Ethicality of Narrative Inquiry as a Tool of Knowledge Production in Research[1]

Alireza Mirzaee[2] & Mohammad Aliakbari[3]

Abstract

The sociocultural ways of conceptualizing human learning in general education have given rise to various sensitive and time-consuming tools of knowledge production for both the researcher and the researched. The gravity of the situation is more noticeable in narrative inquiry methodology, which has gathered momentum in both general education and second language teacher education (SLTE) because it requires long engagement with participants and (re)telling of tales of success and failure. However, the ethicality of this knowledge production tool has remained in the periphery of academia. Grounded in our data, we present a case for a critical-event approach to narrative inquiry, indicating how the participants' engagement in the research process enabled them to externalize their feelings, verbalize their everyday and scientific theories and, ultimately, systematically examine their teaching philosophy and develop ecologically valid pedagogical practices. These 3 functions of narrative inquiry seem to enhance the ethicality of narrative inquiry research methodology.

***Keywords*:** Ethicality; Knowledge Production Tool; Narrative Inquiry; Critical Event

1. Introduction

The movement from behaviorist, to cognitive, and to sociocultural ways of defining and conceptualizing human learning in general education has fundamentally changed researchers' ways and tools of approaching and investigating teachers' professional development, that is, a movement away from objective and quantitative research designs to qualitative and interpretivist

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[2]Corresponding author, English Department, Ilam University, Ilam, Iran; alirezamirzaee_edu@yahoo.com

[3]English Department, Ilam University, Ilam, Iran; maliakbari@hotmail.com

methodologies (Freeman, 2002; He, 2009; Johnson, 2006; Johnson & Golombek, 2011). What seems to be have been more influential in attracting the attention of educational researchers is what Denzin and Lincoln (2005; see also Denzin, 2000) dubbed narrative turn (e.g., life history, autobiography, diary study, critical event). Following in the footsteps of general education theorists who have increasingly used narrative approaches in their research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Connelly & Clandinin, 1987, 1990, 1999; Elbaz, 1991), second language teacher education (SLTE) researchers are increasingly being influenced by this narrative turn, recognizing it as a very important tool for investigating teachers' learning and professional development (Barkhuizen, 2011; Bell, 2011; Johnson, 2007, 2009; Johnson & Golombek, 2002).

Given the long engagement with research participants required by narrative inquiry, which necessarily requires us to enter "into areas so private, personal and intimate that they are rarely—if ever—breached in the study of SLA [second language acquisition]" (Pavlenko, 2001, p. 167), the ethicality of this tool of knowledge production should also take center stage in an effort to develop a sacred epistemology (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000). Lincoln and Denzin's (2000) notion of sacred epistemology suggests that it is incumbent on educational researchers to develop emancipatory and just research methodologies which would have consequentially valid impacts on research participants. This reconceptualization heralds a move away from the deterministic approach of pay-to-play practiced in positivistic research designs (e.g., monetary incentives, exchange of labors, and other incentivized participations) toward more ethical means of knowledge production espoused in poststructuralist research methodologies. This shift has increasingly foregrounded the issue that "what the researcher can return to the researched, which is external to the research itself" (e.g., monetary incentives) stands in a far less important position compared to what "the research process itself provides . . . to participants" (Olmedo, 1999, p. 360). In other words, the true value of a research process and its outcome should be gauged by the extent to which the research process per se is emancipatory and meaningful for the researched (Noonan, 2008).

Notwithstanding this, the ethicality of knowledge production tools has for long been understood and even currently practiced mostly through the pay-to-play approach (Fisher et al., 2002; McGinn, 2008). What is seriously missing are such sensitive questions as the following: What would research participants gain from spending several months in research? How are they going to evaluate and harvest the benefits, if any, of their valuable involvement in someone else's research and not feel exploited? Would the participants be empowered or impoverished by the research process? Current scholarship in both general education and SLTE has

surprisingly remained silent about these of questions which are very critical and highly relevant to qualitative research approaches. More specifically, the ethicality of the narrative inquiry research process is still an unknown phenomenon, which requires serious attention given the widespread popularity of the methodology as a means of knowledge production. As Jurasaite-Harbison and Rex (2005) argue, teachers who produce reflective narratives in qualitative research are necessarily changed by it, and that the inability to account for the potential impacts of the research processes on participants breaches the trustworthiness of the findings.

A cursory glance through the pages of flagship journals in the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) reveals the increasing commitment of researchers to different versions of narrative inquiry. In both general education and SLTE, researchers have been vociferous in elevating the value of narrative inquiry, arguing that when L2 teachers make inquiries into their own experiences, the very process of narration and reflection can function as a mediational tool facilitating and influencing their professional development via, among others, connecting scientific and everyday concepts (Doecke, 2004; Golombek & Johnson, 2004; Jay & Johnson, 2002; Johnson, 2006, 2007, 2009).

According to the sociocultural theory, there are two types of concepts when we talk about teacher professional development: everyday concepts and scientific concepts (Vygotsky, 1963). Everyday concepts, which comprise the preteaching identity (Flores & Day, 2006) and are not easily available for conscious inspection, are largely shaped by prior experiences of teaching and observation of teaching. According to Pillen, Beijaard, and den Brok (2013), these unarticulated lay theories impact the ways in which preservice teachers respond to teacher education programs and may be in conflict with scientific concepts. Scientific concepts, on the other hand, are the result of "theoretical investigation of a specific domain. When understood within and through everyday concepts, scientific concepts enable learners to move beyond the limitations of their everyday experiences and function appropriately in a wide range of alternative circumstances and contexts" (Johnson, 2009, p. 21).

Johnson and Golombek (2011) argue that, by narratively sharing their stories with researchers, L2 teachers can reflect on their lived experiences and (re)interpret them in an attempt to develop reflexivity and enhance their professional development. This perspective, when evidentially supported, would enhance the ethicality of the narrative inquiry methodology. The current study is an argument for this line of thought in which we indicate how the three functions of narrative inquiry in SLTE (externalization, verbalization, systematic examination), as outlined by Johnson and Golombek (2011), are realized within the particular methodology adopted in the current research, which can make it an ethical tool of knowledge

production. This type of ethicality which refers to "the possibility of the research moving to help those researched so as to transform their world and experiences" (Bhattacharya, 2008, p. 245) reminds us of the catalytic validity or transformational validity (Chao & Trent, 2006), whereby the research processes are expected to provoke and open up "a potential space for increased self-understanding and transformative action" for research participants (Waterstone, 2008, p. 57; see also Lather, 1986).

In what follows, we dwell upon narrative inquiry with a critical-event orientation and the three functions of narrative inquiry in SLTE (externalization, verbalization, systematic examination) delineated by Johnson and Golombek (2011) as our conceptual lens.

2. Conceptual Lens

In this study, we subscribe to the position that "teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and other's stories' (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). As Xu (2009) highlights, story is the primary tool through which we understand the world and make sense of our experiences. Stories are, thus, recognized to be epistemologically the most relevant mechanism to understand teacher knowledge, which is largely structured by stories (Xu, 2009). In language education, as Lin, Wang, Akamatsu, and Riazi (2002) assert, "personal stories (which are simultaneously sociological and political) told by the agents themselves unfold the complex and multidimensional nature of mastering and appropriating English in different sociocultural contexts" (p. 310)

Adopting this perspective required us to employ a methodology that focuses on the narrative aspect of human experience. Narrative consists of a set of chronological events tied together in a meaningful way, which gives insights into people's lived experiences (Clandinin & Caine 2008). The narrative inquiry research design adopted in the current project required us to engage in "people's consciously told stories" (Bell, 2002, p. 209) because "stories . . . are the core of any narrative research activity" (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008, p. 373). These stories "tell past events, revolve around unexpected episodes, ruptures or disturbances of normal states of affairs or social rules" (De Fina, 2003, p. 14). In the current research, we opted for a critical-event approach to narrative inquiry (Webster & Mertova, 2007). According to Webster and Mertova (2007), "the essence of a narrative approach is the criticality of an event and its impact on human understanding and action" (p. 73). Webster and Mertova, further, argue that narrative inquiry is an event-driven instrument whereby we identify life experiences as critical events. Mertova and Webster (2012) define critical event "as an unplanned and unstructured event that significantly impacts" (p. 16) an individual's learning or teaching trajectories.

Recalling, reflecting on, and (re)interpreting critical events in a narrative research seem to have a transformative power by enabling teachers externalize, verbalize, and systematically examine their teaching and learning experiences (Johnson & Golombek 2011). Johnson and Golombek introduce and define these functions as such: Externalization is the process through which teachers are enabled to give voice to their feelings and beliefs by means of introspection, narration, and interpretation. This process functions as a mediational tool, in that, as teachers' understandings are laid open to themselves and others and brought to conscious awareness, their thinking undergoes restructuration leading to self-regulation. To assist in the self-regulation and internalization process, verbalization helps teachers articulate scientific concepts and theories and link them to their everyday and experiential experiences. The outcome of this process is thinking in concepts (Karpov, 2003). These two processes provide teachers with a defamiliarization space to systematically examine their understandings, critically explore their teaching and learning assumptions, and ultimately change their thinking and practices in ways to be ecologically valid.

3. Methodology

This study draws on data collected for a larger project in which we set out to narratively explore the identity construction of EFL teachers in Iran. According to Creswell (2007), researchers adopting a narrative inquiry should "focus on a single individual (or two or three individuals)" (p. 214), least for the reason that we need to explore the phenomenon more deeply. The participants were three male EFL teachers (hereby Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C) of state junior and senior high schools in Ilam Province, each with 7 years of teaching experience. Teacher A was 31 years old, Teacher B 28 years old, and Teacher C 29 years old. They were all graduates of teacher training universities. After obtaining their informed consent to take part in our project, we requested them to think of and recall their past critical events about English teaching and learning experiences from the very first years of English language learning to their current practice of English language teaching. Because they all also held an M.A. in TEFL, we requested them to recall the critical events experienced in B.A. and M.A. universities as distinctive communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). As Webster and Mertova (2007) argue, "critical events that are of most interest to researchers are most likely to occur within communities of practice" (p. 83). We also requested them to write down a synopsis of the events to function as a cognitive map in the interviews. We held bi/triweekly interviews, each lasting nearly 1/5 hr. In each interview, we focused on two to four critical events. Our main general questions were the following: What happened? Why do you think it happened? And, how does it help you in your own teaching? Based on the main research questions, we had to extract identity conflicts the participants had

experienced in the events and use them as building blocks of our data analysis. This required extensive reading and rereading of the transcribed interviews in order to produce codes, common themes, and categories.

Our long interaction with the data and the abductive nature of the research process, which required us to go back and forth between data and theory, turned our attention to an issue more important than our initial theoretical framework which was grounded in the data. We noticed how the processes of introspection, narration, and interpretation of the critical events were giving the participants space to systematically examine their understandings by externalizing their feelings and beliefs, and verbalizing their scientific concepts and connecting them to their practice. Upon noticing this, one month after the data collection, we contacted the participants and asked if it would be possible to observe their classes. They accepted and the following weeks we observed three of their English classes to pinpoint any possible changes in their practices. Additionally, to develop a sense for the participants, we talked to some of their students, their M.A. thesis supervisors, and some of their colleagues. We also conducted one last interview with them after our third class observation to explore how they would describe their 6-month engagement in story (re)telling and interpretation; these final interviews lasted less than 30 min. An earlier version of this study was sent to the participants to check its argument. Furthermore, a Ph.D. student of applied linguistics, who was also an EFL teacher of state schools and experienced in qualitative data analysis, analyzed around 15% of the data recognized as relevant to the three functions of narrative inquiry in order to achieve intercoder reliability. For instance, Teacher A's and B's stories of being punished in front of the class (see below) were categorized by both the researchers and the independent coder under the externalization function. However, in cases where disagreement about which function would best describe a critical event seemed unresolvable, we decided to remove the specific event from the final interpretation. In the next section, we present the findings and intertwine them with the conceptual lens.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Externalization

The narrative interviews and the required task of writing a synopsis of the critical events, which were employed as a cognitive act (DiCamilla & Lantolf, 1994), created a zone of proximal development (ZPD) as a mediational space where the teachers were enabled to externalize their beliefs and feelings about various aspects of English language learning and teaching. We can see this in numerous occasions when two of the teachers, for instance, narrated how they were punished in school and teacher training university and that they dared not to object because the teacher was the authority:

> *I liked him [the English teacher in junior high school] very much.*
> *But once I didn't learn how to turn the simple tense structure into*
> *negative and question forms using 'do,' 'don't,' and 'doesn't.' He*
> *told me, 'you're my best student and I didn't expect you to make*
> *such mistakes and it isn't acceptable.' . . . He hit me with a*
> *broomstick. I didn't dare to object because the teacher was the*
> *authority; but my internal voice would object that he hasn't taught*
> *the topic properly and the allocated time was insufficient.*
> *(Teacher A)*

Teacher A's disappointment with his English teacher's normative and repetitive uses of *'Ali'* and *'Mina,'* as the sole sentence subjects in junior high school, can also be deemed as examples of externalization. Teacher A reminisces that, in the overwhelming majority of the examples, the English teacher would write on the board *'Ali'* and *'Mina'* were the sole subjects of the sentences. These "*decontextualized examples and lack of creativity*" on the part of the teacher, Teacher A argued, demotivated the students: *'Whenever I noticed Ali and Mina I'd think that the structures were all alike, namely, there was no marked or unmarked information.'*

Teacher B also recalls one of his university lecturers who was very harsh in class and gregarious outside academia. He would always find fault with and criticize students' attendance and appearance, stating that an English teacher must be *'distinguished'* in university. In a grammar course, for instance, once the lecturer had summoned Teacher B in front of the class to practice some drills on the whiteboard. While doing them, Teacher B heard a voice several times saying, *'Do we have fastly!?'* Assuming that the teacher was addressing the class, Teacher B went on doing the drills. All of a sudden, he felt a very harsh blow on his back. It was the lecturer hitting him because of a mistake Teacher B had made and written *'fastly'* instead of *'fast.'* Later on, the teacher had sent for him and apologized for his behavior. Teacher B interpreted this event as such:

> *He was like a dictator in class, even with his own child, but very*
> *sociable outside the class . . . We became friends and whatever he*
> *needed [he asked me and] I was like a representative. This made*
> *me approach him more often. Right now in class my own behavior*
> *is very much like his. At school I am very serious with students*
> *and everything must be right in its place, but outside school I am*
> *very convivial. His character became mine.*

In the case of Teacher C, the devise of a script as a blueprint and entering into a new community (private language institute), for instance, are celebratory moments, which expanded his learning trajectories. Teacher C argued that the core

and pillars of his language learning had been formed in the English institute he was participating during senior high school. However, this feeling had been heavily disturbed by an incidence he stated as being critical in reorienting his learning trajectory. There was no qualified teacher for level nine at the institute and the class had to be postponed for one semester. Because Teacher C would not like to have any suspension in his English learning, he unwillingly enrolled in another institute. However, he had to undertake a placement test. Reflecting on the test, he had realized that although he had been the top student for four consecutive semesters in the toughest, most-principled and strict teacher class, he *'was not able to undertake simple language functions which were supposed to be needed in the placement interview.'* The new situation was a *'turning point'* as it had raised his awareness of *'speech acts and conversational exchanges.'* He had devised a script of all the possible questions that could be asked and their probable answers in the placement interview, which was very effective in getting him admitted at a proper level in the new institute. Teacher C articulates this critical event:

> *It all started from my script . . . After being accepted, my world was overturned and I entered a new world . . . as if I was freed from a cage . . . I was now speaking . . . I was functional . . . I changed from grammatical-vocabulary-reading only to communicative competence [which was the main focus in the new institute] . . . I never returned to the previous institute.*

This externalization, wherein the teachers were able to "situate personal experience as text" (Dyer & Keller-Cohen, 2000, p. 285) and the required reflection indicate how they reinterpreted such experiences, which, in turn, has helped them develop alternative understandings. For Verity (2000, as cited in Johnson, 2007), such externalization was mediated through keeping a daily journal, which enabled her to externalize her feelings and mediated her professional development.

4.2 Verbalization

As we argued previously, the requirement to write a synopsis of the critical events and also the relations with the researchers as temporary other (Izadinia, 2015; Johnson, 2003; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002), functioned as a symbolic space helping the teachers bring their experiences to conscious awareness and inspection (Ochs & Capps, 1996). In tandem with externalization, verbalization, which is more outstanding in Teacher A's narratives, assisted in the internalization process (Gal'perin, 1989) in which the teachers were ascending from the abstract to the concrete (Johnson & Golombek, 2011). That is, thinking in concepts allowed them "to ascend to a detailed understanding of the concrete and particular" of their sociocultural context (Bakhurst, 2007, as cited in Johnson & Golombek, 2011, 492).

As evidenced in the findings and encouraged by our research process, Teacher A articulated several SLA theories as symbolic tools, helping him reinterpret his experiences. Teacher A contemplated that he was punished because the teacher believed in '*error as a sinful act*' that must be prevented rather than '*error as an inevitable and necessary part of the learning process*.' This situation, according to him, ignores the gap between '*procedural and declarative knowledge*' and between '*performance and competence*.' Teacher A explains more: '*From theory and practice perspective I believe that [I didn't possess] any declarative knowledge. Even if there was any, it had not been proceduralized.*' Teacher A proclaimed that he would draw on '*dialogical relations*' and '*scaffolding*' as teaching strategies so as to avoid such problems. He argued that had there been a '*dialogical relationship*' between students and teachers at the time the students would dare to externalize their inner voice and make teachers reflect on their teaching techniques and content knowledge.

Similarly, Teacher B posited that his English language teacher in the first grade of senior high school was of immense influence on him and helped him obtain self-confidence not only in school but also in society. As a villager who would stick out in class by way of his appearance and clothes, Teacher B noticed that most of his classmates come from rich families and that the overall atmosphere of the class and school had isolated and positioned him unfavorably. However, the English teacher had completely changed the imbalance of power. As the one who had scored the highest grade in an exam in class, Teacher B received an enormous amount of admiration in front of the students by the teacher. Teacher B vividly recalled this critical experience and stated that thinking about it urged him to look for theories exposed to in university courses to answer the 'Why' and 'How' questions posed by us (the researchers). He explained that in his readings he was familiarized with theories such as scaffolding and ZPD, which he could use to help shy and silent students:

> *When I read these theories, I was reminded of how my English teacher scaffolded me . . . My problem was not competence, I was the best in class. My problem was performance . . . Teachers should get to know students, their learning styles, their learning strategies . . . some students are stressful, some are shy and introvert, some are talkative and extrovert.*

In a similar line, we can also see that Teacher C verbalizes some SLA theories. However, he does not simply adopt these scientific theories, but he imbues them with his own understandings to make them personally relevant. In thinking about Krashen's affective filter, for instance, he argues that in such contexts '*stress can never be debilitative . . . just facilitative.*' During the penultimate interview,

Teacher C formulated a critical reading of SLA theories in regard to their application in the context of higher education in Iran. He argued that:

> *When I was thinking about it, I realized that Krashen's SLA theory falls short of explaining the stressful situations I experienced in M.A. modular courses. The more stress other students and I underwent the more effort and time we would invest in the courses and thus more preferable outcomes would ensue. [In such contexts] stress can never be debilitative . . . just facilitative.*

This verbalization process, as Johnson and Golombek (2011) suggest, enables:

> Teachers to begin to not only name the theoretical constructs they are exposed to in their SLTE programs but, through the activity of narrating, to begin to use those concepts to make sense of their teaching experiences and to regulate both their thinking and teaching practices. (p. 493)

4.3 Systematic Examination

The recollection, narration, and reinterpretation of these critical moments provided the teachers with a safe and nonjudgmental space in which they were enabled to systematically examine their teaching practices, externalize the reasons and feelings behind their pedagogical decisions, and verbalize and populate the many theories they have been exposed to in teacher education programs and higher education institutes in an attempt to link this expert knowledge to their experiential knowledge. In the last interview, after our class observation, the teachers described the six-month experience of recalling, reflecting, and reinterpreting as "a critical experience and turning point in itself" (Teacher A) in which they "have become increasingly aware of [their] existence as an English teacher and [their] ability to change both [themselves] and [their] students" (Teacher C). Similar to Farrell (2013), we thus argue that "teaching experience does not automatically translate into teacher expertise unless teachers consciously and actively reflect on these experiences" (p. 1080). Our particular narrative methodology seems to have instigated such critical and conscious reflection on experience. To trace the outcome of this reflection in the teachers' pedagogical practices, as we explained before, we tried to observe the teachers' English classes. What seemed to be very noticeable in our observations was that the teachers were very active, employing many question and answer strategies, adopting pair and group work, using different color markers, and also using the students' names as sentence subjects or objects. However, because there was the fear of the observant's presence to exert negative influence on the teachers' ways of teaching, we also talked to some of their students to see what

possible emerging changes they had witnessed in the teachers' teaching strategies. The overall sentiment of the students seemed to relatively approve the issue that the teachers' teaching practices in the observation sessions were not a one-time phenomenon and that the students stated that the teachers had also been using the particular practices in previous sessions. Notwithstanding this, however, we are of the opinion that had our observations been extended to later academic semesters, we would have been better prone to spot changes in the teachers' practices. Future research, we suggest, would benefit highly from following this line of research by using more longitudinal research and extended-through-time observations.

We further proclaim that reflection (thinking about something after the event) induced by the research process adopted in the current narrative inquiry has the potential to lead to reflexivity (continuing self-awareness) (Finlay & Gough, 2003). Such critical reflection as engendered by the research processes is faintly alluded to in Wang's (2013) ethnographic study. In Wang's study, one of the participants, at the end of the project, commented that reading the manuscript for conducting member check had made her critically reflect on and reinterpret her experiences and thus look for alternative ways of undertaking pedagogical practices. In passing, Wang draws on this event and argues that she became aware of "the importance of enabling participants' active self-reflection in future research. That is to say, the researcher should be more attentive to ways of stimulating and facilitating respondents to reflect critically on their current situations and possible alternatives" (p. 777). Barkhuizen and Wette (2008) underline this issue by arguing that when teachers narrate their teaching and learning stories, they "necessarily reflect on those experiences and thus make meaning of them, that is, they gain an understanding of their teaching knowledge and practice" (p. 374).

5. Conclusion

Although the epistemological shift in human learning has given rise to sensitive and time-consuming research methodologies (both for the researcher and the researched) imported from such disciplines as anthropology, sociology, and literature, the ethic of production has not gone far beyond participant anonymity and incentivized participation (Fisher et al., 2002). In both general teacher education and SLTE, which are all concerned about teachers as learners of teaching (Johnson, 2009), and with narrative inquiry gradually attracting the attention of researchers, it seems more attention should be given to the ethicality of the research process because "good research ethics practice requires that researchers consider what they take from research participants as well as what they give to them" (Crow, 2008, p. 740).

In this study, we tried to indicate how the three functions of narrative inquiry as outlined by Johnson and Golombek (2011) are realized in a critical-event

approach, which can enhance the methodology's ethicality. We previously mentioned that according to the literature on the ethicality of research methodologies a particular methodology is ethical as long as the research process itself provides participants with the opportunity to make sense of and understand their teaching practice and knowledge. In this study, we illustrated that apart from functioning as an appropriate tool for exploring the processes of teacher identity construction, the research process itself has provided the opportunity to the participants to reflect on their lived experiences and (re)interpret them in ways which not only has increased their reflexivity, it also has influenced their pedagogical practices as evidenced by our class observations and their students' comments. This finding is consistent with the literature on ethicality in which researchers are recommended to move away from "rape model of research: Career advancement of social scientists built on alienating and exploitative methods" (Lather, 1986, p. 75) and choose methodologies in which the processes of engagement in research projects would emancipate teachers and facilitate their professional development by, particularly, increasing their reflexivity.

Drawing on our findings, we argue that because interview is the commonest tool of data collection in qualitative research and because inducing reflexivity has been recognized as an emblem of ethicality of a particular research methodology, TESOL and SLTE researchers are in the privileged position to organize their interviewing in ways which, apart from yielding the required data, further move participating teachers to reflect on their own pedagogical practices. These practices can become so hegemonic and ingrained in teachers' teaching self that the only way of confronting or changing them is primarily through reflection. As we indicated, besides our particular interview questions, this type of reflection was also increased in the present study by the time lapse between the recall of the critical events and the actual narration in the interviews. Such a consciousness-raising is also emphasized by Schwandt (1996) who argues that social inquiry or inquirer is ethical as long as they succeed in "enhancing or cultivating critical intelligence in parties to the research encounter" (p. 69).

On a more practical dimension, in terms of verbalization, researchers (e.g., through a diary approach) can request teachers to theorize their practice by observing, recording, and analyzing their daily teaching practices. This way teachers not only become cognizant of their implicit teaching philosophy, they would be able to move beyond the constraints "of their everyday experiences and function appropriately in a wide range of alternative circumstances and contexts" (Johnson, 2009, p. 21). Furthermore, not only would such an approach help researchers gain insights into teachers' knowledge and ways of knowing, it would also help teachers connect their lay and theoretical theories in a way to be mutually informative, that is,

to make theories locally appropriate and relevant. Interview as conversation (Clandinin & Caine, 2008), writing diaries or autobiographies or recalling and narrating critical events can function as symbolic and nonjudgmental spaces in which participating teachers would be able to freely externalize their beliefs and feelings about various aspects of English language learning and teaching. This externalization process, as we indicated, can be very beneficial in helping teachers move to the verbalization stage so as to "make meaningful contributions to their own well-being and not serve as objects of investigation" (Benmayor, 1991, p. 160).

We think that a critical-event approach narrative inquiry, as outlined in the current project, could have the potential to establish reflexivity and create a defamiliarization space wherein research participants can systematically examine their thinking and practice, develop autonomy (e.g., Xu, 2015), influence their professional development and, consequently, function as agents of change. Hence, the use of the critical-event approach to narrative inquiry in the present study seems to be ethical and emancipatory by increasing reflexivity and enabling teachers to bring to conscious awareness their various understandings of teaching and learning, which is a necessary condition for developing ecologically valid pedagogical practices. By interlacing this approach with the adopted conceptual lens, we endorse the position that "teachers . . . are storytellers and characters in their own and other's stories" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). These stories usually include critical turning points which disrupt initial states of equilibrium (Elliot, 2005) causing what Denzin (1989) has called epiphanies, that is, "significant, turning-point moments in a subject's life" (p. 206). And, it is by recollecting and narrating these epiphanies that the EFL teachers were provided with the space to externalize their various feelings and understandings, verbalize different scientific concepts and connect them to their practice and ultimately, systematically analyze their teaching philosophy and pedagogical practices.

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