

Book Review

What Roles Do Researchers Adopt in Collaborative Research? A Book Review of *Collaborative Autoethnography*

Sudarsan Limbu*

Kathmandu University School of Education, Lalitpur, Nepal

Email: sudarsan_mpsteam22@kusoed.edu.np

Abstract

I offer this review of the book *Collaborative Autoethnography* to diverse readers. The book *Collaborative Autoethnography* presents a framework for collaborative autoethnographers at all levels, from novice to advanced multidisciplinary scholars. This book provides in-depth insights into the entire process, from an introduction to collaborative autoethnography (CAE), preparation, and post-collaborative autoethnography writing. It highlights the significance of prior awareness of CAE for identifying the type of CAE, defining the roles and boundaries of the researchers, and involvement in pre-CAE, during-CAE, and post-CAE writing. I emphasize that understanding an individual's position within collaborative work is dominant before or during the process. This review features the CAE writing and the collaborative model—whether partial or full collaboration—and strongly underlines the importance of understanding the researchers' roles in CAE. Furthermore, this review aims to provide a clear and academic perspective on the book and its contributions to collaborative autoethnography. I found this book immensely valuable, especially for CAE practitioners, and I highly recommend it to anyone interested in subscribing to CAE as research methodology.

Keywords: Collaborative autoethnography. Building Community. Collaboration Model. Solidarity. Interactive and Dialogical

Introduction

I am writing the review of the book '*Collaborative Autoethnography*' by Heewon Chang, Faith Wambura Ngunjiri, and Kathy-Ann C. Hernandez. As I explore collaborative autoethnography (CAE), I relate deeply to their diverse experiences and perspectives, each author representing a different stage in their professional and personal journeys. Their stories resonate with my

*Corresponding

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own academic and personal struggles and achievements—collaborating with seniors and higher academic profile during action and ethnographic research—highlighting the multifaceted nature of collaboration (Aijazi et al., 2021; Yoder & Jaffee, 2019). The editor of the book Heewon Chang is a full professor and naturalized U.S. citizen, stands out with her impressive accomplishments, having already authored two books and founded two online journals. Likewise, Faith Wambura Ngunjiri, an assistant professor, is depicted during her journey toward permanent U.S. residency while working on her first book. Meanwhile, Kathy-Ann C. Hernandez, an associate professor and recent permanent resident, is portrayed as juggling the challenges of adjusting to motherhood and advancing her publication efforts.

This book was published by Left Coast Press, Inc. in 2013, and has been an invaluable resource for me as a researcher and student across various disciplines. It introduces innovative methods, such as classifying full or partial collaboration and justifying oneself in collaboration, while also refining existing methods by highlighting the types of researchers' roles. These advancements drive the field of qualitative inquiry forward. As framed by the book, CAE amalgamates lived experiences related to specific sociocultural phenomena and facilitates the joint analysis and interpretation of these experiences (Aijazi et al., 2021; Roy & Uekusa, 2020). The book comprises seven chapters and an insightful epilogue from the authors on the process of developing this book. It begins with an introduction, explores typology and all elements of the mechanism, and concludes with a wide range of CAE applications.

In the first chapter, "What is Collaborative Autoethnography?" introduces the concept of autoethnography and its collaborative variant. This chapter searches the benefits and challenges associated with collaborative autoethnography. Chapter 2 explored the typology of collaborative autoethnography, discussing aspects such as research team size, levels of collaboration, modes of collaboration, and methodological variations. Chapter 3 guided me in preparing for collaborative autoethnography, including forming a research team, selecting a focus, choosing a collaboration model, and defining roles and boundaries. Data collection is the focus of Chapter 4, covering diverse data sources such as personal memory, archival data, self-observational data, and conversational interactions. Chapter 5 addresses data analysis and interpretation, emphasizing organization, logistical considerations, and the use of Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). Chapter 6 offers the foundation for collaborative autoethnographic writing, discussing challenges, paradigms, and the writing process. Finally, Chapter 7 explores practical applications of collaborative autoethnography, including its role in the classroom, community building, activism, critical work, and professional development.

A Review

At present, my position can be defined as a scholar and science education researcher. I am writing this review to provide the significance of the book, especially in the line of collaborative research work. The book '*Collaborative Autoethnography*' is structured to guide scholars and students at all levels in applying CAE in their research. Initially, I intended a modest review for the reference, but as I explored deeper, I realized the importance of identifying the researcher's position in collaborative work. I have prior experience in ethnographic research, but this exploration was more profound. Consequently, I decided to reflect on my valuable insights from the book. Additionally, I analyzed the book along the lines of Dahal (2023, 2024), that a review doesn't always need to be critical; it can also reflect insights, identify gaps, or analyze practical implications.

Process of Writing Collaborative Autoethnography

The book begins by addressing the contradictory nature of collaborative autoethnography (CAE). It struck me as ‘oxymoronic’ to simultaneously include collaboration, autobiographical elements, and ethnography. The question, ‘How can a study of self be done collaboratively?’ intrigued me and prompted deeper reflection. The book clarified how Autoethnography (AE) can fit into or extend to CAE as I continued reading. Both AE and CAE utilize autobiographical data and cultural interpretation of self-other relationships to understand society from a personal viewpoint (Dahal, 2024; Dahal & Luitel, 2022).

The most intriguing aspects of the book for me are the three steps of writing CAE (pre-CAE writing, CAE writing, and post-CAE writing) and modes of collaboration. The initial phase, *pre-CAE writing*, marks the transition from team formation, data collection, and analysis to the initiation of the final report writing. During this phase, teams fortify their bonds and establish both formal and informal operating guidelines. As they gear up for the task of crafting the final report, two key aspects come to the forefront: *Creating a collaborative autoethnography writing plan* and *defining member roles and responsibilities*. The second phase, *CAE writing*, follows the team’s agreement level of collaboration. Upon this team, the prominent typology of CAE writing is selected, deals with multiple voices in one writing, and addresses ethical concerns. Various prominent typologies of CAE writing are - imaginative-creative writing (IC), confessional-emotive writing (CE), descriptive-realistic writing (DR), and analytical-interpretive writing (AI). Finally, the *post-CAE writing* marks the culmination of the CAE process. It is a time for celebration, reflection, and planning future projects. The relationships and networks formed during this process often continue, fostering ongoing collaboration and creating a supportive network of learning and growth.

The unique insights about full and partial collaboration with examples have made me more aware of collaborative scholarly writing. *In full collaboration*, in such mode, all team members partake in every aspect of the research process, implying shared responsibility until the research report's completion. This process is often facilitated by regular discussions and mapping of individual narratives. The outcome is typically a co-authored scholarly article encapsulating the exploration of complex topics and the production of autoethnographic narratives. These narratives are shared, discussed, and tied to relevant literature, enriching the academic discourse. *Partial collaboration* is characterized by researchers’ involvement in distinct stages of the research process without a consistent engagement from inception to conclusion.

Contextualizing the CAE

The practical implications of collaborative autoethnography (CAE) beyond the classroom setting are more insightful and contextual. Recent works like Hornsby et al. (2021), Pretorius (2022), and Roy and Uekusa (2020) strongly endorse the practical benefits of CAE, aligning with this book. However, I have observed that the book seems to devote less attention to the drawbacks and limitations of collaborative work. The subjectivity of CAE can introduce biases that influence data collection and analysis. Researchers must make some compromises during data collection and analysis to be fit in collaboration (Aijazi et al., 2021; Roy & Uekusa, 2020). Furthermore, high hierarchical or interdisciplinary collaboration introduces intersubjectivity and dialogical tensions, which present challenges in managing different perspectives and conflicts (Roy & Uekusa, 2020).

In Nepal's context, I found insufficient literature on CAE, particularly concerning vulnerability. However, there have been some notable works on autoethnographic research, which do not fully capture the essence of CAE. Recently, two CAE activists from Nepal have

been promoting and raising awareness of CAE research. Their work includes Luitel and Dahal (2021), and Dahal and Luitel (2022, 2023), informing CAE is an emancipatory research method in education, encountering ethics of self and others, and storytelling of the lives. In addition, Yoeli et al. (2022) promote collaborative work's benefits as democratizing knowledge generation processes under specific roles.

Conclusion

In this review, I reviewed the collaborative nature of autoethnographers as the process of writing and positioning themselves in collaborative work. I thoroughly read all seven chapters, and the book provides insightful chapters and an epilogue that can guide readers from 'zero to hero' in the field of collaborative autoethnography. I highly recommend this book to those who plan to conduct CAE, as it is a must-read in the field of qualitative research worldwide. In the context of connecting the bibliography of oneself and others to cultural, political, and societal life, I commend the authors for their extensive engagement of more than five years in creating this book, which has garnered minimal criticism from my perspective. I suggest that readers implement the insights gained from the book and encourage them to conduct CAE in their academic or journal literature. Finally, I want to thank Heewon Chang, Faith Wambura Ngunjiri, and Kathy-Ann C. Hernandez for offering the book *Collaborative Autoethnography*.

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ORCID ID

 Sudarsan Limbu <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-6090-668X>

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