivity of knowledge, the complexity of social phenomena, and the reflexivity of researchers—find it uncomfortable to explicitly present personal emotions and opinions (or 'I'-words) in their research reports. Within that long-established academic tradition which tends to dismiss researchers' presence as the first person in their writing, qualitative researchers are often expected to do a 'code-switch' between performing subjective reflexivity in researching and ensuring objective scientificity in writing. Despite a few exceptions (see Mann, 2005; Lee, 2021), most networked learning researchers have remained the third person in their writing practice.

The purpose of social research is multifaceted. However, the present article follows van Manen's (2016) well-articulated aim of phenomenological work:

> to transform lived experiences into a textual expression of its essence—in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experiences. (p. 36)

Ellis and Bochner's (2006) insight about the evocative purpose of autoethnographic work that differentiates it from other qualitative or ethnographic studies can also be helpful for readers:

> [to show] struggle, passion, embodied life, and the collaborative creation of sense-making in situations in which people have to cope with dire circumstances and loss of meaning.

> Autoethnography wants the reader to care, to feel, to empathize, and to do something, to act. It needs the researcher to be vulnerable and intimate. Intimacy is a way of being, a mode of caring, and it shouldn't be used as a vehicle to produce distanced theorizing. (p. 433)

Both descriptions stress the reflective, relational, and responsive nature of academic writing (and reading), through which researchers and readers share and co-construct deeper insights into the focused social phenomenon that may lead to meaningful changes in their lives. Thus, phenomenological and autoethnographic writings do not follow the objectivity of academic dogma but instead embrace the subjectivity of researchers (and the authenticity of their experiences).

Adams and Holman Jones (2018), building upon Goulish's (2000) notion of the work of art, argue that research is work and, at the same time, an art: "the 'work' of [social] research is the work of life—the work of writing the events of our human experiences as they overflow their frames from the inside out" (p. 142). Here, a work refers to an event "made through human action and experiences" (p. 141), and thus, research is an event of writing made through the researcher's (and research participants') actions and experiences. No one would disagree that writing is an essential part of research practice, especially in qualitative projects where researchers mainly deal with 'text' both as data and outcome. Such heavy emphasis on writing makes each qualitative research project naturally an art. Researchers are already inside their work of research as authors are already inside their work of writing, and artists (or all aspects of their existence such as their histories, cultures, circumstances, and emotions) are an integral part of their work of art. When we appreciate a piece of art, we often start by understanding the artist and their genuine motive for the work. We can do the same when reading a piece of qualitative and evocative research.

This set of statements may appear irrelevant and out of context to some readers and researchers, particularly given the incompatible genre-deterministic differences between academic writing and artistic writing (i.e., journal articles versus novels). However, the relevance of these statements to educational researchers and networked learning researchers is vital from the point of the present author, who will be called I, hereafter. I believe that researching a phenomenon of networked learning is a work of writing, which can and should be aesthetic processes and artistic practices. As I argue somewhere else, networked learning as a social phenomenon is not only idealised and distanced theory but messy, often ugly, and embodied reality. The lived experiences of networked learning involve the dynamics of struggle in ordinary educators' and learners' daily practice (NLEC et al., 2021). Thus, researching the lived experiences of networked learning needs to embrace and capture the messiness and concreteness, which is also well-aligned with the aforementioned purpose of phenomenological and autoethnographic research.

Rather than opening up a fundamental debate around a paradigm war in social research or defending a specific methodological tradition (see Bryman, 2008), I want to focus on practical values of particular writing approaches that can help research the lived experiences of networked learning. Two approaches introduced in the article are: 'evocative writing' drawn from autoethnographic tradition (Ellis, 2004) and 'lived experience descriptions' from phenomenological tradition (Adams & van Manen, 2017). I have found the artful writing method integrating the two approaches particularly useful when I engage with the 'work' of research and academic writing, which is an admittedly intimidating and frequently daunting task. When it comes to qualitative academic writing, there has been a lack of practical 'how to' advice. There is a notion of 'thick descriptions', as opposed to thin descriptions (Geertz, 1973; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which has been the most well-known approach to qualitative research writing. However, as Denzin (1989) argued decades ago, there are significant variations in understanding and doing thick descriptions among qualitative researchers. While a large number of qualitative researchers attempt to provide thick descriptions in their academic publications, there tends to be a lack of workable definitions and practical methods to do so (Ponterotto, 2006).

As a doctoral educator teaching qualitative research methods in an online PhD programme and supervising a range of different qualitative research projects, I am frequently asked to advise them on how thick is thick enough for their theses or other genres of academic publications. Especially, doctoral students employing particular research methodologies (i.e., phenomenology or narrative inquiry) tend to find grasping the notion of thick descriptions challenging and enacting it in their real-life writing even more challenging. I often find students haunted by the pressure to give more details, which can be endless and aimless, while being frustrated about the strict word limits of theses and journal submissions. While no one knows how thick is thick enough for a good thesis, I believe the loaded notion of thickness can be misleading. Coupled with the core purpose of research to make readers powerfully animated and ultimately act, I ask students to think about the aim of their

writing—a central work of research that needs to be conducted throughout the entire process of research. The question is, therefore, 'why do you write?'.

This question further helps students think and break an invented and fabricated sense of division between academic and artistic writing. That is, if students decide to write to enable readers "to care, to feel, to empathize, and to do something, to act" (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 433), the nature of their academic writing will become naturally artistic and inevitably personal. Just like the artists belong to their work of art—doctoral researchers will belong to their work of research (and writing). Here, the boundaries of academic and artistic writing will be collapsed and blurred. In the following section, I will first explain the two writing approaches, 'evocative writing' in autoethnography and 'lived experience descriptions' in phenomenology in turn. I will then discuss how the two approaches can be used in a single qualitative research project, complementing each other. Evocative writing supplemented with lived experience descriptions will also produce thick descriptions. However, added details will be carefully selected, purposely constructed, and aesthetically presented. The final section will present a brief scenario of how artistic writing can guide networked learning research.

Autoethnography and evocative writing

Autoethnography is a form of qualitative research that foregrounds a researcher's personal experiences and emotions and investigates the researcher's sense-making process of these experiences and emotions (Chang 2008). Autoethnography has its origin in a critical effort to develop an alternative approach to realist ethnographic tradition where researchers tend to stand as objective observers outside a cultural phenomenon under observation, aiming to develop generalisable theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena. Autoethnographers, on the other hand, are full members of a particular cultural phenomenon of their interest, offering insider knowledge of the phenomenon by researching and writing their own lived experiences in the phenomenon (Adams et al., 2015). Many autoethnographers are particularly interested in increasing their (and others') critical awareness of the problematic (unequal and oppressive) nature of social relationships and cultural practices. They employ critical reflexivity as a tool to analyse the influence of their social identities and relationships on their sense-making processes and subsequently reveal and critique taken-for-granted cultural assumptions and norms. Thus, autoethnographers are critical, not only about the outside world but also about their insider knowledge.

Anderson (2006) points out that a growing number of analytic ethnographers and qualitative researchers have also employed self-study methods in their inquiry, such as autobiographic writings, self-observations, and self-narratives. Although they would not explicitly present and reveal the self in their substantive writings, their works share many aspects of autoethnography. Therefore, to Anderson (2006), autoethnography, despite its newness as a methodological term and practice, is not necessarily alienated from analytic ethnography that emerged from the realist ethnographic tradition. He further categorises a specific type of autoethnography that is distinguishable from analytic ethnography but aligned with the ethnographic tradition as analytic autoethnography and proposes five key features of analytic autoethnography: 1) complete member researcher status, 2) analytic reflexivity toward both society and the self, 3) narrative visibility of the researchers' self in their writing, 4) dialogue with informants beyond the self, and 5) commitment to theoretical analysis (p. 378). And, it is the last feature that raises incommensurable disagreements between analytic autoethnographers and other autoethnogrphers (often labelled as evocative autoethnographers).

In their response to Anderson (2006), Ellis and Bochner (2006) strongly indicate their intention to maintain the critical positionality to the realist ethnographic tradition by highlighting the ungeneralisability of autoethnographic outcomes and unknowability of subjective truth—no one, including the self, will ever fully know and make sense of human individuals' lived experiences of social phenomena. Therefore, to Ellis and Bochner (2006), autoethnography is a political endeavour (rather than a theoretical one), which critiques cultural practice and social structures and reveals a hidden mechanism to oppress a particular social group. Autoethnographers, through evocative writing, engage others with their critical and reflexive self-narratives not only cognitively or theoretically but emotionally and politically, aiming to enable "the reader to care, to feel, to empathize, and to do something, to act" (p. 433) and ultimately, change social and cultural practice. As discussed above, this is where artistic writing, with its communicative and evocative (and often provocative) power to touch and change readers' minds.

Phenomenology and lived experience descriptions

Phenomenology is an umbrella term referring to a theoretical and methodological perspective that investigates a social phenomenon through the direct experiences of individuals in that phenomenon, not based on existing knowledge and external truth. Phenomenologists approach their concerned phenomenon from the subjective position of research participants who are (were) 'there' in the phenomenon—who live (lived) the phenomenon directly and make (made) meanings out of their experiences consciously (Groenewald, 2004). However, the essence of the phenomenon (or the primal meanings of human existence and experiences) is not easily accessible to researchers, especially when they are not there. Researchers' biases and assumptions, constructed by living and making sense of other phenomena, can make their access to the informants' experiences and consciousness even more challenging. Therefore, phenomenologists have strived to address such inaccessibility by utilising methodological strategies such as the epoché (i.e., bracketing the phenomenon to block researchers' biases and assumptions) and reduction. Phenomenological research also gathers concrete details, focuses on subtleties of direct human experiences, and draws meanings out of the details (Adams & van Manen, 2017).

There are some differences among phenomenological traditions regarding their approaches to the essence (or essential structures) of human experiences and consciousness. For example, Husserl (1913) puts an exclusive emphasis on the first person's consciousness in terms of making meanings of one's experiences to the degree that he brackets the question of the existence of the natural world outside the first person's intentional consciousness. Heidegger (1962), on the other hand, argues that the essence of human existence is being-in-the-world and being-with-others; thus, the meaning of our lived experiences needs to be sought based on the 'thoughtfulness' to the relational existence. Merleau-Ponty (1945) further points out that our consciousness is embodied in the natural world; thus, it cannot be separated from our body and the world. Despite such differences in the scope of analysis, all phenomenologists agree with the social and cultural situatedness of human interactions and value the human consciousness as a source of interpretations of those actions (Cohen et al., 2017). All phenomenological research projects aim to understand how people experience a particular phenomenon and make sense of these experiences. Outwith philosophy, applied phenomenology primarily draws upon qualitative research methods.

A phenomenology of practice (Adams & van Manen, 2017) inquiry begins with collecting concrete and detailed accounts of the first person's experiences, writing lived experience descriptions (LEDs, hereafter). Phenomenologists write LEDs to capture "the living throughness of the pretheoretical and prereflective immediacy of experience (Adams & van Manen, 2017, p. 784). Although they use data collection methods such as interviews and observations that other qualitative researchers commonly employ, they focus on collecting raw data from research informants (i.e., detailed experiential descriptions of the concerned phenomenon) rather than refined or reflected interpretations of the phenomenon (i.e., thoughts, reflections, opinions, and emotions). A collection of diverse LEDs of a particular phenomenon serves as an important data source in phenomenological work, from which phenomenologists draw to reveal specific characteristics structuring the lived experiences of the phenomenon and their existential implications on meaning-making processes (Lee, 2020).

Evocative writing complemented by live experience descriptions

In this article, I hope to provide a useful tool for qualitative research writing, helping networked learning researchers blur (at least, more freely cross) the fixed boundaries between academic and personal writing and expand the limited scope of research writing. Writing is a central act in qualitative research projects that needs to be performed not only at the end of the research process to present and publish research findings but continuously throughout the entire research process. As discussed above, autoethnographers and phenomenologists both focus on developing a text format of lived experiences, primarily based on personal memories, whether researchers own or research informants'. Researchers and research informants also use personal artefacts (e.g., photographs, videos, diaries, letters and posts on social networking sites) and consult with neighbouring others in their lived moments to construct more complete and comprehensive (or less distorted) life stories (Adams & Holman Jones, 2018).

However, there is a clear difference in the focus of their life writing acts between autoethnographers and phenomenologists. While autoethnographers' raw data of written memories would include a range of statements of their thoughts, opinions, emotions, and inner speeches, phenomenologists who advocate the epoché aim to block those personal judgements and reflections (at least until the later stage of the project). For autoethnographers, who are often researchers and research participants simultaneously in their inquiry, their subjectivity (i.e., their bias and assumptions about the self and others) is not something they can willfully remove from their life writing or sense-making processes. Instead, they try to explicitly acknowledge and critically analyse the influences of their subjectivity on their lived experiences, meaning-making processes and

subsequently, research outcomes. In this sense, researchers' bias can be a central subject in autoethnographic work that may reveal problematic cultural norms and regulations underlying particular social practices and relationships. Therefore, autoethnographers' descriptive texts of their lived experiences tend to be emotional, reflective, and interpretative, making their data collection and analysis a simultaneous task.

Autoethnographers' evocative writing employs diverse writing genres (e.g., poems, scenarios, anecdotes, dialogues), and many autoethnographers find such artistic and creative writing more natural, comfortable, and enjoyable than conventional (and scientific) academic writing. Evocative writing can be used not only in autoethnographic studies but in other qualitative studies. Qualitative researchers, through evocative writing, can engage with their research more personally, emotionally and freely, and the outcome can be extremely insightful and powerful. Carter (2002) provides her first-person account of lived experiences of being in an abusive marriage relationship alongside the information derived from academic literature. The sharp contrast between her evocative writing and academic writing as juxtaposed in the article (her "voices" versus "academic discourse", Cater, 2002, p. 1199) effectively demonstrates the value of evocative writing. On the left-side column, academic discourses focus on providing definite and complete narratives about abusive relationships such as characteristics of victims and abusers, different categories of abuses, causes and effects of abuses, victims' (and abusers') behavioural responses and perceptions, and policies and devices to protect victims. On the other side column, however, her evocative writing provides more nuanced accounts of victims' lived experiences of repeated abuses and decision-making processes to leave the abusive relationships, revealing the complex and persisting nature of the experienced abuses and subsequent emotional and behavioural responses in the past and their continuing impacts on her present (and future) life.

Nevertheless, the freedom of evocative writing should not turn into self-indulgence such that authors scribble whatever comes into their minds and burble on their feelings, thoughts, and opinions without supporting evidence. Unlike novels, autoethnographies are the outcomes of researchers' careful analysis of their lived experiences, often collaboratively done with research participants. The written stories and reflections in autoethnographies (even plots and endings in novels) need to be sensible, understandable, and trustworthy to readers (particularly those in similar situations). As much as researchers are allowed to bring themselves in their writing, readers as active meaning-makers in autoethnographic dialogues are encouraged to use their reflexivity to read and assess autoethnographies. Thus, autoethnographers' self-indulgence can be severely criticised by readers (Campbell, 2018). Therefore, evocative researchers must maintain critical reflexivity not only to others but to themselves and their own writing. To do so, researchers can also support and supplement their evocative writing with LEDs.

Writing LEDs is that stage in the phenomenology of practice approach where conscious effort is made to focus on pre-reflective concrete details about lived experiences, mindful of if not completely removing their biases and assumptions that direct their research activities, including data collection, towards a pre-set and self-serving direction. LEDs can provide evidence and further explanation of specific emotions, opinions, and reflections of evocative writers, while counter-evidence (or absence of supporting evidence) and different explanations can also be found in LEDs. Writing LEDs is not aiming to pursue objectivity in academic writing and data collection, but to utilise researchers' critical reflexivity more explicitly in gathering a richer and more rounded data set. Although there can be many more (or even better) ways to utilise evocative writing and LEDs together in a single qualitative research project, in this article as a starting point, I will propose three different ways to use LEDs as a complementary research strategy to evocative writing, each for a research phase of i) problem identification, ii) data collection and iii) finding verification. The following section will present a brief scenario describing how the two research methods can be used complementarily at each of the three research phases—based on a real-life networked learning research project.

A Scenario of Evocative Networked Learning Research and Writing

This section is written based on my chapter, entitled *"Why don't I feel empowered? Autoethnography and inclusive critical pedagogy in online doctoral education"*, in Handbook of Digital Higher Education (Lee, in press). The chapter presents my autobiographic narratives of how I ended up teaching autoethnography in my research methods module in an online doctoral programme and how I made sense of my teaching approach as the inclusive enactment of critical pedagogy. Despite critical pedagogy's fundamental requirement for teachers to empower their students and create democratic learning cultures and equal power relationships in their classroom, I have found it challenging (or even impossible) to do so. Here is a brief excerpt from the chapter:

Now, you walk into your classroom with the noble determination of liberating and humanizing your students, and you remind yourself that "it is the pedagogy of THE OPPRESSED". Thus, you need to empower your students by avoiding teacher-centred instruction and encouraging student-centred dialogues—you feel ready for it. But something starts getting a little off here. You look at your students. They are confidence-looking educational professionals pursuing a doctorate at one of the most highly-rated educational departments in the UK. Many of them are more experienced educators than yourself, and some are academics or teachers in [higher education] just like yourself. It is evident that they possess social and educational privileges that have allowed them to enter your classroom in the first place. They are not like illiterate, silenced Chilean peasants (or urban workers) in Freire (1970) who would build solidarity towards liberating themselves from a shared oppressor. [...]

"Why am I so nervous?" You pause and think. You then realize that you are a coloured immigrant woman and early career academic. While your middle-class privileges have been left back in your home country, your non-native speaker status continues to threaten your pedagogical legitimacy. Does this matter? You know that you need to empower your students. However, do you have the power to empower them? You now feel puzzled even more. [...]

Upon the realization that your students, at least on the surface, appear to be more privileged than you, enacting the empowerment principle becomes even more challenging. Your genuine feeling of disempowerment may further harm your self-perception and self-confidence. It is a human instinct that you want to hide your lack of authority (and subsequently, a lack of confidence) by striving to gain more respect from students by emphasizing your intellectual superiority or taking more authoritarian attitudes. However, such efforts alienate you even more from the empowerment principle in critical pedagogy. Without sorting your own "inner" struggles and dilemmas as a disempowered critical pedagogue, you have no room to live up to your pedagogical expectation, unfortunately. Any breakthrough?

My evocative writing in the chapter continues to reveal limitations of critical pedagogy' empowerment ideal in today's networked learning contexts with a growing diversity not only among students but tutors. I critically reflect on Ellsworth's (1989) critique of the empowerment principle, using my own lived experiences, and add a more nuanced account. I further discuss how embracing autoethnographic principles (such as vulnerability, emotional dialogues, and unknowability) helps me overcome my own "inner" struggles and foster a genuine sense of community among module participants. Based on this evocative networked learning research scenario, I will now explain how researchers can use evocative writing and LEDs at different phases of such research projects: i) Problem formulation, ii) data collection and iii) outcome validation.

Problem formulation

Like other social researchers, networked learning researchers start their projects by selecting a research topic of their interest. Evocative networked learning researchers are likely to choose to research their own dilemmas, struggles or negative emotions in particular social learning situations. For example, I decided to focus on understanding and unpacking inner struggles (i.e., a lack of confidence and a sense of disempowerment) that I had experienced as an online doctoral educator with multiple cultural markers of disadvantages (i.e., Asian, female, non-native speaker, etc.). Most of those personal dilemmas and inner struggles, albeit natural and straightforward on the surface, are results of complex dynamics influenced by multiple social, cultural and relational factors. I could have just assumed that I did not feel confident because I did not have enough teaching experience, expecting to feel better over time. I could have ignored the negative emotions and continued following networked learning principles and introducing student-centred learning activities to my doctoral students. However, instead, I started writing about those feelings and emotions and specific events and accidents that aroused such emotions, wondering what underlying issues and causes were and how I could address them (at least make me feel better and more confident)—which became the subject of my inquiry.

Once a (relatively broad) research topic is selected, researchers need to identify a more specific research problem that needs to be addressed through the project. Researchers can write a series of evocative anecdotes of their lived experiences on the selected research topic, through which they can effectively grasp the complexity of the research topic and further understand the gravity of the issue in their (and others') lives. Here, researchers can also write LEDs or add more detailed and pre-reflective descriptions to their evocative anecdotes. While

researchers' own emotions, opinions, and reflections can be of a great place for them to start brainstorming their "personally" meaningful research projects, it is also important to ensure that their research outcomes would be "socially" meaningful, helping others in similar situations and other researchers in the relevant fields of networked learning research. Thus, through writing LEDs, networked learning researchers may identify what they know (or remember) and what they do not know about the lived networked learning events—the gaps in their knowledge (and memories). This process needs to involve reviewing relevant literature to check if previous researchers have already provided useful knowledge to fill such gaps in their knowledge. A specific research problem can now be formulated based on the identified gaps both in their personal understanding and academic literature (for more details, see Lee, 2019, 2021).

Data gathering

Researchers design their projects and set up specific plans and timeframes to collect data to address their research problems. In the project mentioned above, I produced a set of evocative anecdotes and LEDs that capture a range of critical lived moments of my networked learning experiences both as a PhD student many years ago, and as a tutor more recently. In order to write more comprehensive narratives and descriptions, researchers first collect their (or others') memories and perspectives of specific life events. Using qualitative data gathering methods such as interviews, observations, and journals, therefore, networked learning researchers can collect research participants' lived experiences of networked learning (both evocative and descriptive details of those experiences). In autoethnographic work, where the researcher is the research participant, researchers also talk to co-informants (neighbouring others in their memories) to collect those details that complement their own (incomplete and often distorted memories). Researchers write evocative texts that capture complex and authentic emotions, feelings, and thoughts based on the collected details and add LEDs to their evocative texts to increase the completeness of the data.

In evocative research projects, there is no clear-cut between data gathering and data analysis as researchers' work of writing the lived experiences naturally enables them to be analytical and reflective. I often write critical responses to previous research or imaginative dialogues (interviews) with educational and social theorists whose theorisation is particularly relevant to my inquiry. Such evocative writing helps me explore and record my lived experiences more meaningfully from multiple perspectives. For example, my chapter (Lee, in press) is effectively built upon my critical responses to Freire (1970), Ellsworth (1989), and Bali (2014), which were written at the data collection phase. Of course, this writing can be performed at the previous "problem formulation" phase when researchers reviewed relevant literature and identified gaps in the reviewed literature. I would call this "evocative literature review", which I have found useful to make reading academic literature more personal, meaningful, and entertaining.

Before "explicitly" moving into the data analysis phase, researchers can also check that they have collected enough details and subtleties of their pre-reflective experiences in their LEDs that are less influenced by (at least partially free from) their biases and assumptions. Researchers may read their evocative texts and LEDs side by side to see how they complement and contradict each other. They may have already noticed some emerging themes and core notions (answers to their research questions to a certain degree); however, it is important not to rush to the next steps that often involve coding or categorising exercises (depending on researchers' methodological approaches) but to focus on the completeness of the dataset. If there are contradictions between the two writings or apparent gaps in their LEDs that need to be filled, researchers can follow up with research participants.

Outcome validation

To maintain the trustworthiness of their projects, evocative researchers utilise different validation strategies (e.g., data triangulation, critical friends, and member-checking) to review their findings. Such effort to validate evocative research outcomes can be distinguished from what objectivist researchers would do to ensure the "reliability" of their data collection instruments (including inter-reliability of coders)or the "validity" of their (often statistical) results and interpretation. As much as researchers' subjectivity is important and appreciated in evocative research projects, the trustworthiness of their subjective findings and arguments is an essential aspect of those projects. Especially given that the purpose of evocative research writing (in opposition to objectivist research writing) is to "transform lived experiences into a textual expression of its essence", and so the experiences are re-living in readers' minds and creating meaningful changes in their thoughts and behaviours (van Manen, 2016, p. 36), researchers need to take the validation process seriously. That is, the outcome of evocative and artistic research work should be more than just creative and aesthetic artwork. When presented to

their target audience, authors' narratives (research findings) must be persuasive and understandable. Although readers may not necessarily agree with authors' entire arguments and interpretations, they should be able to "feel" and make sense of researchers' (research participants') lived experiences and emotional and behavioural reactions to the researched phenomena.

Doctoral students in my module often conduct their autoethnographic assignments on highly personal and political issues, such as institutional racism, gender discrimination, educational disadvantages, and workplace harassment. Many submit well-written evocative writings with aesthetic components, demonstrating a high level of emotional and cognitive engagement with their research problem and embracing a noticeable level of vulnerability and self-disclosure. Nevertheless, they frequently fail to fully articulate their findings or adequately support their arguments. Especially in their draft submissions, there is a wide range of problems, including taken-for-granted assumptions, unsupported claims, unarticulated statements, and hasty conclusions that threaten the quality (trustworthiness) of their final submissions. When reviewing these drafts, I tend to spend hours putting question marks on the margins and asking them to "provide evidence here", "explain this", "unpack this", "rethink about this", and "be more critical about this".

Here, phenomenological methods of the epoché and reduction can be useful. I specifically advise students to double-check if their findings are still persuasive when their own emotions (many appear to be angry, which is understandable considering their chosen topics), biases and assumptions are removed. Revisiting their LEDs is one of the effective ways to perform the validation process. I specifically request them to find evidence (or counter-evidence) of their arguments from LEDs. If they could not find adequate evidence there, they would need to rewrite their assignments. That is, evocative researchers can triangulate their dataset (comparing LEDs with and against their findings)—based on which they can more effectively and explicitly reflect on and write about the role of their own bias and assumptions on research outcomes. In conclusion, LEDs are useful research artefacts that mediate and facilitate the outcome validation processes in evocative research projects, helping evocative researchers maintain the firm boundaries between academic (and methodological) freedom and self-indulgence.

Closing remarks

Every freedom comes with a responsibility. I know it is a cliché. Nevertheless, for me, this is a core principle of doing evocative research: a work of art. Evocative academic writing is, to a certain extent, a political act to subvert an established academic tradition and create a new communication medium to achieve its own purpose. In evocative writing practices, authors are allowed and encouraged to bring themselves—all aspects of their existence, including their histories, cultures, circumstances, and emotions (even their biases and assumptions as a subject of critical reflection). However, while we can be free from the normality of scientific writing on our part, it does not automatically lift the normality of academic judgement on the other end (readers' end). Despite its aesthetic merits and communicative power, evocative writing enters the academic review process from a rather disadvantaged position by being abnormal. Evocative researchers are in a constant battle to gain the legitimacy of their methodological choices and approaches. Frequently, their works are not appreciated and regarded as an acceptable academic practice by reviewers, who do not share similar beliefs on the purpose of evocative writing.

Although reviewers appreciate its value to some degree, they may unconsciously employ a stricter (or more sceptical) attitude to evaluate evocative research outcomes. They may not tolerate minor issues in evocative writing, such as a small number of taken-for-granted assumptions, unsupported claims, or unarticulated statements. Therefore, it is even more important for evocative researchers to clearly explain their findings and effectively support their arguments (than for other researchers following the normality and formality of academic writing and publication). Evocative authors who fail to provide "adequate" details, explanations, and evidence in their manuscripts, can be called self-indulgent, and their voices can be neglected. Even though they present a "large" amount of information (e.g., detailed descriptions of lived events) and data (e.g., long interview excerpts) in their manuscript, it may not be the right information that needs to ensure the trustworthiness of their project. Nevertheless, when researchers are already inside their work of research (or authors are already inside their work of art), it is quite challenging for them to fully understand which details, explanations, and evidence are needed at which points of their work.

This is when evocative writing (or evocative researchers as human beings) faces its limits and LEDs can help. Writing, reviewing, and reflecting on LEDs at different phases of their research projects let evocative researchers put a conscious effort to distance themselves from their lived experiences and focus on pre-reflective

details that they may have forgotten, ignored, or simply not noticed at the moment of living the phenomenon. Networked learning researchers, who take certain discourses (e.g., educational empowerment, democratic learning, learner participation) for granted, may struggle to see critical details in the lived moments of networked learning that suggest otherwise. In any given moment of the social events (including networked learning events), numerous human experiences (emotions and actions) overflow their frames from the inside out (Adams & Holman Jones, 2018). Research is the work of writing those events, and it needs to capture and make sense of those experiences—not only those that fall into their frames of reference but those that fall outside. In the same vein, networked learning research writing needs to capture both the beautiful and the ugly of networked learning experiences to advance knowledge in the scholarly community and practice in everyday networked learning contexts.

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