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Martin Andrew and Mawera Karetai

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INTRODUCING BRICOLAGE

This paper explores bricolage as a qualitative approach to research. Imbued by the broadly linguistic 'bricolage' described by Lévi-Strauss (1962), modern bricolage, as a qualitative research methodology, is best defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) as "a complex, dense, reflexive collage-like creation that represents the researcher's images, understandings and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under analysis" (p. 6). It is now regarded as a methodology for professional practice research, including creative studies. It seeks to free bricolage from charges of being "undisciplined" (Roberts, 2018, p. 1), mix-and-match and random (Kincheloe, 2001), and even schizophrenic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Our exploration focuses on several features of the methodology: its ability to incorporate and allow eclecticism, multiplicity and diversity of practice; its alignment with a transdisciplinary approach, and its concordance with a portfolio method of curating collections of outputs. As a methodology of emergence, it is tolerant of the stop-start nature of practitioner research we recognise from the tenuous age of COVID-19. It holds possibilities for learners and for mentors.

As well as accommodating the emergence that resilient methodologies need in the COVID era, bricolage is eclectic and autoethnographic and enables creative sense-making. This feature shows in bricolage's potential to embody the multiple journeys and lived contributions of a single practitioner or collaborator. It allows learners and mentors to recognise that a professional practitioner seldom does just one thing. One feature of the bricoleur's practice is that bricoleurs put "something of [themselves] into it" (Lévi-Strauss, 1962, p. 21). This acknowledges the thread of the self and the subjective in research writing.

Emphasising the role of autoethnography in professional practice, Denshire (2014) wrote: "autoethnographers will often blur boundaries, crafting fictions and other ways of being true in the interests of rewriting selves in the social world" (p. 831). These acts of blurring, crafting and reconfiguring, however, require critical reflectivity to extend personal-professional understanding into sociologically-oriented professional knowing. In other words, learners and mentors need to be clear that bricolage as a method of professional practice may require a context (con-text, an accompanying text) that explicitly and critically makes sense of its component parts.

How this criticality manifests itself in bricolage is one concern of this exploration. First, we discuss the charge of randomness levelled against bricolage; then we consider the role of multiplicity in bricolage as it may be applied to professional practice. Then, we explore how it might operate within a transdisciplinary approach. This leads into the issue of portfolios as repositories of a bricoleur's artefacts/textuality. This means bricoleurs may use portfolios as methods of presenting different components of the thesis. We also discuss the autoethnographic dimension as a means of allowing experienced professional narratives into bricolage. At the end, we offer a completed doctoral learner's narrative of the lived experience of being and becoming a bricoleur as a case study of a bricoleur-practitioner.

BRICOLAGE: BEYOND RANDOMNESS

Recent studies of bricolage in such areas as arts-based research and social and human sciences rehabilitate the method from a reputation for randomness, fragmentation and pastiche by indicating its multi-perspectival nature (Kincheloe, 2001). Lévi-Strauss (1962) had called the bricoleur a 'Jack-of-all-trades' whose method involves using whatever is handy, "creating structures by means of events" (p. 15) while the scientist creates 'events' via 'structures.' In recent years, this polarity has broken down to the extent that today bricolage denotes potentially mixed-method processes and the multi-textual and multi-vocal media of communication employed by bricoleur researchers in such areas as community welfare (Phillimore et al., 2018; Roberts, 2018). Lévi-Strauss conceded that both the scientist and the bricoleur create knowledge from *prior knowing,* giving the example of the Elizabethan miniaturist having to investigate the history and authenticity of the lace collars they paint. Further, the deliberateness and strategic planning Lévi-Strauss attributed to the scientist coexist with random handiness, allowing for either the positive serendipity or negative unexpectedness that may confront professional practitioners in our era of epistemological uncertainty and methodological pivoting.

In the era of COVID-19, bricolage offers learners and their mentors the flexibility and contextual contingency needed to make, create, curate and/or write professional practice research: the ability to use as 'data' materials at hand, including one's own experiences and practices. Bricolage has other features: it accords with the transdisciplinary turn in solving wicked problems among multiple stakeholders; it offers a multi-perspectival discourse, meaning the views and voices of many across the world can be in the mix, and it understands the continually evolving processes and practice of complex real-world problems (Yardley, 2019).

EMERGENCE AND PRIORITY

The tension between *emergence* and *priority* in bricolage requires ongoing exploration for professional practice learners and their mentors. Because *emergence* is one of the characteristics of bricolage, there is the same need to capture acts of becoming in a reflective form – diary, log, spoken memorandum – as there is in professional practice. The need to reflect on incidents of practice in action for future scrutiny and eventual understanding means the practitioner needs to capture data for the enquiry as geographically and chronologically close to the incident as possible. This quality of *emergence* is what makes a bricolage hard to define as an *a priori* project (a priority, something coming before) as may be required by a probation panel if a doctoral candidate professes to be a bricoleur. Bricolage is not monological; indeed, it is it multi-logical and even multi-methodological (Kincheloe, 2001).

Crouch (2017) writes: "bricolage may be about 'getting by', but it may also be able to render tackling situations, in however much detail and nuance they may assert, require, or happen" (p. 1). This observation aligns with the reflective recording of critical events in professional practice. Bricolage has the potential to see into the cracks of everyday professional living and becoming. Reflective journals may be one key method for learners to explore such cracks. It is *how* the bricoleur enables elements of knowing to emerge that matters. To borrow from Lévi-Strauss (1962), the learner-as-bricoleur puts things together in new and 'devious' ways – fashioning, linking, assembling, curating, showcasing – making portfolios. Bricolage allows learner-practitioner knowledge to be provisional without requiring a privileged reference point. Denzin and Lincoln (2011, pp. 681–682) opened up bricolage as a fresh material and ethnographic approach in qualitative methodology:

> The material practices of qualitative enquiry turn the researcher into a methodological (and epistemological) *bricoleur.* This person is an artist, a quilt maker, a skilled craftsperson, a maker of montages and collages. The interpretive *bricoleur* can interview; observe; study material culture; think within and beyond visual methods; write poetry, fiction, and autoethnography; construct narratives that tell explanatory stories; use qualitative computer software; do text-based inquiries; [use] focus group interviews; and even engage in applied ethnography and policy formulation.

Applying the insights of Denzin and Lincoln (2011), we describe bricolage in relation to conventional methods. The spirit of bricoleur disputes *already-given* methods, preferring instead to seek the *most appropriate* method of portraying any particular aspect of the emerging portfolio.

Essentially, the learner-bricoleur must have a sense of the shape and form of the whole to which the parts belong, a design; a strategy. Within this holistic frame is the work of the magpie, as Stewart writes in an online study: "the bricoleur appropriates available methods, strategies and empirical materials or invents or pieces together new tools as necessary" (2001). Stewart (2001) emphasises that whatever is presented as bricolage for audience, assessment or evaluation will be complex, dense and reflexive. It will represent learner-practitioners' stories, as well as reflecting their understandings and interpretations of the world (Campbell & McNamara, 2007). Thus, it brings the phenomena under investigation into new light and contributes to ongoing conversations and scholarship. In this light, it is worth investigating how a transdisciplinary approach might accommodate a bricolage methodology for learners and mentors.

THE MULTIPLICITY OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE LEARNING

Multiplicity is a feature of the professional practice contexts of many learners undertaking work-based learning, such as that of Mawera, whose narrative concludes this article. Their generative or creative work is unlikely to have merely one single thread; one form, one genre. Embracing formal and structural multiplicity characterises many professional practice learners such as those in critical social practice, educational and curricular writing, organisational communications, marketing, culinary arts and design. These works of textural or artefact multiplicity, where the research output comprises a portfolio corresponding to the strands of practice, lend themselves to the methodology of the bricoleur, 'bricolage'.

To show how learners in creative and professional practice have already employed bricolage, we present some examples, all pseudonyms and composites, but based on actual completed learner profiles from the first author's experience:

- Jeanette creates sculpted gardens and public sculptures out of a range of meaningful materials and for a range of cultural groups.
- Karen is a creator of in-house communications for an organisation, and her professional practice envelops a range of social impact and creative domains, and notes how bricolage is used in organisational studies.
- Maria is a contributor to regional civics with stories for multiple areas of impact, from the cultural and the ecological to the socio-political and the economic. Bricolage is now a key method used in interpretative sociology.
- Arthur is a respected media commentator who operates across print, radio and video and covers a range of subjects, largely those with social impact.
- Robert is a culinary artist whose curated banquet incorporates a range of eclectic dishes of regional, cultural and historical significance, each of which corresponds to an aspect of his multiple whakapapa.
- Ian is a creative marketer, whose productions incorporate the written, the visual, the filmic and the auditory, both in isolation and combination, and whose portfolio represents forms generated for a gamut of visionary stakeholders.
- Jill creates and curates educational content and materials for online educational programmes, but also works in print, which incorporates such texts as YouTube videos, pamphlets, books and posters.

Adding to the complexity is the fact that in many cases these learner-practitioner-researchers work within teams or collaborate with others or for stakeholders/clients. In these cases, in order to capture the complexity of these learners' professional practice and their roles in a generative process, a broad methodology affording a multiplicity of ways of doing, making and thinking is required. Bricolage is one such methodology.

ALIGNMENT WITH TRANSDISCIPLINARITY

Professional practice, as a discipline allied to work-based learning, and a transdisciplinary approach to enquiry have in common an orientation towards understanding contemporary problems *in evolution* and generating *possibilities* for practical application. These possibilities may or may not end up contributing towards *solutions.* In a transdisciplinary approach, bricolage may be conceived as Stewart (2001, p. 4) saw it: "a pieced together, close-knit set of practices providing possible solutions to a problem in a concrete situation." In other words, a 'solution' can come from multiple projects integrated towards understanding one phenomenon.

A key difference is that transdisciplinarity allows the impetus towards 'solutions' to no longer be essential in research: progress *towards* 'action' is sufficient. This can mean that the positivist urge to solve and prove is out of the picture; instead there is a desire to enquire into, come to understand, and contribute to comprehending complexity, including understanding one's own practice. In a professional nursing research context, de Campos and Ribeiro (2017, p. 3) write: "*bricolage* is elevated due to its characteristic of freedom provided to the researcher, accepting his or her connection with the studied object." There is care and rigour in the investigation, collection and curation of its components and in its method of representation as an entirety – within a frame, a portfolio, a room, a URL. Defining these parameters is the methodical work of the bricoleur. Bricolage potentially affords, Rogers (2012, p. 12) argues, "the plurality and complex political dimensions of knowledge work."

Bricolage deviates from the transdisciplinary approach in that it carries within its fabric the potential to challenge readers/audiences by employing unexpected, irregular or offbeat methods of representation (Wibberley, 2017). The multiple contents of the portfolio comprise various media and forms, any of which may evolve through its own method.

BRICOLAGE AS PORTFOLIO

Although 'found data' generated through a deliberate act of seeking and finding – the etymological heart of 'bricolage' – remains the most famous method of bricolage, a more generative facet can be seen in its use of extended metaphors and symbols which stand for the process of creativity. *Weaving,* as in indigenous methods, is the most universal metaphor (Wibberley, 2017); those of the *mosaic* and the *patchwork,* perhaps, run second and third. In kaupapa Māori, the *kete* may both comprise and contain combinations and multiplicity; the processes of its making and its contents, like process and product in autoethnography, are not logically separable. The kete is understood as a researched set of resources (Jefferies & Kennedy, 2009); as a form of portfolio.

It is valuable for learners and mentors to see that the bricolage method is concordant with a portfolio method of evaluation or assessment, such as that used in visual arts, or creative writing; or in health and social sciences where the portfolio represents evidence of contribution to a range of actions and discourses. It is a kind of collected works, with rigour coming in part from volume of evidence, diversity of discourse and versatility of practice, and partly from the necessity of incorporating reflection (Romova & Andrew, 2011). It creates entireties from bite-sized data chunks both discovered, created and generated through creating innovations. Bricolage effectively applies the *already-known* to the *not-yet-known.* It is possible for a thesis in professional practice as in creative industries to include fiction, poetry, drama and/or visual imagery alongside critical and reflective representations of practice, which are often but not always in a written form. This written form may be considered the professional or academic thread, contributing to the readability of the work.

In professional practice thesis writing, 'the text' can become an authentic record of the multiple facets of an individual's practice. Learners and mentors can conceive that potentially such a text might incorporate such authentic forms as critical incident reports, case or field notes, vignettes, accounts of meetings or other multivocal events, anecdotes and reflections on any of the above or for the explicit purpose of reflective practice as a professional development or enquiry activity. All of these forms are qualitative and interpretative in

that they present feelings, responses, attitudes, perceptions and experiences, and so are grounded in personal convictions and subjective readings of actuality. In other words, they are both ethnographic and narrative, and their underpinning methodology is autoethnographic.

There is nothing in our exploration of bricolage that lessens the criticality and rigour of the method as it pulls together 'art' and 'science' in a unifying way, in the interests, Holman Jones (2005) wrote, of generating analytical, accessible texts that change us, our world and its environments "for the better" (p. 274). Importantly for learners and mentors, bricolage creates new meaning by building on existing scholarship, professional practice and evidence. This evidence can take the form of traditional literature and contextual reviews, or of the genre of secondary data, which includes such in-house documents as policy and contractual documents, mission statements and annual reports, agendas and affirmed records of meetings; any artefact contributing to the culture of the workplace, organisation, community or 'site of practice.' In some professional practice cases, bricolage is valuable for creating thick descriptions of sites of practice (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). The purpose of this, Jorgenson (2002) wrote in the context of understanding an engineering practice environment, was to enable insiders and outsiders alike to understand a culture. For learners and mentors of professional practice work, the methods used to generate and discern patterns of experience included field notes, interviews, and/or artifacts, which can be analysed inductively to listen for recurrent events, feelings, narrative threads, all of which can be told as themes.

Bricolage allows for the multiplicity that characterises many learners' practice. There may be multiple sites of practice because bricoleurs are practitioners of diversity and their impact may be felt in many contexts and evidenced by multiple forms of textuality. Bricolage can also be immersive, so it works as a method for those in passion work, from artists and composers to social activists to social workers and nurses, deeply involved in the affective domains of their individual practices. Within those affective domains are *others* who have feelings, experiences and identities, and it becomes the ethical curatorial work of the bricoleur to be responsible for the representation of others' identities and voices. These identities and voices can be formally heard, gathered and arranged through a range of collection methods such as interviews, focus groups, picture elicitations and narrative frames.

BRICOLAGE AS RETELLING AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC STORIES

The process of representing others, and the implicitness of the 'I' in such representations, can occur through autoethnographic methods, where representation of others happens by way of representing the story of the autoethnographer, where stories may be told or retold on a spectrum from *close account* to *fictionalisation* (Andrew & Le Rossignol, 2017). It can also come from the bricolage method of collecting and curating authentic stories which may vary from raw to safe narrative recreations (Campbell & McNamara, 2007). The ethical imperative of writing, or representing, nothing that may harm readers present or future through its being recognisable, is a given. Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) remind us that when we conduct and write research, we implicate others in our work and must abide by codes of relational ethics (Ellis, 2007). The ethics of bricolage require the same tenets as autoethnography (Tolich, 2010).

The 'text' of the bricoleur may be described in autoethnographic terms. Such texts may be stories curated by what Ellis (2004) called *"the autoethnographic 'I'"*; or, in portfolio terms, a curated collection of framed and represented artefacts, each labelled and annotated to demonstrate critically the contribution of each part to the whole. For the creative or academic writer, the subgenre of the subjective academic narrative is a useful conception (Arnold, 2014, 2015), since it affords and allows multiplicity and understands that what is represented occurs through the subjective lens of the creator, who is also the generator. In other words, both the methods of coming to understand and of representing are the work of the autoethnographic 'I.' In professional practice work, we can understand this subgenre, this mode of representing enquiry, as subjective professional narrative.

More specifically, 'subjective' refers to self and self-understanding as data; 'academic' denotes the privileged intellectual discourse adding to a scholarly conversation, and 'narrative' indicates that all writing that creates knowing participates in a process of storying (Arnold, 2014). There may be overlap between process and product, a feature Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) identify as a feature of autoethnography.

CRITICALITY VIA REFLECTION IN BRICOLAGE

The reflexivity as well as the 'unfolding' emergence that bricolage allows mark it as appropriate for professional practice enquiry capable of challenging "systems and bias" (Johns, 2020, p. 149). Nursing practitioner Johns (2020) mainstages bricolage in a book-length study of narrative reflexive methodology, emphasising its potential to capture the synchronous and the diverse. The emancipatory potential of bricolage is writ large: "in adopting bricolage, the researcher responds to the complexity of self-inquiry and the lived world" (Johns, 2020, p. 19). This adoption, Johns writes, enables researchers to move beyond the demands of any particular methodology, absolving themselves of the need to conform to its rules. The creative process informing a work/text will have its own method, and application of methods will be rigorous. Emphatically, the bricoleur maintains a reflective diary in any form in order to capture the emergent and iterative learnings observed from applying and enacting methods over time.

In professional practice, the dimension of reflectivity must be recorded with discipline and rigour. If process and product are intertwined on the helix of autoethnography, as Ellis, Adam and Bochner (2011) emphasised, then the 'how' and 'why' knowledge processes are best accessed via a reflective form, often a written or spoken word journal. Reflective practice is a core method in the mix (Schön, 1983). As the bricoleur as professional practitioner confronts dilemmas that disorient or are new, unexpected or challenging, reflective learning processes are enacted because they afford professionals the chance to acquire new knowledge and skills for the situation should it recur (Mann et al., 2009). This is the key method for ensuring criticality within the work of the professional practitioner as bricoleur.

Then, once the assemblance is in place, the practitioner can re-examine the product and the processes behind it from a reader's or viewer's point of view, generating critical knowing in the spaces of reflection *on, in* and *for* action (Schön, 1983). At the same time, practitioners reconsider brushes with the unfamiliar, the unforeseen, the perplexing and the destabilising. This is Dewey's 'disequilibrium,' a state we confront in gaining new knowing. We encounter, Dewey (1916/1944) wrote, situations whose "whole full character is not yet determined" (p. 150). Yearning for balance from disequilibrium leads to critical learning via reflection. This process of enquiry affords criticality in bricolage too, as it must in professional practice research.

Before this study concludes, we introduce the narrative reflection of a completed learner on the Doctor of Professional Practice and a professed bricoleur. This narrative exemplifies some of the way that the elements of bricolage operate in authentic practice spaces as a medium for liberatory praxis.

BRICOLAGE IN ACTION: A LEARNER REFLECTION

Imagine you have a celebration coming up, and for weeks you have been planning an incredible cake to serve to your guests. But there is a problem: you can't find a recipe that will give you the outcome you are looking for, and there is a global pandemic happening at that time, so some of the ingredients you would usually use are not available. You have choices. Do you (a) give up on the vision you had, and go with someone else's recipe, or do you (b) adapt your plan to the resources you have and create something authentically you, with what you have on hand? If you chose (b), welcome to the bricoleur club!

When Lévi-Strauss described the bricoleur in *The Savage Mind* (1962), he painted a picture of a capable, creative, problem solver who has amassed a collection of useful skills learned from practice, that they could adapt, to help them achieve their objectives. The bricoleur does not concern themselves with the rules around the traditional use of a tool, they concern themselves with the job at hand and the tools they have do it.

My name is Mawera, and I am a bricoleur. I am not a traditional academic, even when I try hard to be one (how I perceive them to be). High school was not a great experience for me, and at times I have found tertiary learning a struggle. Some people seem to have a knack for following the rules set down by others and conform with ease. I missed out on that gene, and the absence of it has been the cause of much conflict in my life.

Through my formal education journey, my brain has always looked for signs of what Roger Waters wrote as "thought control" in the 1979 song, "Another Brick in the Wall." Where I see control, I rebel against it. Education should be enabling, not controlling. People should be enabled, not controlled. Yes, there are some conventions that we can't push back against – if we seek to obtain recognition for knowledge and experience, we need to produce something that can be measured against a standard. But how we get to that place has traditionally been set in stone, and that stone can be a barrier for learners. Our system of education and educational assessment were designed by a dominant culture, for its own members. It has been a system of oppression for learners who exist outside of the dominant culture. I am one of those learners.

I am a 50-year-old wahine mau moko and a lifelong learner. I want to learn more and incorporate that learning into my practice, but I cannot thrive in a place where what I know is less relevant than how well I conform. Bricolage has enabled me. Bricolage as a method has allowed me to bring all that I know, and all that I am on the academic journey. It has valued my lived experience, my areas of endeavour, my practice, and my voice, in its many forms. It has allowed me to bridge over the rules and conventions of traditional academia, that would have stopped me from achieving my goals. Using bricolage as a method, I have been able to express my authentic self, and have produced work that I feel proud of. I have been able to reflect on my life of service and share ideas with others.

CONCLUSION

The methodology known as 'bricolage' has vast potential for creative mentors comfortable with non-fixedness and those open to the possibilities that transdisciplinarity holds for addressing wicked problems. It is a methodology that accommodates the unpredictability of the COVID-19 era. It has value for learners in professional practice whose practice has multiple tentacles and may benefit from a portfolio or repository mode of presentation. Bricolage, we have started to show, has moved beyond its early sense of *making do* with collected objects and carries with it a range of potentialities that render it a valuable strategy for the practitioner portfolio/ thesis. Among these positive facets are:

- its potential to allow multiplicity, eclecticism and diversity in practice;
- its alignment with a transdisciplinary approach, and to afford the 'who' and not just the 'what';
- its applicability to curate a material portfolio method of presenting collections of outputs that is strategic, not merely 'mix-and-match';
- its capability to embody and encourage reflectivity and line up with the critical impetus;
- its non-instrumentalist ability to allow for poetic and liberatory praxis, both in terms of operating in a social change and sustainability space, and its ability to free researchers from the bonds of conventions that are not validating creativity.
- its capacity for affirming authenticity within real world professional practice contexts.

This article explores the potential of bricolage as a methodology for professional practice. It suggests mentors need to understand that bricolage is a useful methodology for curating the multiple, eclectic and emergent texts of some professional practitioners. However, mentors need also to be wary that such curation must necessarily be accompanied by critical reflection. As we move into an increasingly uncertain COVID-era period, the spaces of interpretative and spatial bricolage, further off-chutes of the bricolage discussed here, have the potential to inform professional practice (Roberts, 2018). Mentors and learners can view bricolage as a methodology of possibility, emergence and authenticity. We close with our learner's haiku:

A bricolage
allows my authentic voice
my knowledge counts.

Martin Andrew operates as a creative mentor in postgraduate programmes, including Master and Doctorate degrees in Professional Practice. Prior to his four to five years supporting the College of Work Based Learning in Otago, New Zealand, he had sojourned away from his hometown of Ōtepoti/Dunedin with two honorary posts at Melbourne universities in Creative Industries and Transnational Education (TNE). His work and research have become increasingly focussed on doctorate education and supporting learners to reach their own personal best through critically reflective practice and writing. A trans-disciplinarian, he emphasises that his past disciplines have included Education, Drama, Linguistics and Writing, Creative and otherwise. He holds honorary positions in Australia, Vietnam and Indonesia.

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0108-5195

Educator, facilitator, governor, entrepreneur, and mediator, **Mawera Karetai** brings a diverse perspective to her communities. Mawera's research interests are in education, environment, and social justice. Her current work is in identifying barriers to success in education, particularly for those who are marginalised and discriminated against. Based in Whakatāne, Mawera is active in te ao Māori and enjoys working with groups to build relationships and capabilities.

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9646-0962

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