

## Everyday Everywhere 24/7 Re-Searching our lives: Bricolage Autoethnography

Si Transken, Phd, RSW, MA Candidate  
Assistant Professor, Social Work Program  
UNBC  
3333 University Way  
Prince George, BC  
V2N 4Z9  
250-564-4753/ 250-960-6643  
[sitran@telus.net](mailto:sitran@telus.net) [si@unbc.ca](mailto:si@unbc.ca)

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Panel Title:

**'Bricoleurship/ Multimethods/ Joy-of-chaos/ Cultural Studies Approaches to Research'.<sup>1</sup>**

Our intention in this session is to focus on the dis/connects between creativity and the ways the powers that be (patriarchy/ capitalism/ Eurocentrism) in mainstream research can be resisted/subverted. Engaging with the scholarship of Denzin (2003), Reinharz (1992), Saukko (2003), Smith Tuhiwai (1999) and others we will discuss over a dozen projects we've been involved in. We will explore how conservative and oppressive forces have organized the categories of research/ scholarship – and where we've been un/successful in inserting ourselves and our interests differently. We will discuss the consequences we experience when we romp about and completely disregard standard or mainstream categories (such as disciplinary categories/ professionalization categories/ 'good manners/ protocol categories/ timing categories/ their funding channels/ even their ethical categories). Sometimes this is dangerous work. Fun sometimes. Exhausting sometimes. Often, this type of 're-search' is vital work in regards to opening up the edges and margins and making different spaces available for activism and thought. Bricolage, for example, won't usually be celebrated within the mainstream formats/ forums of academic publishing because it doesn't fit their journal boundaries, doesn't fit the tenure format, etc. There are joys and advantages though to doing this style of multimethods/ bricolage: we can form coalitions and solidarities outside of their discourses and walls of inclusion/ exclusion and we can more holistically, complexly and meaningfully explore, describe, and change the world around us.

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<sup>1</sup> I thank all the students who have worked with me over the last 8 years for all they've taught me about teaching and about research. My peers at UNBC have helped me in their acceptance of my 'unconventional' approaches to some aspects of teaching/ activism/ scholarship. Ken Belford, my creative mate, also deserves a big thank you because while I write these papers he takes care of everything else in my life.

## Everyday Everywhere 24/7 Re-Searching our lives: Bricolage Autoethnography

The authors of autoethnographic performance texts use personal experience and memory as the point of departure for writing about things that matter in everyday life. Such texts allow writers to confront and interrogate the cultural logics of late capitalism, including those logics connected to the myths of motherhood, family, marriage, love, and intimacy. When effectively crafted, these texts create a sense of emotional verisimilitude for reader and writer, producing experiences of catharsis, self-renewal, and self-discovery. (Denzin, 2003, p. 137)

...the goal of self-reflexive autoethnography is twofold. First, to relate an experience and, second, to critically investigate the discourses that have constituted that experience. (Saukko, 2003, p. 85)

bricolage \bree-koh-LAHZH; brih-\, noun: Construction or something constructed by using whatever materials happen to be available. The Internet is a global bricolage, lashing together unthinkable complexities of miscellaneous computers with temporary lengths of phone line and fiber optic, bits of Ethernet cable and strings of code. --Bernard Sharratt, "Only Connected," New York Times, December 17, 1995

Cultural studies...represents a body of work concerned with culture and power, with politicizing theory and theorizing politics, with the political nature of knowledge production, an orientation to the texts and contexts of the object of cultural analysis, a commitment to the theory of articulation and to the belief that theory offers a necessary explanatory framework for the object of inquiry...(Denzin, 2003, p. 264)

Reality check! The words ‘scholarship’ and ‘research’ can be intimidating. Sometimes I witness my academic peers as they talk about their latest grant, their promotion, their merit increase, their journal publications and I feel disoriented, disappointed in my own scholarly progress or accomplishments – and then I remember what my own personal/ political missions are. Many women<sup>2</sup> feel this sense of fraudulence and incompatibility with mainstream/malestream/mega-research machine expectations. Sometimes I feel inadequate in academia because the assumed universal plan is that you will (a) form some kind of linear hypothesis about some relationship among variables (causation/ correlation) and then (b) you will get a grant

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<sup>2</sup> In this paper I speak about ‘women’ and their sense of being silenced or overwhelmed by the mystique of research in a malestream empiricist corporatist world – but these dynamics are often true for men who have been marginalized in some ways (Gay men, disabled men, downshifter men, men deeply committed to a different kind of world, etc...). I refer to women here because the majority of my students, peers, and community comrades are women because social work is still demographically a women’s profession. Also: my areas of research/ activism/ teaching are in regards to themes such as sexual abuse, violence against women, women and poverty, etc.

to organize students to do the data collection and data inputting and then (c) you will reach your indisputable conclusions in an unbiased manner and (d) publish those results and present those results at academic conferences where you will soon form a new hypothesis about some other variables and...And you'll economically manage your teaching load and service commitments in the dignified background of your publishing marvels. An evidence based universe will submit to your probings and categorizations until you are a revered Full professor with a long list of million dollar grants and at age 65 you will retire with dignity and confidence that your life has been profoundly and perfectly invested.

In contrast to that imagined success story: I rarely receive grants, am only a tenure-tracked assistant professor, am usually refused for merit increases, struggle to find appropriate moments in the calls for papers of high quality journals where they'll accept my writing. Most of my colleagues in my 'mother discipline' of social work (i.e. this is the discipline that puts the bread on my table!) aren't sure what to make of my 'unconventional' or 'unfocused' approaches. My colleagues in my 'kindred disciplines' of Sociology, Women's Studies, Creative Writing, First Nations Studies find me interesting to visit with now and then but they're glad, it sometimes feels like, when I return home after a 'visit'. On discouraging days I feel that I fit nowhere. It is a chaotic ruthless terrain of Darwinian threat and I'm some predator's lunch. Or: it's a tundra and I'm a dumb snowball.

Saukko (2003) suggests that the goal of "self-reflexive autoethnography is twofold. First to relate an experience and, second, to critically investigate the discourses that have constituted that experience." (p. 85) this paper is a summary defense of my own eclectic, or bricolage, or multi-methods way of doing/ being research<sup>3</sup>. This paper concludes with thirty one 'tips' for how to live our lives as 'autoethnographic

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<sup>3</sup> Obviously though I have not invented anything 'new'. It's more than I am **encouraging** us to do what we already know how to do and want to do. We become discouraged because we're in a time where every 'real research project' involves multiple computers, teams, and large sums of money. Often these are necessary and vital projects but they are not the size, scale or technology that is readily available for most of my students, agency/activist peers or myself. First Nations scholars are frequently leading the way/ reminding us that our own individual observations organized in low budget ways are intelligent, scholarly and significant. Sometimes all that machinery and machismo of research are required to distract from the truth – the research FOCUS isn't that meaningful or consequential. Scholars such as Lee Maracle, Fyre Jean

bricoleurs'. I want to encourage the students I work with (northern, rural, mostly working class, many from First Nations communities) to see their own process of knowledge finding, affirming, promotion, distributing as valid; I want to cherish them in their capacities as 'organic intellectuals' or 'embodied knowers'. As I write this paper it is their minds I am hoping to also reach out to. I am trying to give some suggestions in the follow pages for 'stances toward the chaos' that many of my overworked/ undervalued new academic peers are confronted by (again in a northern, rural, small university context – and they're often arriving as contract or new tenure track faculty). These are the same challenges that my professional peers in northern grassroots community agencies are confronting (often as incredibly overburdened contract workers in a hostile neo-liberal/ conservative climate). All of us (in this managerial corporatist capitalist patriarchal racist global paradigm) are asked to produce a document trail proving what is important, who is doing what, where things are headed.

### **SOMETHING LIKE A COHERENCE IN RESPONSE TO CHAOS?**

The concept of bricolage refers to the rearrangement and juxtaposition of previously unconnected signifying objects to produce meanings in fresh contexts. Bricolage involves a process of re-signification by which cultural signs with established meanings are re-organized into new codes of meaning. That is, objects that already carried sedimented symbolic meanings are re-signified in relations to other artifacts under new circumstances... (Chris Barker, *The Sage Dictionary of Cultural Studies*, p. 17)

Above, I have described how my purposes and 'productivity' could be labeled in diminishing and dismissing ways – and how sometimes I have been worn down and anesthetized into accepting those diminishments and dismissals. For example, more than one of my peers have told me that if I can't access grants to do research on women's issues (the area I have devoted myself to for twenty-five years) that I

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Graveline and Jeanette Armstrong are examples of these voices. bell hooks, a Black feminist activist, is another scholar who simply and profoundly describes what she notices around her. Dorothy Smith is another famous scholar who advocates that we 'botonize' bits of the world around us and document our 'lived embodied experiences'.

should just take **any** money that comes along (research into the causes of child poverty<sup>4</sup> or ways that workers can be further harassed into returning to work more quickly while they're on a WCB claim, are some examples). I've been told that I should just sign up with any of the senior scholars and do their bidding; that I should just accommodate myself to the trends. Those suggestions repulse me. One of the motivating joys of doing social justice work is being able to hang on to our sense of authenticity and integrity.

In fact – and I am as surprised by it all as anyone – I **do** have many successes, even in the gaze of those mainstream/ malestream/ research-machine lenses. Although I am a dilettante (dabbler, smatterer, do-it-your-selfer) this bricolage autoethnographic approach to getting some things done is the most appropriate approach, I've decided, given the socio-political era and material context I am located in (i.e. anti-feminist, anti-socialist, etc.). My CV says I have published 16 peer reviewed articles/ creative writings and 34 non-peer reviewed articles/ creative writings. Six books of poetry and prose 'witnessing' have been edited/co-edited by me. I have presented over 50 scholarly conference papers. I received my doctorate in 1998 from the University of Toronto and in 2006 I will complete a second MA from UNBC. I have taught 63 courses at two universities and facilitated dozens of workshops and professional trainings. I've been nominated for three *Teaching Excellence Awards* and have received awards from women's organizations for my activism. I have been a registered social worker for ten years.

My areas of expertise include courses such as: *Social Work with Victims of Abuse; Family Counselling; Qualitative Research Methods; Crisis Intervention; Clinical Intervention Techniques; Creativity/ Cultural Studies and Healing*. In the last ten years I have been involved with 33 grassroots research/ activism/education projects. As an academic, and Primary Investigator I have been entrusted with \$133,000 of research funds. As a collaborator I've been part of \$84,000 of research funding. As a board

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<sup>4</sup> I'm always shocked by this suggestion because, I believe, we've known for about a hundred years what the causes of child poverty are: maternal poverty, a cruel minimum wage, a lack of subsidized housing, the absence of affordable child

member of various organizations in the last twenty years I've been involved in millions of dollars worth of social work/ social justice activity. Presently, I am involved with pending projects which may total another \$267,000 in research funds. I usually supervise ten thesis students; teach 6 – 9 courses a year and sit on more than a dozen university and community committees. The research interests I am involved in include: Creativity for Health, Education, Empowerment, Research and Resiliency; Mobilizing from Strength (Assisting Young Women Through Participatory Action Research and Activism); Multiculturalism/ Art/ Various Communities; The Anti-Harassment Video Project; The First Nations Writers' Festival. I have been teaching in the Social Work Program at UNBC since 2000. Like many women and people from oppressed communities I've been socialized to doubt my own accomplishments, voice, and worth. Many of our new MSW students who have marvelous depths of knowledge about some areas of social justice tell me they don't know what to say, don't know where to start, feel unsure of their voice.

While these accomplishments have been going on in the forefront of my life – in the background of my life, over those 25 years of scholarship/ activism I have been recovering from a childhood of sexual abuse (Transken, 2001, 1995); a childhood and youth of poverty; an adulthood of waitressing in strip clubs and greasy spoons from the age of fifteen to the age of thirty – often while also working at social justice jobs that paid poorly and always while attending school full-time or part-time. I've also gone through a divorce, a substantial relocation, a legal bankruptcy – and I am now in my 28<sup>th</sup> job. At forty-four years old I now I take 5 medications a day and my 25 year old son no longer speaks to me because (among other disharmonies between us) he believes that I've given my career more importance than I gave to his well-being. Like most of us our lives are always there being lived while we attempt to construct that persona that academia/ professionalism demands. My life as a white bush-trash woman has always been under siege – and I have accepted that this is likely to be the norm for the rest of my time on this planet. But – those experiences are part of my wealth now as an 'organic intellectual' in that there are many social dynamics and the interplay of

many identity pegs that I intuitively and profoundly understand. This is also so for most people. We have an ‘in-the-bones’ knowledge that becomes dismissed or diminished when gazed upon by our funders/ bosses/ traditional ivory tower ‘betters’. We often internalize those colonizing and abusing gazes and assessments. Albert Einstein said, “We should be on our guard not to overestimate science and scientific methods when it is a question of human problems; and we should not assume that experts are the only ones who have a right to express themselves on questions affecting the organization of society” (as quoted in Waring, 1988, opening page).

The terrain of Academia is under siege. We have so many things impelling us in various directions. The formula we signed up for when we entered teaching was: 40% research; 40% teaching; 20% service. This has become a different formula. For many of us note that the new formula translates into day-to-day lived experience this way: 60% teaching; 60% research; 40% service. An impossible workload. A workload we must somehow cope with. The Women’s Caucus of the *Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work* said that they had a ‘major concern’ about the ‘absence of a gender analysis at any level in the recently published Sector Study’ (a report about our profession). They also made comments about ‘the crushing workload expectations’ of women in the profession/academia.<sup>5</sup> Krouse (1999) says this about academia:

The more the university becomes a corporate enterprise the more knowledge is approached as a commodity that is to be produced, packaged, advertised, sold and consumed. Under these conditions, knowledge is deemed to be relatively scarce, and therefore something that should not be accessible to just anyone. Control over the definition of knowledge and its value is maintained in part by the Western patriarchal power structure of science. Western science still requires that knowledge of the highest value be objective, analytical, specialized and instrumental – capable of accomplishing desired effects. Knowledge by this definition is a zero-sum game. One either has it or not. Universities sell it. Students consume it. And those of us who are faculty are trained to compete with one another to produce it. (p. 223).

These types of perceptions are echoed by many respected scholars (Graveline, 2004; hooks, 1994; Monture-Angus, 1999). In the midst of this chaos, combining the spheres of our lives in ways that flow as

smoothly as possible can assist with the coping. Like the main character in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* all we might be able to do is keep a diary of what we're witnessing and place that document somewhere between the walls that entrap us. For now. These autoethnographic bricolage 'reports' can become some of those papers we're expected to publish. Some of us will never produce those thick scientific reports but we **can** produce our own 'science' and add that to the fray of discussions. People like Marx, Freud, Bowlby, Dr. Spock, Goffman, Jung – they mostly just kept journals of what they saw and thought – yet they've been defined as significant scholars. They are defined as 'major theorists'.

A 'Workload Report' on Social Work Faculty in Canada (Colins and Rogers, 2001) states that 15 of 17 universities surveyed **expected** Assistant Professors to publish one to two scholarly peer-reviewed articles per year and two universities expected us to publish three to four a year (p.4)! In **reality though**, the report states, the fact is that most Assistant Professors actually only publish one a year (no doubt because of the intensified workload). In my own department there have been many intense conversations about what a realistic expectation is. We've had a recruitment and retention problem partially because of these kinds of stresses. Many of these concerns are intensified in rural contexts like ours (Transken, 2004).

Learning to **love** writing and learning to somehow encourage our students **to love their writing** can be one way within a multitude of strategies to cope. Cameron, in her book *The Right to Write*, said this about her new students and her urge to inspire them to write:

Next to diving into a new novel, play, or movie of my own, there are very few things as exciting to me as staring off a new batch of writers. I feel a deep happiness, a profound excitement, as the class gathers. I have been teaching now for two decades, and I can still remember specific rooms, the precise way the light fell across certain faces twenty years go. I remember, too, my feeling of a glowing secret certainty, what I knew that the class didn't: they would write and write well. (226)

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<sup>5</sup> This is taken from the Annual Report 2001-2002 from the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work Women's Caucus report page 13.

Cameron has many books now which take up the theme of finding and expressing our creative voice and I encourage everyone to read and take to heart her suggestions. Bricolage autoethnography is about many things but core to this approach is learning to love the **process** of writing.

Subversive/ alternative locations for publishing our research are under siege. The journals and book publishers that may have been more open to feminist activist material in the 1990's are disappearing and being replaced by more American and large scale profit-oriented publishers. For example a journal that published an article of mine last year, *Rural Social Work*, has sent a memo saying 'As yet, no one else has decided to take over publication. I have been approached by three large, international, commercial publishing companies ...However, at the time of writing none of these has made a decision one way or the other.<sup>6</sup>' In spite of the fact that some of these more accessible forums are shrinking we can still find spaces in which to insert our voices (Transken, 2005) and a bricolage autoethnographic approach can assist in that accomplishment.

The social work/ social justice profession is under siege. Armitage, Callahan and Lewis (2001) have this to say about our context right now:

Accompanying a globalization ethos is a managerial approach to social welfare services based upon assumptions that social conditions are controllable through the right organizational form, the use of proper tools, and measures to increase accountability. To achieve these objectives, social services and health are combined into larger overall structures. General purpose managers are put in charge of mega ministries. Intervention in families' lives is increasingly defined in terms of protection of children and social control. Carrying out these tasks is defined in terms of system inputs and task specificity. (11)

While under siege what should we be doing in our day-to-day? Page (1999), in his excellent book, *The shadow and the counsellor: Working with the darker aspects of the person, role, and profession*, talks about the ways we must find containment. He suggests there are seven containers and we **must have them** to remain effective. This 'effectiveness' is meant in that 'being effective' involves never being

destructive to ourselves or others through sinking into our 'darker' abusing/collaborating with abusers selves. Think here, for example, of the whole Residential School era or the 1960's 'Scoop' of First Nations children and how our profession abused or colluded with abusers (in that we were administratively linked to those contexts).

Taken together these seven containers: the practical structure; awareness of task; supervision; codes of practice; therapy; personal life; and team network can serve an important function in minimizing the detrimental effect of our personal shadow on our work with clients, particularly while we are in the stage of denial. They do more than this of course, protecting us from the dangers of the role and forming the foundation for good practice throughout our counseling career. (p. 57)

In academic or professional contexts where these containers don't exist anymore, are fragile or fractured, being an autoethnographic bricoleur can become part of our container/s – one that we're more in control of. Documenting each day or week of struggles becomes both our container and our data for research.

Our students are under siege. At UNBC the tuitions went up by more than 77% in the last 3 years. The debt load many students are confronting is making them more likely to be working while in school and to be working through the whole year (i.e. no summer or Christmas off). They are more likely to be ill, tired, cranky. A study done on social work students in Ontario five years ago (and conditions are likely to have gotten worse since then) found that

...debt load of students has carried with it a variety of undesirable behavioral and attitudinal outcomes. ...students are working more during the course of their education, resulting in reduced attention to both classroom and field education. ..56% of the [students] are working an average of 15.6 hours a week. The reduced time available for formal study inevitably leads to a devaluation in the quality of education received, as essays and assignments are done quickly and more superficially...Faculty are aware of the students' financial pressures and as a result some may – consciously or otherwise – attempt to accommodate the greater work obligations (Lightman and Connell, 2001, 144)

Students may not have time to learn or practice 'big machine research'.

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<sup>6</sup> This is a letter from Brian Cheers, the editor of *Rural Social Work* dated December 31, 2004. The heading on the letter says, 'Concerning: Final issue of Rural Social Work from the Centre for Rural and Regional Development'. This journal

Grassroots activists are under siege and we have been for a long time – especially in rural contexts and especially in women’s activist public educational organizations (Transken 2000, 1997a, 1997b, 1994). Amidst these battles I try to prepare my spirit and mind to embrace wonderment and a tenacious attention. Living vibrantly and effectively is one of the best revenges! Every day I witness demands to produce research. I witness faculty, activists, peers in the community, students being pressured to produce documents and they’re within such chaotic contexts that it is difficult for them to produce big scale research. They sometimes concede defeat (put off for another year their dreams of applying for a tenure track position, drop out of school, tell their agency supervisor they can’t do research, hire an outsider from the group/ agency to do the research for them, etc.).

SSRHC, our largest national body and funder who assesses research, recently released a major report. In regards to ‘The Importance of Engagement and Impact in a Knowledge Society’ they said:

Social sciences and humanities research informs all aspects of our lives, from understanding the causes of poverty to helping build more competitive industries. It provides the foundations for sounder social policies and for the human understanding on which true innovation depends. It enriches our knowledge of ourselves, our histories, our cultures, our successes and failures, our world.

After consulting with multiple universities and scholars they found three major messages.

1. Canada depends on social sciences and humanities research. In a time of rapid change and growing social, economic and cultural complexity, the need for understanding is tremendous and often unpredictable. There is an urgency among public, voluntary and private sector organizations to understand the ever-evolving environment in which they work, to develop the tools to analyze vast amounts of data with confidence, and to be able to respond to challenges that seem to come out of nowhere (as they did on September 11, 2001).
2. Social sciences and humanities research is no longer just academic. Because of this demand for evidence, analysis and understanding, organizations that would never have done so in the past—or would have never done so intensively—are now conducting social sciences and humanities research. Non-profit and voluntary sector organizations, philanthropic foundations and government departments— even those constrained by limited resources—are building or seeking to build the capacity to carry out and apply the results of social sciences and humanities research, often in partnership with university researchers.

3. Researchers recognize the need to maximize the impact of their work on Canadian society. As a result of these changes, researchers in universities and non-academic organizations alike are addressing new subjects, adopting new approaches and applying new methodologies. At the same time, scholars who use traditional research methods are also seeking to communicate their work more effectively and to broader audiences. Much is already being done on university campuses and elsewhere to maximize the impact of social sciences and humanities research; often, though, the effectiveness of these measures is constrained by very limited systemic support. Taken together, these three messages reveal a nation in transition as Canadians seek to create a thriving knowledge society in a world of growing economic integration, increasing social complexity and rapid technological change.

Every social work faculty member, social work student, and social work practitioner is influenced by these trends and would be wise to accommodate those trends in some way. Autoethnographic bricolage research is probably the most practical and effective way for each of us to try and fit in with those larger realities and possibilities. Most of us do not have budgets for large scale research and many of us may be a bit intimidated by even trying to construct a computer dependent, methodologically complicated and time intensive large-scale project. Also, given that many of us are working on contract/ temporary jobs it is difficult to commit to a three year project or five year project – some of us only know how our lives are going to be scheduled one semester in advance. Rather than sink into a distaste for, or fear of, ‘research’ there are ways to incrementally accomplish some methods of assessing and reporting on what is going on around us. And: if those wonderful resources (more support, more money, more computers, etc.) DO come available to us that level/ style of research can be integrated with the data that emerges from your autoethnographic bricolage research – the various ways of collecting evidence are not dichotomous - they can integrate.

## **CONTINUAL COMPASSIONATE CURIOSITY AND CREATIVITY**

For a long time we talked about the personal being political. There have been discussions among feminists about the private being made public. Social work sometimes prides itself on being transdisciplinary and having permeable boundaries to other professions (psychology, law, medicine, economics, etc.). My

relationship with my mother discipline has always been moody and uncomfortable but it's the closest relationship to the ideal – and doesn't everyone wish their own mother could be more perfect and responsive to our every need and want? Those disciplines inform my bricolage. They are additional locations for data, comradeship, grants. Necessarily they inform my spiral of re-searching.

Bishop (2005) suggests we always be engaged in a spiral of: placing ourselves → reflection → analysis → strategy → action → placing ourselves → (166). In regards to 'placing ourselves' she asks us to always be asking ourselves about where we/they/us are in response to these identity pegs: class, race, sex, age, language, sexual orientation, religion, dis/ability, national origin, values, assumptions, ideology, learning style. In regards to 'reflection' we/they/us have which feelings, reactions, hopes, fears, challenges, surprises, contradictions. In regards to the next place on the spiral, analysis: history, power structure, dynamics, patterns, trends, context, leverage points, actors, interests, allies/enemies – have what meaning? Strategy includes our pondering these words: implications, goals/objectives, planning for action. Action involves doing 'it' and then we start again in our process of placing ourselves.

Bishop is using this spiral in regards to a long conversation about institutional oppression but I think that her spiral questions can be applied in regards to this discussion of bricolage research. Bishop's spiral can be a daily, weekly, or monthly process 'template' for our journaling regarding what is going on around us. Using a bricolage autoethnographic approach and a stance of continual compassionate curiosity and creativity toward ourselves and our constituencies we can spiral and compose some kind of sense out of our chaotic contexts. In an incremental affordable practical way: write down everything you notice and what you think it means. Collect details. Some day all this will come together in interesting ways.

A recent article in *Scientific American* (2005, Vol. 16, No. 1) summarizes some of the newest research on creativity. Like other scholars who write about creativity they assume in this article that we all have a 'creative intelligence' but some of us invest in it more than others and some of us manifest it more than others.

They advocate we practice these ‘steps to a creative mind set’ and I propose that these steps are also relevant to autoethnographic bricolage research:

1. **Wonderment.** Try to retain a spirit of discovery, a childlike curiosity about the world. And question understandings that others consider obvious.
2. **Motivation.** As soon as a spark of interest arises in something, follow it.
3. **Intellectual courage.** Strive to think outside accepted principles and habitual perspectives such as ‘We’ve always done it that way.’”
4. **Relaxation.** Take the time to daydream and ponder, because that is often when the best ideas arise. Look for ways to relax and consciously put them into practice. (p. 19)

The article also encourages us to look for certain creativity traits or fluencies in ourselves and others. These are traits of people who excel at ‘divergent thinking’:

**Ideational fluency.** The number of ideas, sentences and associations a person can think of when presented with a word.

**Variety and flexibility.** The diversity of different solutions a person can find when asked to explore the possible uses of, say, a newspaper or a paper clip.

**Originality.** The ability to develop potential solutions other people do not reach.

**Elaboration.** The skill to formulate an idea, expand on it, then work it into a concrete solution.

**Problem sensitivity.** The ability to recognize the central challenge within a task, as well as the difficulties associated with it.

**Redefinition.** The capacity to view a known problem in a completely different light. (p. 19)

These thinking strategies and ways of being in the world inevitably will enhance anyone’s ability to effectively and ongoingly provide a document trail that can be made into ‘research products.

## DEFINITIONS

There are many definitions offered for the word ‘bricolage’. ‘Bricolage’ was the ‘Word of the Day for Thursday April 26, 2001’ on a cyber dictionary service<sup>7</sup>. Here’s the definition that was offered:

bricolage \bree-koh-LAHZH; brih-\, noun: Construction or something constructed by using whatever materials happen to be available. The Internet is a global bricolage, lashing together unthinkable complexities of miscellaneous computers with temporary lengths of phone line and fiber optic, bits of

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<sup>7</sup> Here’s the location information: Copyright © 2005, Lexico Publishing Group, LLC. Dictionary.com/Word of the Day: bricolage. Printed Jan. 15, 2005.

Ethernet cable and strings of code. --Bernard Sharratt, "Only Connected," New York Times, December 17, 1995

Cooking with leftovers was bricolage--a dialogue between the cook and the available materials.  
-Susan Strasser, *Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash*

I point out to my students that no one ever really reads Hamlet for the first time now; we've heard it all before in bits and pieces, cultural bricolage. -Marjorie Garber, "Back to Whose Basics?" New York Times, October 29, 1995

Bricolage comes from the French, from bricole, "trifle; small job."

Bricolage means that we can use 'whatever materials' will assist us amidst the chaos. With bricolage we can 'lash together unthinkable complexities from across the globe'. While we are under siege (in our profession, among social activists, in our classrooms, etc.) we may have to use scraps of cloth to make quilts and eat scraps of leftovers to survive.

And here are some thoughts about what bricolage and the adult learner can do together from a blog page called 'Hot Futures' from Australia.

...Some foundational assumptions contributing to mainstream definitions of "adult learners" are the following: The adult learner is self-directed about their learning, she knows what and how she wants to learn, and therefore exercises control over her learning. A second assumption is that the adult learner is independent, self-supporting, and an autonomous being....these assumptions are evolving also because of changing demographics, economic globalisation, and the increased role of technology in communication, the work place, and education. Rapid changes in demographics have contributed to the evolution of the definition of "adult learner". The recognition of racial, class, and gender diversity has led to a broader conception of learning styles and needs. (Posted by Morgan Daly at August 24, 2004 07:18)

As adult learners amidst chaos we're on our own most of the time and we have a huge potential for creativity (Transken 2005a, 2005b, 2002). Autoethnographic bricolage can also mean something about sewing together the rags or torn bits of what's around you and making that into a costume or covering.

The term bricoleur has been used to suggest someone who constructs a bricolage and has most commonly been applied to those who stylize themselves using the clothing and artifacts of popular culture. Here the idea of the bricoleur has been deployed to discuss the ways in which commodities – notably those of the fashion world – form the basis of multiple identity construction. In doing so attention is drawn to the meaning-oriented activity of consumers in selecting and arranging elements of material commodities and meaningful signs into a bricolage that forms part of identity construction. (Barker, 2004, p. 17)

I am in academia/ the social work profession is in the era of McDonaldization (Ritzer, 2004) of knowledge and the ‘marketing’ of our products/ us as products. We provide ‘deliverables’ to students, funders, and clients. Within that framework – and with some trickstering energy – I pull together whatever I can get. I pull it together within the container or frame of my journaling. This helps me get through the semester with some semblance of dignity – and with a huge degree of effectiveness. Definitions, as provided above, are helpful but of course seeing how others are applying those definitions to their own research activity adds depth to the word ‘bricoleurship’.

### **EXAMPLES OF RESEARCHERS BEING BRICOLEURS**

In the most recent issue of *Perspectives; the social work newsletter of British Columbia* (May 2005) the theme of research is highlighted. Natalie McCarthy, a long time practitioner, says, “I’ve heard many social workers comment on how difficult it is to maintain a ‘personal relationship’ with research while simultaneously trying to keep pace with a demanding workload. Some have described feeling uncomfortable with research, expressing a belief that they lack the knowledge and/ or experience necessary to analyze or participate in it successfully.” (p. 11) She goes on to describe her own journey with research and demonstrates an example of bricolage autoethnography even as she continues in the article. Further, the whole issue of *Perspectives* could be thought of as a lively intelligent collection of various bits and voices from various scholars and practitioners all across the province.

In this same issue there is an article from Jenny Puterman who describes doing her MSW research on young adult women who witness their mother’s cancer. That was exactly what Jenny was going through at the time and she made her own journey part of the core of what she did for her degree. She says,

Consistent with an autoethnographic approach I conducted a series of minimally structured interviews. Though I shared some of my own experiences to encourage rapport and dialogue, I maintained the focus on the participants’ stories. These interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed in their entirety. I analyzed the interviews, including my own narrative, using content analysis, an approach focusing on commonalities across data.

Through this process I identified a number of themes including family relationships, coping skills and living with uncertainty. My research revealed that although parental cancer presents numerous challenges, the experience can become a learning opportunity incorporated into this unique stage of development. ...I have benefited from the research process on academic, professional, and personal levels. (p. 13)

Here is another example of someone using this autoethnographic bricolage approach:

In this study, I employed an in-depth personal narrative approach with three participants who identified themselves as bisexual or gay to learn whether or not people drew upon symbolic and material resources to continually (re)define their personal relationships. I drew upon Claude Lévi-Strauss's concepts of *bricolage/bricoleur* and the engineer to analyze the personal narratives. Bricolage describes the process of the bricoleur who works with symbolic and material resources from her or his personal experiences, and membership in social communities and larger cultural contexts. Resources are defined broadly as stories, concepts, perceptions, memories, and so forth, by which persons make their world coherent. The bricoleur works with these resources in a concrete, improvisational manner, whereas the engineer progresses in an abstract, formulaic fashion. Each of the participants' narratives presented evidence to suggest that participants acted as bricoleurs and engineers to perform their sexual identity and to (re)create their personal relationships. Acting as bricoleurs, participants continually (re)assembled discursive resources without a specific structure or end in mind. The available resources in their immediate context influenced the forms and ways of relating that eventually emerged through the process of drawing on these resources. Acting as engineers, participants approached these resources with abstract, pre-planned structures that guided the selection of specific resources to accomplish predefined ends. The personal narratives also provided examples where there was not sufficient information to determine the manner in which participants drew upon the discursive materials. Further, I problematized a rigid dichotomy between the bricoleur and the engineer. I concluded the paper by discussing the implications of bricolage to future research and scholarship on maintaining and defining personal relationships. Bricolage holds great promise as an analytic perspective because of its emphasis on processes of relating, its broad heuristic scope, and its potential to complement and/or challenge existing scholarship in the areas of communication and personal relationships.

Examples of bricoleurship are usually fascinating, layered, and honoring of human complexity. In his article, 'Writing Our Lived Experience: Beyond the (Pale) Hermeneutic?' Geelan, from the Institute for the Service Professions, describes how he integrated creative descriptions and interpretations into his research about educational practices. Geelan (2005) begins by quoting another bricoleur:

I am not just a researcher who observes life; I am also a parent and teacher who stands pedagogically in life. Indeed, is it not odd that educational researchers often seem to need to overlook the children's interests (including their own children's interests) in order to pursue their research careers which are supposed to be in the interests of those very children? (Max van Manen, 1991, p.90)

Geelan (see also Geelan 1997, 1998), emphatically throws himself into the characters he creates based on qualitative research and participant observation (and various bricoleur bits).

....A copy of 'School Stories' is sitting on David's desk, open at the beginning. A breeze catches the pages and flips them rapidly until, somewhere near the middle of the book, they slow and stop. The new page is suddenly no longer flat in the centre, but has begun mounding up into a small hill. The process continues, accelerating, so that the shape is soon a print-covered paper ovoid on a stem, which quickly expands out into broad shoulders. Features form on the front of what looks increasingly like a head, and a blocky body rises from the page, followed by two sturdy legs. In a few moments, a creature that looks like David, but composed of paper and print and much smaller, stands on the pages of 'School Stories' and looks around. After a moment, the David-creature looks down at the page on which he is standing, and extends a hand to it. A tiny hand of paper rises from the page. He grasps it, and pulls a paper Peter from the pages of 'School Stories'. Together, they reach down and bring forth Carolyn then, in a paper-doll chain, Therese. They are born from the pages of text, into...the real world? In this way, the fictive characters (David and the teachers and students with whom he worked, and Peter, his colleague and research supervisor) from the impressionistic novel 'School Stories' (Geelan, 1998) are evoked - and invoked - in a subsequent chapter of David's dissertation. There they consider the implications of various interview and paper-and-pencil survey data which David had generated (objectively?) from teachers and students in the 'real world'. But, surely, this is the wrong way round! Shouldn't the 'real world' data take precedence over 'imaginary' data? Is not the point of classroom research to convey a trustworthy impression of teaching and learning? Well, the novel is based on data that David generated from his lived experiences of/within the 'real world', not while locked away in a quiet room. The point of this particular piece of research writing, however, rather than to convince the reader of its trustworthiness through strategies of verisimilitude (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, pp. 579-580), is to evoke in the reader a pedagogically thoughtful response.

Geelan continues and celebrates and explains the absence of a firm demanding conclusion. As an autoethnographic bricoleur he is wanting to display multilocational polyvocal spaces of exploration and possibility.

.....The detailed description of people and events - the grey drizzle outside the window, Therese's doodling in her folder, the bent staples appearing on the floor beside Jules - are included in the tale with the intention of engaging the reader, offering scenes for the mind's eye and points of connection with the reader's own experience. They are chosen specifically as touchstones with common experiences for teachers, in order to make these connections. The narrative is very short yet, if it does its work well, will make connections with readers in ways that support critical reflection on their own experiences as teachers and learners. Similarly, details of characters and actions that seem irrelevant to the main 'issue' at the focus of the narrative - for example, the whole sub-narrative of Tony, Carolyn and Tony's Mum - also add richness and depth to the tale, and to the reader's understanding of the complex web of relationships between the three main protagonists. Details are included of other interactions occurring in the classroom at the same time, and David's discomfort with Carolyn's

'picking on' Tony - and tensions in their working relationship more generally - are suggested by this added narrative. The tale also includes details of David's professional dilemmas and internal monologue in the course of teaching this class - Schon's (1983) 'reflection-in-action'. Dilemmas, about the relevance and appropriateness of the philosophical ideas that David values for himself to the lifeworlds and maturity of the students, are raised quite explicitly, but not dealt with in any final way, leaving readers to ponder their own values and beliefs on this issue, and whether, in the moment, they would have chosen to solve the dilemmas differently. . . This narrative is intended to leave the reader with questions and reflections about a whole range of beliefs, values, perceptions and ideas. It is not closed, and in some senses it is not fair or balanced either.

## **REFRAMING, REASSESSING, REAFFIRMING**

I am not a failure. I am a success, differently. I am not a disorganized unfocused learner/ teacher/ researcher/ activist. I am an effectively organized multifocused multigazing multilisting transdisciplinarian engaged with longitudinal complexity rather than drive-through quick question/ quick answer knowledge factory big bucks producer. I **am** a re-search project embedded within a chaotic world - and 'quickenings', stretching and wiggling within multiple other re-search projects. There are no completions; there are only pauses, various seasons, changing weather, re-rootings, uprootings, fruit falling, pollen drifting, harvests... I take notes and collect evidence. I encourage peers, activists, students to keep regular notes. These are both simple summaries of what you're witnessing and pondering – and, cumulatively, they are complex 'field notes'. That data becomes the bricolage autoethnographic 'report' you can then chose to bring to the next level (by using the ideas in this paper – including the 31 'tips' included at the end of this). We not only deserve to add our research voices to the conversations of society, our communities, our agencies, our interpersonal networks – we have a moral obligation to do so.

Denzin (2003) uses the term 'performative' to not only refer to 'being on stage' like a professional actor' but in the way that we 'perform' our identities every day and that we 'perform' in our roles as citizens of the world. Elsewhere he suggests that research, as we know it in the Western world, has gone through seven eras or moments. The most recent one, the seventh, is the recognition of multiple ways of knowing and

multiple ways of expressing what we know. Denzin offers us these understandings to guide our assessment of the ‘success’ of our ‘performative understandings in the seventh moment’ of research writing:

The tales and performances...are organized by a counterhegemonic, or subversive, utopian anti-aesthetic...

\* Claims to truth and knowledge in these texts are assessed in terms of multiple criteria, including asking whether they (a) interrogate existing cultural, sexist, and racial stereotypes, especially those connected to family, femininity, masculinity, marriage, and intimacy; (b) give primary to memory and its connections to concrete lived experience; (c) use dialogue and an ethics of personal responsibility that values beauty, spirituality, and a love of others; (d) implement an emancipatory agenda committed to equality, freedom and social justice, and participatory democratic practices; (e) emphasize community, collective action, solidarity, and group empowerment.

\* These texts presume ethnographers, performers, and social researchers who are part of and spokespersons for local moral communities, communities with their own symbolism, mythology, and storytelling traditions.

\* These texts draw upon vernacular, on folk and popular culture forms of representation, including proverbs, music (work songs, spirituals, blues songs, jazz, rap, corridos), sermons, prayers, poems, choeropoems, folktales, paintings, plays, movies, photography, performance pieces, and murals.

\* These texts are produced by artists-researchers-writers who aim to speak to and represent the needs of particular communities (drug addiction, teenage pregnancy...)

\* The authors of these texts understand that no single representation or work can speak to the collective needs of the community. Rather, local communities are often divided along racial, ethnic, gender, residential, age and class lines.

...These performances are sites of resistance. They are places where meanings, politics, and identities are negotiated. (pp. 122-123)

How precisely suited Denzin’s ‘understandings’ of success are to the contexts we’re living in and trying to write about! Of course, not all of us, in every research ‘performance’ will be able to accomplish all of those things – but Denzin is encouraging us to try. As northern, rural, working-class, etc. social workers/ social justice activists and scholars doing autoethnographic bricoleur work Denzin’s ideas are fortifying. Sasaki and Hemingway (2005) while talking about research projects say this about the role of research and all the other aspects of what we do and who we are as social workers/ advocates:

[We’d like to] ...underscore the significant and necessary relationship between research and advocacy. Investigating a particular policy or practice issue arms the social worker and other service providers, with ammunition and substantiation for the development and funding of new initiatives. Study of a particular topic can also assist practitioners and policy makers to identify and act upon needs and gaps that may otherwise not be on the radar. (p. 20)

## PLAYING AND FROLICKING AMIDST THE CHAOS

This quote from Dorothy Allison expresses what might motivate us to want to create research projects and write research material, ‘I have wanted everything as a writer and a woman, but most of all a world changed utterly by my revelations.’<sup>8</sup> That is often our craving. Osho (1999) invites us to claim our ability to hang on to multiple truths at the same time. He says, ‘You come to me seeking knowledge; you want set formulas so that you can cling to them. I don’t give you any. In fact, if you have any, I take them away! By and by, I destroy your certainty; by and by, I make you more and more hesitant; by and by, I make you more and more insecure. That is the only thing that has to be done. (p. xii) Whatever our roles are in regard to research (student, scholar, activist) we know how stressful the process can be. Dorothy Parker (1999) expresses what it might feel like to be facing the fear our research work inspires in us; in some moments it is like facing the journey to hell.

### CODA

There’s little in taking or giving,  
There’s little in water or wine;  
This living, this living, this living  
Was never a project of mine.  
Oh hard is the struggle, and sparse is  
The gain of the one at the top,  
For art is a form of catharsis,  
And love is a permanent flop,  
And work is the province of cattle,  
And rest’s for a clam in a shell,  
So I’m thinking of throwing the battle B  
Would you kindly direct me to hell? (p. 156)

I include Parker here because the urge to slide into acceptance of defeat and to fall into cynicism should be recognized (and hopefully laughed at).

Dr. Heather Harris (1999), a First Nations scholar and activist, communicates another dimension of the research process – how complicated it is to see through our own cultural blinders and to heartfully and intelligently do the ‘translation’ from various modes of expression to other various modes of expression.

Although she is referring specifically to the First Nations/ Settler relationship I believe these blinders and translations exist from many sites to many sites.

### **WE WRITE IN OTHER WAYS**

They say we were illiterate  
until they brought us civilization.

The written word.  
Even in this decade,  
one of their officials said  
we had none of the badges of civilization.<sup>8</sup>

The written word being one of them  
wheeled vehicles being the other.

The scratchings of semi-literate  
explorers and traders  
outweigh the words of our great chiefs.

We write in other ways.

We write our histories  
in the memories of our elders.

We write out knowledge of the land  
in the mind of our hunters.

We write our values  
in the hearts of our women.

We write in other ways.

Things they see as art.  
Our chief's robes and crest poles,  
our lodge covers and quilled clothing  
record messages plain to us.

Maybe we couldn't read their written words  
when first they came.

But neither could they read ours.

We read their writings now.  
Can they read ours? (p. 68-69)

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<sup>8</sup> As quoted in *The Columbia Book of Quotations by Women* by Mary Biggs, 1996, p. 469.

In *A We Write In Other Ways* Harris is reminding us of the multiple ways that information can be discovered, recognized, valued, and shared. She invites us to examine some of the problematics of trying to understand our selves (our internal hesitations, judgments, >isms=, etc.) and what is going on in situations/contexts we are interested in (external hesitations, judgments, >ism=s, etc.).

As bricolage autoethnographers it is our task to expand our competencies for seeing, knowing, and inviting change in multiple ways. Harris uses her knowledge of art, land, robes, crest poles, quilled clothing, as part of her bricolage. She reminds us that it is racist and inaccurate to not include these genres of 'data sets' in our definition of 'research'. Similarly, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) in *Decolonizing Methodologies, Research and Indigenous Peoples*, describes twenty-five AIndigenous Projects@ or themes she proposes should be considered when we=re trying to affirm an anti-racist stance in our roles as researchers.

Tuhiwai Smith (1999) emphasizes that research belongs to the communities being researched and that the results of research be easily accessible and understandable. The titles for her twenty-five themes include: claiming, testimonies, story-telling, celebrating survival, remembering, indigenizing, intervening, revitalizing, connecting, reading, writing, representing, gendering, envisioning, reframing, restoring, returning, democratizing, networking, naming, protecting, creating, negotiating, discovering, and sharing. Although many of these same words are used in common/street-level ways here Tuhiwai Smith is using them in depthful and distinctive ways. She offers us a wealth of theory and then applies that abstract thinking to practical considerations. Effectively integrating admirable themes into our own work is often a harder task than we initially expect. As bricolage autoethnographers some of the challenges and contradictions in these idealistic and admirable goals will be reviewed, confessed, and optimistically examined.

Reinharz (1992) in her book *Feminist Methods In Social Research* offers us eleven different methodological approaches. Some of these approaches interweave with each other and with the ideas forwarded by Tuhiwai Smith. Reinharz shows us how feminist researchers have been bricolaging with various ways into/through the chaos of patriarchy. Other feminist researchers have encouraged us to simply trust and describe our lived realities (Graveline, 2004; Neysmith, Bezanson and O'Connell, 2005; Rebick, 2005). Others like Judy Chicago have been asking us to consider dinner plates and art as research material.

Norman Denzin is one of the most published (over 100 articles and more than a dozen books which he has solo authored or co-edited) qualitative researchers in the world today. One of his most recent publications, *Performance Ethnography*, (2003) is very accessible and begins to explore the intersections of mainstream academic research which has been biased in many ways (racist, sexist, etc.) and the communities we exist to serve and respond to (working-class, feminist, First Nations, etc.). He asks many soul-searching and intelligent questions about how the research we produce has any relevance or use to ordinary people. We are conduits of information and we should be doing the work we do with intentions toward improving the world for vulnerable populations. His work supports and parallels the ideas expressed by Harris, Smith Tuhiwai and Reinharz. Bricolage autoethnography is a stimulating and effective container or vehicle for addressing and exploring social work concerns. Denzin also asks us to 'perform' in contexts where we can serve social justice causes and where the people who are centered in our research will be able to see themselves/ feel their realities in our performances.

An autoethnographic bricoleur, I believe, should also be attempting to cultivate comradeship. This is a challenge in a world where most people have been indoctrinated with rugged individualist selfishness. My course outlines usually say things like this:

Through out the course the emphasis will be on advancing the specific and practical research endeavors of the students signed up for the course. Students will be expected to become peer supporters, mutual coaches, and practical guides for and with each other. One of the primary goals of this course is to expose students to an overview of contemporary theoretical considerations that underpin research. An equally significant goal is to develop concrete focused skills that students can bring not only to their present academic work but to the client groups and agencies they=ll work for /with in the future. Research, as we will be experimenting with it here, includes skills in: intelligent layered observation; accurate written and verbal descriptions of what is being sensed/observed; mature organization of data; pointing toward and assisting in the constructing/accessing of resources to improve the well-being of those we serve.

Most of our MSW graduates will be in contexts where there will not be huge budgets and abundant human resources specifically available for Aresearch@. During your social work career you will be well advised to ongoingly cultivate an eye for description; for capturing data; for Amaking a convincing case for your cause@. All helping professionals are situated to be doing research just as an everyday aspect of who they are, what they do, where they go, how they live their dedicated lives, etc. Many aspects of >research= are also >professional and personal development skills=.

In this course a new vocabulary and new micro-skills may be added to your professional and personal >tool kit for survival= as a mindful, compassionate, effective advocate and helping professional. My hope is that you will leave this course with a richer sense of your own competence as a producer of knowledge and as a scholarly writer. You will be given many opportunities to cultivate your own complex ethical template and to internalize guidelines and question-clusters regarding research material you produce or read.

Obviously the core of bricolage is documentation. A core part of that is journaling. A peculiar kind of journaling too. I'm advocating for a type of journaling that often has it's insights shared (versus the private self-absorbed diary that is only about shallow-minded navel gazing.

### **EFFECTIVE INTEGRATIVE JOURNALING :**

Part of a dialogue between bell hooks and an interviewer on the topic of writing:

Q: What's your writing process like?

hooks: Well, one dreary thing that I do is handwrite everything; I've handwritten all my books... Also, I keep a journal, and I write in it every day to try to get a handle on why I'm doing something or what I hope to accomplish by doing it. Asking such hard questions of ourselves usually compels us to hone our perspective. (p. 119, *Critical Intellectuals on Writing*, 2003, p. 119)

For the last eight years I have become more and more committed to journal writing every day and producing between one and ten pages of text. My ‘journaling’ is also part ‘scrapbooking’ in that I glue in newspaper articles and critique them; past in notes from students; include the bills that come in my mail and dialogue with the senders, etc. Through that process I have been able to track my discomforts, dishonesties, dramas – and the patterns of behaviors of the world around me. In her book, *Wild Garden, Art, Education and the Culture of Resistance*, Marino says, ‘The sound of breaking silence makes us understand what we could not hear before. But the fact that we could not hear doesn’t prove that no pain existed. (27) Often when I reread at the end of the month or year (or course or project) pages of my text I realize certain patterns. I comprehend things differently.

While journaling I also learn to write my mind out differently and more expansively. These pages frequently get photocopied and put into one or another – or many --- binders. As themes or interest areas emerge I open a new binder for journal entries (or newspaper clippings, photos, articles found, etc.) on that topic. My ‘private journals’ always have bits that drop off or reproduce into these other binders. These ‘field notes’ become part of some paper, poem, lecture, public presentation. They help clear my mind and focus my time. In my journals I give myself lots of permission to rant and be spontaneous. Osho’s suggestion serves me well in this practice;

One who is ready to go on the exploration called truth has to be ready also to commit many errors, mistakes B has to be able to risk. One may go astray, but that is how one arrives. Going many many times astray, one learns how not to go astray. Committing many mistakes, one learns what is a mistake and how not to commit it. Knowing what is error, one comes closer to what is truth. It is an individual exploration; you cannot depend on others= conclusions. Osho, p. 16, Courage, The Joy of Living Dangerously

Many people find the whole idea of journaling to be a waste of time and they don’t even consider giving it a deeply disciplined attempt. I strongly suggest that, at least while a research ‘push’ is on in your life (from your department, your agency director, your funder, your thesis committee), that you practice this and sincerely give it your best effort. In the end it has proven to me (and many famous

and incredibly productive scholars such as Goffman, Freud, Jane Adams, bell hooks) to be a time saver – not a time waster. My belief is that some people haven't taken to journaling because they're not quite sure what they should be considering to include in these pages. My answer is everything. The following list of considerations has proven useful for many of the students/ clients/ peers/ workshop participants I have engaged with in the last eight years.

**Effective integrative 'field note' or 'file note' journaling usually includes these traits:**

It includes the data for footnotes/references that might need to be organized later.

It does not name people other than yourself. It uses created names or details to protect the confidentiality of classmates, clients, co-workers, etc. Where direct quotes or someone else's private data is included use a pseudonym to identify that person.

It intelligently weaves together knowledge from past and present conferences, class lectures, class discussions, faculty meetings, speeches from someone inside/outside the organization, readings, the newspaper, poetry, etc.

It demonstrates imaginative creative and practical grounded thinking and feeling that is indirectly and directly relevant to our practice as social workers/ activists.

It identifies problems you are working through and mindfully points toward the precise next steps you might be taking with those problems (i.e. is not always just a shallow statement, list, or rant of problems).

It demonstrates an active intent to find balance between personal and professional understandings and examinations of, the macro end of social work and the interpersonal or micro end of social work (i.e. speaks to both ends of the continuum from psychological to sociological and to all the disciplines or 'fields of discourse' in-between).

It makes innovative linkages (i.e. doesn't just blindly or obediently repeat what you have been told by others). These linkages demonstrate a consciousness of the Arings up and down the slinky@ (i.e. the sociological, his/herstorical, and all the rings down to the interpersonal of the right now). (Note the research mentioned at the beginning of this paper about creativity).

It sometimes shows your shadow side/ troubled heart/ emotional and intellectual confusion, etc. This often happens because we are a profession that advocates socialist ideas yet we are embedded within a capitalist system; we are a profession that advocates equality yet we are often instruments of social control against those who are oppressed... This journaling dares to describe the incongruencies around us (i.e. what the agency director says and does; between what the government of the day declares and practices; between what you wish for yourself and what you sometimes are/do, etc.).

It doesn't repeat itself from one entry to the next to the next; there is always a sense of movement (i.e. your first entry for the day/week/month of the semester and your third and your fifth should all have a differently textured sense of the struggles or problems or issues you are addressing).

It often has some elements of a passionate speech, a confession, or a testimonial but intelligently makes reference to the assigned readings, scholarly material from other contexts and times in your life, etc. Continually and compassionately you are seeking understanding – not just judging, labeling, stereotyping, blaming, etc.

It often demonstrates some sense of vision, idealism, imagining of a better and different world.

It should usually demonstrate some sense of a vision or image of an eventual better different and bigger (or happier, or more satisfied) you (the individual, scholar, teacher, activist, practitioner).

### **SUGGESTIONS TOWARDS A JOYFUL BRICOLAGE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY:**

In this paper I have tried to describe a way of not doing research in binges or specified time frames -- but BEING a research endeavor ongoingly. I've summarized some thinking and practice strategies which have assisted me to become better, more productive, less trapped and trampled in chaos. These contemplations and practices have helped me organize my mind, my time and my document trail. Imperfectly. We can resist these constraints (downsizing, globalization, corporatization, etc.) but unfairly and seemingly unescapably we **are** thrown into chaos and we **must** still try to do some type of research that we can use for our own purposes. My belief is that only by snatching moments in our everyday every day will most of us be able to intelligently and evocatively produce useful theory, analysis, and paper trails from our own standpoints. I hope this paper and the following imperfect bullets of 'to do/ to think about' information will help you defend your self in these times of siege. This list is also a reminder to my self – for those difficult days when I feel worth less and inadequate.

1. Prepare practically by having lots of binders, disks, colored pens, glue sticks, clear plastic envelopes (which insert into those binders with scraps of the day's papers, etc). Readiness is important. Never leave the house without lots of sheets of paper in our pockets. Engaging in a process of 'bindering'

information that is similar to what Mills taught us to do in the 1960's helps us document our 'sociological imagination'.

2. Trust the messiness and incompleteness of everything listed above; everyone listed above; every part of my own self/ thinking processes – and know that I can write/ speak from those incompletenesses and partial understandings – not feeling ashamed of my imperfections of being or imperfections of comprehensions. Getting comfortable with being uncomfortable. State these 'failures' of scholarship with comfort, grace, and even a punky bit of pride (because ideally each mistake is an activity I'll be less likely to repeat)!

3. Unashamedly and conscientiously invest in my own mental health: this is a central instrument for my analysis/ perception. Perhaps I've spent more than \$10,000 in my life on therapy (and ongoingly I connect with a therapist to check in with/ challenge myself regarding my fears, interests, stresses and their sources/ solutions. This is oriented toward also learning to listen to and trust my own perceptions and my own voice. Said differently: if you're burnt out the world is a place of ashes and fires to you and your 'research gaze' is possibly distorted.

4. Be with Cameron's, Cropley's, Denzin's, Richardson's ideas of creativity and 'perceptual alertness' everyday in everyway. I recognize that I do not want to start-do-finish research projects. I want to BE a research project flowing ongoingly. I intend to have a continual compassionate curiosity to those around me and the structures around me. As a 'practice' or a 'praxis' or a 'prayer' I ask myself a few times a day this list of questions: who/ what/ when/ where/ why from the standpoint of various people in various stories/ contexts. Who benefits in which ways from what is now going on? I try to accomplish a brave empathy.

5. Make sure that I try to give some kindness, support, affirmation (samples of my writing, a christmas gift, etc.) to all the people who are supporting all the spheres of my bricolage life – doing my best to be a 'sustainable development' versus being a parasite or a thief

6. Collect and scrap-book information from newspapers, magazines, graffiti, poems, stories, pamphlets, quotes from bathroom walls, etc. Note, for example, the divergences between what I witnessed (and journaled about) at an event and how the various modes of media cover that event.

7. Bootleg content from movies, the news, etc. and doing ad hoc 'content analysis'. Watching a particular clip repeatedly gives a deeper sense of what is really being said. One of my thesis students, for example, is has a clip of the show Judging Amy. She is organizing a focus group of social workers to discuss how their own practice in northern British Columbia is different/the same from what Hollywood is showing us a 'real social worker' is and does. This is going to be a marvel research project with lots of bricolage information in it.

8. Mindfully engage with personal experiences/ encounters and bring that into every other aspect of my teaching/ writing/ being. This often requires a peculiar kind of vulnerability in that telling 'stories' about one dimension of my life to people in another dimension of my life may give some people a portion of insight (power?) that may feel uncomfortable to them (or me).

9. Try to write at least one poem a month – believing that poetry writing is a space of integration and interrogation and knowing that our rich unconscious often has marvelous wisdom to offer up to our

bricolage work. The process of diving into our imagination is what counts for ‘success’ not necessarily the product of the poem.

10. Give time to poetry reading/ attending readings as a way to improve my ability to think multimodally and to express myself concisely and memorably. The point of this is not necessarily to form a strong bond with all the local poets or to produce publishable poems – but to strive for enchantment, magical clarity, intense or ‘thick’ description, etc.

11. Perform/ read poetry and prose of my own in public contexts such as protests, fundraisers, educational events (and watch for / receive feedback from the audience).

12. Read scholarly texts in various fields, disciplines and fields of discourse.

13. Intermittently organize ‘consults’ with key informants on various topics I am ongoingly listening to/ embedded within. Take very good notes during these discussions.

14. Do my best to read at least two newspapers a day; a local one and a national one and do my best to read at least two news oriented list-serve messages a day (such as Alternet, women’s news, parl-I, etc.).

15. Attend and present my own work at 2 to 5 conferences a year – expose myself to various geographies and ideologies.

16. Strategically place myself as an faculty supervisor for 10 – 15 social work interns a year. This connects me intimately to the 10 – 15 agencies which are working toward women’s well-being, anti-poverty, anti-racism, etc. Learning what the students are learning teaches me a great deal.

17. Strategically supervise 9 MSW thesis students a year – they connect me to the most recent and depthful knowledge on the themes I care about and they must use cultural studies and feminist insights in their research approach (thus they deepen my understanding of how these orientations shape and can be applied to scholarship in our specific community). Only consent to supervise students who use these theories that are interesting to me and compatible with my own writing interests.

18. Organizing ‘coffee time’ life so that I regularly dialogue with comrades and colleagues in different provinces, different contexts, with different identity peg profiles from my own.

19. Spend personal time and personal money in ways that ongoingly connect me to the ‘bohemian’ or ‘non-mainstream’ segments of the community (buy books at the Salvation Army and Value Villiage, when I go out for supper try to go to restaurants which cater to ethnocultural minority specialities, etc.)

20. Try to read one novel a month which is centered in a context/ identity profile completely different from my own such as: *What the Body Remembers* by Shauna Singh Baldwin (set in 1937 India/Pakistan; Hindu/Muslim world-views); *The Water Lily Pond: A Village Girl’s Journey in Maoist China* by Han Z. Li (set in Communist China from the 1940’s to the 1980’s – political changes for rural girls and women); *All That Matters* by Wayson Choy (set in Vancouver’s Chinese community in the 1930’s and forward). These kinds of texts rebuild and refortify my imagination and expand my empathy to various possible ways to experience family, geography, spirituality, class issues, disabilities, etc.

21. Chose to teach courses such as ‘Social Work with Victims of Abuse’, ‘Qualitative Research’, ‘MSW Thesis Research/ Integration’, ‘Sociological Theories’ and ‘Family Counseling’ which continually force me to test and **apply** -- and often disassemble or throw away -- abstract scholarly concepts. Teaching courses which I deeply care about means that I can bring all the spheres of who I am into each lecture or discussion. This is a privilege and one that I am deeply grateful for.

22. Do my best to open my heart and mind to every student I engage with because they teach me almost everything I need to know to teach them and to bring the strips of relevant knowledge forward. I am particularly fortunate in that our classes are a mix of students from all over the world but mostly from northern British Columbia. There are usually about twenty percent of the students in my classes who are from First Nations communities. Therefore, they teach me about what it means to be Gixsan, Witsuitan, Carrier, Nisga, Haida, etc. Another larger group are students from the Sikh community and they also teach me various things about the world as it is and the world as it might be.

23. Intensely seek out and celebrate others who are in the ‘zones’ of activism/ multimodal re-search and do my best to let them know I care about them and their accomplishments in this world. It is important that we make space for grieving – and raging -- together sometimes because we know we will not be rewarded in the standard ways which are supposed to count the most (promotions, high wages, etc.).

24. Organize my life so that it can respond to the fluidity of all of the above (i.e. sometimes I’m up until five in the morning responding to questions on email or I’m at a protest on the weekend so .. and I need to be able to flow into things and flow out of things – trying to teach people and organizations in my life that these are the ‘movements’ that most assist me to be the largest most holistic person I can be). Said differently: build some unstructured time into each day if you can. Only answer the phone if you feel like it. Don’t let everyone and anyone interfere with and rearrange your schedule.

25. Do my best to stay away from people who sour my heart/ mind/ process. This is a particularly complicated goal to achieve. Often I must bifurcate who I am and consciously decide that I am going to have to engage in a ‘hostessing performance piece’ while engaging with a particular person/ context. Of course, in small towns and at small universities there are people who are right wing, oppressive, sexist, etc. and I must, nonetheless, sit with them to accomplish certain tasks. I have matured enough to realize that there is a value in attempting (when we first meet people) to be authentic and open – but there is also a value in accepting that there are people who aren’t interesting in engaging in authentic respectful ways. This is one of those contexts where people have let me know that civil functional boundaries between us are the most reasonable and respectful thing to construct – nothing more and nothing less.

26. While engaged in uncomfortable conversations and contexts write down what is going on as though it were a script. Describe the characters as if they were in a novel. This might help you to think through what’s going on. It might help you later on to problem-solve with individuals or organizations. It might help you to launch a letter of complaint, etc. These conversations can become the center pieces of a future research project. My doctoral thesis emerged because of various uncomfortable conversations I’d had with sister activists in feminist anti-racist organization over ten

years. Those 'field notes' and journaling pieces emerged later into the questions for interviewing forty-one activists about their social justice experiences.

27. Doing my best to sit on community or university committees (14 of them at this moment) where I am surrounded by people who are as close to my own world view regarding re-searching as possible. Avoid – like an incurable disease – people and causes I don't believe in or who do not believe in me.

28. Find and fight for the hope within/ that is possible for each organization's/ individual's perspective. Try those hopes on and see how it enriches my empathy or comprehension of a situation.

29. Dream impossible solutions then redream that material into improbable solutions and research what gets in the way of the construction of those solutions.

30. Remember that we have been deskilled and crippled in that the managerial corporatist world has tried to take away our imaginations and our spirits. Remember that creativity is an active resistance to that predictable measured controlled and monitored world. Remember how good it has felt in the past to resist and to resist successfully. Write a lot of words about those successes and resistances.

31. Recognize that I am at an age now/ a place now in my scholarship that I can write a paper and let it 'gel' and grow itself for another year or two and then return to it; and at that time I'll enrich it and then present it and then let it gel or grow for another year or two... Letting go of the desperate (and externally forced) need to get to the punch line asap. This is a type of lateral learning. Letting the material branch and form nodes that you explore and then move on and then return to the various modes.

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