Learning Ethnography Through Doing Ethnography: Two Student—Researchers' Insights

Aisha Ravindran[1] , **Jing Li[1]** , **and Steve Marshall[1]**

Abstract

In this article, we present the accounts of the field experiences and challenges of two graduate student-researchers practising ethnographic methodology, conducting fieldwork, and writing up "post-modern" ethnographies that are both creative and "integrative". We describe the complexities and tensions when two student-researchers negotiated many issues in the field and "behind the desk" as they transformed the texts: epistemology and ontology, reflexivity and auto-ethnography, and writing researchers and participants in and out of accounts. We conclude with a discussion on pedagogical implications, and consider the value of learning ethnography through doing ethnography.

Keywords

reflexivity, post-modern ethnography, pedagogy, learning ethnography

Ethnography has become an increasingly popular methodology course across a number of fields and disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, linguistics, education, geography, and the medical sciences, to name a few. One goal of an ethnographic research methods course is to foster students' inquiry and sense of agency in making connections between the "book" and the "world." While a large body of literature exists on the pedagogical strategies of engaging students in ethnographic methods and writing skills (e.g., Arias, 2008; Trnka, 2017), there is a dearth of studies on the actual process of students learning to do ethnography and the perspectives and voice they bring to such learning processes. Bearing this awareness in mind, in this article, we present the accounts of the field experiences and challenges of two graduate student-researchers practising ethnographic methodology, conducting fieldwork, and writing up "post-modern" ethnographies that are both creative and "integrative" (Beach, 2006; Emerson et al., 2011) in an ethnographic methodology course at a university in western Canada, a course that emphasizes both the *ethnos* and *graphia* in ethnography (Marshall, 2014; Walford, 2008).

One of the aims (and an assessed component) of the course was for students to *learn ethnography through doing ethnography*, thus becoming student-researchers. In doing so, the two student-researchers taking the course carried out small-scale (over a period ranging from two weeks to 2 months at a chosen site) ethnographic projects at chosen sites of interest, observing

behaviors, taking ethnographic fieldnotes, and transforming their notes, reflections, and analyses into creative and integrative "post-modern" ethnographies (Beach, 2006; Brewer, 2000; Emerson et al., 2011). We describe the complexities and tensions when two student-researchers negotiated many issues in the field and "behind the desk" as they transformed the texts: epistemology and ontology, reflexivity and auto-ethnography, and writing researchers and participants in and out of accounts. We argue that doing and practising ethnography in this way contributed toward greater sensibilities of the students as future ethnographers as they took responsibility for their actions, applied theoretical and methodological frameworks, performed their identities as ethnographers immersed in the conditions generated in the field, and reflected on the validity and credibility of their representational modes.

In an exercise of collaborative scholarship and authorship, Authors 1 and 2, the student-researchers, and Author 3, the course instructor, present and analyze selected data excerpts

[1] Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, Canada

Corresponding Author:
Aisha Ravindran, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, Canada; Faculty of Creative and Critical Studies, The University of British Columbia-Okanagan, 1148 Research Road, Kelowna, BC, Canada V1V 1V7.
Email: aisha.ravindran@ubc.ca

from two small-scale ethnographic studies/assignments in order to illustrate the processes of two students choosing the field sites: (re)defining research questions, dealing with contextual contingencies in the field, and practising authorial reflexivity when incorporating fieldnotes into post-modern ethnographic texts that blended writing genres.

The following data excerpts are presented: traditional handwritten fieldnotes and fieldnotes written on laptops and iPads during observations and retrospectively; images and artifacts from the different sites; auto-ethnographic narratives in which issues ranging from researcher reflexivity to negotiating ethics are addressed; and excerpts from the final written accounts of the observation. In presenting these data, the authors reflect and analyze on two levels: "local" questions of relevance to the respective small-scale studies, and the broader questions that relate to their processes of writing up fieldnotes and developing authorial reflexivity through doing the assignment.

The two small-scale studies done by Authors 1 and 2 are not ethnographic studies in the traditional sense characterized by features such as long-term immersion in a site of research, inductive framing, etc. Accordingly, we understand the studies less as traditional ethnographic sites and more in terms of heuristic spaces and processes for learning about ethnography in graduate studies (for which there is a relative lack of research done). The assignments carried out in these heuristic spaces were thus designed to give students an opportunity to carry out some of the techniques studied during the course and to develop reflexivity as writers.

One focus of this article is on several important issues of relevance to the authorial and critical reflexivity that developed during the process of learning by doing ethnography. The first relates to epistemology and ontology: how could the ways of knowing and the realities of researched and researcher be best represented in the texts? Second, each student-researcher addressed the issue of writing researchers and participants in and out of their ethnographic account: if their endeavor was truly emic in nature, how much space should they give to participants' voices? The third important issue was the following: what role does authorial reflexivity play in the writing of an ethnographic text that weaves the voices of the researcher and researched in and out of the account?

We offer answers to these questions, and provide a brief discussion of pedagogical implications, in which we consider the value of *learning ethnography through doing ethnography*, suggesting that it is through studying, doing, and writing ethnography concurrently that the complexities of ethnographic research can best be taught and learned. In our analysis, we use the pronoun *we* to present the shared ideas and understandings of all three authors, while Authors 1 and 2 use the personal pronoun *I* in the sections in which they discuss their respective small-scale studies.

Method

In line with the course ethos of learning ethnography through doing ethnography, each of the two student-researchers

engaged in their own small-scale ethnographic research project as a means to apply, problematize, and reflect upon the aspects of ethnographic research being studied in the course. As can be seen in the Course Assessment section of the course description in the Appendix, 40% of the students' grade for the course was for a task called "Writing up ethnographic fieldnotes," requiring the following foci: justification of the research site; description of "entering the field"; aims of the observation; discussion of the following: ethical issues, researcher reflexivity, position as insider/outsider; an autoethnographic narrative; detailed description/analysis of observation through thematic synthesis of fieldnotes; and attachment of original notes as appendices.

Student-researcher 1 carried out her observation by studying university students taking a first-year academic literacy course (AL098) at a university that we have called Western Pacific University (WPU) in Vancouver, Canada, focusing on students' interactions in English and other languages during collaborative tasks, their learning strategies, and the challenges they faced with formal academic literacy. Each of the two academic literacy classes observed by student-researcher 1 was made up of 18 students, all of whom gave informed consent to be observed for the purposes of the study/course. For the purposes of the student-researchers' individual observation-based research projects, no clear link can be made between the number of student participants in each class and credibility of the data. Admittedly, each student-researcher had specific research questions that they were hoping to find answers to through carrying out observations; however, the research exercise was as much to do with learning ethnography through doing ethnography, and reflecting on the process of developing authorial reflexivity. This focus required putting into practice aspects of ethnographic research studied in the course as well as the process of transforming fieldnotes to post-modern ethnographic texts.

Student-researcher 2 carried out her observation among multilingual communities in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, one of Canada's most economically and socially disadvantaged neighborhoods. Following a walking and visual ethnographic approach (Borer, 2013; Lee & Ingold, 2006; Pink, 2008), she carried out observation in public spaces, taking photographs of the linguistic landscape (specifically, multilingual street signs and shopfronts), and writing fieldnotes of what she found. In terms of the number of participants and the credibility of the data, there were no participants who were formally interviewed; instead, the data collection involved walking through a community made up of thousands of individuals. Again, there is a blurry link between the number of participants and credibility of findings; findings were not only understandings that emerged around the linguistic landscaping, but also the writing process of transforming notes into ethnographic text.

The course instructor, Author 3, applied for and gained ethics approval for the course from the university's Research Ethics Board, enabling the student-researchers to select an educational or social site for observation, carry out participant and/or non-participant observation, take fieldnotes during the observation, present findings in the class, write up fieldnotes for a course assignment, and disseminate the findings at

conferences and in academic publications. Informed consent was gained in the academic literacy classes after presenting prospective participants with a one-page study details document and a consent form. Other ethical issues that were addressed during the process of applying for course ethics, studied during the course, and adhered to during data collection, analysis, and dissemination, included the following: participants' rights to privacy, respect, and protection from harm (Murphy & Dingwall, 2007); honesty, trust, and use of pseudonyms (Fetterman, 1998); non-maleficence (no harm should come to participants) and beneficence (research should benefit participants in some way); maintenance of trust between the researcher and the researched (Brewer, 2000); and researchers' ability to exercise "interpretive authority" (Murphy & Dingwall, 2007, p. 345), which can involve the selective construction of ethnographic accounts in ways that can omit spaces for participants to offer different interpretations of their own practices (Marshall et al., 2014).

To sum up this section, there are some key points to note with regard to the methodology and credibility of the data. First, the two student-researchers were taking observation notes as participants and non-participants (as will be explained below), depending on the changing contexts of their data collection. These notes were primarily content-oriented and based around research questions to be answered. Nonetheless, the end goal of the activity was to write an assessed task that required a discussion both of content issues and the reflexive writing processes of transforming fieldnotes into creative, convincing ethnographies. In other words, for the student-researchers, the assessed writing up was as important as finding answers to the research questions. In terms of study participants, the two student-researchers are also, in a way, participants who have generated data for this article, the aim of which is to illustrate the key factors negotiated during the processes of transforming their fieldnotes into postmodern ethnographic texts. As no claims regarding credibility or generalizability of findings are being made, the limited number of participants at this level has few drawbacks.

Results

Results are presented in two sections, one for each student-researcher. In each section, the research questions that framed the observation are presented, followed by a brief summary of the answers to those questions. Then, each student-researcher has highlighted the key issues that emerged during the transformation of fieldnotes into postmodern ethnographic texts, with a particular focus on the following themes of relevance to authorial reflexivity highlighted above: epistemology and ontology; auto-ethnography and reflexivity; site, space, and fluidity; ethical issues; and writing researchers and participants in and out of accounts.

Student-Researcher 1 (Author 1): Academic English and Identities

My foray into the field as an ethnographer attempted to combine two aspects: the rigor of process on the one hand, and the imaginative documented account of my experience that borrowed from the creativity of the genre of fiction on the other. The initial research questions for my small-scale study were the following:

a. How do students from diverse socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds learn in an English language-learning environment that prioritizes standardized academic English?
b. To what extent do these student practices represent theories of identity formation?

I observed three classes of two sections of AL098, each with 18 students, over a period of two weeks, with the expectation that themes would emerge from the observations to provide answers to my questions. I chose this site due to its closeness to my own professional background and interest in the learning experiences of multilingual students in Canadian higher education.

Emerging Alterities Through Shifting Researcher and Participant Roles

After my first observation, my research questions shifted from the learning processes of the students and their pedagogical strategies in relation to identity, to the role of the instructors and their instructional strategies. This shift took place as a result of my own professional identity (having many years of experience in the field of teaching English for Academic Purposes), and my positionality within the data-gathering context. Moreover, during the class, I found myself constantly writing myself into fieldnotes that were supposed to be about others, creating a kind of postmodern "*bricolage*" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 4). Not only did I objectively document events, I also became a *bricoleur*, whose self, memory, experiences, shifting roles as student and teacher, and linguistic, cultural, and ethnic identities interwove in events in which I participated. My research questions also shifted to questions related to ethnographic praxis: How was I, as a novice ethnographer, weaving together ethical, ontological, and epistemological strands while producing fieldnotes? Secondly, how was my reflexivity framing my auto-ethnographic narrative during the writing of the fieldnotes? My analysis below addresses these shifts and questions.

I began the observation as a non-participant observer, sitting apart from the students, taking notes. Figure 1 reflects my altered responses, as demonstrated by the reflections within the parentheses, to the epistemological and ontological premises with which I commenced the observation. It displays the messiness of my handwritten fieldnotes and the eagerness of a diffident novice ethnographer's encompassing gaze that is reluctant to let go of anything that would contribute as data. I was prepared to faithfully document and represent, with as much detail as possible, the sequential unfolding of events occurring in the classroom. With time, my role shifted somewhat to more of a participant observer mode as I interacted with
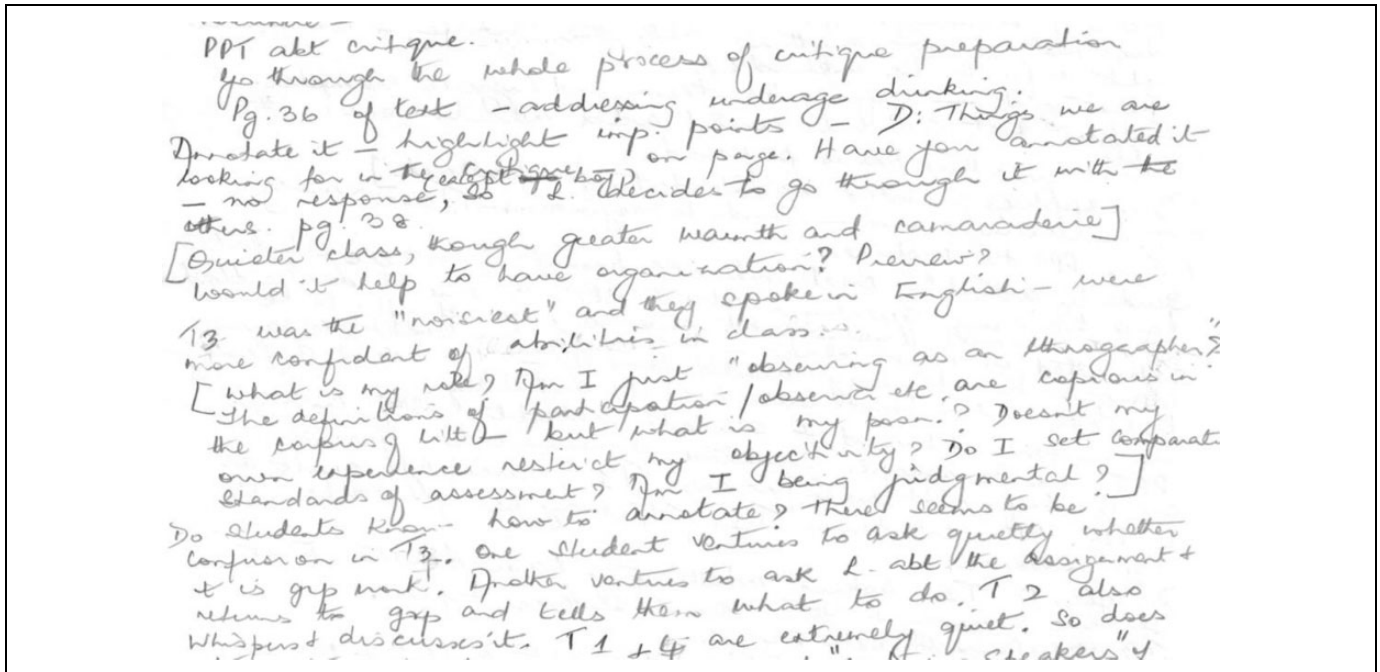
Figure 1. Self-reflexivity during observation in the field (Fieldnotes, 10 October 2014).

the instructor and students during observations. Even though I carefully recorded the actions, reactions, and responses of students and the instructor, as seen in Figure 1 above, I also documented evaluative terms that represented my perception and interpretation, and in doing so, to some degree fictionalized the context through the following words: quieter, greater warmth and camaraderie, noisiest, more confident, ventures, quietly, and whispers. This process conforms with Geertz's (1973) description of the ethnographer's jottings to be an interpretive activity, "fictions in the sense that they are 'something made', 'something fashioned'" (p. 15). Interspersed within the data-gathering *product* in Figure 1 (the field notes) are self-reflexive assessments of the *process*, which I see to be the result of a metafictional, double consciousness brought out by my engagement in the assessment. To put it simply, as I transferred my visual observation of events to fieldnotes, my written notes also wove in self-reflexive interpretive language, thereby documenting a recursive movement between being participant and non-participant simultaneously.

Secondly, the stages of interpretation that I went through later as I transcribed, polished, and expanded the elliptical and fragmented "thick descriptions" of my handwritten fieldnotes, caused a subtle transformation in my perspective: my initial focus on the students shifted to one on the instructors, as I re-observed the site from a *reflexive* distance through the process of polishing the fieldnotes. This shift was due to the fore-grounding of my ontological status, as I experienced the dual identity of being both an insider and an outsider at my research site. My personal background forged connections with the students of English in the AL098 classes, but my professional background established bonds with the instructors who were teaching these courses. I thus confronted ethical issues that

related to the validity and reliability of my task, as through authorial reflexivity I evaluated my dual role of researcher-student and researcher-instructor, and the selection and valorization of specific events over others. An additional consideration was the extent to which these three instances of classroom observation were temporally dislocated from what had occurred before in the field, and what would take place after my departure from the field, and whether they were authentic representations of what I had surmised them to mean. This raised questions about the ontological nature of temporal reality, and the epistemological validity of my observation, due to it being partial and selective.

In the excerpt below from my polished fieldnotes, the raw data in the first excerpt is transcribed with a detailed analytical section, and a self-reflexive interpretation that highlighted ethical concerns.

> There seems to be some confusion at [the hexagonal table] pod 3 as the assignment was not clear. Eventually one student, the girl, as spokesperson for the group ventures to ask the instructor quietly whether it is group work. The instructor asks them to do it individually. Another from pod 3 approaches the instructor to seek details about the assignment and returns to the group to give them the information. Students at pod 2 also whisper with each other and discuss the assignment. Pod 1 and pod 4 are extremely quiet. Pod 3 has students of East Asian origin. They are all of Chinese origin as they revert to Chinese intermittently, but they communicate most of the time with each other in English.
>
> *I am curious about the seating. Are they friends, or did they just configure themselves based on their ethnicities? Pod 3 comprises of speakers of Chinese origin. I am curious about the use of language here. Does having/sharing a common language establish a*

rapport that transcends ethnic/racial barriers? These students speak English fluently, so they would be comfortable speaking in any configuration of students, yet they remain with their own linguistic group. Am I reading too much into this? Does my desire to be an "ethnographer" lead me into imbuing meanings to situations where none exist?

I wonder about my role here. I am an insider as I have taught many classes where the context was the same, and so were the topics. Am I just observing as an ethnographer? Does my own experience in the past, as an instructor restrict my objectivity? I am exposed to just three sessions in class, perhaps an insufficient duration to gauge the linguistic level of the students, their level of knowledge, the rapport they share with the instructor. (Polished Fieldnotes, 10 October 2014)

My first concern was with "representational politics" (Murphy & Dingwall, 2007, p. 344) and my role of ethnographer in the construction of reality, as "ethnography is always caught up in the invention, not the representation of cultures" (Clifford, 1986, p. 7). I addressed this in the fieldnote as I identified the ethnic origin of the students seated at the hexagonal pod table 3 as Chinese, not taking into consideration the differences in language/dialect that may have existed in their conversation. I also attributed their choice of seating arrangement with their desire to be with their own linguistic/ethnic group, whereas their choice may have been the result of chance, seating availability, or a desire to be seated with friends. The authorial representation and ethnographic perspective were thus partial due to the fragmentary knowledge acquired through my brief observation. My selective representation and interpretation of events was only one of many perspectives, an issue that I confronted in the fieldnote excerpt when I questioned my perception of events as being constructed through my desire to be an ethnographer. Finally, the events that I had experienced are represented in the text as being temporally fossilized. Events had occurred before my entry, and would continue after my exit. By documenting the events as being fixed in time, excluding the impact of events that may have occurred before my observation, and being unable to acknowledge those that would occur after my exit, I was in effect freezing those events in present time. In doing so, I was granting them a stable and static position on a specific temporal axis, rather than on a dynamic continuum. During the process of transforming fieldnotes to a reflexive postmodern text, it is therefore important to acknowledge the distinction between the "discourse time" (when the telling of the story took place, or was written up) and the "story time" (when the story took place) (Genette, as cited in Baynham, 2003), and the different representations that may emerge therein.

If my observation were to reflect an emic objective, my account required some degree of validation through greater participation in the field and the incorporation of participants' voices, a concern that I documented in my reflexive analysis in the polished fieldnote. Connected to this was the auto-ethnographic interweaving of my own life and experiences in the fieldnotes, where I was engaging in a process that Bochner

(2016) terms as one where "something we call experience is being inquired into, interpreted, made sense of, and judged" (p. 54). The next excerpt from my fieldnotes addresses the final issue raised by the interweaving of auto-ethnographic reflections and experiences into the accounts.

"Boundary – Crossing" Through Authorial Reflexivity

In the second excerpt from my polished fieldnotes, my evaluation was also juxtaposed with my own professional standards and processes, thus engaging in what Atkinson (as cited in Emerson et al., 2001) considered as a construction of the field through "the outcome of what the ethnographer may encompass in his or her gaze . . . and what the ethnographer omits and overlooks as much as what the ethnographer writes" (p. 354).

The Instructor gives the students a final assignment. There is about half an hour before class ends. She distributes a magazine, *Geist.* Students are to read two articles, or even one, and write a response regarding the manner in which the style supports the purpose of the argument. One of them is an article on photographs of a poster of Jean Harlow, and the other, about the translation of novels by the Turkish novelist Tanpinar. Students have to write about (the Instructor writes the prompt on the blackboard) how the author presents the purpose of the article, through their style, with examples.

This is a terrific assignment . . . but I wonder whether the students would be able to perform well without being aware of what the instructor's expectations are. I read both articles. They are dense with references to content located within specific cultural and generic contexts that presume a high level of cultural/artistic awareness of the reader. Do students also know how to identify specific characteristics of "style"? Or is this an assumption on my part, that the students are unaware? Perhaps this has already been discussed before in a previous class? (Polished Fieldnotes, 22 October 2014)

I was constructing the field here with my *ethnographer's gaze* but was also being constructed by it and was self-reflexively aware of my "connection to the research situation and hence [my] effects upon it" (Davies, 2008, p. 7). Together with the writing of the fieldnotes, I was also positioning myself as a student, and generating possible impediments that my student-self may confront while doing the assignment. There was then, a shift in position from that of a student-self to that of the instructor-self, and a consideration of the processes that I would have engaged in were I to assign a similar task. I was thus a "boundary-crosser" with the "role of a dual identity" (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 9), and my experiences in the past were invoked to interpret the experiences in the field in the present through a "mode of knowing and a way of being" (Sparkes, 2015, p. 516). This pivot of authorial reflexivity was also the means to reach a better self-reflexive understanding of my inner self as I moved recursively back and forth between my student self and teacher self, engaging with both.

Engagement in the practical processes of doing ethnography while learning about its theoretical and conceptual bases and

ethical issues exposes student-researchers to concerns and issues that are central to the ethnographer's ontic status. My experiences in the field and in preparing fieldnotes transformed process into experiential practice, and the interconnections between self, epistemology, and the larger social world transformed the process into ethnographic praxis: a mode of learning by doing. Marshall et al. (2014) not only reconfigure ethnographic praxis as a data-gathering method but also call attention to "how [they] represent this praxis in a range of traditional and less traditional genres in the communication of [their] results" (p. 10). The mélange of creative styles, the ambiguity of literary language and of multiple genres, express the post-modern focus regarding the ontic and the epistemic: that it represents plural realities and perspectives; that representation or documentation can only present one view among the many; and that the authority of authorial representation concurrently holds the possibility of deferral of meaning and stability in representation when re-represented by an-*Other*, the ethnographer. My engagement with the process of *learning ethnography* by *doing ethnography* highlighted these issues and provided a valuable process to follow for subsequent preparations of ethnographic research designs and of their application through practices in the field.

Student-Researcher 2 (Author 2): Linguistic Landscaping in Vancouver's Chinatown

Pink (2009) argues that "ethnography is a reflexive and experiential process through which understanding, knowing and (academic) knowledge are produced" (p. 8). This conceptualization of ethnography corresponds to the newly emerging literature on the importance of "the experiential and evocative elements of ethnography" (p. 8) in producing ethnographic knowing (e.g., Pink, 2009; Vannini, 2015; Vannini et al., 2012). The following account, through my experiences of conducting a linguistic landscaping (LL) project in Vancouver's Chinatown as a student ethnographer, demonstrates my attempt of doing and experiencing ethnography "through the senses" (Pink, 2009, p. 9) in an experimental and exploratory manner.

I chose Vancouver's Chinatown, one of the oldest neighborhoods in the culturally and linguistically diverse city, as the research venue due in part to my interest, as an international student from China, in how Chinese languages and cultures would be represented in this rich urban space. Thus, my focus was on examining the informational and symbolic features of linguistic items (i.e. multilingual street signs and shopfronts) displayed in the area's LL. I addressed two questions:

a. How do language signs in Chinatown's LL provide information about the power dynamics between different language groups?
b. How do static and dynamic aspects of the LL inter-relate to reflect multilingualism in the neighborhood?

Multisensory Encounters with the LL: Beyond Photographing

As with most LL studies, I started my project by gathering multilingual signs, mainly through walking and photographing. What started out as a somewhat random walking-and-photographing type of LL study, however, turned out to be an emergent learning experience, in which I developed the sensory "understanding of the doing (the methodology) and the being (the ontology) of ethnography" (Pitts, 2012, p. 1).

I embarked on my data gathering – wandering, photographing, and doing observation – with an aim to obtain a sense of the diversity and scope of multilingual representations in the LL. The walking and photographing, as Cheng (2014) argues, brings the walker's body "into 'conversation' with the environments we move through" (p. 213). While I walked around the neighborhood, taking photos in the exterior and interior landscapes, I simultaneously engaged with the LL and research settings through the sensorial aspects of my body. I saw the co-presence of different languages on street signs, shopfront signs, posters, and outdoor art; heard different languages (e.g., Cantonese, English, Mandarin) spoken in various locations; observed everyday communicative activities in the historic building of Carnegie Community Centre; and smelled the hybrid scents from the surrounding environments. These emergent and embodied "experiences of reality" (Pink, 2009, p. 8) played an important role in my reading and interpretation of the data, helping me to form a broader understanding of what I was observing.

Interpreting the Visual Data Sensorially

After the initial data collection, I read relevant literature in search of analytic lenses through which I could phenomenologically view my fieldwork experiences. I felt that a sensory take on ethnography (Pink, 2009) and walking ethnography (Lee & Ingold, 2006) provided the lenses that I was looking for to theorize my research practices. Sensory and walking approaches to ethnography attend to the corporeal, sensory, and mobile dimensions of ethnographic practices and knowing (Cheng, 2014; Lee & Ingold, 2006; Pink, 2009; Vannini, 2015; Vannini et al., 2012), with a focus on "the sensations and movements of the body in the moment-by-moment unfolding or emergence of activity" (Leander & Boldt, 2012, p. 22). Photographs of linguistic landscapes, viewed through these lenses, are not simply a mode of visual representation, but become a connection to my sensory encounters in the field, allowing me to construct associations between linguistic items, objects, people, and social, material environment.

Figure 2 shows an image of monolingual Chinese signs in local shops in Vancouver's Chinatown. The presence of exclusive traditional Chinese characters seems to indicate the linguistic heritage of Vancouver's Chinatown as a deeply-rooted Cantonese-speaking neighborhood. In the meantime, as a result of the growth of downtown Vancouver and the area's re-zoning plan, Chinatown and its surrounding areas have attracted

Figure 2. Monolingual signs in traditional Chinese script, Chinatown (2014).

Figure 3. Multilingual lease advertisement on a new condo, Chinatown (2014).

intense interest from developers. The effect of gentrification also finds representation in the area's LL (see Li & Marshall, 2018, for more discussion in this respect). Figure 3 is one such example, showing a brand-new apartment building – among other newly-built condo buildings in Chinatown – available for lease, with the conspicuously visible simplified Chinese characters in the lease advertisement targeting particularly at Chinese-speaking customers.

The sociolinguistic features described above are evident in the photographs. However, as Cheng (2014) observes, the power of photographs lies not just in capturing representations of local landscapes, but more in "the performative powers of the photographed objects to provoke openings for imagination" (p. 214). Reading these individual photographs thus prompted me to relate to my multisensory in-field encounters: what I saw (e.g., heaps of dried seafood and barbeque pork dangling from strings), smelled (e.g., the unique odor of the dried fish and ginseng lingering in the air), and heard (e.g., the different languages being spoken). Particularly, my auditory experiences in public domains stood out, for example, in terms of how much and where different languages (i.e., Cantonese, English, and Mandarin) I heard were being spoken.

In the shops where the photo was taken and in other similar types of local businesses in Chinatown (e.g., Chinese bakeries, butcher shops, and grocery stores), I frequently heard the Cantonese language being used. However, in the process of gentrification and the changing demographic, such local businesses are being replaced by high-end restaurants and shops that are oriented toward middle-class, non-Chinese consumers. Within these "zones of exclusion,"[1] English has begun to replace the Cantonese language, becoming a major presence in the soundscape.

Thus, attending to the visual (photographs) and dynamic (people's actual language activities) aspects of the linguistic landscape, as well as the presence and absence of languages in

the soundscape enabled me to develop a multisensory aware-ness of the changing linguistic dynamics in the area's LL. Viewing the photographs and fieldnotes as sensory materials, the seemingly unrelated individual images then became entangled in relations with other photographs, fieldnotes, and associated observation. Navigating sensorially in such a rela-tional connection between linguistic items, sonic resonances, people, and their linguistic activities in the natural and built surroundings, I was able to reproduce "an affinity for the anal-ysis of events, practices, assemblages, affective atmospheres, and the backgrounds of everyday life against which relations unfold in their myriad potentials" (Vannini, 2015, p. 318).

Writing Sensorially with Reflexivity

Vannini (2015) urges ethnographers to "break rules and to think, feel, and write differently" to "cultivate heterogeneity" (p. 324). When writing up the text, I adopted a writing style proposed by Vannini et al. (2012) to "acknowledge the tenta-tiveness, situatedness, and fallibility of fieldwork and somatic work, and evoke a sense of emergence" (p. 76). I foregrounded the visual data to create a space for my embodied and emplaced experiences weaving into my writing narrations and fieldnotes that captured the sensory experiences.

Sensory writing also requires ethnographic reflexivity (Van-nini et al., 2012). In my case, this involved including reflections on how my linguistic/cultural background and experiences served to shape my interpretation. For example, I initially assumed that Chinatown was populated primarily by Cantonese speakers due to the ubiquitous traditional Chinese scripts appearing in signs and also the fact that Cantonese was what I frequently heard in the neighborhood. What I failed to take into account was that this version of written Chinese language is also prevalent among Mandarin speakers in and from Taiwan and other parts of Southeastern Asia. Concerns and problems of how my subjectivity both in and outside the field would affect my interpretation, and in what ways, reminded me to temper my assumptions. I thus sought to take on "a decidedly reflexive and reflective posture," constantly examining "the various per-sonal and professional stakes attached to particular ways of representin(g)" (Hill, 2006, p. 947). This involved writing myself (my own linguistic repertoires and cultural trajectories) into my fieldnotes and ethnographic accounts as a means of acknowledging my authorial reflexivity, allowing me to make my ethnographic practices more transparent, not only to the reader, but also to myself.

Although the course and ethnographic project was pre-designed to a degree, the process of doing and encountering ethnography could not be pre-defined. Rather, it took different shapes and unfolded in unexpected ways as I explored, reacted and adjusted ethnographic practices in and out of fieldwork. In the process, emergent relations and connections were formed, and meanings and knowing constructed. Such an ongoing pro-cess allowed me to critically engage with ethnography, com-bining local realities with personal senses and subjectivities, in ways that would not have been possible had my experiences

been limited to reading texts on qualitative-ethnographic research and discussing them in a graduate research class.

Discussion

With regard to the nature of ethnography and ethnographic fieldwork, Ball (1990) states: "The prime ethnographic skills cannot be communicated or learned in the seminar room or out of the textbook. Students can be prepared, forewarned, or edu-cated in ethnography, but the only way to learn it is to do it" (pp. 157–158). Indeed, one of the stages of becoming an ethnographer through learning by doing was to "reconcile the abstract and the concrete" (Luttrell, 2010, p. 5). Being *in the field* was an opportunity for both student-researchers to be socialized into the research context by applying and practising disciplinary, conceptual, and methodological knowledge and processes learned in the course, in local, social, and educational contexts. Addressing serendipitous contingencies and engaging in researcher and authorial reflexivity raised awareness of issues that may arise in the future, which allowed for a more productive incremental evaluation of processes, and the devel-opment of professional and methodological research expertise and proficiency.

Learning Ethnography Through Doing Ethnography

The manner in which the student-researchers sought alterna-tives to address contingent situations were based upon concepts learned in the course and also through emergent experiences in the field. Student observation of EAL students by student-researcher 1 commenced with specific research questions, but the actual observation generated contextual reflexive assess-ments that were moderated by concerns of validity. The con-sideration of the *validity threat*, or "a way you might be wrong" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 123), incorporates the manner in which researchers acknowledge the possibility of their subjective per-ceptions impacting research processes and findings. Student-researcher 1's assessment of validity threats in her research led to multiple perspectival lenses being directed toward the anal-ysis of data as the fieldnotes were re-written, and created spec-ulative pathways of possibilities that exist beyond the knowledge and experiences of the researcher. Even though the potential existence of these threats is embedded in the research design, the ethnographer encounters them unexpectedly and directly while doing ethnography in the field or while reflex-ively analyzing the data. Student-researcher 1 responded to these threats by acknowledging that the *graphia*, the represen-tation of the experience, was idiosyncratic and as one among many other perspectives. These responses often entail, as Katz (2019) affirms, contradictions and "existential choices" (p. 16). Despite the limitations presented by the duration of the study that disallowed the application of various validity tests as sug-gested by Maxwell (2013, pp. 130–134), student-researcher 1's learning experience as a novice ethnographer revealed the representational ambiguity and incompleteness of the ethno-grapher's representation, and as one that may not "fit neatly

into any methodological research protocol . . . . [and that] the experience . . . [could be] unpredictable, uncontrollable, irrational, emotional, unsystematic, and unscientific" (Gill & Temple, 2014, p. 13). For student-researcher 2, the learning-by-doing ethnography trajectory evolved organically, from sensory engagement and embodied encounters in the field to searching for appropriate conceptual tools, shifting from linguistic landscapes to soundscapes, and exploring novel ethnographic writing genres behind the desk. It is through this discursive-reflexive explorative trajectory that new assemblages of relations and knowing emerged and that the textbook knowledge was transformed into an internalized critical understanding of ethnography.

Therefore, the student-researchers found that *doing* during the stage of *learning* contributed toward better research designs, greater sensitivity to contextual contingencies, and deeper critical reflection of research processes. It also contributed to what Pink (2018) terms as the creation of an "ethnographic place . . . . as an ongoingly emergent and changing configuration of things and processes" (p. 202). The early initiation of the student-researchers into the practice of ethnography sharpened their sensibilities as future ethnographers as they took responsibility for their actions, applied theoretical and methodological frameworks, performed their identities as ethnographers immersed in the conditions generated in the field, and reflected on the validity and credibility of their representational modes. This rite of passage, fraught with a combination of excitement, diffidence, and responsibility, contributed to an early transition into being practitioners of qualitative research methodologies.

Authorial Reflexivity and Post-Modern Authorship

Reflexivity includes both the response and the responsibility of the student-researchers to themselves and to the contextual "research relationship" (Luttrell, 2010, p. 160), and informs every stage of the research process (Crocket, 2004; Etherington, 2004; Luttrell, 2010; Maxwell, 2013; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) in a reciprocal, entangled construction of contextual reality, exposing the thought processes that lead to knowledge claims of the work's validity and authenticity (Copland & Creese, 2015; Etherington, 2007; Lichterman, 2017). The student-researchers reflexively embedded this dynamism into their accounts, allowing for possible changes in the future, acknowledging the contingent nature of observer-perception and analysis, and recognizing the possibility of retrospective changes in interpretation (Beach, 2006; Lichterman, 2017).

The ways in which each student author in this collection has chosen to write their ethnographic account should be read as a reflection of authorial reflexivity: how they best want the voices of their participants, the contexts of their studies, and their own voices as authors to be interwoven for readers. However, ontological shifts occurred both with regard to their own roles and those of their participants when they moved from placing events and people within prescribed expectations to "an affective openness to the other in which one asks, simply,

what is it to be this?" (Wyatt et al., 2018, p. 750, emphasis in original). Together with an acceptance of the partiality and temporality of their assumptions, they also made ethical choices about the representation of this partial access to *reality* so that the readers would have a broader perspective of why the researchers were impacted through specific events during the observation. Allowing for transformative changes during ethnographic engagement led to an openness to ontological and epistemological shifts, that is, shifts in how realities were observed, recorded, and reflected upon, and in how the student researchers' ways of understanding and knowing developed. In this regard, the becoming of the student-researcher-ethnographer was processual rather than static and fixed.

The ways in which we write up our ethnographic accounts are never neutral (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1990, p. 205). Accordingly, Beach (2006) refers to a post-modern celebration in experimental writing in ethnography, as one in which "reflexivity turns toward ethnographic authorship" (p. 167), giving more prominence to less traditional, and to more narrative genres of writing.

It is suggested by Marshall et al. (2014) that it is our role as ethnographers to engage with, document, analyze, and problematize these changes. The authors highlight how this can take shape in many forms: for example, changing understandings of what ethnography is, creative methodologies that unravel multi-layered phenomena, and different modes of writing yourself, the ethnographer, in and out of ethnographic accounts. Moreover, our writing of ethnographic accounts reflects our position on whether an objective social reality (that is separate from us as researchers) exists, assumptions made about our audience, and how authors may choose to persuade readers through writing

Concluding Thoughts

One significant limitation of the present research is the limited strategies the student-researchers used to collect data in the field due to the constraints of the ethics approval, which prevented them from a steady, in-depth involvement with the culture observed and thus developing a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics in the research context. The shorter duration of the data collection period also restricted a deeper understanding of both context and participants. Equally, had the small-scale studies been longer and more immersive in their own right, rather than course assignments that were exercises in learning through doing, the ethnographic accounts would have been more emic in nature, representing more of the voices and worldviews of the individuals whom we observed and less about our own processes as emerging researchers. Despite these limitations, in *becoming* a practitioner of ethnographic processes through the immersion in the field, the student researchers' experiences and practical assessment of the foundational concepts grounding ethnographic research contributed to the *being* of the field and to the building of theories of practice in qualitative research methods through their research studies.

Future research could extend the student-researchers' projects to address these constraints of duration and inability to include participants as "epistemic partners" (Holmes & Marcus, 2008, p. 84) for greater collaboration and enhanced validity. As we realized through our own collaborative work, it is important to share the stories from our research and "methodological anxieties [that] reveal the creative inventiveness emanating from fieldwork practices that challenge what [was] assumed to be the norm and form of ethnography" as suggested by Estalella & Criado (2018, p. 1). Even though a vast corpus of richly documented multimodally diverse ethnographies exists to guide student-ethnographers, additional research studies of novitiate student-ethnographers and their initial experiences hold significant pedagogical value. The present study demonstrates the potential for learning that such student-led projects hold in graduate education. As Hancock and Morrison (2018) emphasize, "ethnography is not something that is directly taught, and instead is often something that we learn in the field alone, or along the way in the experience of conducting fieldwork" (p. 197). The links between theory and praxis, and the classroom and the field, occur through learning by *doing* ethnography. There is a relatively small number of such publications, especially ones reported primarily from the student-researchers' perspective. More continued and sustained research in this regard is in need.

Appendix

Course Assessment

1. **Writing up ethnographic field notes 40**%

Each student will write up observational field notes collected during the course. The write up should include the following:

- justification of the research site
- description of "entering the field"
- aims of the observation
- discussion of the following: ethical issues, researcher reflexivity, position as insider/outsider
- an autoethnographic narrative
- detailed description/analysis of observation through thematic synthesis of field notes
- attachment of original notes as appendices

12–15 pages double-spaced, APA referencing.
The instructor will read one complete draft and provide comments prior to submission.

Authors' Note
The authors are co-equally responsible for the text.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD
Aisha Ravindran https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3911-0226
Jing Li https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2956-1939

Note
1. The phrase "zones of exclusion" is used in a 2017 Carnegie Community Action Project report. Retrieved from: http://www.carnegieaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/CED-REPORT-PRINT.pdf

References

Arias, J. (2008). Teaching ethnography: Reading the world and developing student agency. *The English Journal*, *97*(6), 92–97. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40503419

Ball, S. J. (1990). Self-doubt and soft data: Social and technical trajectories in ethnographic fieldwork. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, *3*(2), 157–171. https://doi.org/10.1080/0951839900030204

Baynham, M. (2003). Narratives in space and time: Beyond 'backdrop' accounts of narrative orientation. *Narrative Inquiry*, *13*(2), 347–366. https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.13.2.07bay

Beach, D. (2006). The deceptive imagination and ethnographic writing. In G. Troman, B. Jeffrey, & D. Beach (Eds.), *Researching education policy: Ethnographic experiences* (pp. 74–94). Tufnell.

Bochner, A. P. (2016). Putting meanings into motion: Autoethnography's existential calling. In S. H. Jones, T. E. Adams, & C. Ellis (Eds.), *Handbook of autoethnography* (pp. 50–56). Routledge.

Borer, M. I. (2013). Being in the city: The sociology of urban experiences. *Sociology Compass*, *7*(11), 965–983. https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12085

Brewer, J. D. (2000). *Ethnography*. Open University Press.

Cheng, Y. (2014). Telling stories of the city: Walking ethnography, affective materialities, and mobile encounters. *Space and Culture*, *17*(3), 211–223. https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331213499468

Clifford, J. (1986). Introduction: Partial truths. In J. Clifford & G. E. Marcus (Eds.), *Writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography* (pp. 1–26). University of California Press.

Copland, F., & Creese, A. (Eds.). (2015). *Linguistic ethnography: Collecting, analyzing, and presenting data*. Sage.

Crocket, K. (2004). Ethics and practices of re-presentation: Witnessing self and other. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, *14*(2), 154–161. https://doi.org/10.1080/14733145.2013.779733

Davies, A. C. (2008). *Reflexive ethnography: A guide to researching selves and others* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Sage.

Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2001). Participant observation and fieldnotes. In P. A. Atkinson, A. Coffey, S. Delamont, J. Lofland, & L. Lofland (Eds.), *Handbook of ethnography* (pp. 352–368). Sage.

Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.

Estalella, A., & Criado, T. S. (Eds.). (2018). *Experimental collaborations: Ethnography through fieldwork devices*. Berghahn Books.

Etherington, K. (2004). *Becoming a reflexive researcher: Using our selves in research*. Jessica Kingsley.

Etherington, K. (2007). Ethical research in reflexive relationships. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *13*(5), 599–616. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800407301175

Fetterman, D. M. (1998). *Ethnography: Step by step*. (2nd ed.). Sage.

Geertz, C. (1973). Thick description: Towards an interpretive theory of culture. In C. Geertz (Ed.), *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays by Clifford Geertz* (pp. 3–30). Basic Books.

Gill, P. R., & Temple, E. (2014). Walking the fine line between fieldwork success and failure: Advice for new ethnographers. *Journal of Research Practice*, *10*(1), 1–16. http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/442/349

Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (1990). *Ethnography: Principles in practice*. Routledge.

Hancock, B. H., & Morrison, D. R. (2018). The ethnographer's circle: Institutionalizing ethnography in the pacific sociological association. *Sociological Perspectives*, *6*(12), 195–206. https://doi.org/10.1177/0731121418756548

Hill, M. L. (2006). Representin(g): Negotiating multiple roles and identities in the field and behind the desk. *Qualitative Inquiry* *12*(5), 926–949. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800406288613

Holmes, D. R., & Marcus, G. E. (2008). Collaboration today and the re-imagination of the classic scene of fieldwork encounter. *Collaborative Anthropologies*, *1*(1), 81–101. https://doi.org/10.1353/cla.0.0003

Katz, J. (2019). On becoming an ethnographer. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *48*(1), 16–50.

Leander, K., & Boldt, G. (2012). Rereading 'a pedagogy of multiliteracies': Bodies, texts, and emergence. *Journal of Literacy Research*, *45*(1), 22–46. https://doi.org/10.1177/1086296X12468587

Lee, J., & Ingold, T. (2006). Fieldwork on foot: Perceiving, routing, socializing. In S. Coleman & P. Collins (Eds.), *Locating the field: Space, place and context in Anthropology* (pp. 67–85). Berg.

Li, J., & Marshall, S. (2018). Engaging with linguistic landscaping in Vancouver's Chinatown: A pedagogical tool for teaching and learning about multilingualism. International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2017.1422479

Lichterman, P. (2017). Interpretive reflexivity in ethnography. *Ethnography*, *18*(1), 35–45. https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138115592418

Luttrell, W. (Ed.). (2010). *Qualitative educational research: Readings in reflexive methodology and transformative practice*. Routledge.

Marshall, S. (2014). Negotiating the ism schism: Is it possible to be 'partially ethnographic'? In S. Marshall, A. Clemente & M. Higgins (Eds.), *Shaping ethnography in multilingual and multicultural contexts* (pp. 131–150). Althouse Press.

Marshall, S., Clemente, A., & Higgins, M. (Eds.) (2014). Introduction. In S. Marshall, A. Clemente & M. Higgins (Eds.), *Shaping ethnography in multilingual and multicultural contexts* (pp. 1–27). Althouse Press.

Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Murphy, E., & Dingwall, R. (2007). The ethics of ethnography. In P. A. Atkinson, A. Coffey, S. Delamont, J. Lofland, & L. Lofland (Eds.), *Handbook of ethnography* (pp. 339–351). Sage.

Pink, S. (2008). Mobilizing visual ethnography: Making routes, making place and making images. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *9*(3), 1–17. http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0803362

Pink, S. (2009). *Doing sensory ethnography*. Sage.

Pink, S. (2018). Afterword: Refiguring collaboration and experimentation. In A. Estalella & T. S. Criado (Eds.), *Experimental collaborations: Ethnography through fieldwork devices* (pp. 201–212). Berghahn.

Pitts, M. J. (2012). Practicing the four seasons of ethnography methodology while searching for identity in Mexico. *The Qualitative Report*, *17*(79), 1–21. https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol17/iss40/1

Reed-Danahay, D. E. (Ed.). (1997). *Auto/ethnography: Rewriting the self and the social*. Berg.

Richardson, L., & St. Pierre, E. A. (2005). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 959–978). Sage.

Sparkes, A. C. (2015). Autoethnography as a mode of knowing and a way of being. In S. H. Jones, T. E. Adams, & C. Ellis (Eds.), *Handbook of autoethnography* (pp. 512–516). Routledge.

Trnka, S. (2017). The fifty minute ethnography: Teaching theory through fieldwork. *Journal of Effective Teaching*, *17*(1), 28–34.

Vannini, P. (2015). Non-representational ethnography: New ways of animating lifeworlds. *Cultural Geographies*, *22*(2), 317–327. https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474014555657

Vannini, P., Waskul, D., & Gottschalk, S. (2012). *The senses in self, society, and culture: A sociology of the senses*. Routledge.

Walford, G. (Ed.). (2008). *How to do educational ethnography*. Tufnell Press.

Wyatt, J., Gale, K., Gannon, S., & Davies, B. (2018). Creating a space in between: Collaborative inquiries. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed., pp. 738–756). Sage.