



The arts of making sense

Deborah Green

with Naomi Pears-Scown, Mary Weir, Istvan Csata, Rosa Heney, Mary McGeever, Rei Lambert, Kathrin Marks, Ingrid Wang

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Introduction

Arts-Based Research through Autoethnography (ABR + A) makes sense of arts therapy by inviting heart/head/body/soul/context/theory into creative conversations. Researchers engage physical senses, implicit soul- or felt-senses, and/or heart- and head-led senses to chart a new sense of direction. I'm Deborah Green, and I teach at Whitecliffe College of Arts & Design (New Zealand). Today I'm joined by seven Arts Therapy Masters students – Naomi, Mary, Istvan, Rosa, Mary, Rei and Kathrin; and one who couldn't be in Melbourne in person, Ingrid. We will weave together a cartographic bricolage of creatively storied vignettes detailing our expeditions through the terrain of ABR + A. We will explore pre-journey jitters and joys, traverse topographic highs and lows, and gaze back at emergent map/s only visible at the journey's end.

Let's begin by getting in touch with ABR + A in a practical way. Take a deep breath and settle. Take time to come to your senses – notice the weight of your body and the sensations on your skin; pay attention to what you can smell and taste; become aware of what you can see and hear... and now listen even more deeply to your own breathing and heartbeat. Ask these inner sounds to take you to the heart of your researcher-self. Settle here and be attentive – you are not judging, you are welcoming and curious. Notice the colours and shapes, the smells and sounds, the tastes and textures of your researcher-self. Once you have a sense of this self/s, join us as we share our research experiences...

Beginning our ABR+A journey

Naomi Pears-Scown

Noticing the hues of my research environment

My precious hands you know where to go. Feeling your way over this map, over this landscape spread before you.

My precious fingers, you absorb the colours around you.

They are the hues surrounding my hilltop home, the hues of the dusty blue mountains rolling and overlapping in the distance, and the dense, layered, uncultivated native bush in the foreground, rising on the hill opposite me.

Down in the deeper, darker parts of the valley, my eyes drift south to the ocean. Deep, rich blues and greys, ripples of windswept waves just visible in the harbour. And above, the ever-changing, fast-moving clouds pass through the valley. Mostly they are monochromatic tones of grey, a neutral backdrop for the vibrant greens. But, sometimes, the depths of the blue sky take my breath away. On mornings when I wake up to total stillness, and my eyes are drawn further and further back into the mountain

range, I think I can almost detect the grains of earth and rock on the colourful slopes.

My environment, my topography, my landscape, my map grounds me. It provides me with a point of reference. And from here, I begin to put words to my research wonderings. This place holds me. How can I hold it? I am part of it, and I desire for it to be more a part of me.

The hues of my environment guide my research process.

I wonder about what my art-making will look like in my research journey, and I wonder about what my footsteps will look like too. I wonder about the earth under me, that which will hold me, and I wonder about my hands, my tools.

My story of walking feels most appropriately told through an arts-based, autoethnographic lens. I sense it is the most genuine and authentic way to explore questions that are so integral to who I am as a person, and who I want to become as an arts

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