

Mar 19, 2025

A Method for Creative Reflexive Data in Autoethnography

DOI

<https://dx.doi.org/10.17504/protocols.io.rm7vzj8e4lx1/v1>



Fiona McDonald¹, Donna Langille¹, Suzi Asa¹, Emilie Isch¹

¹University of British Columbia Okanagan

EMERGE, A Matrix for Et...



Fiona McDonald

University of British Columbia Okanagan

Create & collaborate more with a free account

Edit and publish protocols, collaborate in communities, share insights through comments, and track progress with run records.

Create free account

OPEN  ACCESS



DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.17504/protocols.io.rm7vzj8e4lx1/v1>

External link: <https://www.emergematrix.org>

Protocol Citation: Fiona McDonald, Donna Langille, Suzi Asa, Emilie Isch 2025. A Method for Creative Reflexive Data in Autoethnography. protocols.io <https://dx.doi.org/10.17504/protocols.io.rm7vzj8e4lx1/v1>



License: This is an open access protocol distributed under the terms of the **[Creative Commons Attribution License](#)**, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited

Protocol status: Working

We use this protocol and it's working

Created: April 17, 2024

Last Modified: March 19, 2025

Protocol Integer ID: 98350

Keywords: sensory, autoethnography, creative, reflexivity, data, fieldwork, analytic, fieldnotes, drawing, anthropology, method, autoethnographic research, conducting autoethnographic research, autoethnography, ethnographer, method for creative reflexive data, ethnographic voice, creative reflexive data, anthropology, case of anthropology, qualitative data, reflexivity, research, research participant, culture, researcher, acts of reflection, essential research process, reflection, writing

Funders Acknowledgements:

SSHRC (Social Science and Humanities Research Council) Partnership Development Grant

Grant ID: 890-2021-0114

Abstract

When conducting autoethnographic research, ethnographers engage in acts of reflection that produce qualitative data. This method is designed to help researchers create a data set for reflexivity and when practiced consistently, is a way in which one can find, in the case of anthropology, an ethnographic voice in their writing. This method is an essential research process to ensure we are not speaking for research participants and attending to the responsibility of our synthesis of culture over time.

Image Attribution

Fiona P. McDonald



Guidelines

This protocol takes sense memories as a starting point. A sense memory means recalling ones' experiences triggered through external stimuli that are visual, auditory, tactile olfactory, smell, and beyond (Howes 2022; Seremetakis 2019, Hetherington 2013; Banks 2009; Byrne 2008). While we have proposed this protocol as autoethnographic, it has the potential to become a collaborative tool, too.

If you have found yourself in a group while undertaking this protocol, there is an opportunity to extend the exercise into something more collaborative. This can be considered a collative way of transformation in which you bring together your output from Stage 2 to create a more visual collage or patchwork.

If you have found yourself with a community partner, interviewee, a fellow researcher, and have encountered dissonances together. You can do this exercise and use it as a way to see what perspectives and values you both bring to a visual cue, a soundscape, or a material encounter.

This protocol is meant specifically to engage with a researcher's reflexive positionality for those moments during fieldwork when one needs to reflect on where personal bias is experienced. This protocol is intended to be a personal exercise in your field notes. However, this can also be done in a group context where each person does the protocol but at the end comes together to collaborate on a shared reflection. No matter how it is adapted, the objective is about finding a consistent way to engage with your own embodied and lived experience during fieldwork when moments of interruption or discrepancy are encountered.

When it comes to Stage 3, Analysis, interpretation and reflection of what you have created is a meaningful way to engage with your unconscious knowledge and often bias and is a critical step in getting to new understandings. Possible ways to undertake this synthesis (i.e. textual, visual/drawing, sonic, or all of the above!). However, we will focus here on the textual.

Materials

Drawing Supplies

You will need paper of some kind and a writing tool. Here are some suggestions:

- Paper (watercolour paper)
- Watercolours
- Pencil crayons
- Pen or pencil
- Markers



Safety warnings

! This is going to be fun!

Ethics statement

If this is part of human subject research, you must ensure you have cleared and have an approved Ethics Certificate for Human Subject Research. Remember to consider the ethics of Do No Harm in your qualitative work. And ensure you have permission to work with any visual or material content before publishing.

Before start

This protocol is a way to pause and undertake reflexive moment(s) in a systematic way that gets documented in your field notes. As the outputs from following this protocol accrue in one's fieldnotes, and especially in the context of autoethnographic work, one is creating pieces of invaluable data. If you are not working in an autoethnographic way, these again will eventually enable a qualitative researcher to recognize over time how they have come to understand their biases and how this informs making reason in the analytic.

In this protocol, we focus on the sensory ways of knowing. Therefore, you are asked to focus on a sensory cue, which is a stimulus that you have experienced and encountered in your everyday life during fieldwork.

Know your Scenario

Begin by selecting a sensory cue, i.e., a stimulus that you have experienced during fieldwork or in response to a tangible object that you gathered in the field, that left you feeling a sense of interruption to your own thinking.



Construction

10m

- 1 With your sensory cue in mind, recall a sensorially loaded moment/experience from your everyday life that is sparked when you experience this sensory cue.
- 2 After recalling this memory, describe it in detail on a piece of paper, using as many sensorial words (e.g. stinky, smooth, salty, vibration) as possible (emotional and affective words can also work here: e.g., painful, scary, gloomy, dense, bright, joyful...). Do this for a few minutes or until you feel you have exhausted your sensorial words.

10m

00:10:00

Disintegration

- 3 Looking at your list of words from Step 2, look for words on the page that you deem to be sensorial, and/or affective, and/or emotional and identify them with a star, circle, or underline.

Note

When thinking both with and about your senses here, this is based on your own cultural perspective on them that may well go beyond the five Western conceptions of senses (ie. seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, smelling, and others).

Transformation

- 4 Using your drawing supplies, take those words and find a way to visualize or draw them.

Note

This might include using shapes, colours, illustrations, etc. You can draw abstractions of sensorial impressions (lines/shape/usage of colour etc.) but you can also draw concrete/tangible things. You can do this on a blank page, or if you are using a sensory cue that is a tangible object (e.g., photograph, poster, etc), you can draw directly on that material. Note that this is a transformative action and the tangible object you are working on will be irreversibly changed at this step.

Analysis



- 5 Looking at what you created, using a writing tool (i.e. pen, pencil, marker, etc), paper, etc write a reflection in which you respond to the following questions or prompts:
 - 5.1 What is it that you responded to in the sensory cue?
 - 5.2 Why those sensorial words? How did you visualize them? Why do you think particular shapes/colors patterns/repetitions are used?
 - 5.3 How do you feel now that you are seeing the sensorial layers of your experience? How were you feeling before? Do you think there is a change in your feelings? In which way and why?
 - 5.4 Having investigated the sensory cue, are there any parts of it that have gained new meaning for you?
 - 5.5 Define in your own words what the source of the interruption to your thought was, as well as your relationship to the interruption is it now.

Expected result

Over time, if you conduct this protocol throughout your research, you will find that your field notes will be punctuated with consistency through this systematic reflection. This protocol, and any exercises in reflexivity, when practiced consistently, is a way in which one can find, in the case of anthropology, an ethnographic voice in their writing. Or find new ways to ask questions while in the field. An essential process to ensure we are not speaking for others and attending to the responsibility of our synthesis of culture over time.



Protocol references

Banks, William P., ed. 2009. "Encyclopedia of Consciousness." Accessed April 17, 2024.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com:5070/referencework/9780123738738/encyclopedia-of-consciousness>.

Byrne, John H., ed. 2008. "Learning and Memory: A Comprehensive Reference." Accessed April 17, 2024.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com:5070/referencework/9780123705099/learning-and-memory-a-comprehensive-reference>.

Hetherington, Kevin. 2013. "Rhythm and Noise: The City, Memory and the Archive." *The Sociological Review* 61 (1_suppl): 17–33. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12051>.

Howes, David. 2022. *The Sensory Studies Manifesto: Tracking the Sensorial Revolution in the Arts and Human Sciences*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Seremetakis, C. Nadia. 2019. *Sensing the Everyday: Dialogues from Austerity Greece*. 1st ed. Routledge.

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429198182>.