**INTRODUCTION TO ETHNODRAMA**

**by Simon Moss**

|  |
| --- |
| **Introduction** |

Ethnodrama is a technique in which the researcher writes and stages a theatrical performance—a theatrical performance, like a play, that is derived from the data collected about some community or setting. To illustrate, the researcher could

* interview a particular community or segment of the population, such as research candidates who are addicted to an elicit substance
* write a script that integrates the themes and quotes that emanated from these interviews
* stage a performance of this script

|  |
| --- |
| **Benefits of ethnodrama** |

Ethnodrama offers several key benefits over more traditional methods and techniques. The following table summarises these benefits.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Benefit | Details |
| Inspires the audience to challenge their assumptions | * In comparison to written reports, theatrical performances are more likely to engage an audience. * When an audience is immersed in a performance, they became more receptive to the material they watch—consistent with research on transportation theory (Green & Brock, 2000) * Consequently, the audience might be more likely to adjust their beliefs and assumption about some topic, such as people with drug addictions |
| Sensory details can enhance the intuition of an audience about a topic | * Theatrical performances are more vivid than written reports * People are more likely to appreciate a principle they have witnessed vividly—because such vivid details tend to engage the intuition of individuals (Lee, Amir, & Ariely, 2009). * The audience can thus gain vital insights about interpersonal dynamics (Davis-Manigaulte et al., 2006) |
| Respect towards participants | * This approach demonstrates respect towards the participants of this research * That is, these participants feel honored by an event that depicts their perspectives and insights * The experience might also help participants contemplate and understand their own lives better |

|  |
| --- |
| **How to conduct an ethnodrama** |

Researchers initiate and complete a variety of activities to produce an ethnodrama: No two researchers follow the same activities. Nevertheless, the following table outlines some of the most common and helpful activities, coupled with an illustration. These suggestions were largely derived from Eaton (2017). Importantly

* the initial stages resemble a typical research approach in which researchers define the research question, clarify the theoretical perspective, choose a method to collect data, specify the sample, collect the data, and analyze the data
* the final stages, however, are unique to ethnodrama

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Activity | Illustration |
| **Design the study** |  |
| Clarify the goals of this study. The goals might include   * which communities or circumstances the researcher wants to understand * which audiences the researcher wants to influence or assist | The aim of this ethnodrama was to   * appreciate the lived experience of research candidates who are addicted to an elicit substance * communicate to general audiences the challenges these students experience and the qualities they exhibit |
| **Collect the data** |  |
| Determine which methods you will utilize to collect data—such as interviews, observation field notes, or archived documents. Interviews are perhaps the most common method. | * For this study, the researcher arranged narrative interviews * Specifically, participants were asked to relate their story about how they became addicted to drugs |
| Choose the participants | * The 15 participants were research candidates of a local Australian university |
| Decide who will collect the data—such as interview the participants   * Sometimes, the principal researcher will interview the participants * Or, the principal researcher might organize specific individuals, such as school students, to conduct the interviews—partly to help these individuals learn about the setting | * For this study, the principal investigator—a research candidate—conducted the interviews |
| Develop the interview schedule | * Participants were asked to relate their story about how they became addicted to drugs * In addition, they discussed the daily challenges they experienced—as well as how they managed these experiences * Finally, they discussed what they gained from this addiction, such as empathy |
| **Analyse the data** |  |
| Transcribe the interviews |  |
| Translate the data to codes   * That is, each segment—such as a sentence or clause—might be translated to a code | * In this study, codes included “concealed addiction from supervisor”, “felt ashamed”, and “drugs can improve concentration” * Each interview generated 20 to 50 codes * Some segments of data were assigned more than one code |
| Related codes are classified into patterns or themes | * The researcher read the codes several times * Each time, the researcher classified related codes into the same cluster * For example, the codes “concealed addiction from supervisor”, “acted happy”, and “ascribed behavior to a virus” were initially assigned to the same cluster * When assigned other codes, this cluster evolved into a theme called “pretense of mental health” |
| Before, during and after assigning codes and themes, underline possible quotes   * Underline quotes that seemed informative or telling * Underline quotes that summarize or epitomize a specific theme well * Do not be too discriminating: you want to be able to garner about 2500 words of quotes | * One quote was “I was surprised that an institution that values understanding of diversity did not seem to accept my addiction” |
| **Plan the ethnodrama or script** |  |
| Specify the main insights you want to include in the ethnodrama   * You might include between 5 and 20 main insights * These insights will tend to emanate from the themes you extracted from the data | Examples of these insights could be   * These individuals pretended they were mentally healthy * These individuals felt their addiction was perceived as immoral * These individuals felt they had developed empathy because of their addiction * These individuals felt that, after years of difficulties, they had become more resilient to other stressful life events * These individuals felt special * The mood of these individuals was unpredictable—and hence they could not commit to various events |
| Check this set of insights encompasses all the informative codes and themes you uncovered   * For example, you might need to modify an insight to encompass some additional codes |  |
| Arrange these insights into some order. For example   * You might arrange these insights into themes that correspond to the same research question—such as the benefits of addiction * Or you might begin with pleasant insights to engage the audience, proceed to more unpleasant insights, and then end with pleasant insights again, to instill some hope. * You might also feel that some insights will be more meaningful if they appear after other insights * Finally, you might also want to end the ethnodrama with the issues in which you begun the script | Here is an excerpt of a plan   * **Complications of drug addictions to the thesis** * The mood of these individuals was unpredictable—and hence they could not commit to various events * These individuals felt their addiction was perceived as immoral * **Benefits of these drug addictions** * These individuals felt they had developed empathy because of their addiction * These individuals felt that, after years of difficulties, they had become more resilient to other stressful life events |
| **Write the script** |  |
| Assign the quotes to this plan of insights   * That is, insert each quote under the relevant bullet point in your plan * If a quote does not align to a bullet point, you might need to modify your plan |  |
| Delete unsuitable quotes from the plan   * Omit words or quotes that could identify a participant * Omit words or quotes that might be distressing or upsetting for a participant who watches the ethnodrama * Check with participants on whether they perceive a quote as distressing or upsetting * Prioritize quotes that epitomize a theme—rather than merely quotes that are dramatic or emotional |  |
| Develop characters   * Your ethnodrama might include between 5 and 15 characters * You do not need to develop one character for each of your participants * Instead, develop one character for all the quotes that are consistent with each other | The following quotes were assigned to one character—because they correspond to a person who is proud of their challenges they have experienced   * “If I can through this, I can get through anything, especially a PhD” * “I’m not afraid of my mistakes” * “I’ve grown from my mistakes” |
| **Edit the script** |  |
| Do not include long excerpts from one character   * Sometimes divide longer quotes into shorter segments—often between 5 and 15 words * These segments should not be delivered consecutively * Instead, organize the quotes or segments to ensure you shift between characters every 5 to 15 words * One character might repeat the words of another character or ask brief questions like “Why” | The quote “The addiction made me feel strong. I did not feel helpless. I felt that, if I can through this, I can get through anything, especially a PhD” was changed to   * Character 1: “The addiction made me feel strong” * Character 2: “Strong?” * Character 1: “I did not feel helpless. I felt that, if I can through this, I can get through anything” * Character 2: “Like a PhD?” * Character 1: “Especially a PhD” |
| Refine the quotes   * The script should primarily comprise the verbatim quotes of participants * However, the researcher might, occasionally but sparsely, include some additional words to help audience members understand the material * The script should not significantly exceed 2500 words—because you want the actors to be able to perform the script within about 20 minutes; otherwise, the audience might become restless * Hence, the researcher may delete some unnecessary words |  |
| Edit the script, but not too dramatically   * If possible, seek feedback from a scholar in ethnodrama or theatre in general * Conduct additional interviews to seek the feedback of participants * You can include quotes from these interviews to update the script as well | Each participant received a preliminary version of the script. They were encouraged to read the script. After reading the script, they participated in short interviews. During these interviews, they were asked   * Do you feel that your answers to the interview were represented in this script? * Do you feel this script is accurate of your experiences? * If not, what changes would you suggest? |
| **Stage and perform the script** |  |
| If possible, arrange a non-profit acting company to direct, stage, and perform the ethnodrama |  |
| Typically, the performance would include three or so actors, each playing multiple characters |  |
| To maintain confidentiality, actors should not meet the participants |  |
| During the performance, invite participants to attend |  |
| **Evaluate the performance** |  |
| As part of the research, you should evaluate the impact of this performance. For example   * the audience members in general, including the participants, could be invited to complete a survey * the survey might include questions about what they learned from this performance | Audience members received a short survey before and after the performance. The survey included questions about attitudes towards research candidates who are addicted to illicit substances. |

|  |
| --- |
| **Key principles to apply** |

The previous example demonstrates how you can develop an ethnodrama. This section outlines some of the key principles and caveats that should guide this endeavour:

* Do not deviate too far from the original quotes—otherwise, in essence, you are altering the data
* The script is not intended to resemble a linear narrative, like a play.
* Instead, the audience should immerse themselves in an array of insights that are not integrated into a neat story
* Whenever possible, all the participants should be represented equally; the quotes of one articulate participant should not dominate the performance.

|  |
| --- |
| **Suitability to a PhD or Masters by Research** |

Ethnodrama can be included in a PhD or Masters by Research. To illustrate

* the script as well as the evaluation of a performance can be included in a thesis
* indeed, the ethnodrama might represent the bulk of a Masters by Research
* the ethnodrama might represent one of two or three empirical chapters of a PhD
* the ethnodrama could also be included in a thesis by creative works—alongside an exegesis.
* for an example of how an ethnodrama was included in a thesis, Google “Ethnodrama as a Path to Teacher Euphoria”

|  |
| --- |
| **History and theory of ethnodrama** |

If you include an ethnodrama in your thesis, you need to present the historical and theoretical underpinnings to this approach. You may also need to differentiate ethnodrama from other similar methods or approaches. This section offers some insights that could help you achieve this goal.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Relevant topics or  questions to answer | Details |
| Ethnodrama can be regarded as a methodology or as a method to present findings | * Some scholars conceptualize ethnodrama as a research methodology (Mienczakowski, 2001) * Other scholars conceptualize ethnodrama as a method or technique to represent and present findings (Saldaña, 2005) |
| Ethnodrama is distinct from other methods that entail theatre | * Often, ethnodrama is used synonymously with ethnotheatre; however, ethnodrama tends to refer to the script or written material, and ethnotheatre refers to the performance or theatrical event * Unlike ethnodrama, nontheatrical performances utilize research data in a natural performance in which staging and rehearsals are limited (Rossiter et al., 2008) * Unlike ethnodrama, theatrical research-based performance often deviates significantly from the data. The data mainly inspires the play but does not constrain the play (Rossiter et al., 2008) |
| Historical precedents | * Inspired by the work of Paulo Freire—who advocated the benefits of learning by doing-- Augusto Boal championed the need to present problems in action, comparable to theatre, to discuss and identify solutions (Boal, 1985) * Turner (1982) advocated the performance of ethnographic data |

|  |
| --- |
| **References** |

Boal, A. (1985). Theatre of the oppressed. NY: Theatre Communications Group.

Davis-Manigaulte, J., Yorks, L. & Kasl, E. (2006). Expressive ways of knowing and transformative

learning. New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 109, 27-35.

Eaton, J. (2017). The process of creating an ethnodrama highlighting late life potential through nursing student and older adult collaboration. Qualitative Research, 17(5) 498-519. doi: 10.1177/1468794116674770

Green, M. C., & Brock, T. C. (2000). The role of transportation in the persuasiveness of public narratives. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 79, 701-721.

Lee, L., Amir, O., & Ariely, D. (2009). In search of homo economicus: Cognitive noise and the role of emotion in preference consistency. Journal of Consumer Research, 36, 173-187.

Mienczakowski, J., (2001). Ethnodrama: Performed research: limitations and potential. Handbook of

Ethnography, 468–476.

Rossiter, K., Kontos, P., Colantonio, A., Gilbert, J., Gray, J., & Keightley, M. (2008). Staging data:

theatre as a tool for analysis and knowledge transfer in health research. Social Science and

Medicine, 66(1), 130-146.

Saldaña, J .(2005). Ethnodrama: An anthology of reality theatre. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira.

Turner, V. (1982). From ritual to theatre: the seriousness of human play. New York:

Performing Arts Journal Publications.