Trust the Researcher?
Autoethnography as a Tool to Study English Teaching Professionals

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AUTOETHNOGRAPHY (AE) – 1

Function of AE

- "pursues the ultimate goal of cultural understanding underlying autobiographical experiences." (Chang, 2008, p. 49)

Value of AE

- Acknowledges relativism and the multiplicity of identities (Burnier, 2006; Mirhosseini, 2016)

- Useful for the examination of contextual or cultural nuances (Chapelle & Duff, 2003)

AE – 2

- AE studies have involved
  - Educators
  - Social workers
  - Medical professionals
  - Clergy
  - Counselors
    - To examine social relations (between self and others)

AE – 3

- Because AE has an interest in the 'self', this paradigm allows the self to reason and interpret experiences, making sense-making more visible to the readers

Types of AE

- Evocative AE

- Analytic AE

WHICH TYPE OF AE APPROACH?

- Among autoethnographers
  - To be analytical?
    - To situate the study within a theoretical framework
  - To be evocative?
    - To tell a story as it is

EVOCATIVE AE

- Is a "cognitive awareness", which includes the "emotional, bodily and spiritual reactions" (Ellis, 1997, p. 116).

- Delivers a narrative accessible to a larger and more varied audience, and not confine it to a select group of people (i.e. scholars or academics).

- Renders the social sciences more useful as it enables 'silenced voices' to speak up for themselves.

EVOCATIVE AE – 2

Ellis and Bochner (2006, p. 433)

- [a]utoethnography shows **struggle**, **passion**, **embodied life**, and the **collaborative creation of sense-making** in situations in which people have to cope with dire circumstances and loss of meaning. Autoethnography wants the reader **to care**, **to feel**, **to empathize**, and **to do something**, to act. It needs the researcher to be **vulnerable** and **intimate**. Intimacy is a way of being, a mode of caring, and it shouldn't be used as a vehicle to produce distanced theorizing. **What are we giving to the people with whom we are intimate, if our higher purpose is to use our joint experiences to produce theoretical abstractions published on the pages of scholarly journals?** (emphasis in bold added)

EVOCATIVE AE – 3

- The representation of AE is that of a 'creative non-fiction'
  - Monologue
  - Dialogue

ANALYTIC AE

- A.k.a. auto-anthropology, auto-biographical ethnography or sociology, personal or self-narrative research and writing

- Analytic AE has five key features (Anderson, 2006)

  1. complete member researcher (CMR) status – an immersed position of an ethnographer within the context under examination;

  2. analytic reflexivity – "an awareness of reciprocal influence between ethnographers and their settings and informants", entailing a "self-conscious introspection guided by a desire to better understand both self and others through examining one's actions and perceptions in reference to and dialogue with those of others." (p. 385);

ANALYTIC AE – 2

3. narrative visibility, or 'textual visibility' that illustrates the ethnographer's 'personal engagement' through 'recounting their own experiences and thoughts as well as those of others', on top of 'changes in their beliefs and relationships over the course of fieldwork' (p. 384).

4. dialogue with informants beyond self, which involves becoming intimately knowledgeable of the context and the data, unless the researcher slips into indifference.

5. commitment to theoretical analysis refers to the larger goal of an ethnographic study; to see how issues found in the research site are pertinent to broader social phenomena, instead of merely representing an emic perspective of an individual or a social context.

"PROBLEMS" IN EVOCATIVE AND ANALYTIC AE

- Evocative AE emphasizes the experience as is

- Analytic AE takes emphasizes the situatedness of the experience within a larger social realm; calls for 'abstraction'

THINKING ABOUT THESE PROBLEMS

- The expectations for qualitative research and ethnographic or AE research
  - Journals
  - Theorists

THINKING ABOUT THESE PROBLEMS – 2

Qualities of qualitative studies, as expected by journals

(Computers & Education, Twining, Heller, Nussbaum, & Tsai, 2016)

- Rigorous research approach where theory, methodology, and analysis are aligned

- Problematize existing theories

(MLJ, Lazaraton, 2003; TESOL Q, Chapelle & Duff, 2003)

- How does it (qualitative studies; ethnographic studies) fit with theoretical frameworks

THINKING ABOUT THESE PROBLEMS – 3

However,

- The abstraction of qualitative studies may restrict readers and the researchers from insightful findings (Lazaraton, 2003)

- Conventional criteria to evaluate qualitative studies may not be applicable to ethnographic type studies (Sparkes, 2000)

  - The form of AE (esp. evocative) may not fit the conventions expected of journals for qualitative studies (Chapelle & Duff, 2003; see the example of Holt, 2003)

THINKING ABOUT THESE PROBLEMS – 4

- Subjectivity is crucial; hence, it needs to be visible; affects reliability and validity

Reliability

- An autoethnographer's entry and his/her subjectivity is evaluated based on the consistency of his/her story (Bell, 2002)

Validity

- "likelihood or probability that the claim is so." (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 477)
  - plausibility, credibility, or trustworthiness

- **Consider Tracy's (2010) criteria for high quality qualitative research**

THINKING ABOUT THESE PROBLEMS – 5

- AE is concerned with how useful it is to others (Vyran, 2006)

  - Whether or not readers are expecting some form of theoretical abstraction, or

  - If readers aim to see if an emphatic relation can be established by reading AE narratives

- AE should be "both personal and scholarly, both evocative and analytical, and it is both descriptive and theoretical when it is done well." (Burnier, 2006, p. 414).

AE IN AL

- **Canagarajah (2012)**
- Park (2014)
- **Moloney & Wang (2016)**

AE IN AL – CANAGARAJAH (2012)

- Interested in how 'self' is socially constructed through ideological mediation
  - Historical approach; time and space was boundless
- Took an analytic approach
  - Nexus of membership; Community of Practice (CoP) – Wenger (1998)

- Tensions experienced throughout his professional career
  - Representation of self
  - Alignment with the CoP

AE IN AL – MOLONEY & WANG (2016)

- Collaborative narrative inquiry (for another example, see Adamson & Muller, 2017)
  - Looked at self-/collaborative narratives over four years
- Primarily an analytic approach (but with issues pertinent to evocative AE)
  - Interested in how self aligned with the respective CoPs by looking at trajectories (Wenger, 1998)
- Focuses on the emotional aspect as well, and the issue of empowerment (which are cornerstones for evocative AE)

AE IN AL

- Needs to be relevant to other professionals
  - Created through an analytical approach

CONSIDERING AE

- AL lecturer – English academic skills instructor

- Personal journal entries (part of lesson plans)

  - Reflective entries before and after a lesson

  - Collected over thirteen weeks (August to November 2016)

    - 8 entries

  - The entries were consolidated and re-narrated based on Wenger's (1998) notion of trajectories (both analytic and evocative)

PERIPHERAL OR OUTBOUND?
AN ANALYTIC EXAMINATION

- Peripheral
  - I was different because of my professional background, and how I thought these students perceived me
  - To move towards an insider trajectory, I aimed to help the students recognize that they are valid English users
- Outbound
  - I could never be 'one' of them
  - My own perception about genre (more descriptive than prescriptive)

EXTRACT FROM MY ANALYTIC AE

In this light, I saw myself as having an outbound trajectory. One who was in conflict with normative practices (of my current teaching context). It needs to be noted that trajectories may be contested by social entities who may come from a different community. In my case, entities which contradicted my assumed trajectory were my current students and the teaching materials. This is common, as seen in other studies. For instance, in Liu and Xu's (2011) study, Hui, an English teacher in China was met with competing discourses when she was tasked to represent her CoP to attend a course introducing 'current' and 'liberal' language teaching methods. Or, in the study of Adamson and Muller (2017), their positions as teaching professionals were contested because of the lack of understanding of Japanese and the Japanese culture, and ominous fate of their jobs.

NOT AN INSIDER
AN EVOCATIVE EXAMINATION

Hmm, yeah, I'm still not quite sure why I need to be under observation. I know you had mentioned the purpose in your email but I'm still a little confused. But I am not opposed to the idea of being observed!

Oh, well, your work experience comes mainly from teaching in an EFL context. This new environment may be completely different from what you're used to. We just want to make sure you acclimatize well.

NOT AN INSIDER
AN EVOCATIVE EXAMINATION

I think this problem is interrelated with so many other issues that have to do with who I am. Look, I have been speaking English all my life. My family speaks English at home. Even so, claiming that English is my first language still comes with resistance or disbelief by others.

There are also questions regarding my students. Yes, a majority of them speaks English as their second language, with the exception of a few who have international schooling background. To be accepted into the program, they need to have a certain level of language proficiency. Everything that we do in class is conducted wholly in English, so are all the other extra-curricular activities held outside of class hours.

Considering my personal and professional background, I don't see how I am someone who is not from an ESL environment!

FINAL THOUGHTS

- AE was a liberating experience

  - Giving a voice to aspects of my identity that I may have silenced

  - Third space for the validation of identities

  - Representing the complex nature of English language teaching

- How to account for the multiple stories when using an evocative approach?

  - Having a (theoretical) foundation may help develop coherence

    - Internal consistency

FINAL THOUGHTS – 2

- Challenges
  - Cherry picking
  - Representation of self or others in AE
    - Smooth over quirks/cast a character in a bad light (relational ethics)
  - Representation of ELT professionals as one who is
    - Critical
    - Able to synthesize

THANK YOU!