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PROCEEDINGS OF THE INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON TRANSFORMATIVE IDEAS IN A CHANGING WORLD

THE GLOBAL SOLIDARITY CRISIS


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Dewey, Habermas, and Bakhtin: The Epistemology for Autoethnography and Narrative Inquiry⁸⁸

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In this paper, I discuss the importance of Dewey, Habermas, and Bakhtin's ideas for grounding the epistemology of autoethnography and narrative inquiry. As emerging methods of inquiry, autoethnography and narrative inquiry are both qualitative research methods that put the emphasis on experience and subjectivity – a great leap from the positivists' perspective on research, which emphasizes on objectivity and generalizability. For epistemological ground, Dewey (1929a, 1929b) contributes to our understanding on experience and reflexivity as the basis for generating knowledge. Habermas (1981), on the other hand, completes Dewey's naturalistic views on experience with a critical perspective and the socio-cultural factors which shape our experience. In addition, Habermas also contributes in framing experience in three types of truth claims: subjective truth claim, objective truth claim, and normative truth claim. Completing the endeavor to ground autoethnography and narrative inquiry into a sound epistemology, Bakhtin (1981) offers a framework of understanding experience in terms of unending dialogue. One's experience as narrated in an autoethnography or stories can be understood as a dialogue, responding to past events and inviting to future responses. In this way, experience is understood in terms of diglossic world where dominant voice suppresses less dominant ones. Basing on the three philosophers' perspectives, I believe that autoethnography and narrative inquiry have strong groundwork to investigate experience-based knowledging. Especially in education where experience is central in professional growth of teachers and educators, autoethnography and narrative inquiry can be a productive avenue for research, professional development, and empowerment. More importantly, this epistemology will be able to be critical on injustice, be able to empower the oppressed, and be able to enhance solidarity among those who fight for the betterment of human kind.

Key Words: Dewey; Habermas, Bakhtin, autoethnography, narrative inquiry

Introduction

Epistemology is related to the way of knowing or simply how we create knowledge that we can pass on to the next generation and to the public. For autoethnography and narrative inquiry, emerging popular research methods in education and social sciences, the main sources of knowledge we generate is our experience. Generating knowledge from experience, however, has brought about debate as experience may not be reliable and is more subjective—depending on unreliable senses and memories which are prone to forgetfulness.

In this debate on knowledging from experience, autoethnography and narrative inquiry, this paper outlines the basis of those two approaches by looking at Dewey, Habermas, and

⁸⁸ Originally, this paper is a part of my dissertation (Yumarnamto, 2016). For this conference, I have made some changes to reflect current development in the field of qualitative research and the transformation of my perspective on autoethnography and narrative inquiry as well as focusing the discussion on the nature of knowledging in education inquiry.

Bakhtin. Dewey is an American philosopher, specializing on education. His contribution to education philosophy is central in his inquiry on experience as a source of knowledge. Habermas, with his social philosophy, is critical to the current modern and postmodern reality. Finally, I also put the fundamentals of the epistemology of autoethnography and narrative inquiry on Bakhtin, a Russian philosopher and literary critic who developed the philosophy of language on the basis of dialogic tradition.

Bringing together Dewey, Habermas, and Bakhtin for the epistemological foundation of my autoethnography enterprise may seem like an impossible feat of trying to fit three different worlds together into a tight space, but it is not my purpose to collapse three different views of the world into a single epistemology for my autoethnography. My intention of bringing them together is two-fold. First, I intend to highlight my embrace of a sociocultural perspective in which meanings are created *in situ* and bounded in time and space that is influenced by sociocultural factors in a dialogic process. Dewey, Habermas, and Bakhtin serve my purpose by providing the foundation for relating experience, reflection, and organic development, along with intersubjectivity and validity claims, in the process of dialogism. Second, the framework I build for my autoethnography is not monophonic but multivoiced, being diglossic or even multiglossic in Bakhtin's terms. Indeed, although it is my story, in the narrative there are many different voices that have shaped and reshaped my professional identity. Bakhtin's ideas provide me with a space for dialogic conversation with my past experiences, Dewey's with experiential epistemology, and Habermas' with a critical perspective and validity claims.

Autoethnography

Personal experience, which is central in autoethnography create tension in terms of knowledging. Can personal experience be justified for generating knowledge? As suggested by Ellis et al. (2011), "writing an autobiography, an author retroactively and selectively writes about past experiences" (p, 275)." Therefore, in writing an autoethnography, the researcher has dual roles, as the researcher and as the subject being researched.

Dewey's notions of experience and reflective action play two important roles in the process of selecting and highlighting my experiences. Experience as conceptualized by Dewey (1929a) can have meaning only when it is significant and can bring about growth personally and professionally. This growth, which is naturalistic in Dewey's conception, depends on reflection on past experience. In this way, my autoethnography is both analytical and evocative. Also, it is reflective and dialogic in that, as Ellis (2004) has commented, "a reflexive connection exists between the lives of participants and researchers that must be explored. And the relationship between writers and readers of the texts is one of involvement and participation." (p. 30)

Unlike a wholly analytic autoethnography in which a strict objectivity is maintained and from which subjective bias is expunged, I unapologetically acknowledge that my autoethnography

involves subjective perspectives as suggested by Denzin (2006) in his characterization of the nature and functions of ethnography in a pedagogical context:

Ethnography is not an innocent practice. Our research practices are performative, pedagogical, and political. Through our writing and our talk, we enact the worlds we study. These performances are messy and pedagogical. They instruct our readers about this world and how we see it. The pedagogical is always moral and political; by enacting a way of seeing and being, it challenges, contests, or endorses the official, hegemonic ways of seeing and representing the other. (Denzin, 2006, p. 422)

The subjectivity that Denzin represents as performative, pedagogical, and political well serves my purpose to explore my professional identity formation as an Indonesian English teacher and educator. As a person who was raised and educated in Indonesia, I have experienced and engaged with the tension of being an English teacher in a setting in which my nonnativeness is often questioned and the government keeps changing its policies for the sake of reforms and continuing development. Unlike Denzin (2006) and Ellis (2004), my autoethnography does not rest in the opposing view. I do not view the evocative and performative as in opposition to the analytical autoethnography (Anderson, 2006; Atkinson, 2006). Rather, my approach is aligned with that of Burnier (2006), who asserts that autoethnography is inherently both evocative and analytic, and the two characteristics should not be separated. In his words, “Autoethnographic writing is both personal and scholarly, both evocative and analytical, and it is both descriptive and theoretical when it is done well.” (p. 414)

The Narrative Inquiry

The Narrative Inquiry is a way of knowledging as well as a research method as suggested by Connelly and Clandinin (1990), McAdams (1993), Riessman (2008) and Barkhuizen (2011). While McAdams uses narrative to explore the human mythmaking process, Connelly and Clandinin, Riessman, and Barkhuizen highlight the nature of knowledging as a process of constructing and reconstructing knowledge and identities. In line with this conception, Connelly and Clandinin suggest that narratives can reflect ways in which humans experience make sense of the world:

... the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world. This general concept is refined into the view that education and educational research is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; learners, teachers, and researchers are storytellers and characters in their own and other's stories. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2)

With regard to teachers' narratives, Johnson and Golombek (2002), put the emphasis on narrative as professional development. They argue that the notions embedded in narrative

inquiry can be traced back to Dewey's conceptions of the nature of knowing and the nature of experience. They summarize Dewey's core idea by saying, "we are all knowers who reflect on experience, confront the unknown, make sense of it, and take action" (p. 2). In this way, narrative inquiry is an inquiry into experience. Therefore, narrative is both the method and the phenomenon (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 5). As a method in which a phenomenon is investigated through stories lived and told, it falls under qualitative research methodology. In Riessman's (2008) conception, "narrative analysis refers to a family of methods for interpreting texts that have in common a storied form" (p. 11). Narrative inquiry is a method of inquiry affecting research purposes and design and a method of analysis. In a dialogic process between the researcher and the participants, narratives are constructed through intersubjectivity. According to Riessman, narratives can refer to texts at overlapping levels, which she describes as follows:

The term narrative in the human sciences can refer to texts at several levels that overlap: stories told by research participants (which are themselves interpretative), interpretive accounts developed by an investigator based on interviews and fieldwork observation (a story about stories), and even the narrative a reader constructs after engaging with the participant's and investigator's narratives. (p. 6)

In these multiple levels of texts, a narrative can also be perceived as a continuum from a discrete unit of discourse at one end to an entire life history at the other end (Riessman, 2008, p. 5). Personal accounts such as those shared in therapeutic conversations with psychologists occupy the middle range of the continuum. The narratives I collected are not from therapeutic conversations but from interviews and continuing consultations with the participants. These narratives of the subjects' experiences embodied their life events and their actions as lived and recounted in our dialogues. Specifically, the narratives that I collected were the source material for my reconstructions of the subjects' life histories, in which I identified critical events which were pertinent to their professional identity formation as English teachers and educators.

In his essay *Life in quest of narratives*, Ricoeur (1991) traced the relation between life and story. First, he explained the commonly accepted adage that story is recounted and life is lived, which denotes a gap between life and story. To bridge the gap, Ricoeur concluded by using the term "a life recounted," indicating that an individual's life story represents the subjective and interpretative experiences of the person as author and so is not separate from but an extension of the person's life.

The terms "life story" and "life history" are often used interchangeably to refer to the same genre of narrative that encompasses a person's history including the events s/he experienced along with their significance for current situations or a future trajectory. In my inquiry, I prefer to use the term "life history" to refer to the narratives I co-constructed with the subjects. They are co-constructed narratives because they emerged in interviews in which the subjects answered questions I posed as an interviewer, a listener and a researcher. The co-

constructed narratives are not simply stories without objective truth validation, but rather they are life histories that represent memorable events and actions as experienced by the subjects. I agree with the contrast Titon (1980) drew between the nature of story and of history:

A story is made, but history is found out. Story is language at play; history is language at work. The language of story is charged with power: it creates. The language of history is charged with knowledge: it discovers. Story is a literature of the imagination; history, though it [can] be imaginative, drives toward fact. (Titon, 1980, p. 278)

In this conception, I use the term life history to refer to the co-constructed narratives of the participants as they shared narratives of facts, life events and significant episodes in a process of knowledge creation based on the epistemologies of Dewey, Habermas and Bakhtin. In this process of knowledging, my narrative inquiry is analytical (Anderson, 2006) as well as evocative (Carolyn Ellis, 1991, 2004; Carolyne Ellis, 2012; Carolyn Ellis & Bochner, 2006).

Dewey's Epistemology: Experience, Reflection, and Subjectivity

Dewey's thoughts on knowledge are very different from those of empiricists and realists. Dewey's cardinal critique of both perspectives lies in his rejection of a dualistic view of the world, by which human beings are the subjects and the world is the object (Dewey, 1929a, 1929b). In line with his naturalistic views, Dewey (1929a) puts emphasis on human existence as a part of the natural world, in which human actions and nature affect each other. In Dewey's conception, the dynamics of human existence will not allow knowledge to be stable as contexts and subjects keep changing in a continual creation of immediacy.

In Dewey's sphere of epistemological concepts, I highlight his conceptions of experience, reflective thought, and subjectivity; these three concepts are relevant to my autoethnography and narrative inquiry enterprise. Accordingly, in this section I explain how Dewey's concepts of experience, reflection and subjectivity (Dewey, 1929a, 1929b) provide a strong foundation for my qualitative study. Autoethnography and narrative inquiry are grounded on human experience as mediated by reflection on the part of subjects who live in the world and interact with nature, other human beings, and themselves.

Dewey's Experience. Dewey's notion of experience is explained in his book *Experience and Nature* (Dewey, 1929a). In defining experience, Dewey relates it to human interactions with the nature.

It is not experience which is experienced, but nature – stones, plants, animals, diseases, health, temperature, electricity, and so on. Things interacting in certain ways are experience; they are what is experienced. Linked in certain other ways with another natural object – the human organism – they are how things are experienced as well. Experience thus reaches down into nature, it has depth. It also has breadth and to an indefinitely elastic extent. (Dewey, 1929a, p. 4a)

Experience, then, is an encounter with nature, with other people, and with the self. We experience our experiences when we are in contact with nature and with other human beings and with ourselves. Autoethnography and narrative inquiry begin with the subjects' experiences of the world, other people and themselves, which are the pool of data from which they can draw for their inquiry to generate their own knowledge of a certain subject matter. In my autoethnography, as I focused on understanding my own professional identity formation, I systematically collected my experiences from my encounters with the world, with other people around me and with myself. In my narrative inquiry, I began with collecting stories from the subjects and reconstructing the stories to identify critical events in their life histories and the significance of the events for their professional identity formation. Both methods were based on subjects' experiences as told in narratives, connecting life events with their professional lives as English educators.

As the purpose of Dewey's conception of experience was to develop his education philosophy, which put emphasis on experiential learning in which human beings take actions in the world, his concept of experience can also be understood as transactional (Connell, 1996). A self that experiences nature, has encounters with other people, and contemplates his/her self is a self that already has prior knowledge and prior experiences, which eventually influence the way he/she perceives nature and his/her encounters with other people and with her/himself. In this process of making meaning of the encounters, which I will explain further in discussion of the next important concept, reflective thought, both parties are in transaction: the subject and the object, the theory and the practice. In this way, the dualistic views of the world developed since the ancient Greeks do not make sense in generating knowledge, as subject and object, theory and practice are intertwined and influence each other.

Dewey's concept of experience brings us to the understanding of his epistemology. For Dewey, knowing means constructing knowledge in a world that is not stable. So, there is no stable or objective knowledge. In this sense, Boyles (2006) highlights Dewey's conception of knowing as warranted assertions:

By "knowing" Dewey meant inquiry in a world that is not static. He meant inquiry into things 'live' by people. He meant experimenting with solving problems such that the action entailed in the solving of problems is inquiry, such that "warrant" is a property of assertions made about the problem when it is solved (where "solved" is understood as a temporal phase which is also a portal to further inquiry). (Boyles, 2006, p. 61)

In summary, experience takes a central role in Dewey's philosophy and his epistemology. The idea of encounters with the changing world, with different people, and with the changing self- marks the uniqueness of Dewey's conception of experience. Of importance here, Dewey's conception provides a strong foundation for my inquiry, which is based on the importance of experience. In my autoethnography I grounded my inquiry on my own subjective experiences, and in conducting narrative inquiry I delved into others' subjective experiences. Both, my own

and others' experiences are the sources of productive knowledge and support a legitimate way of knowledging.

Dewey's Reflective Thought. The second important concept that is central to my autoethnography and narrative inquiry is reflection. Dewey perceived reflection as a systematic mode of thinking. According to Dewey, reflection should be a deliberate effort of thinking about certain beliefs, knowledge, or experiences. Consistent with his naturalistic view, he considered the purpose of reflection to be growth. Dewey's concept of reflection as a mode of thinking is outlined in his 1910 work, *How We Think* and appears in various contexts with various emphases as reflective thought, reflection, and reflective thinking. He defined this mode of thinking as "*active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends, constitutes reflective thought.*" (Dewey, 1910, p. 10)

As a deliberate effort to understand, therefore, reflection is also a mode of inquiry. It is the process of making meaning of human experiences when a human being encounters nature, other selves and the self. These encounters, which embody our experiences, will be meaningful and accumulated as our knowledge when we reflect on them, that is, when we deliberately and systematically think about those experiences, question our beliefs or disbeliefs, clarify our doubts, resolve conflicts and tensions, and perpetually claim and reclaim our identity.

As acknowledged by Ellis (2004), "autoethnography sure is painful sometimes" (p. 23). Reflection as the main mode of thinking about our experiences in autoethnography can indeed be troubling and might bring about "a condition of mental unrest and disturbance" (Dewey, 1910, p. 13). Reflection in autoethnography as conceptualized by Ellis (2004), is a very powerful tool to understand experiences and emotions when we encounter nature with its living organisms, including other people with whom we interact and our own selves, with whom we engage in dialogue and acknowledge our pride and our mistakes and all thoughts that we keep hidden from the public. This reflective thought understandably creates tension and as Dewey (1910) acknowledged, "suspense is likely to be somewhat painful" (p. 13).

In relation to experience, reflection is very important in freeing us from routines and traditions that might limit our horizon and hinder our growth. Dewey emphasizes his naturalistic views when he says:

Experience is not a rigid and closed thing; it is vital, and hence growing. When dominated by the past, by custom and routine, it is often opposed to the reasonable, the thoughtful. But experience also includes the reflection that sets us free from the limiting influence of sense, appetite, and tradition. " (Dewey, 1910, p. 156)

Therefore, in Dewey's conception, reflection is central in the process of knowledging. As we live in a particular sociocultural sphere, we inherit the beliefs, myths, and all the social fabric that make us members. Reflective thought, as conceptualized by Dewey, enables us

to question and to find a better ground for our beliefs, or in the opposite direction debunk and demystify what we believe and what we embrace as a member of a sociocultural group. Reflective thought, then, is a part and parcel of my inquiry to understand the human experience and to create knowledge which is meaningful for our lives as well as pedagogical for our professional growth.

Dewey's Subjectivity. As outlined in the first chapter (i.e. "Escape from Peril") of *The Quest for Certainty*, Dewey (1929b) was critical of the dualistic view of the world. We have inherited our understanding of the world in dualistic terms: the supernatural realm and the natural realm, theory and practice, subject and object. In the case of theory and practice, the former is considered stable while the latter is considered unstable—always in transformation. And as human beings who have made a great effort to pursue certainty, we cannot escape from uncertainty because we live in and are part of the natural world. Consequently, when we act upon nature, our actions will also affect us, the subject.

Explaining the origins of the tradition of the dualistic view, Dewey highlighted its contrived nature and limitations:

The philosophical tradition regarding knowledge and practice, the immaterial or spiritual and the material, was not original and primitive. It had for its background the state of culture which has been sketched. It developed in a social atmosphere in which the division of the ordinary and extraordinary was domesticated. Philosophy reflected upon it and gave it a rational formulation and justification. (Dewey, 1929b, p. 13)

In the case of epistemology, positivist philosophers and scientists have tried to purify the object of observation from the taint of subjectivity. For Dewey, the view of human beings as the masters of nature led to the objectification of the observation of externalities to generate knowledge about the world, which he considered to be limiting because while we are acting upon an object, we are also influencing the subject, and while we are acting upon nature, we are also shaping nature and ourselves. Consequently, the relation between subject and object is transactional: we act upon an object and the object acts upon us so that we shape and reshape the object, while we are shaped and reshaped in the process. So, both subjects and objects exercise agency as they are actively involved in changing the world. As noted by Hollebeke (2004), this active involvement highlights the agency in the transactional process.

... there is no one supreme seat of action, no single causal source of becoming; the external and linear conception of cause and effect oversimplifies the plurality of acts that conspire to bring about and actualize latent potentiality in nature. (Hollebeke, 2004, p. 5)

The blurred demarcation between subject and object is pertinent to my autoethnography and narrative inquiry. I, the researcher, inquired about "myself" and investigated my own experiences in my autoethnography. Similarly, in the narrative inquiry, I became involved in the

construction of participants' narratives as I engaged in continuing dialogues with the events and actions of their experiences. This approach to the exploration of teachers' professional identity formation is in line with Dewey's view of subjectivity from a transactional perspective, which in turn is in line with Habermas' truth validity claims that I discuss in the subsequent section.

Habermas' Triadic Truth Validity Claims

As pointed out by Connell (1996), Dewey's epistemology is marked by his lack of attention to the sociocultural dimensions around the knower and his underestimation of the importance of power relations, ideas that are emphasized in current critical studies. These two voids can be filled by Habermas' critical ideas, which highlight the importance of sociocultural factors in the process of knowing, including power relations and the three validity claims explained in Habermas' (1981) *Theory of Communicative Action*. Therefore, in this section, I highlight Habermas' critiques of positivism and the role of subject and intersubjectivity in generating truth, the epistemology on which my autoethnography and the narrative inquiry methodologies are grounded.

Habermas' truth validity claim theory provides a strong foundation for the legitimation of experience-based narrative interpretation. Because autoethnography and narrative inquiry are based on my interpretation of my own and my subjects' narratives, Habermas' validity claims for knowledge generation based on interpretation are crucial to my study.

Habermas introduced his pragmatic theory as the basis for his critical theory of society. According to this perspective, as we communicate, we are simultaneously making claims about truth, about rightness, and about the truthfulness of our utterances. As McCarthy (1981) has asserted, these three validity claims are related to the fact that when we speak, we "relate to the world about us, to other subjects, to our own intentions, feelings, and desires" (p. x). Consequently, as summarized by Finlayson (2005), "Habermas argues that any sincere speech-act makes three different validity claims: a validity claim to truth; a validity claim to rightness; and a validity claim to truthfulness." (p. 35)

First, the validity claim of truth is related to the objective world that we claim. When we say that *a dog has four legs*, we are making a claim, based on an objective measure, that in our world a dog normally has four legs. This validity claim is based on our senses and can be compatible with the positivist tradition. Second, the validity claim of rightness is related to the accepted norms and values of a society. When we say "Plagiarism is bad," according to Habermas, we actually intend to say "Don't plagiarize." There is no objective truth value in the utterance since there is no objective measure in the world that can validate it; therefore, we measure the rightness of the utterance with certain norms or values we embrace. Finally, the third, the validity claim of truthfulness is related to subjective truthfulness, such as when we say "I am tired." When I say it to a friend of mine, I make a subjective claim that at the time of speaking, indeed I am tired, not telling a lie so that I can stay at home relaxing.

These validity claims as reflected in our utterances are important concepts that underlie the epistemology of my autoethnography and narrative inquiry. In my autoethnography, I explored my professional identity formation as an English teacher and an educator, and in doing so I was making those three validity claims as I related my narrative with the objective world, with the norms and values of a particular society, and with myself as subject of the inquiry as well as the inquirer. Similarly, in my narrative inquiry, the participants also made subjective claims about themselves and I, the researcher, was interpreting these claims in dialogue with them. Therefore, the validity of my inquiry lies not in objective measurement quantified with numbers but in the honesty of my subjects and my faithfulness in recording and transcribing the data.

In summary, as qualitative inquiry based on interpretation, my research methods of autoethnography and narrative inquiry do not avoid subjectivity. In the process of collecting data, data analysis and presenting the results, I acknowledge subjectivity and the effects of subjectivity on the process of knowledging. This acknowledged subjectivity may be limiting in that my inquiry may not allow for generalization to all cases in the field, but at the same time it can also be empowering by highlighting the agencies of the subjects involved in this inquiry.

Bakhtin's Dialogic Enterprise

In addition to Dewey's concepts of experience and reflection and Habermas' three validity claims as conceptual bases for my autoethnography and narrative inquiry, Bakhtin's (1981) dialogic epistemology and fresh perspective on history and narratives are relevant to my autoethnography and narrative inquiry. Bakhtin's ideas emerged from his exploration and analysis of literary works, from which he outlined his idea on dialogism, one of the important concepts upon which he built his philosophy on language and society. Here, in tracing my own and others' professional identity development through my autoethnography and the participants' life histories, the concepts that mainly framed my endeavor were from Bakhtin's dialogism. Within the framework of dialogism, I can display and share myself with the readers, not as a hero or a character fully defined in fiction, but as a person whose story is a process, not a plot. Similarly, within the framework of dialogism, the different voices in participants' stories can come to the surface. I view my own and others' stories as always in progress. This view is similar to Bakhtin's view of the novel as "the sole genre that continues to develop, that is as yet uncompleted." (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 2)

Although Bakhtin's dialogic concept developed from his analysis of novels, the implications of this concept expand beyond literary criticism to philosophy of language and social theory. In this discussion, however, I limit myself to Bakhtin's dialogic concepts and how knowledge is generated in the dialogic process. As a caveat, Bakhtin did not explicitly relate dialogism to his epistemology. However, his conceptions about the nature of agency in a polyglot world shed light on his ideas about generating knowledge as a dialogic process.

Bakhtin viewed the world as a polyglot arena in which languages are in relation to each other. In his view, “the period of national languages, coexisting but closed and deaf to each other, comes to an end. Languages throw light on each other: one language can, after all, see itself only in the light of another language” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 12). In this way, a dominant language in society might assert its power and less dominant languages also struggle for a space to be acknowledged. Languages, then, should always be understood in dialogic process with each other.

In this conception, Bakhtin views language as utterances which are part of a larger dynamic context of communication, not as completed statements waiting for interpretation but as assertions responding to previous utterances as well as provoking new responses. Thus, continuing streams of dialogic utterances shape and reshape the world as conceived by speakers and listeners as well as by writers and readers. Between the two interlocutors exists a space where words are in action, realizing the actual meanings, which are bounded by space and time. As concluded by Morris (1994), Bakhtin’s epistemology highlights that language is “active creative capacity” (p. 4). In this way, Bakhtin’s views on language are complex, regarding it as always in motion and at the boundary of overarching oppositions: monoglossia versus polyglossia, centripetal force versus centrifugal force, and the sacrosanct versus the carnal.

Using this dynamic concept of language, or more precisely utterances, meaning making takes place in a dialogical process, an ongoing conversation between two entities in which words (*slovo*) enact their potential for realizing meanings. I agree with Holquist (2002) when he summarizes Bakhtin’s dialogic process as a relation between self and other:

Dialogism argues that all meaning is relative in the sense that it comes about only as a result of the relation between two bodies occupying simultaneous but different space, where bodies may be thought of as ranging from the immediacy of our physical bodies, to political bodies and to bodies of ideas in general (ideologies). (Holquist, 2002, p. 19)

Here, Bakhtin’s dialogic process is a never-ending process of creating meanings in which the relations between two bodies are witnessed and interpreted by others, who are also involved in the dialogue and the meaning making processes. In the autoethnography as well as in the narrative inquiry, this meaning making takes place among many parties involved in the dialogues. In my autoethnography, I engaged in a dialogue with my past self as well as with the current world to understand how my professional identity has been and is being shaped and reshaped. Similarly, in the narrative inquiry, I witnessed and vicariously experienced the dialogues of others with themselves and with the world in a particular time and space. As the researcher and therefore the interpreter of the participants’ narratives, I was also in dialogue with them in co-creating knowledge and truth claims about their professional identity formation. As concluded by Holquist (2002), therefore, “conceiving being dialogically means that reality is always experienced, not just perceived, and further that it is experienced from a particular position.” (p. 19)

In summary, Bakhtin's epistemology, which is based in dialogue, enables interpretation of human experiences to reveal not only the main narrative but also minor narratives, the suppressed voices, which are hidden and tacit rather than directly expressed and hence less likely to be acknowledged. My autoethnography and narrative inquiry delved into the subjects' experiences, in dialogue with other experiences in the framework of past and present selves, to create meanings from the events and actions of their ongoing lives. The dialogic enterprise opens personal experiences to have dialogues with the wider worlds and to bring suppressed narratives to the surface.

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