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Collaborative autoethnography in applied linguistics: reflecting on research practice

<https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl-2023-0001>

Received January 1, 2023; accepted August 3, 2023

Abstract: This reflective paper explores collaborative autoethnography (CAE) as a research method by analyzing 15 of our CAE English language teaching and applied linguistics studies published from 2015 to the present. Focus is given to tying CAE to its ethnographic roots, including autoethnography and duoethnography. The implications of CAE representing a methodological expansion of ethnographic methods from researching and reporting on the other to researching and representing one’s own authentic experiences are explored. We discuss the “counter-narratives” that CAE spaces facilitate, where minoritized opinions and experiences can be safely shared and (re)affirmed, including how to facilitate transformative experiences in practice. Two implications for CAE practice are shared. The first concerns the need for CAE participants to be conscious of different levels of participation, particularly as life circumstances change, and to flexibly accommodate these. The second concerns how CAEs should represent a process that facilitates growth and transformation rather than a final, published product. We conclude by noting that while CAE may have shortcomings, it represents a promising avenue of exploration for practitioners interested in developing professional practices through reflection and discussion with research collaborators.

Keywords: collaborative autoethnography; applied linguistics; reflective inquiry

1 Introduction

In collaborative autoethnography (CAE) researchers investigate their experiences through collaborative co-construction of narrative texts that are analyzed in a cyclical, reflective manner to yield shared insights regarding their practice (Chang et al. 2013). Considering its relative youth as an investigative method, CAE has

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garnered considerable interest across and beyond the qualitative social sciences, whether referred to explicitly as CAE, duoethnography, or using other terms.

As a relatively new method, there is considerable variability in how CAE is conceived and implemented (Keleş 2022a, 2022b). Further, different approaches have been suggested for conducting CAE investigations. These include narrative presentation styles where the CAE writing becomes the published text (Gale et al. 2013) and more critical discourse analysis-oriented examinations of CAE texts with linguistic analysis and critique presented in the published text (Adamson and Muller 2017; Hiratsuka et al. 2023). While such heterogeneity can represent a strength of CAE, as it accommodates broad perspectives, it can also present ambiguity for those seeking to pursue their own CAE investigations. As CAE researchers who have collaborated since 2008, here we explore our use of CAE in applied linguistics, focusing on how we have approached it as method and methodology in collaborative research, critically linking our approaches to CAE with others from the qualitative research literature. In doing so, we disambiguate the characteristics of CAE that set it apart from other types of autoethnographic investigation that incorporate collaboration to clarify how CAE investigations can be structured for those interested in doing CAEs and to establish their place in the study of the sociology of language research. We also detail some of the challenges, benefits, and the kinds of research questions that CAE can answer by describing how CAEs have been used to elicit and analyze qualitative data. We trace how this has changed for us over time across projects exploring various themes in applied linguistics and teaching English as a foreign language.

This reflective investigation firstly overviews CAE as an ethnographically informed approach to research. It then delves into research using CAE as a single method or as a supplement to other research methods together with commentary on what CAE contributes to the broader social science literature. This is followed by reflections on four emergent themes from across the various CAE studies that we review: differing degrees of participation in CAE projects; the importance of process over product in CAE research; how CAE research presents opportunities to develop “counter-narratives” (Andrews 2004: 1); and how CAE research presents opportunities for personal transformation. In doing so, we explain what unique contributions and challenges CAE can present to social science researchers, describing what CAE has in common with and how it is distinct from other autoethnographic investigative approaches. Implications of our discussion concern the importance of acknowledging and planning for different levels of participation among CAE project participants and the power of viewing CAE as a process rather than a published product.

2 Literature review: CAE as method and methodology

As this is a reflective review of CAE work to date, we outline the origins of CAE, its characteristics, motivations for CAE across the fields, and finally how it is developing as a research method.

2.1 Origins of CAE

Reflecting on CAE's origins, qualitative autoethnographic research into individual stories or CAE groups of individuals narrating their stories together share common roots in ethnography. While the term CAE appears to have first been used in Chang et al. (2013), it has evolved since, with current understanding seeing CAE as interested in the interaction between participants and how this creates a space for transformative social understanding and change (Keleş 2022a). It has also been interpreted as an umbrella term for autoethnographies conducted with more than one participant, subsuming such work across a variety of fields (Keleş 2022a). CAE is qualitative and interpretivist (Bochner 2013), with participants seeking “an understanding of their lives and their circumstances” (Bochner and Ellis 2006: 111).

Each field has embraced CAE in the context of its own priorities, primarily in social health (Norris et al. 2012) and education research (Sawyer and Liggett 2012), although it has also been applied in cross disciplinary research (Haeffner et al. 2022). In social health research, investigations have explored the expression of patriotism in music (Huckaby and Weonburgh 2012), identity and multiculturalism (Nabavi and Lund 2012), and the representation of beauty (Shelton and McDermott 2012). In education, investigations have explored memory of curriculum design (Sawyer and Liggett 2012) and teacher narratives (Blalock and Akehi 2018; Coia and Taylor 2009). In cross-disciplinary research, CAE has been used to bridge disciplinary divisions between social scientists and natural scientists (Haeffner et al. 2022).

Concerning CAE as methodology, as outlined in Chang et al. (2013), early studies sought to expand away from the autoethnographic limitation on one person's experiences to group experiences through an autobiographical, ethnographic focus on multiple simultaneous autoethnographies. As in ethnography, the focus of such research embraces the researcher's (and simultaneously researched) subjectivity. Initially, there was considerable variety of terminology used in these studies,

including the terms co-ethnography (Ellis and Bochner 1992), duoethnography (Breault 2016; Norris and Sawyer 2004), community ethnography (Toyosaki et al. 2009) and “collaborative field testing” (Norris and Sawyer 2012: 12) before the label CAE became more accepted (Ngunjiri et al. 2010). Nevertheless, these terms, and other similar terms, remain in circulation. For example, Hiratsuka et al. (2023) use the term “trioethnography” (1). Interestingly, whilst the autoethnographic approach anchors CAE in focus on the auto, or self, its ethnographic influence has shaped CAE into a seemingly contradictory focus on how group participation (collaborative) can influence the individual (auto).

Regarding data collection and analysis, CAE as emergent from autoethnography research elicits narratives from participants in writing or orally through cyclical reflection on participants as members in society, emphasizing particularity and personal experience. Data analysis involves examining the narrative(s) as text, meaning “autoethnography is both process and product” (Ellis et al. 2011: 273). Chang (2013) advised that this analytical procedure include taking notes on “recurring topics, dominant themes, unusual cases, and notable statements” (116) to identify within them codes, fragments, and segments, termed categories, that are broad enough to accommodate themes that may emerge later. Chang (2013) noted that imposing categories too early in data analysis excludes important meanings that naturally emerge through multiple participants re-reading the narratives, a process typical to CAE data analysis. Commonalities in CAE analysis include focusing on researchers as participants longitudinally sharing and probing one another to elicit data, which facilitates reflection to encourage transformation of individuals’ beliefs (Chang et al. 2013). This combination of individual reflection, subjectivity, and subsequent group interaction is followed by coding to identify key themes and incidents, with emphasis on how initial individual beliefs transform through collective questioning, such as how self-awareness shifts over time (Chang et al. 2013).

Some have discussed CAE interchangeably with duoethnography and jointly authored ethnographies. For example, Keleş (2022a), acknowledging that “collaborative autoethnography emphasizes collectivity” and “duoethnography highlights the dialogical aspect of collaboration in autoethnographic data collection and analysis” (455), nevertheless collectively discusses duoethnographies, collaborative (or joint) autoethnographies, and multi-authored autoethnographies. While there is overlap in the methods and terminology used, we argue for the value of disambiguating CAE as distinct from other types of joint autoethnographic investigation in that CAE facilitates mutual empowerment, understanding, and potential for calls to action. In so doing, CAE is distinct from other types of collective autoethnographic investigation through its creation of a new space where otherwise marginalized participants can feel empowered within the social semiotic space generated through their shared collective reflection (see Bruffell 2015).

2.2 Characteristics of CAE

Turning to CAE's characteristics, in addition to the joint narrativization discussed previously, Lapadat (2017) stresses the importance of joint interpretation of data, which considers how narratives are formed and the lens through which they are analyzed (Keleş 2022a). Such stories are frequently evocative, with participants employing their own voice and agency in conveying their experiences and beliefs, representing "character building through dialogues and descriptions in well-described settings" (Keleş 2022a: 450). This is like a more traditional "narrative interpretation" (Chang et al. 2013: 19) where the focus of analysis is on how narratives relate to existing theory.

In practice, CAE work emphasizes interactive community-formation between members that enhances narratives to represent collaborators' selves, a key difference between autoethnography and CAE. Additionally, CAE can facilitate "counter-narratives" (Andrews 2004: 1) among participants who feel unfairly portrayed and stigmatized. Thus, CAE's collaborative nature encourages creating spaces that have real-life transformative impacts on participants' lives (Breault 2016).

CAE and autoethnography "refer to research in which the researcher is (1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in published texts, and (3) committed to developing theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena" (Anderson 2006: 373). However, CAE expands this multi-agent participative view to considering audiences and readers part of the process of reflection normally only associated with direct research participants. This performative function "actively seeks a reciprocal relationship with audiences" (Holman Jones et al. 2013: 24). Chang (2013) sees this wider influence as an extra "layer of intersubjectivity" (111) beyond the original purpose of transforming only narrators' understandings of themselves towards an issue. Thus, the audience's seemingly passive engagement becomes actively dialogic (Norris and Sawyer 2012), which resonates with Boal's (1979) term "spect-actor" (122) (spectator-actor) that describes readers or audience members creating "new meanings unique to the reader" (22).

Due to the transformative potential inherent in CAE, sensitivity among participants is essential to help them narrativize their stories so that, as Norris and Sawyer (2012) stress, "one does not impose meanings on to the other, rather, one trusts in the nature of the storytelling process" (22). Compared to autoethnography's solo narrativization, CAE narratives "disrupt" (Breault 2016: 778) individual members' narratives by questioning and challenging, encouraging "dialogic change and regenerative transformations" (778). Thus, individuals are challenged not to simply retell their past but to rationalize and reconceptualize it, resulting in typically messy

narratives (Rinehart and Earl 2016). Compared to solo narratives where there is a “risk of privileging one perspective” (Chang 2013: 111), the possibly less ordered, yet challenging nature of CAE creates deeper reflections and insights into an issue (Chang 2013; Chang et al. 2013). Another feature of CAE, mentioned previously, is its longitudinal nature during which participants bond as a community drawn together by a common theme and the cathartic nature of the dialogues (Chang et al. 2013). However, its merits can be offset if participants withdraw into themselves and resist co-constructing dialogs in “parallel talk” (Breault 2016: 782), like in traditional solo narratives without collaboration with others. Furthermore, “theory confirmation” (782) can occur in which accounts of theory are presented with little justification or resistance from others.

Finally, how participants collaborate can differ, with “full collaboration” (Chang et al. 2013: 41) and “partial collaboration” (42). The former involves all members producing data, analyzing it, then writing up the research, whereas the latter entails permutations of engagement in different parts of the research. Important to such collaboration is agreement among members as to how they contribute. Thus, the sharing of narratives to produce an in-depth process of exploring experiences and perceptions distinguishes CAE from other collective ethnographic approaches.

2.3 Motivations for CAE across the fields

Two motivations underlie CAE’s potential to positively contribute to sociology of language research: its ability to create and foster a sense of shared community and its potential to inspire action in the wider world beyond the narrow context of academic research (Flick 2020). Regarding the first motivation, in CAE the communal space created through collaborative narrating is of interest to investigators (Chang et al. 2013) as it reflects social experiences that represent otherwise marginalized views. It is a tool for sociology of language researchers to explore how, in their own experience, language is shaped by and shapes social structures and practices. Rather than the sociology of language researcher investigating other groups for how language use creates and reinforces social inequalities, CAE researchers explore their own experiences of social inequalities manifesting. Turning to the second motivation, CAE can spur collaborators to address the wider social inequities it helps to identify. As such, following Flick’s (2020) advocacy for the role of qualitative research in the public sphere, CAE can incorporate research impact into the act of conducting research rather than as a separate step outside of the research process. Thus, CAE represents a social-justice oriented method of investigation.

2.4 CAE as a developing research method

As noted previously, CAE exhibits a healthy diversity of applications in terms of how its texts are produced and analyzed, including the themes addressed in them, and whether it is incorporated as a standalone method or supplementary to other research methods (Breault 2016). Concerning the dialogic co-construction of CAE texts, these can be recorded then transcribed in a “concurrent” mode of investigation (Chang et al. 2013: 44), asynchronously via email (Gale et al. 2013), or through collaborative writing technologies such as Google Documents (Adamson and Muller 2017; Muller and Adamson 2018). This third option allows for “sequential collaboration” (Chang et al. 2013: 45). These texts can be presented in publication as the CAE or analyzed further to uncover the meanings embedded in them (Boal 1979; Holman Jones et al. 2013; Rinehart and Earl 2016). An important part of this dialogic co-construction is interaction through engagement with other participants, which should be reflected in publication (Hernández et al. 2010). For example, word processing software commenting functions can be used to respond to collaborators’ writing (Adamson and Muller 2017; Muller and Adamson 2018) or the CAE text can be represented by an email discussion chain (Gale et al. 2013). As CAE researchers are both researchers and researched, they tend to explore themes of interest to them. These themes can be pre-negotiated as “frames” (Barkhuizen and Wette 2008: 373) that structure the interaction or can emerge organically through reflection and response to participants’ experiences. However the CAE text is constructed, the focus of investigation is the shared reflective space produced through this interaction. Finally, as Breault (2016) indicated, CAE can be incorporated as a supplementary tool to aid a larger investigation or applied as a standalone method. However it is applied, the focus is on the shared, collective space that it facilitates through collaborators’ dialogic interactions.

3 Our previous CAE studies

Responding to calls for reflective, critical examination of autoethnographic practice (Keleş 2022a, 2022b), here we review the CAE studies that we have been part of as author-researchers. This review promotes greater CAE researcher reflexivity by illustrating how researchers can approach CAE investigations and what issues they should be aware of when conducting CAEs. The variety of different ways to approach and conduct CAEs and their heterogeneity of investigative direction (Keleş 2022a, 2022b) can mean ambiguity for researchers seeking to use the method. To better facilitate successful CAE practice, here we reflect on our experience of CAEs to

extract principles of approach and practice. These reflections are not intended to be definitive, but rather informative, in the hope that the challenges and dilemmas we explore can help others to better navigate their own CAE journeys. Here we review our studies that employ CAE. These focus on teachers' identity construction and career trajectories in Japanese academia as outlined in Table 1, which highlights the focus of the studies, whether CAE was a main or supplementary method, and the participants engaged.

The CAEs employed online collaborative writing in shared writing spaces such as Google Drive, which provide data for later discourse analytic analysis (Adamson and Muller 2017; Muller and Adamson 2018) of the produced text, in contrast to studies that involved conversations later transcribed for analysis (Chang et al. 2013). Concerning research methods, eight studies employed CAE as a main method (Table 1, column 4). These explored issues of relevance to our experience as practitioner-researchers, such as how translanguaging influences our teaching and research practice (Muller and Adamson forthcoming) or how our positioning as outsiders in Japanese higher education has shaped our experience (Adamson and Muller 2017; Muller and Adamson 2018). Epistemological studies into CAE itself and how it is used have also been conducted (Adamson 2022; Adamson and Muller 2017). This contrasts with commentary papers concerning CAE, including Anderson (2006), Ellis et al. (2011), Lapadat (2017), Ngunjiri et al. (2010), and Roy and Uekusa (2020). The other seven used CAE to supplement other qualitative methods, such as surveys (Adamson and Nunn 2017; Adamson and Yamauchi 2020), document analysis (Adamson and Coulson 2015; Adamson et al. 2023; Fujimoto-Adamson and Adamson 2018), and/or text history analysis (Adamson and Yamauchi 2020; Muller and Tsuruoka 2020). In these studies, CAE represented a means to research local contexts as it not only elicited data, but also reflected local participants' experiences, thereby enacting social and educational transformation (Adamson 2022). Such strategies are compatible with Anderson (2006), who describes how "there has always been an autoethnographic element in qualitative sociological research" (375) with self-observation intermixed, to varying degrees, with other ethnographic investigative methods.

Regarding themes of investigation, teaching practices were explored in Adamson and Coulson (2015) who conducted a CAE among teachers looking into undergraduate freshmen academic writing practices at Japanese university and later by Adamson and Yamauchi (2020), Adamson et al. (2019a), and Adamson et al. (2019b) into thesis writing supervisory practices, a vein of investigation also explored by Lowe and Lawrence (2020). More current work (Adamson et al. 2023) similarly uses CAE to investigate its effectiveness for teacher development (see also Lowe and Lawrence 2020). Our CAE-based research has investigated attitudes of bilingual teaching and learning practices at the Japanese tertiary level (Adamson

Table 1: Previous studies using CAE.

Author(s) (year)	Focus of the study	CAE main or supplementary	Participants in the CAE
1. Adamson and Coulson (2015)	Undergraduate freshmen academic writing	Supplementary	2 teachers
2. Adamson and Nunn (2017)	Open review in academic publishing	Supplementary	2 journal editors
3. Adamson and Muller (2017)	Academic career trajectories	Main	2 teacher-researchers
4. Muller and Adamson (2018)	Academic career trajectories	Main	2 teacher-researchers
5. Fujimoto-Adamson and Adamson (2018)	Bilingual teaching and learning	Supplementary	2 teachers and ~600 students
6. Adamson et al. (2019a)	Undergraduate thesis and postgraduate dissertation writing supervision	Main	3 supervisors
7. Adamson et al. (2019b)	Writing for academic publication	Main	7 researchers
8. Adamson and Yamauchi (2020)	Bilingual teaching and learning	Supplementary	2 teachers
9. Muller and Tsuruoka (2020)	Postgraduate dissertation writing	Supplementary	1 supervisor and 1 supervisee
10. Adamson and Fujimoto-Adamson (2021)	Translanguaging in EMI	Supplementary	2 teachers and ~600 students
11. Adamson et al. (2021)	Journal positioning in academic publishing	Main	5 editors
12. Adamson (2022)	Decentering academic research	Main	1 teacher and ~800 students
13. Muller and Adamson (forthcoming)	Multilingual research	Main	2 researchers
14. Adamson et al. (2023)	CULL pedagogy	Supplementary	3 teachers
15. Fujimoto-Adamson et al. (2022)	Academic literacy development in Sweden and Japan	Main	3 teachers

and Yamauchi 2020; Fujimoto-Adamson and Adamson 2018). More recently we have investigated translanguaging in Japanese university EMI classroom and non-classroom learning spaces (Adamson and Fujimoto-Adamson 2021). Outside of university teaching, our CAE studies have also looked at editorial views toward academic publishing (Adamson et al. 2021; Adamson et al. 2019a; Adamson et al. 2019b) and perceptions of non-blind reviewing (Adamson and Nunn 2017). In this sense, our research involving CAE has moved from a means to gather data surrounding specific educational themes to an epistemological analysis of how it can empower local agents, reflective of the turn toward collaborative transformation illustrated in the broader literature (Chang et al. 2013).

4 Reflections and observations on CAEs

We now turn to a critical appraisal of issues in practicing CAE research by drawing on examples from the studies reviewed previously. We discuss four themes that emerge as key considerations for future CAE work: Practical issues concerning the different degrees of member participation in CAE research; the process of doing CAE research in contrast to focusing on the product of that process (such as a published research study); CAE research as a space for developing “counter-narratives” (Andrews 2004: 1); and the socially transformative opportunities inherent in CAE research.

4.1 Different degrees of participation in CAE research

CAE studies can involve “full” or “partial collaboration” (Chang et al. 2013: 42) among participants. Three examples of full collaboration are Adamson and Muller (2017), Muller and Adamson (2018), and Muller and Adamson (forthcoming), where both authors worked together to produce a CAE text then wrote the publication through their analysis of that text (studies 3, 4, & 13, respectively, in Table 1). Although even in these cases, there were times when one author may have taken the initiative to, for example, analyze and synthesize data before discussing as a team how to proceed based on that analysis. Two examples of partial collaboration are Adamson and Nunn (2017) and Fujimoto-Adamson and Adamson (2018), where one author took the lead in analyzing data and writing the study while the other mainly contributed CAE data (studies 2 & 5, respectively, in Table 1). Some later projects illustrated the importance of reminding those who had initially agreed to full participation to contribute to writing part of the study, such as in Adamson et al. (2021), in which 5 editors reflected on journal positioning in academia (study 11 in Table 1). One difficulty that emerged at the writing up stage in that study was that the writing style

among the authors differed significantly, resulting in a draft which lacked coherence. This was resolved when the two leading authors rewrote sections of the manuscript that co-authors had drafted to create a consistent style throughout. Another strategy that has been taken in publication is to name each author in turn, thereby justifying to readers potential changes in authorial voice between paper sections (Gale et al. 2013).

Issues of authorial voice are also evident in a current study (Adamson et al. 2023) among three teachers reflecting on their pedagogical practices who have different academic writing experiences (study 14 in Table 1). To compensate for this, the lead author wrote a section of the manuscript in advance so the other author-participants could follow its style. Perhaps problematically, this kind of struggle to compose texts is not necessarily apparent in published texts, both ours cited here and others, such as Gale et al. (2013) and Hiratsuka et al. (2023). This may reflect requirements to present polished prose that push CAE participants to minimize these negotiations and struggles in their published manuscripts. Nevertheless, we feel discussion of this struggle and how we have successfully resolved it in our own experience is important to make visible to aspiring CAE researchers.

One noteworthy problem occurred when an author experienced in academic publishing shifted from full to partial participation to give feedback to other, emerging scholar authors (Adamson et al. 2019b; study 7 in Table 1), which initially created friction within the seven-author group. This indicates how seemingly pre-determined roles in a CAE can come to be fluid and require renegotiation. Another instance of shifting roles was seen in Adamson and Yamauchi (2020) when work pressures led to a change from full to partial participation by the original leading author and, as a result, an augmented role for the co-author (study 8 in Table 1).

In contrast to these shifts to lesser participation, there are also instances where co-authors who initially agreed to partial participation were invited to much fuller participation after review feedback was received (Adamson and Coulson 2015; Adamson et al. 2019a; Adamson et al. 2021; studies 1, 6, & 11, respectively, in Table 1). In these cases, co-author field knowledge and experience in changing manuscripts to accommodate challenging review feedback provided welcome input for resubmission during peer review. We would encourage CAE authors to make such roles and changing roles more explicit in their published accounts, as this would lead to potentially greater transparency and reflexivity regarding the CAE research process.

4.2 Process versus product in CAE research

The process of conducting a CAE as a supplementary method to others to create a body of co-constructed narratives (the product) can take various forms (Ellis et al.

2011). Adamson and Coulson (2015) and Adamson and Nunn (2017) adopted a relatively simple methodological approach of speaking about the themes under investigation, undergraduate freshmen academic writing and open review, respectively (studies 1 and 2, respectively, in Table 1), like a description of autoethnographic methods by Denzin (2014). However, when adopting CAE as a main method, recalling oral interactions can be problematic, so Adamson and Muller (2017) and Muller and Adamson (2018) used shared Google Drive documents to write relatively unstructured CAE narrative reflections that we later analyzed into thematic categories through a cyclical, reflective reduction process (studies 3 and 4, respectively, in Table 1). This contrasts with email collocations of reflective texts (Gale et al. 2013). An advantage of such approaches is accommodating physical distance and different time zones, which can make face-to-face oral interaction difficult. Further, writing creates permanent text, allowing revisiting narratives later to add comments, which facilitates more reflection on the narratives than face-to-face interaction. An example of this delayed response was seen in a more recent study (Adamson et al. 2023) where one reaction to a participant's narrative came one year after it was originally written (study 14 in Table 1). Such time to research is also reflected in Hiratsuka et al. (2023) who researched issues of identity over a period of more than one year.

One strategy for organizing CAE reflective texts is to negotiate “frames” (Barkhuizen and Wette 2008: 373) to guide discussions in a more semi-structured manner, seen in Adamson and Muller (2017) and Muller and Adamson (2018), where themes were decided to orient the discussion of the issues under investigation, in this case, our experiences of othering in Japanese higher education. Such frames offer an additional layer of structure for CAE texts, enabling more focused interaction, avoiding the problem of discussing the research themes too broadly. CAE studies also accommodate various data analysis strategies, including identifying emerging sub-themes within a frame, termed “macro reviews” (Chang et al. 2013: 103), a process which entails noting the nature of the sub-theme using the comment function to annotate text, called “memoing” (Strauss and Corbin 2008: 117). This is illustrated in our CAE from Adamson and Muller (2017) in Extract 1, where the left margin shows macro review memos of text written by John who received comments from Theron in the right-hand margin. The text in the center represents the original CAE text.

Extract 1: Macro reviews, memoing and commenting in CAE (Adamson and Muller 2017: 219).

The image shows a screenshot of a Google Drive document. On the left, there is a text snippet with a yellow highlight: "workplace decisions. I felt confident and empowered by my studies and often was surprised in Japan by decisions made by Japanese middle managers who didn't research EFL at all as they were not qualified in the field." Below this, there is a comment from John dated 2015-1-25: "I remember at a science university in Nagano where ESP courses (for business) were allocated by a female director to other female teachers who were close to her but had never taught business English before. I had [previous to this](#)." On the right, there is a comment thread from Theron Muller dated Feb 17, 2015: "It would be good to get some examples of these kind of surprising decisions. Perhaps you've already done this below. I'm making notes as I read." Below the comment is a section labeled "From imported document" with a text input field and a button.

This identification of sub-themes within larger frames can be supplemented by self and joint reflection about “critical incidents” (Butterfield et al. 2005: 480), or key stories that shape views and beliefs. After macro reviews and critical incidents are identified in CAE texts, these can be compiled into a “crystallization” (Hycner 1985: 279) of each frame, borrowing a data analysis step from interview data reduction. We have consistently applied this collaborative method of first framing the CAE discourse then breaking it down through macro reviews, critical incidents, and crystallization in a variety of projects (Adamson and Yamauchi 2020; Adamson et al. 2019a; Adamson et al. 2019b). This analysis strategy is compatible with a critical discourse analysis approach to the analysis of data (Fairclough 1992, 1995), where the CAE text is examined for how issues are framed and rhetorically presented, such as in Adamson and Yamauchi (2020). Such strategies have also been applied in autoethnographic research, such as in Atanga (2021).

While frames can be convenient to focus CAE discussions, it is also important to accommodate what may appear to be, at least initially, potentially off-topic or tangential reflections in CAEs, as these may yield important insights later during analysis. Thus, in addition to the methodological development of using frames to organize CAE texts, in Extract 2 below from Adamson et al. (2021), we expanded our analysis by identifying different types of findings within frames (study 11 in Table 1). We identified themes directly related to the frame (**bold**), indirectly related (*italicized*), and unrelated, yet still important to the overall research objectives (underlined), which we termed “emergent themes” (Adamson et al. 2021: 72).

Extract 2: Identification of different themes within frames (Adamson et al. 2021: 72–73).

I also **wonder about the top-tiered journals and what gives them this status**. The metrics through impact factor is perhaps one indicator and reputation among the field. Reputation is a fuzzy concept and may simply be an elitist/prestige perception of quality or standard. *We wrote some years ago about how we disliked the use of the word ‘standard’ to describe a journal as it is perceived differently by its editors and reviewers. I prefer the word ‘quality’ and refer to the in-depth reviewing process, one in which more than the usual two rounds of review take place.* A review team which sees potential in a submission and works with the author(s) over several rounds of review to help get it published is the ideal definition of ‘quality’.


In summary, one approach to CAE analysis is to produce an initial CAE text that is analyzed using discourse analytic methods. These texts can be structured using frames to guide the discussion of the issues explored around certain pre-identified themes, although analysis should flexibly allow for emergent themes to be included (the underlining in Extract 2). While CAE projects may result in publication (the product), the process of development and community building (Keleş 2022a) emerges through producing and analyzing the CAE text which then informs the manuscript

that is ultimately written for publication. Further, the process of writing (and revising) for publication can strengthen the sense of community among participants. It also presents additional opportunities for participant researchers to contribute and change their type and degree of participation. However, from a CAE researcher perspective, this process tends not to be made explicit in published research accounts, which often sanitize what can be, and often is, a messy, nonlinear process. Thus, we would encourage CAE authors along with reviewers and editors of such manuscripts to accommodate attention to CAE processes in publication.

4.3 CAE research as a space for developing counter-narratives

Here we address how CAEs create opportunities, or “space” (Andrews 2004: 1), to develop counter-narratives. Several cases of participants’ personal views being counter to assumed opinions were evident in Adamson and Muller (2017) and Muller and Adamson (2018), where we co-constructed counter-narratives of Western male privilege in Japanese academia (studies 3 & 4, respectively, in Table 1). Similar findings were also reflected in Hiratsuka et al. (2023), who developed a counter-narrative that challenged assumptions of native speaker privilege in the context of English language education in Japanese higher education. Through our CAEs (Adamson and Muller 2017; Muller and Adamson 2018), we described how we created an insider identity in teacher communities outside of our workplaces, as illustrated in Extract 3.

Extract 3: Creating a counter-narrative (extracted from CAE text produced for, but not published in, Adamson and Muller 2017; Muller and Adamson 2018).

<p>Outside/work Insider/non-work</p>	<p>myself through my non-workplace activities. Instead of complaining about my work situation (although I did admittedly), I achieved a balance in participation in a variety of other communities which moved me from the dejection of being an outsider at work to an insider in other communities. I had multiple identities in a sense – at work at the periphery but outside work more towards the core.</p>	
<p>First communities</p>	<p>Theron's 2015-2-17 expansion on John's theme of being an insider outside of work: My first communities that I started to really passionately be a part of were JALT Publications and the University of</p>	

In studies concerning writing for academic publication (Adamson et al. 2021; Adamson and Nunn 2017) CAE enabled journal editors to challenge assumptions about non-blinded open peer review and prejudice against non-major publishing house journals (studies 11 & 2, respectively, in Table 1). In Adamson and Nunn (2017), a study into unblinded reviewing, or Open Review, whilst attempting to avoid the binary nature of stereotypical counternarratives, both author-participants problematized the non-blind reviewing process they were engaged in (Extract 4).

Extract 4: Problematizing Open Review (Adamson and Nunn 2017: 81).

(Nunn): I see this constructive interaction between reviewers and authors as a means to identify and eliminate individual blind spots that narrow the perception, yet I am aware that this process is a kind of privileged process that may not be easily available to all academics.

(John): It's fascinating how the improvement of one manuscript can reveal this alternative community feeling. It is so fluid in practice, I hope (wonder) if all participants in their varied stages in their careers can relate to it.

Another example of a CAE creating a space for a counter-narrative comes from Adamson et al. (2021) where the use of journal metrics to evaluate faculty, a growing trend criticized in Extract 5, solicited considerable interaction.

Extract 5: Faculty evaluation and journal metrics (based on CAE text analyzed and discussed in Adamson et al. (2021).

(Theron) Related to the issue of indexing and bibliometrics, and which Roger perhaps implies but doesn't address explicitly is the trend toward a desire to quantitatively evaluate faculty output in some way. My university uses complicated metrics for this, which also include an adjustment for the number of pages a manuscript has. These are used internally to rank faculty relativistically, which is problematic in my mind because the university faculty are pitted against one another in a competition; my publishing more makes those who don't publish as much look bad and end up lower on the evaluation ranking scale because there is no designation for what is 'enough'; it's just where you fall relative to the other people you're being measured against.

(John): Theron, the metrification in your case seems to be pitting departments and individuals against each other which creates a potentially competitive environment. I read something years ago about how Canadian research institutes used to collaborate well across disciplinary boundaries but after the government compared their research output, that collaboration declined. Departments with 'good metrics' were less inclined to collaborate with those with 'poor metrics' which led to overall poorer research output for projects which needed interdisciplinary insights.

This review of our CAE studies shows it represents an important space to create counternarratives, in our case, towards issues of identity and assumptions of privilege in academia, a trend mirrored in other studies (Hiratsuka et al. 2023). Additionally, we note how this space also serves to explore and problematize our practices, seen in our exchange regarding faculty evaluation and Open Review. This space is one of the valuable aspects of CAE research as opposed to single autoethnographies, which may tend to overemphasize the individual. We described how, within the CAE's safe shared space, researchers could challenge and develop one another's views through critiquing their collective experiences.

4.4 Transformative opportunities inherent in CAE research

The transformative potential of CAE (Breault 2016; Norris and Sawyer 2012) manifests in various degrees, ranging from completely new insights (Adamson et al. 2021; study 11 in Table 1) to a lack of transformation (Adamson et al. 2023; study 14 in Table 1). To the extent that transformation is realized through participation in CAEs, this may be due to its grounding in constructivist orientations to the production of knowledge. Such a perspective holds that beliefs are not *a priori* present within individual participants and thus need only be expressed in text (Ivanič 1997). Rather, a constructivist perspective holds that the production of text and participation in dialog is constitutive of knowledge (Ivanič 1997). Thus, participating in CAE writing facilitates author researchers formulating and understanding their own stances toward the topic of investigation (Adamson and Muller 2017; study 3 in Table 1). The added benefit of the collaborative part of a CAE methodology is that the shared space created through the process of CAE research can facilitate growth and development (Chang et al. 2013), which can lead to going beyond outlining one's position to fostering development and innovation (Adamson and Muller 2017).

For example, Adamson et al. (2021) exhibited an example of extreme transformation (study 11 in Table 1). One editor-participant expressed surprise at the animated exchanges between the others regarding the growing importance of journal indexing, author publication charges (APC) in Open Access (OA) publishing, and the metrification of scholarly output. Their contribution succinctly indicates the ethical conflict entailed by financial realities, whereby pay to publish models of open access publishing result in *economic discrimination*, as authors from lesser means are unable to disseminate their findings while well-resourced authors can (Extract 6).

Extract 6: Transformation in awareness of Open Access, Author Publication Charges, and metrification (based on CAE text analyzed and discussed in Adamson et al. 2021).

As I had confessed at the beginning of this project, when it comes to OA, APC etc. I am still learning though this discussion above has clarified much for me. Yes, true, there is a tension between economics and ethics here and I completely get the point about economic discrimination.

A further example of transformation of practical knowledge was observed in a study among university dissertation (thesis) supervisors located in Japan and Sweden (Fujimoto-Adamson et al. 2022; study 15 in Table 1). Interesting contrasts were observed in terms of different expectations and approaches to supervisory practices in Japanese and Swedish academia. Swedish students were described as more autonomous and collaborative, whereas Japanese students were characterized

as requiring more detailed modeling of writing expectations. The Swedish university supervisor's experience in Extract 7 describes student independence as an academic norm; *supervisors need to be careful not to provide too much assistance to the students*. The Japan-based supervisors' experiences in Extract 8 contrast with this, where more modeling of academic writing is described as necessary; *I wrote a model thesis which was suitable for my undergraduate student level*.

Extract 7: Supervisory practices in Sweden (CAE text from Fujimoto-Adamson et al. 2022).

As independent work is expected from BA students at our university, supervisors need to be careful not to provide too much assistance to the students. When we meet for group supervision sessions about once a month, I simply check their progress and see if they have encountered any problems, and I encourage fellow students to help each other, for example, with solving problems in data collection, doing peer readings, etc.

Extract 8: Supervisory practices in Japan (CAE text from Fujimoto-Adamson et al. 2022).

I agree with John that showing my assignments and research papers are not the right kind of modeling for my students. Therefore, I wrote a model thesis which was suitable for my undergraduate student level almost six years ago. The reason is that writing a thesis whose length is about 5,000 words is quite challenging for them, so providing a basic model would be helpful. Also, Japanese is my L1 language, so it can be an attainable model for my students.

These extracts show the potential of CAE collaboration across contexts to present transformational opportunities for “making the strange familiar and the familiar [...] strange” (Lillis 2008: 382), as participants realize that taken-for-granted aspects of their respective contexts are not universally reflected in other places. This is perhaps one area where CAE would benefit from more explicit efforts to gather more diverse groups of investigators, including geographically, gendered, disciplinary, to explore these potentially deeper insights concerning their contextualized practices (Lapadat 2017).

While there is understandably interest in CAE's transformative potential, it is important to keep in mind that not all CAE interactions (should) result in radical changes to stances and beliefs. Rather, the potential for more subtle transformations (and lack of transformation) should also be kept in mind, along with their potential significance to the larger research project. For example, in Adamson et al. (2023), a comment posted in the CAE revealed the more experienced of the three participants not transforming his teaching practices compared to the newer faculty participants who exchanged pedagogical ideas (study 14 in Table 1). In Extract 9, taken from this

CAE text, the absence of transformation is noted with some frustration with, *Your transformation is not as clear to me.*

Extract 9: Example of Non-transformation (CAE text from Adamson et al. 2023).

Your transformation is not as clear to me as ours. It is clear that you believe it is transformational, however it is difficult to find what transformed? Future transformation? Affective transformation rather than practices?

This apparent lack of transformation of teaching methodology was accepted by the more experienced participant who in response during a group discussion stressed his sense of self-reflection on each lesson through weekly post-lecture diary-like entries in the CAE. He felt this emphasis on everyday reflection to enact discreet, ongoing amendments to his teaching rather than overt, sudden transformation was more important. Subsequently, his initially skeptical co-author (see Extract 9) later expressed understanding of this different positioning in Extract 10, writing *Your notes illustrate a great deal of self-reflection with regard to classroom practices.*

Extract 10: Self-reflection in CAE (CAE text from Adamson et al. 2023).

Looking at our ordinary and mundane practices, the ordinary can give valuable insight into the identity of participants in this type of inquiry. An exploration of the extensive post-teaching notes that you took throughout the duration of our CAE gives visibility to your teacher and researcher self. Your notes illustrate a great deal of self-reflection with regard to classroom practices. You have been teaching [Lecture] for many years, and are clearly a practitioner who takes care to update his methodology, materials, and mode of delivery.

This realization by the co-author regarding the veteran teacher's stance problematizes the need to transform beliefs and practices in CAE (Breault 2016). It illustrates how gradual development is possible through sharing regular self-reflective narratives, described in Extract 9 as representing an *update* to teaching *methodology, materials, and mode of delivery*. This may challenge assumptions regarding the necessity for more cathartic implications underpinning such transformation typically associated with CAE work.

5 Final reflections and conclusions on CAE practice

Here we synthesize our reflections into implications for CAE practice. We discuss two overriding themes; how heterogeneity of participation strengthens rather than hinders CAE projects, together with the importance of making the messy process of CAE research visible to readers, in addition to the CAE research process being more

important than the published product. Concerning heterogeneity of participation, as our discussion illustrates, members of a CAE project are simultaneously participants, authors, and researchers, although they may contribute to different degrees to each of these three different aspects of participation depending on their individual circumstances. Further, readers are brought into the CAE through calls to action that help to practically address the issues raised in larger society (Boal 1979; Holman Jones et al. 2013; Rinehart and Earl 2016).

While CAE participation with equal sharing of roles and responsibilities may be idealized as preferred, with CAEs representing a democratic space where everyone is equally represented (Chang et al. 2013), in our experience this is not always the case. Rather, as we argue here, it is important to acknowledge that different levels of participation can express a healthy heterogeneity in CAE projects, particularly since as busy professionals, not everyone may be able to contribute an equal amount of time and effort to a given project. As we discuss, building space in a CAE for participants to negotiate their varying levels of participation over time, along with explicit acknowledgment that individual circumstances may change, can help ensure the successful completion of a given project. For example, in Adamson et al. (2021) one author moved from full-time academic employment in Southeast Asia to part-time employment in Europe, which ultimately affected how much time they had to devote to revising the manuscript in preparation for submission for review (study 11 in Table 1). This resulted in an explicit decision to change the authorship order of the submitted manuscript, as another author took over responsibility for formulating and refining a substantial portion of the text. Further, some CAE participants may be at different stages in their careers, and therefore bring different perspectives to a project, such as in Adamson et al. (2023), where a senior academic collaborated with two more junior faculty members (study 14 in Table 1).

While one of the advantages of CAE is the potential for collaborators to challenge and request clarification of one another's beliefs, there remains the possibility of collaborators not challenging one another and therefore the CAE reflection leading into parallel talk and theory confirmation (Chang et al. 2013). So long as participants build a mutual space where they can share, acknowledge, and respect one another's perspectives (Norris and Sawyer 2012), such heterogeneity represents a strength of CAE, as it allows all participants to grow through their participation (Breault 2016). Such flexibility and openness to different and changing levels of CAE participation is necessary because inflexibility may result in the failure of projects as collaborators cannot come to a consensus about how to proceed.

Further, rather than viewing a CAE as a published product, we have illustrated the importance of attention to the process of CAE text production, analysis, report

writing, and further negotiation following review. While these different stages are not necessarily linear, with considerable circularity in producing, analyzing, reproducing, and reanalyzing text, they nevertheless represent a convenient way of conceptualizing the process of developing CAE texts into published reports (Rinehart and Earl 2016). Reconnecting to the importance of the heterogeneity of different participants and roles in CAE, our discussion here adds the perspective that, in addition to named CAE authors, academic reviewers and editors also shape how CAE projects are ultimately represented in publication. For example, Adamson et al. (2021) was submitted to two different journals and ultimately published in the second journal because the stance taken to framing the investigation in the manuscript, using predetermined themes of interest to the editor-authors, was irreconcilable with a reviewer at the first journal (study 11 in Table 1). This was despite this investigative method having successfully informed our earlier published CAE work (Adamson and Muller 2017; Muller and Adamson 2018; studies 3 & 4, respectively, in Table 1). The reviewer fundamentally disagreed that we could set frames that informed the structure of our discussion, insisting instead that our manuscript present a general review of the field before outlining the specific issues we investigated in our analysis. After two rounds of review, as authors we agreed to move from seeking publication in the original journal to submitting the revised manuscript to a new journal. Here again the community we had developed as CAE participants helped us respond to this challenge, with the support we had given one another throughout the project lending itself to developing consensus concerning how to proceed with the manuscript. The messiness of such changing degrees of participation and struggles to create meaning should be reflected in CAE accounts by acknowledging them and reflexively discussing how they shape projects.

Despite its potential messiness, CAE has the potential to empower author-researchers to collectively explore topics of interest to them and their contexts, considering their contextualized worldviews. It is particularly well-suited to investigating issues of identity and beliefs where transformation through community building has the potential to address issues of marginalization within the larger society, as well as to influence conversations concerning policy (Flick 2020). While Anderson (2006) acknowledges that “there has always been an autoethnographic element in qualitative sociological research” (375), CAE’s advantage is in facilitating insider accounts and experiences. Thus, CAE offers potential for socially transformative research within a given group of CAE researchers (Breault 2016) and, as Flick (2020) asserts, through suggesting policy changes that can inform larger society.

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