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You-the Voice: Using auto-ethnographic and collaborative auto-ethnographic methodologies in Youth and Community Work

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Abstract

Youth and Community Work encompasses and navigates across a spectrum of realities, voices, and experiences; from young people participating, to the Youth and Community Workers practicing, to stakeholders, and members of wider society. One of the key values of Youth and Community Work is to enable authentic youth voice and participation to take place (National Youth Agency, 2021), supported, and underpinned by social justice and anti-discriminatory practices (Chouhan, 2009). Youth and Community Work aims to enable young people to have their say around issues that directly impact them and their communities. To aide young people to explore their lived realities and offer opportunities to have their voices heard, is one way to achieve this. Auto-ethnographic and collaborative auto-ethnographic methodological processes can be hard hitting and emotive but positively challenging. Youth and Community Work has adapted, over time, to ensure that the needs of young people are met, aiming to redistribute power amongst societies at local, national, and international levels. In order to ensure that research approaches in Youth and Community Work do the same, contextual methodological frameworks used in practice must encourage these opportunities; this article demonstrate ways in which auto-ethnographic and collaborative auto-ethnographic can achieve this.

Introduction

Supporting youth voice throughout the Youth and Community Work field, alongside, amplifying the voices of Youth and Community Work practitioners, is vital to demonstrate the strength of the sector. Voice amplification can take place through participative activities, dialogical conversations, consultation processes and research studies. With varying research methodologies available to use, a limited amount enable and encourage *authentic* input and collaboration with the subject matter and the research participants (Heron & Reason, 2001). Examples of these could include, co-operative inquiry, appreciative inquiry, auto-ethnography (AE) and collaborative auto-ethnography (CAE), to name but a few.

AE and CAE, as the focus of this article, will be used to frame ways in which young people can be researchers in collaboration *with* Youth and Community Workers. Where generating data based on their lived realities, can lead to authoring their own research findings and results; without interference from an outside source, such as a traditional ethnographer or research interviewer, whom might misinterpret results or interviews (Heron & Reason, 2001). Youth and Community Work practice is grounded in Youth Work values and principles, examples of these include;

> Respect and promote young people's rights to make their own decisions and choices; contribute towards the promotion of social justice for young people and in society generally; and practice with integrity, compassion, courage and competence (Banks, 2010:10:11).

Using AE or CAE can enable young people and Youth and Community Work practitioners to work in partnership, aligning the process to these values of Youth Work; to challenge current ideological narratives or perspectives, that re-inforce the current hegemonic (Gramsci, 1971), dominant, patriarchal hierarchies. Enabling the researcher(s) to articulate their narrative and be actively encouraged to 'tell it as it is', with support to offer recommendations using their power, to shape genuine, authentic change.

This article explores ways in which non-traditional and contextual qualitative methodological frameworks, namely, auto-ethnography (AE) and collaborative auto-ethnography (CAE), can be used to develop youth voice (and Youth Worker voices) across the sector. Proposing a practical guide to be used as a framework when exploring young people and Youth Worker voices in practice. The article will discuss AE and CAE including, uses and limitations in

practice alongside ethical considerations. It will draw on practical application, when exploring lived realities and youth voice. Finally, it will offer guidance around how to use the enriched qualitative process to bring young people and Youth Worker voices to the forefront; in practice activities, organisational policy or legislation.

What is it? Auto-ethnography and collaborative auto-ethnography
Auto-ethnography is where an ethnographer portrays a narrative of their life events, seeking to conduct self-exploration, acknowledging perceptions and meanings, and analysing where they fit within societal contexts against cultural or worldviews (Crotty, 1998; Spry 2001; Denzin, 2014). As described by Ellis et al. (2011:1),

> Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)… Thus autoethnography is both process and product.

It is performed solo and focuses on exploring one's own lived reality and places emphasis on the ethnographer and how *they* interact with the research subject or topic. Employing this perspective, auto-ethnography enables the ethnographer to place themselves at the forefront of their research study. Exploring and critiquing their experiences by highlighting a particular culture or community and the interactions that take place, which, therefore, allows the researcher autonomy over their narrative and their chosen domain. AE or CAE investigates the lived realities through the lens of the researcher(s) as participants and encourages emotions and narratives to reinforce or steer the research methods and analysis; allowing for the ethnographers' domain to be explored in ways that previous literature and research have not explicitly enabled, acknowledged or valued (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Muncey, 2010).

Denzin (2014, 2018) discusses critical auto-ethnography as performative, stating that this act of making oneself vulnerable and putting their experiences out into the public domain is a radical action, arguing that,

> … performance is used subversively, as a strategy for awakening critical consciousness and moving persons to take human, democratic actions in the face of injustice, efforts that serve social justice (2018:9).

The positionality of AE and CAE researchers can become juxtaposed, by using this methodology for radical action to 'decode the system' (Arshad, 2012:3). The researcher(s) consciously or unconsciously place themselves into simultaneously powerful and vulnerable positions, taking a synonymous role of researcher-participant, in the promotion of educating readers around unjust systems at play. AE and CAE enables exploration of experiences, offers contextualization of current affairs and unpacks complex feelings that are difficult to understand using conventional methods (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Muncey, 2010), or where existing literature does not speak to the researcher(s) narratives. For example, race inequalities, feminist perspectives, young people's experiences, Youth Work practices, and LGBTQ+ communities, in contrast to the heteronormative, patriarchal, Eurocentric or White normative narratives, evident throughout historical and mainstream literature (Winnings, 2019). AE and CAE aims to enable research to engage and resonate with the reader, developing a critical relationship (Denzin, 2018) in order to raise critical consciousness (Hooks, 1994; Friere, 1996) and empower researchers and readers to create change (Denzin 2018) in resistance to the status quo. Denzin (2018) states that auto-ethnography is a critical practice, suggesting that it takes place by focusing on critical moments or 'epiphanies… that define a crisis, a turning point that connects a personal trouble, a personal biography, with larger social, public issues' (2018:9); where these areas or topics lack further exploration, discussion or understanding. When using AE or CAE, whilst positioned as researcher(s) and participant, enables the researchers(s) to have much more control over how they shape and design the methods, analysis, and discussion (Crotty, 1998). Whilst also sharing their cultural experiences in a way that they want it heard and understood (Méndez, 2013), reducing the risk of misinterpretation or manipulation, which can occur when written by an 'outsider' (Heron & Reason, 2001).

Collaborative auto-ethnographic research acts as a powerful tool to be used with trusted companions, although the procedures or processes explored during the data generation can be devised by oneself, the collaborative process takes place with others who have a shared or parallel sociocultural experience. Using CAE by co-operating with others, allows for the collaborative, autobiographical, and ethnographical to come together in one place. Together they give space to explore and manoeuver between solo and collective research through the methodology of ethnography (Chang et al., 2016). When AE is coupled with the collaborative, it creates the methodology CAE, where researchers no longer need to approach ethnographical and autobiographical exploration alone (Lapadat, 2017).

According to Chang, et al. (2016:23, 24)

> We define CAE as a qualitative research method in which researchers work in the community to collect their autobiographical materials and to analyse and interpret their data collectively to gain meaningful understanding of sociocultural phenomena reflected in their autobiographical data.

CAE offers a critical perspective to the research process, due to it having multi-vocal researcher-participants taking part, with the advantage of a collective analysis (Chang, et al., 2013:2016). The juxtaposition allows for a 'deeper learning about self and others' (Chang, et al., 2013:25). Listening to and understanding multiple voices enables contributors and readers to understand a fuller, more authentic picture of a sociocultural experience (Hooks, 1996). This is vital when constructing counter-narratives, in order to aid social justice or anti-discriminatory practices, ensuring that the same voices are not continuing to dominate the discourse by reinforcing cyclical, narrow or ideological narratives (ibid) and in practice, reinforcing the values of Youth and Community Work.

What's the point? How to use AE/CAE: Framework in motion
Identifying research rationale, aims, and objectives
AE allows for spontaneity and promotes self-reflection within its methods; allowing readers of the research to understand the lived realities of the authors, as expressed as a result of their choosing. Rather than trying to answer a hypothesized question or 'posing a problem' (Moustakas, 1990:15) as is generally the norm for research studies, the researcher(s) might want to highlight 'what is going on' (James, 2015:106) within the phenomenon in which they are immersed. Auto-ethnography is a flexible methodology, which allows for the researcher(s) as participant(s) to generate their own data, using a wide array of methods for the development, analysis, and discussion of their findings, as standalone studies. This differs to collaborative auto-ethnography where this methodology allows for *co-researchers* to generate data as individual participants, using methods of their choosing to share with the group; or to allow for the generation of data as a *collaborative* group, using reflexive, creative methods to be shared and developed between one another. Resulting in either individually generated data and/or group generated data to be analysed, reflected upon, and discussed further; as individual studies (individual narratives) or as one group study (group narratives) (Chang et al., 2016). Working in this way enables CAE researchers' to take note

of individual member perspectives, to enable individual members to draw their own conclusions or devise their own discussions of experiences, should they wish to do so.

Being aware of this, prior to starting the research process can support the researcher(s) to identify their rationale, aims, objectives, and practical limitations (Flick, 2014). AE and CAE can highlight social injustices or discriminatory experiences, during the epiphany moments (Denzin, 2018) that can occur towards individuals or groups of people, such as, young people, people living with disabilities, Black or Brown people, working class people, or a combination. Due to the flexibility of this methodology, a specific topic could be explored, such as, Covid-19, substance misuse, trauma, educational experiences, positive or negative Youth Work experiences, age relevant or subcultural experiences, relating specifically to being a young person; this is not an exhaustive list. Highlighting a research rationale, underpinned by clear aims and objectives can help researchers to identify whether AE or CAE is an appropriate methodology to choose.

To ensure that the chosen research methodology meets the needs of all participating researchers, agreement should be made, where co-researchers explore an array of methods and processes for conducting the data generation, data analysis, discussion and/or dissemination of findings. Drawing from the authors' experiences of using these types of methodologies, factors to be considered pertaining to the researchers' choice of methodology, could include, but should not be limited to, alignment with the research rationale; meeting the aims and objectives of *all* researchers; acknowledging time and resource limitations; acknowledging whether there is a need for methodological flexibility; and finally alignment to developing social justice or anti-discriminatory practices, and in turn Youth Work values. Consideration should be given to the potential intensity required to become actively reflexive whilst intentionally immersing oneself within a particular subject area; as well as, recognising previous or existing rapports, research or lived experiences (Heron & Reason, 2001). The authors' make this point as prior to conducting their own CAE research, they had maintained an existing rapport between one another based on their University studies and parallel lived experiences, in this case, being 'mixed-race', working class, women. This experience enabled them to identify a research rationale which aimed to counter literature exploring negative experiences of 'mixed-race' people within Britain. In addition, this existing rapport enabled the researchers to promptly enter the collaborative process, comfortably highlighting or sharing their strengths and vulnerabilities prior to commencing the data generation process.

Relationship building with young people is a key factor of Youth and Community Work (CLD Standards Council, 2019). It should be noted that this methodology can be used with strangers (Chang, et al., 2016), in order to gage further understanding of a phenomenon, or with people who already hold an existing rapport; however, when working in practice *with* young people further ethical considerations should be made to support the welfare of the young people as co-researchers (Banks, 2010).

Locating a theoretical stance or research paradigm

'To ensure a strong research design, researchers must choose a research paradigm that is congruent with their beliefs about the nature of reality' (Mills, et al*.,* 2006:2). When conducting their own AE and CAE research, the authors identified a research paradigm deemed most fitting for their study was that of constructionist-interpretivist (Smith, et al., 2008:102). The notion that social exchanges create knowledge, through the use of language, relationships, and interactions; how these are interpreted by individuals and processed to shape the construction of multiple lived realities (Levers, 2013; Flick, 2014; Crotty, 2015; O'Gorman & MacIntosh, 2015) was imperative to their research rationale. Burrell and Morgan (2005) state that interpretivism aims to find motivations 'based on human consciousness and subjectivity' (2005:36), where the researcher(s) aim to create knowledge from their own standpoint instead of being 'an outsider looking in' and to recognise that social constructs within society are ever changing dependant on individual interactions and interpretations (ibid). This draws parallels to Youth and Community Work, highlighting the importance of young people's voices being authentically embedded within the processes that they are involved in (Smith, 2001; Ord, 2007; Banks, 2010; Sapin, 2013; Taylor, 2015: Davies, 2021), ensuring 'author-ity' (Tilsen, 2018:31) of their narratives and sociocultural experiences.

When working within this paradigm, it could be argued that the ontological position would be that of a subjective view. O'Gorman and Macintosh (2015:29:30) argue that subjective ontologies explore *facts* in relation to their cultural and historical influences and so can vary in behaviours and interpretations of others. They call this the 'subjectivity of both the observer and the observed' (ibid) and argue that this is sometimes called a relativist ontology. They go onto to state that subjective ontology looks at the possibility for multiple realities to exist parallel to one another, where the individuals involved will experience their lives; oppressions, happiness, discrimination, and achievements, for example, in different ways.

This idea correlates with rationales, aims, and objectives of a study where the researcher(s) voices will be at the forefront of the data generation, analysis, and discussion. Mills et al. (2006) argue that relativists approach concepts of truth, reality, judgment, and norms by how they are influenced by the context of an individual's cultural or societal beliefs, values, and experiences. Crotty (1998:63) states that 'to say that meaningful reality is socially constructed is not to say that it is not real', therefore, reinforcing the notion the multiple perspectives are vital for understanding phenomena (Chang, et al., 2013, 2016).

This leads the authors to recommend that acknowledgment of an epistemological stance such as phenomenology (Flick, 2014:541) would enable AE or CAE to operate easily. Individuals construct knowledge, via their interpretations of their direct experiences, connections, and understandings of the world around them; leading them to construct and re-construct their lived realities, impacting their future interactions within their world (Smith, et al.,2008).

Data generation: Methods for application
Auto-ethnography and collaborative auto-ethnography offer a variety of creative and exciting methods that can be drawn upon when determining the most fitting ways to generate *and* collect data (Chang, et al., 2013, 2016; Flick, 2014); not only providing the researcher(s) with control but also fluidity to change procedures if they fail to fulfil the research requirements or meet the needs or capabilities of the researcher(s). It should be recognised that when collecting data using AE or CAE this will not take place using a 'mechanical or linear process' (Chang, et al., 2016:74) and can involve a range of techniques borrowed from traditional qualitative methods, such as, interviews and transcripts, as negotiated with the co-researcher(s).

To assist with the data generation process, methods used can include 'conversational' and 'interactive' recordings; personal memory, 'self-generated' or reflective data; as well as, '…text, performance, songs or art' (Muncey, 2010: xiii). Other types of data generation can include, 'observations, reflections, analysis of identity, archival data, interviews with others' and one another' (Chang, et al., 2013:75). These types of data generation can be used for both AE and CAE methodologies, however, when using CAE, only, co-researchers will gather a range of thought-provoking materials and reflections that can be annotated as agreed by the research group. These may include personal memory recollection pieces like journal extracts and exploration of past memories; self-reflective data, which may consist of previously

written reflections to be shared during meetings, with allocated space for dialogical conversation; as well as, thought provoking poetry, drawings, paintings, photographs, music and/or stories can be devised or collected by research members. These items are referred to as artefacts (Chang, et al., 2013:2016).

When working through this stage, the authors discussed and identified a range of materials to use as artefacts, based on their experience of 'being mixed-race', these included, individual reflections and critical incidents, personal drawings, poems, family photographs, news reports, re-calling of accounts, 'meaningful' or thought-provoking songs, fiction books and videos. The researchers devised a plan to discuss one artefact each, per session, with the data being generated by recording their discussions, to use for further exploration and scrutiny at a later date.

To promote data generation in practice *with* young people, developing or collecting artefacts that aid the exploration of current issues or phenomenon that are impacting young people, could include items as such as, newspaper articles, social media memes or posts, videos, drawings, songs and lyrics, to name but a few. An example of a topic that could become the focus of a research study could be an overarching issue such as, Covid-19, with further exploration of the nuances of phenomenon such as, Covid-19 *and* race; Covid-19 *and* discrimination; or Covid-19 *and* mental health, for example. In practice Youth Workers are able to support young people to write, record, draw, reflect on issues and discuss their thoughts, feelings and experiences. By using Youth Work approaches to data generation, such as group work, dialogical conversation and planned or improvised activities, could support the young people (and Youth Workers) to take action whilst generating data and make changes that could impact them positively.

Generating data by analysing data
Individual analysis of the artefacts can take place through personal reflection(s), as well as recorded dialogical group discussion. Aiming to explore the researchers' experiences; identifying reoccurring themes and/or correlations, as well as variants through ongoing analysis. Researchers using CAE may want to take time to annotate other team members' reflections, to provoke further discussion when returning to the group. Data analysis can and should take place throughout the process of collecting and generating data (Chang, et al., 2016), as a cyclical process throughout; enlisting other methodologies such as grounded

theory (Thomas, 2013) to support the methodology. Researchers using grounded theory develop their ideas and analysis recurrently, re-generating data throughout the process, rather than waiting until the end (Bell & Waters, 2018). This can ensure that the research is led by the data, allowing 'theory to emerge' (Thomas, 2013:239), rather than using 'fixed ideas' (ibid) found within the literature.

In relation to AE or CAE, when using methods of reflection, conversation, and annotation, researcher(s) should integrate the analysis into all aspects of the data generation process. In turn, attempting to create 'a theory that is intimately tied with the evidence' (Lawrence & Tar, 2013: 30). Bell and Waters (2018) argue that researchers must recognise when they have obtained enough data, so as not to become saturated or trapped within a data maze.

Being a critically reflective practitioner is not only integral to Youth and Community Work, as identified within the Youth and Community Work national occupational standards (NOS) (YW25) (CLD Standards Council, 2019), but it is also integral to AE and CAE as it shapes the methodological process. When considering data generation, identifying and recognising incidents to reflect on is not straight forward, as it can become problematic to decide which events are significant. At times, during the reflective process, the focus can be overshadowed by the first significant experience researchers can recall, which may not necessarily be the most noteworthy or 'right one' (Bolton & Delderfield, 2018). When embedding reflective processes into AE or CAE, researchers may be tempted to start by focusing on experiences that they deem as meaningful, but over time, and by repeating these methods of reflection and discussion, reflections can shift from surface level to a deeper exploration (ibid). Cyclical methods can lead reflective processes and data generation to become less about searching for significance, and more about allowing the process to develop naturally. Bolton and Delderfield (2018:14) state that, 'Only with the courage to stop looking and trust the reflective and reflexive processes, will we begin to see what needs tackling'. Being aware of this prior to conducting AE and CAE, can offer the researcher(s) the space to allow for exploration of reflective writing on a deeper level. This may lead to *the* epiphany moments (Denzin, 2018) where experiences had been forgotten, or incidents had gone unnoticed, undeveloped thoughts had dispersed or unconscious thought was unknown; but by adhering to the process, are brought to the surface (Bolton & Delderfield, 2018).

During the data generation process, the researchers became conscious of this and so, arranged to allocate space for further exploration of their reflections; and, with this, epiphany moments materialised. One example occurred during a session, where the researchers where listening to one of their previous CAE recordings. An unnoticed pattern began to emerge, where it was highlighted that one of the researcher's continuously sought out validation from the other. Although, both researchers identified as 'mixed-race', said researcher perceived the other to have a broader understanding and knowledge of the Black culture. Therefore, necessitating her to validate her 'Blackness'. This was something the researchers had not previously recognised, being unaware of this notion until that point in time. This was an important discovery for both researchers, as this behaviour not only impacted on their rapport as colleagues and friends; it also influenced how the researchers worked with young people within their individual practices who identified as Black or Brown. It became clear that the epiphany moments were not occurring when the researchers decided, moreover, they occurred once they had started to trust the process.

Further examples of where the authors' research was steered by reflective practice, occurred as the authors opted to develop a selection of stimuli and artefacts inciting memory recollection. Using allocated space for reflection, supported by the stimuli, allowed the authors to explore a selection of memories to delve deeper, leading to them 're-constructing experiences' (Boud et al., 2015: 11), as well as the generation of new reflections; and, therefore, new data. The combination of reflective writing supported by grounded theory, aided the authors to keep their focus on the aims and objectives of the study, where possible. Reflective techniques included *reflecting on action* (Schön, 1991) and *turning experience into learning* (Boud et al., 2015). These reflections were again shared during the cyclical recorded sessions, between the co-researchers', re-emphasising the 'multivocality' (Hernandez et al., 2017:252) of both authors' throughout their respective studies.

Analysing data by theming data
Emerging or preliminary codes, themes, and connections can be identified by using thematic analysis throughout the AE or CAE process. This can support researcher(s) within a CAE group to explore similarities and disparities between newly generated reflections, retrospective analysis, and transcriptions of dialogical discussion. Therefore, using a cyclical process to re-submit a selection of the aforementioned for further analysis, with the support of artefacts, could enhance or lead to further themes or findings being generated. Having

group consensus for repeating the process using a methodology, such as, grounded theory (Thomas, 2013), could lead to further generation of data, enhanced by keeping the research grounded within itself (Hayes, 2000:184). Using this type of process, to identify themes, allows for the research group to re-establish with clear concepts to compare or combine. This continuous process allows the researchers to reflect on discussions conducted during previous meetings, delving further into the significance of their experiences by unpacking newly identified epiphanies that may have been previously overlooked. Working in this way can support the data validity, relatability, and reliability of findings alongside recognising that knowledge can be created mutually (Charmaz, 2000, 2006, 2008). When considering validity and reliability of this methodology, it is noted that AE and CAE is criticised due to the subjectivity of data generation and the analysis (Harris, 2018). According to Ellis et al (2011), '… when terms such as reliability, validity, and generalizability are applied to autoethnography, the context, meaning and utility of these terms are altered.' Traditional ideas regarding how these terms are measured against the research methodology, are not necessarily fitting, and as a result, CAE could be measured against its ability 'to convey, as accurately and evocatively as possible, our lived experience' (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2008:9) and therefore, to be argued as valid for a specific purpose.

Processes to support the theming of AE or CAE can be further approached through the influence of discourse analysis techniques, as the AE or CAE research could explore the narratives and use of discourse or linguistics taking place within cultural and social contexts (Denscombe, 2010). Conducting further analysis using such a process, would therefore allow for the data collected to be explored through an implied understanding, instead of an explicit content meaning (Denscombe, 2007).

Although this article explores and gives some guidance as to how to use the methodologies of AE and CAE, it is important to understand that these research methodologies offer varied approaches to generating data and therefore, analysing and theming it. The methods chosen can be tailored to suit the approach of the researcher(s) as participants. It is not a one size fits all approach. This article offers one perspective or framework towards how to conduct AE or CAE research. Youth and Community workers aiming to approach this research methodology should be aware that they have the opportunity to design how these processes and methods look within their own research study.

Benefits for application

Lapadat (2017) explains a number of benefits for CAE and suggests that the approach is a credible research method, due to being enhanced by more than one researcher offering in-depth qualitative data, a critical eye and to challenge bias. Utilising methods that are steered by at least two researchers, ensures a multitude of perspectives, encounters and narratives. Further benefits discussed by Lapadat (2017) includes, the co-researchers having access to a range of skills that essentially would not be available if working alone; due to the collaborative nature of the methodology, CAE ensures that researchers are immersed within a community with readiness to discuss issues pertaining to oneself and wider societal members including prejudice, oppression, and discrimination. AE and CAE offer the researcher(s) mobility over chosen methods for data generation and analysis, this can be stimulating; encouraging researchers to use creative skills, that are not traditionally employed in conventional qualitative research methodologies.

Challenges for application

It should be noted that CAE is not without disadvantages, Chang et al. (2013:47) highlight five factors that can occur when using CAE, these include, 'Vulnerability and trustworthiness, logistical issues, ethics, and confidentiality, the other side of multivocality and team effort'. Hernandez et al. (2017) go on to offer further drawbacks to using CAE, considering practical issues that can arise, such as, logistics and punctuality of co-researchers, oversharing, and lack of motivation. In order to prevent the rise of unforeseen ethical considerations occurring, it is recommended that ethical considerations, boundaries, team roles, and responsibilities are agreed or pre-empted prior to embarking on this research methodology. In Youth and Community Work practice, this could be supported by conducting preliminary meetings with the young people or Youth Workers as researcher-participants, to gain a consensus of ground rules, expectations and risk assessments, as required. AE and CAE, can be emotive as it is an intense and continuous process and so, when working with young people, this should be taken into consideration, to protect the welfare of both young people and Youth and Community Work practitioners.

Challenges of using CAE in practice were experienced by the authors. For example, when completing their research study, the authors, experienced several unforeseen external factors that directly impacted their ability to assess and write up their findings; leading them towards falling into the data maze (Bell & Waters, 2018). Including, significant increase in

employment demands; family bereavement; new parental demands; the inability to taper critique, causing emotional exhaustion. The authors acknowledge that these external factors may impact on other researchers from across various disciplines, who implore a range of methodological techniques, however, due to the intense immersion required for the CAE or AE research methodology, these factors were compounded by the researchers growing 'critical consciousness' (Hooks, 1994, Friere, 1996); where they unintentionally began to realise the oppressions impacting them and question their realities, decisions, and experiences; against the back drop 'being mixed-race', racial inequalities and normative discourses. This, alongside the emotional impact of the resurgence of the Black Lives Matters movement; and the global pandemic (Covid-19) had a direct impact on their mental health, resulting in deep emotional labour, 'surface acting' (De St Croix, 2013: 40) and further emotional exhaustion. Although ethical considerations had been made prior to commencing the study, the emotional toil of these particular circumstances were unforeseen and not accounted for. In a naïve fashion, the authors failed to acknowledge the impact their own intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1988) could have on the timely completion of this study; being female, working class, one as a single mother, and 'mixed-race', these factors became obstructions in unison, at one point or another during this process. By sharing these points, the authors hope to offer further practical considerations to be identified when choosing a CAE research team and whilst developing of the research aims and rationale.

Ethical considerations

When using AE or CAE methodology, it is imperative to consider the members of the research team; including, demographics, age, ability, capacity, mental and physical health needs; as this process, although radical in social change (Denzin, 2018), can be challenging and potentially damaging to the researcher-participants if they are not supported throughout the process. A number of mechanisms should be arranged to support or guide the researcher(s) needs, mental health or motivation during the process; including, for example, ongoing and adjourning support or discussion groups, access to counselling or supervision and spaces to identify risk, as well as, opportunity to identify potential goals for future personal or professional development.

As discussed the researcher(s) were immersed within their research area and consciously chose to explore CAE as Youth Workers with 'mixed-race' heritage, in this case the notion of working with young people in practice was inappropriate. For various reasons including, time

and funding constraints, lack of opportunity to offer support to external participants and a drive for the researcher(s) to explore their personal and professional reflexivity as Youth Work professionals in practice. Further justification for not involving young people during the initial research study, was due to the researchers trialling the AE methodology as a collaborative effort with no prior experience or knowledge of potential risks to young people as co-researchers. Upon successful completion of their study, the authors would endorse using CAE methodology *with* young people in practice with a clear focus to align methods to the Youth and Community Work NOS (CLD Standards Council, 2019), such as,

> YW05: Enable young people to identify, reflect and use their learning to enhance their future development; YW14 Assist young people to recognise, realise and defend their rights; Signpost 36: Work with the tensions inherent in community development practice' (2019:11:12:15).

By aligning the CAE research to the Youth and Community Work NOS, supported by Youth Work values and principles, could enable Youth Workers to practically support young people to co-research and explore their own identity, understand their rights, become reflective individuals and acknowledge their own bias or prejudice. An example of using CAE methodology in practice could include, Youth Workers and young people acting as research-participants to explore their lived realities during Covid-19. Using this process to support young people and Youth Workers to unpack their emotions, experiences, and inequalities felt during this time. This may lead to individuals feeling empowered to make further concerted effort to change their own lives and make a difference within their own community, get involved in politics or even just feel more comfortable being themselves; by understanding the shared realities of those around them.

Criticisms of CAE

Although growing in popularity and regard across the social sciences, AE and CAE is a relatively contemporary concept (James, 2015). As it has placed itself firmly within the interpretivist and constructivist paradigms, it is not without its criticisms. Flick (2014: 537), argues that CAE cannot be used for generalisation of subject groups or research domain, stating that this makes applying theory to practice difficult. This may be the case, but generalisation and applying generic theories to a vast group of people, is not the purpose of this methodology (Mills et al., 2006). A second criticism of AE and CAE is that data might 'be invalid or unreliable' (Muncey, 2010:33) due to concerns pertaining to the interpretation

and agenda of the researcher(s), as this can be intentionally steered by their own perspectives and experiences. In contrast, Denzin (2014:70) argues,

> Auto-ethnography cannot be judged by traditional positivist criteria. The goal is not to produce a standard social science article. The goal is to write performance texts in a way that moves others to ethical action.

Therefore, research data collected should not be considered to be less valid. There is not one single paradigm that is considered to be the only credible and significant form of knowledge (Bochner, 2000). This supports Lapadat's (2017) argument that by using more than two researchers, this can offer support to the validity and reliability of the data collection techniques and data generated.

Using AE or CAE within Youth and Community Work

Opting for an 'insider led' research methodology (Caballero, 2012) such as auto-ethnography or collaborative auto-ethnography, enables Youth and Community Work practitioners to research phenomena with young people as co-researchers, in contrast to traditional research processes; where methods used are 'done to' and 'not with' the people that it is about (Heron and Reason, 2001; 2006). This notion aligns itself with the principles and purposes of Youth Work (Youth Work in Wales Review Group, 2018), where it is imperative that young people be authentically involved in processes directly impacting them, reinforcing the 'with them' and not 'to them' principle (Smith, 2001; Ord, 2007; Banks, 2010; Sapin, 2013; Taylor, 2015). Using AE or CAE as research methodology within Youth and Community Work, has the potential to lead to findings or results portrayed by young people as researchers, resulting in realistic and more powerful narratives, rather than negative or demonising discourses (Wayne, et al., 2010). Young people in practice, may choose to use the data or findings generated from their studies to be disseminated using innovative methods, such as, media, music or art projects; written pieces such as stories or blogs; vlogs; or infographics or memes for social media.

The use of these types of research methodologies can enable Youth and Community Work practitioners to support young people to construct new narratives or counter-narratives, in support of anti-discriminatory practice and social justice (Chouhan, 2009). Using AE or CAE, will enable young people to have their voices heard throughout their research; and to make contributions to, and challenge ideologies held about their 'needs' or their realities

within current research, consultation processes, organisational policy and legislative approaches, with their choose of method for research dissemination, should they wish. Lapadat (2017: 599) argues that,

> '… too often auto-ethnographers do not venture beyond telling their story in its context to the subsequent steps of bringing people together to work to make a difference in policy and practice'.

However, through the process of AE or CAE in Youth and Community Work practice, young people (and Youth Workers) as researchers, will have the opportunity to implement their findings within their practice. Therefore, by using AE or CAE when working within the Youth and Community sector and by encouraging young people to be co-researchers, will directly impact and shape the spaces they inhabit.

Collaborative auto-ethnographic research allows for Youth and Community Workers to support youth voice, by developing tools and methods to support the young people to identify social injustice and discriminatory practices, within their own experiences; by using Youth and Community Work approaches to reflect on, analyse and work through their findings. Youth work practitioners have the opportunity to work alongside young people and their communities, supporting them to feel empowered, by offering spaces to explore their own lived realities (Youth Work in Wales Review Group, 2018). Community empowerment provides those with the tools to understand where oppression lays and how that impacts them. This in turn enables understanding of how to combat that oppression. Giving voice to their own lived experiences, supporting them to develop tools to raise consciousness and awareness of their own narratives and lived experiences. In doing so, discovering how societal constructions can leave people oppressed within society, without them necessarily being aware that it is happening, by use of epiphany moments; and therefore, learning how to deconstruct, decode, and challenge the systems.

Conclusion

This article offers an exploration and framework of the creative and empowering methodologies of auto-ethnography and collaborative auto-ethnography. Ways in which the methodological processes can be used as tools to enhance and embed youth voice across research, policy, and consultation processes in the Youth and Community Work sector, have been evidenced and discussed. Practical methods have been highlighted, alongside benefits

and challenges, ethical considerations and ways in which this methodology can be used in practice. Youth and Community Work supports the development of young people, enabling them to know their rights, ensuring voluntary access to equal and equitable opportunities, all underpinned by social justice and anti-discriminatory practices. By supporting young people to participate in research processes where promoting youth voice is central, will actively encourage young people to share their lived experiences, devise new narratives and counter-narratives that can support the aims of social justice and result in real social change.

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