Article

Transactional Analysis: Conceptualizing a Framework for Illuminating Human Experience

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Abstract

Myriad methods exist for analyzing qualitative data. It is, however, imperative for qualitative researchers to employ data analysis tools that are congruent with the theoretical frameworks underpinning their inquiries. In this paper, I have constructed a framework for analyzing data that could be useful for researchers interested in focusing on the transactional nature of language as they engage in Social Science research. Transactional Analysis (TA) is an inductive approach to data analysis that transcends constant comparative methods of exploring data. Drawing on elements of narrative and thematic analysis, TA uses the theories of Bakhtin and Rosenblatt to attend to the dynamic processes researchers identify as they generate themes in their data and seek to understand how their participants' worldviews are being shaped. This paper highlights the processes researchers can utilize to study the mutual shaping that occurs as participants read and enter into dialogue with the world around them.

Keywords: Bakhtin, data analysis, educational policy, interviews, mutual shaping, Rosenblatt, transactional analysis, understanding worldviews

Introduction

As an educational researcher, it is important for me to attend to the increasing standardization of educational policies. In order to facilitate my understanding of this trend, I designed a project that would help me develop an understanding of the ways that secondary English teachers receive and transact with educational policy mandates. Through this study, I hoped to learn about how educational policies, particularly policies that are communicated via what Bakhtin (1981) would call authoritative discourse, are shaping teachers' instructional practices. As I considered my understanding of reading as a dialogic and dynamic process of making meaning, I realized that I

would need an analysis tool that would attend to the process of mutual shaping that occurs as people transact with texts. In this article, I describe the method of data analysis I crafted to facilitate my inquiry.

Qualitative researchers interested in studying human experience have a variety of tools at their disposal for analyzing qualitative data. However, researchers must be sure to employ data analysis tools that are consistent with their research goals and theoretical frameworks. Van Manen (1990) pointed out that Nietzsche once wrote, "Whoever is searching for the human being must first find the lantern" (p. 4). In van Manen's estimation, the point of Nietzsche's statement was to bring forth the following questions: "What does it mean to study the human being in his or her humanness? And, what methodology is required for this kind of study?" (p. 5). Neither Nietzsche nor van Manen would have been likely to argue that there is *a single* lantern or tool that supercedes all others in its ability to facilitate a study of human experience. Instead, their views support the idea that one must reflect upon the inquiry he or she is proposing in order to find *the appropriate* lantern to illuminate the study of human experience. With this concept in mind, I argue that it is imperative for qualitative researchers to find or, when necessary, craft data analysis tools that are congruent with the theoretical frameworks underpinning their inquiries.

As I worked to identify an existing data analysis tool that would best support my research, I realized that the appropriate lantern did not exist. Unable to find a suitable lantern to illuminate the experiences I was researching, I set out to construct a framework for analyzing data that could be useful for me—and for other researchers interested in focusing on the transactional nature of language as they engage in Social Science research. In order to construct this framework, I have blended aspects of narrative analysis and thematic analysis with other qualitative analysis tools, such as memo writing, to create Transactional Analysis (TA). This hybrid approach makes it possible for researchers to pay specific attention to the ways in which individuals' worldviews and lived experiences are shaped as they enter into dialogue with others and with the texts they read. Before I outline the framework I have constructed to create this data analysis tool, I offer an explication of the theoretical foundations underpinning TA.

Theoretical Perspective

I approach the research I conduct from a social constructionist framework that attends to the ways that language and culture mutually shape one another as people experience the world and enter into dialogue. My belief in the dynamic nature of language is grounded in the notion that people use language to construct meaning as they interpret the world around them. The objects we encounter and the things we experience may be freighted with potential meaning; however, those meanings do not surface until our consciousness engages with them (Crotty, 2003). Objects exist before we name them or construct the meanings we attach to them; however, those objects remain nebulous, unnamed entities outside of our social constructs. As we engage in dialogue with others and read the world around us, we use language to construct meaning. This process enables us to give shape to those objects and, perhaps more importantly, it makes it possible to begin to develop an understanding of how those objects color our lived experience.

Understanding the nuances of the way meaning is constructed becomes even more complicated when the words we use to articulate our perspectives are studied. Our contexts and social exchanges govern the construction of the meanings we hope to communicate. The realities of historical and social change will cause those meanings to have a dynamic quality. Our constructed meanings will evolve as our experiences are shaped by our transactions with others and the texts we read. Researchers, then, cannot understand participants' experiences without attending to the ways that language is constantly shaping and reshaping their worldviews.

Engaging in TA is particularly useful for researchers interested in exploring the ways in which lived experience is shaped through dialogue because this analysis tool requires careful and intentional reflection upon how communication between individuals shapes understanding. I will discuss this key aspect of TA later. First, however, it is important to clarify how the work of Bakhtin (1981, 1986) and Rosenblatt (1995, 2005) informs this process.

The Dynamic Nature of Language and Culture

My focus on the dialogic relationship between language and culture and my search for a way to shed light on the experiences I wish to learn more about led me to explore the writing of Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 1986). Bakhtin's theories are focused on the ways that culture and language transact with one another. Although much of his work was couched in terms of the role of dialogue in literature, his theories of language are relevant to qualitative research projects, such as those researching models of teaching and learning. Moreover, Bakhtin's theories can provide some insight into the ways in which researchers and participants communicate with one another.

In his discussion of language, Bakhtin (1981) argued that words live on the boundaries between divergent cultural contexts. To illustrate this idea, consider the image of a river that someone from Jackson, Mississippi might picture when he or she is discussing days spent walking on the sandy banks of a river as a child. Now, consider the very different image that one might conjure if he or she grew up walking on the rocky banks of the Gallatin River in Bozeman, Montana. Clearly, two strikingly different images can be associated with a single word. Those images are a result of the divergent experiences held by each of our imagined individuals. Experience has shaped the language each of these people might use to describe a seemingly similar object. Bakhtin's work offers a vocabulary to discuss the ways that our contexts influence our understanding of the words we use when we engage in dialogue.

A key concept in Bakhtin's (1981) work is the notion of centripetal (centralizing) forces, which seek to unify and standardize language. These forces attempt to "centralize verbal-ideological thought" and defend "an already formed language from the pressure of growing heteroglossia" (p. 271). The concept of heteroglossia is directly linked to Bakhtin's argument that live speech is always subject to the tensions of centrifugal (decentralizing) forces, which account for the numerous unique ways in which individuals employ words to communicate their intentions and to elicit response. The heteroglossic nature of language makes it important for researchers to attend to the myriad ways that people use language to convey meaning and communicate.

I view language as a dynamic force that cannot be understood without being attentive to the transactions that occur between individuals and cultures. Communication between individuals creates opportunities for language to evolve and meaning to be constructed. Words come alive because they are "harmonizing with some elements in this environment and striking a dissonance with others" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 277). The harmony and dissonance that exists in dialogue in the research situation demands our attention. If we, as researchers, wish to develop understandings of the experiences of our participants, we must attend to the varied ways that people use language to communicate. Our words are meaningful because they have history—just as the people who give voice to those words have histories. Returning attention to the imagined children walking along river banks at opposite ends of the same country will help illustrate the ways in which histories influence the connotations of the words we employ. Days spent trout fishing in the clear, blue waters of the Gallatin will leave a different impression than will days spent walking along the muddy banks of mighty Mississippi. Because of their individual histories or contexts, each of the imagined children is likely to imagine different images when the word 'river' is called to mind. In

the same way, the histories and contexts attached to language cannot help but influence the words researchers and participants choose to employ as they enter into dialogue.

The notion of context is imbricated with the concept that language is alive and given new meaning by its use in conversation. Bakhtin (1981) posited the notion that "the word lives, as it were, on the boundary between its own context and another, alien, context" (p. 284). Moreover, even the centripetal (standardizing) forces that seek to unify language and preserve a single unitary system cannot overcome the reality of the life of language. Language comes alive because every social group creates a distinct language or discourse (Bakhtin, 1981; Gee, 2008). This is where the significance of the life of language becomes a concept that is central to the discussion of conducting qualitative research. Bakhtin (1981) put forth the idea that the prose writer welcomes the ability of heteroglossia to enrich literary language and does not seek to "purge words of intentions and tones that are alien" (p. 298). Effective qualitative research, I argue, does not seek to do so either. Instead, qualitative research provides the opportunity to embrace the multifaceted meanings that exist in communication.

In order to communicate and understand the experiences expressed by participants, researchers must be cognizant of the connotations that words, previously uttered by others, bring with them to dialogue. Bakhtin (1981) argued that outside of "the mythical Adam, who approached a virginal and as yet unqualified world with the first word," there is no escaping the influences of previous utterances (p. 279). Recognizing the presence of the connotations that result from prior dialogue and allowing them to flourish are fundamental elements of communication. Bakhtin's theories help illustrate how our personal histories cause us to respond to language in a unique manner. Similarly, Rosenblatt's (2005) transactional reading theory helps illuminate how an individual's "reservoir of past experience with people and the world" will shape his or her response to language and understanding of the world (p. 75). For example, a childhood full of happy memories about days spent wading in the pristine waters of a river while trout fishing is likely to stimulate a positive response, perhaps even a wide grin, when he or she hears the word 'river.' Conversely, someone who had a negative experience on that same river—maybe someone who fell into a rapid and nearly drowned in the rushing water—is likely to have a very visceral and negative reaction to a discussion of rivers. As we seek to communicate with others, we hope that our words will breed understanding. We reflect on our past experiences and choose our words carefully as we communicate with others seeking to elicit a desired response. We hope people will have shared images and understandings of the words we choose.

Bakhtin is careful to point out that "understanding comes to fruition only in the response" (p. 282). The nature of the response can be varied and can often be quite different than we might anticipate. As Becker (2007) pointed out, "Society is made up of a variety of groups, each giving its own meanings to things and people and events" (p. 206). When researchers discuss the dialogue they engage in with their participants, they must account for the nuances of meaning that are at play. Therefore, it is important to explore the ways that participants and researchers are being shaped by the entering into dialogue with people and the texts they read.

Transactional Spaces

Louise Rosenblatt's (1995, 2005) concept of transaction serves as a foundational element of my theoretical framework. Rosenblatt's work as a literacy critic and educational philosopher provided scholars with a revolutionary way to view the reading experience. Rosenblatt (2005) used "John Dewey's term, transaction, to emphasize the contribution of both reader and text" in the reading experience (p. 73). In Rosenblatt's view, a transaction signifies a process an organic process of mutual shaping that causes meaning to be dynamic, instead of static or fixed. Her

work, which reconceptualized the important role that readers play in the meaning making process of reading, changed the way literacy scholars and English teachers view the reading process. Rosenblatt argued that readers shape a text by drawing upon their past experiences as they read. These past experiences shape their understanding of the text, which shapes both the text—as it is understood—and the reader because the reading of the text contributes to the reader's schema. The concept of transaction is important to qualitative researchers because of the social and contextual nature of engaging in Social Science research.

Fecho and Meacham (2007) have argued that researchers do more than simply learn from the communities in which they conduct research. Instead, when research spaces are viewed as transactional spaces, it becomes possible to attend to the ways in which new meanings and understandings are constructed through dialogue in the research situation. Researchers and participants have the opportunity to develop new understandings about the worlds around them when they attend to the moments of mutual shaping that occur during the research process. The theories of Bakhtin and Rosenblatt can work together to clarify how dialogue and experience shape an individual's worldview. When researchers draw upon these theories and attend specifically to moments of mutual shaping during the data analysis process, much can be learned about the ways that language transforms understanding. Therefore, a data analysis tool that specifically explores the contextual and transactional nature of language has much to offer researchers interested in illuminating human experience. In the following sections, I discuss the existing qualitative data analysis tools that I have blended to create TA. Later, I will offer a framework for engaging in TA through a discussion of the steps I employed to utilize TA to develop an understanding of how my participants' experiences have been shaped by transactions with the world around them. I offer this framework in order to provide a blueprint, which researchers might adopt or adapt in order to support their research.

Blending Traditional Qualitative Analysis Tools

A project designed to explore the process of mutual shaping that occurs as researchers enter into dialogue with participants who are discussing their experiences will be enhanced by carefully considering the transactional nature of language. This sort of project requires a data analysis tool that can provide a focus on the mutual shaping that occurs as the utterances of individuals transact with one another in the research situation. In order to accommodate this focus, TA provides a multi-step process, which blends elements of narrative analysis (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Mishler, 1986, 1999; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 2008) and thematic analysis (Maxwell, 2005; Riessman, 2008; Rossman & Rallis, 2003) to offer researchers the ability to focus on the dynamic nature of language and its capability to shape our understanding of lived experience. In her discussion of transactional reading theory, Rosenblatt (1995) artfully argued, "Language is socially evolved, but it is always constituted by individuals, with their particular histories" (p. 25). The ways in which those particular histories influence the ways that individuals shape and are shaped by the world around them are an important aspect of researching lived experience. TA can enhance research focusing on lived experiences by illuminating this dynamic shaping process. In the following sections, I provide a brief discussion of how narrative and thematic analysis serve as a foundation for TA. In doing so, I describe how I have supplemented these data analysis tools to make it possible for researchers to focus on moments of mutual shaping during the data analysis process.

Drawing upon Narrative

Although qualitative researchers have difficulty agreeing on what counts as a story or narrative, it

is possible to analyze narrative accounts in "systematic ways to generate meaningful and promising findings" (Mishler, 1986, p. 77). Researchers do not need to elicit traditional narratives from their participants to draw upon elements of narrative analysis. Instead, researchers can encourage participants to offer examples or short narrative accounts to give shape to their experiences. Riessman (2008) has argued that narrative analysis affords researchers the ability to "interrogate how talk among speakers is interactively (dialogically) produced" (p. 105). Storytelling is one of the most effective means we, as human beings, have for making sense of our experiences in the world (Mishler, 1986). Therefore, it makes sense to elicit narratives from participants as part of the process of exploring their lived experiences (Mishler, 1986).

The chief element of narrative analysis that TA draws upon is the need to be attentive to the ways that the dialogue between the researcher and the participant influence the meaning that is being made during the interview situation. In order to fully understand how dialogue shapes the process of meaning making, the following concepts must be considered: How might the participant be structuring his or her story in ways that are specific to the interview situation? How might the researchers' experiences be influencing his or her understanding of the stories told by the participant? Careful consideration of these concepts while engaging in TA can help researchers gain an understanding of the process of mutual shaping that is occurring during the generation of data. This can be accomplished through the writing of dialogic memos, which I will discuss in detail later. These memos act as a space for the researcher to generate data focusing on how the participant structured his or her stories, interrogate how participating in the research has influenced the participant's worldview, and explore how the project is shaping the researcher's understanding of the data. The focus on the process of mutual shaping and the added step of revisiting these memos specifically to investigate this process is one key element that differentiates TA from narrative analysis.

Building on Thematic Analysis

Researchers interested in exploring human experience through interview data can also find thematic analysis helpful. Maxwell (2005) argued that thematic analysis offers researchers the ability to categorize and compare data to "aid in the development of theoretical concepts" (p. 96). This approach to analyzing the data requires an inductive approach (Rossman & Rallis, 2003), which can facilitate the exploration of how the participants used language to discuss their experiences. In other words, researchers can draw upon the participants' words to develop themes and organize the data into categories to be further explored. This can be accomplished by engaging in a systematic process of reading the interview transcripts; identifying themes in the participants' responses constructed during the interview process; questioning how those responses are structured; and exploring the themes identified to develop an understanding of the participants' lived experiences.

Thematic analysis offers an excellent way for researchers to take an inductive and constant comparative approach to analyzing the data they generate. However, this analysis tool is limited in its effectiveness. Typically, thematic analysis provides a means for categorizing and identifying key concepts within the data. Often researchers will want to take their analysis further to explore elements within those themes. For example, a researcher who is interested in studying the mutual shaping that occurs through dialogue will want to explore the themes he or she identifies to focus on the concept of mutual shaping. Thematic analysis does provide a tool for the identification of themes. It does not, however, attend to the dynamic nature of the transactions that occur when people engage in dialogue with the texts they read or the world around them. In order to explore the ways in which dialogue amongst people shapes their worldviews, researchers need to add a layer of analysis that focuses on the processes of mutual shaping that can be

identified in each of the themes. TA provides this important layer of analysis because it creates an opportunity for the researcher to go beyond the identification of themes and focus specifically on the moments of mutual shaping that he or she identifies as the themes are constructed.

A Framework for Engaging in Transactional Analysis

Exploring the dynamic nature of transactions requires a data analysis tool specifically designed to consider the process of mutual shaping. Drawing upon the theories of Bakhtin (1981, 1986) and Rosenblatt (1995, 2005), TA offers an additional tier of analysis that seeks to illuminate the transactions that occur as people read and enter into dialogue with the world around them. Rosenblatt (1995) argued that "the 'meaning' does not reside ready-made 'in' the text or 'in' the reader but happens or comes to being during the transaction between reader and text" (p. 7). Engaging in TA allows the researcher to look closely at each of the themes he or she has identified in order to recognize and analyze the moments of mutual shaping that are present in the participants' stories. TA creates opportunities for researchers to focus their analysis on the ways that language and its usage shape participants' lived experiences. In order to make it possible for others to utilize this data analysis tool, I describe the framework I have utilized in a recent study in order to illustrate how I supplemented narrative analysis and thematic analysis by employing TA to attend to the processes of mutual shaping that I saw as the seven high school English teachers from the Southeastern U.S. who participated in my study described their experiences of attempting to engage in dialogue with the policies in their schools.

TA is a multi-step process that enhances existing inductive and constant comparative approaches to data analysis. I employed the following steps in the analysis of the data I generated for this study. First, I engaged in the practice of writing dialogic memos to supplement the field notes I took before, during, and after each of the three semi-structured interviews I conducted with my participants. These memos offered me the opportunity to consider how my subjectivities were influencing my understanding of the data generated during these interviews. I revisited these memos as I analyzed the data I generated and continued to engage in this recursive process as I chronicled my understanding of the data throughout my work on the study. I will return to my discussion of these memos later as I provide an example of how they have specifically informed my research.

Second, I engaged in the process of mapping the interviews right after they were conducted. The mapping process consisted of listening to the interviews and noting times during the interview session when participants addressed topics that were related to my research questions. The mapping sessions also allowed me to note who initiated the discussion of topics and how they were discussed. This assisted me in my efforts to contextualize the participants' responses to my questions. The mapping process also allowed me to begin to identify preliminary themes. Third, I drew upon elements of narrative analysis to interrogate the ways in which the interview situation influenced the ways that my participants had structured the responses they offered during the interview sessions. After considering how the interview situation and my transactions with the participants were influencing the data, I listened to the interviews again and read my memos and field notes to compile a list of themes. The fifth step in my data analysis process consisted of reading the transcripts and developing thematic tables where I organized the participants' responses into the themes that I had identified during the mapping process. This step drew heavily upon thematic analysis to identify themes that were consistent across the interviews.

At the sixth step in the process TA really began to take shape and move beyond thematic analysis to inform my understanding of the data. In this step I explored the themes to focus on the dynamic processes of mutual shaping that were occurring. Thematic analysis and coding provide

a structure for researchers to organize data and focus on particular concepts. However, TA extends this structure to create a process that enables researchers to focus specifically on how an individual's experience is shaped as they engage in dialogue. As part of this process, I looked closely at the thematic tables and dialogic memos to see what I could learn about how the participants' experiences were being shaped by the discourse of educational policy. For example, one of the most salient themes I generated during my initial analysis steps was *Standardization of Curricula*. Each of the seven teachers interviewed told me stories about how the policies in their counties mandated the implementation of standardized curricula, which included pacing guides that required them to teach specific texts at specific times during the calendar year.

One of the participants, Sasha (pseudonyms used throughout), told me a story about an experience she had during the 2007 school year when she attempted to engage in dialogue with the county-mandated pacing guide she had received. When she and her students arrived at the date when they were supposed to be reading *Romeo and Juliet*, Sasha realized that her students had all read this play the year before, and they begged her to read something different. Since the county-mandated tests, which the pacing guide supported, were not based on a specific text, Sasha saw no problem with deviating from the pacing guide and having her students read *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Sasha believed that she could still cover all of the required information for the test and engage her students by providing them with the choice they craved. Sasha described her experience by saying:

> I just didn't see the point of having to do *Romeo and Juliet*. Why can't we do another Shakespearean play? So they all really wanted to read a comedy and so I picked *Midsummer Night's Dream*, which was a great bridge because I just finished poetry. And so it was a great way to analyze prose vs. verse and why would Shakespeare make those change or choices, whatever. It was very appropriate for the tract that they were doing. And they all aced it. Shakespeare! Actors from the Fulton Shakespeare Company (pseudonym) came in and watched them perform scenes and gave them feedback and it was this whole festival that I coordinated. I mean it was amazing!

From her description, Sasha's unit appeared to be smashing success. Her students were engaged, the scenes were well received by the visiting actors from the local theatre company, and all of her students passed the county-mandated benchmark test. A short time later an article appeared in the city newspaper lauding the work Sasha was doing with her students. And that is when the trouble began. The administrators in Sasha's county were unhappy because she had deviated from the county policy mandating which texts should be covered. Although her principal was initially supportive of Sasha instructional decisions, Sasha quickly found herself without her principal's support. She was reprimanded and eventually left the school at the end of the year after a series of acrimonious meetings and official reprimands.

Elements of narrative analysis helped me to attend to the transactions that were occurring during the interview situation. This tool helped me interrogate how Sasha had structured this story as we talked. Thematic analysis made it possible for me to focus on the content of Sasha's story and to consider how her it fit with the stories of other participants that I had grouped under the theme of *Standardization of Curricula*. However, to explore how this experience had shaped Sasha's perspective as a teacher and her instructional practices, I needed another layer of analysis. It was at this point of the analysis process that TA was most useful. The lens of TA facilitated my focus on how Sasha's experiences had been shaped by her transactions with policy outside of the context of the interview.

As I employed the lens of TA, I focused my analysis on stories that participants told in order to gain insight into how educational policies were being conveyed to them. I concentrated on the specific words they used to describe the ways that administrators conveyed the policies teachers were to follow. Moreover, I spent considerable time thinking about how the participants' experiences were being shaped by their transactions with the language employed by policymakers and school administrators. I further explored the thematic tables to identify ways in which that language influenced the instructional decisions made by the participants. This process also afforded me with the opportunity to consider the ways that the discourse of educational policy was shaping the participants' perceptions of the language of educational policy and their abilities to enter into dialogue and transact with those policies.

For example, Sasha and several of the other participants discussed receiving policies from administrators through PowerPoint presentations laden the term "non-negotiables." In Sasha's case, the pacing guides were considered "non-negotiable" items. As a teacher with a master's degree and eight years of experience, Sasha believed that she could use her professional judgment and alter the pacing guide to include a text that her students wanted to read without compromising her instructional goals, which included preparing her students for the county and state mandated tests they would need to pass. What she learned from this experience was that her county administrators did not value her professional judgment. Sasha grew frustrated during our second interview session as she told me, "All this work I did. And at the end, mind you, I did not have a single student fail the End-of-Course-Test. Special needs and ELLs [English Language Learners] included, all of them. But the fact that my lesson plans did not coordinate with the pacing guide, they were writing me up and putting something in my file." Despite her belief that her students could benefit from deviating from the pacing guide in the future, Sasha followed the pacing guide explicitly until she left her job at the school at the end of the year.

TA made it possible for me to understand more than just the story Sasha told me. The processes of specifically attending to the moments of mutual shaping Sasha described and carefully re-reading the dialogic memos I had been writing enabled me to interrogate my understanding of the data. Narrative analysis offers the ability to question how participants structure stories, and thematic analysis helps to organize data and identify salient concepts. However, TA makes it possible to take the analysis further. It requires the researcher to revisit the structure and presentation of participants' stories, consider the salient themes, and build upon these elements of data analysis by carefully considering how the process of engaging in dialogue is shaping the experiences of the participants *and* the researcher. This level of analysis allowed me to accomplish my goal of developing an understanding of how Sasha had attempted to shape the policies she received and how those policies shaped her experiences as a teacher. I believe that other Social Science researchers can also employ TA to develop a rich understanding of the social processes they study; however, the influences of one's subjectivities must be considered as part of this process.

Reservoirs of past experience

In order to effectively employ TA, researchers need to consider how their subjectivities are influencing their understanding of the data. As Rosenblatt (1995) has argued, each person has a unique reservoir of past experience that influences the way he or she understands the world. Bakhtin (1981) discussed this concept in terms of the contexts that color our understanding of the utterance. More recently, qualitative researchers have discussed this idea in terms of subjectivity. Some scholars, such as Husserl (1970) have argued that researchers can bracket these understandings, beliefs, or experiences in an effort to reduce their influences on the researcher's understanding of the data. This would be, in my estimation, a futile effort. Van Manen (1990)

agued that we cannot "forget or ignore what we already 'know'" (p. 47). We can try to suppress that knowledge, but it will inevitably "creep back into our reflections" (p. 47). Therefore, I argue that it is more productive to consider and explicitly state our understandings, contexts, and beliefs. Researchers who employ TA will need to be especially careful to do so because this method of analysis, like many other qualitative approaches, attends to how experience shape understanding.

Peshkin's work (1988) highlights the importance of being aware of how our subjectivities influence the research we conduct. While it is impossible to eliminate the influences of our worldviews and reservoirs of past experience on the process of generating and analyzing qualitative data, it is possible—if not imperative—for researchers to find ways to manage the influences of their subjectivities. By becoming aware of how our subjectivity influences our understanding of the lived experiences of others, we can "preclude it from being unwittingly burdensome" (p. 20). It is important to note that engaging in TA will require researchers to remain attentive to the ways that their subjectivities are influencing their transactions with participants and their utterances. Therefore, researchers must find a method for bringing their subjectivities to the surface of their consciousness. The process of memo writing offers researchers a way to become aware of how their subjectivities are influencing their projects. In my view, memo writing should be an integral part of utilizing TA.

Dialogic memos and TA

Dialogic memos are a vital element of TA as they create spaces for researchers to consider and chronicle the ways that their experiences influence their understanding of the data they generate. A crucial part of exploring the transactions that researchers identify during the data generation and analysis processes is the researchers' ability to chronicle moments of mutual shaping and record them in their fieldnotes and memos. Heath and Street (2008) have recommended the use of "conceptual memos" for recording the concepts about particular events that stand out to researchers during the research and analysis process (p. 79). I argue that it is useful to build on the notion of 'conceptual memos' to generate dialogic memos. These latter memos function as spaces for researchers to enter into dialogue with themselves and with their participants' responses.

Through dialogic memos, researchers can record moments of transaction that they identify and make meaning of those moments through the process of writing about them. By recording their thoughts during this process, researchers will be able to see how they are beginning to make meaning and reshape their understanding of their experiences and the experiences of the participants. These memos will also create a space for researchers to catalogue and reflect upon the methods they are employing to facilitate their inquiry. Through the process of writing dialogic memos, researchers can "cast a reflexive eye" on their processes of generating and analyzing the data (O'Connor, 2007, p. 260). Reflexivity is a key element in the development of an understanding of the mutual shaping that occurs during the research process.

The process of writing dialogic memos was integral to my ability to increase my awareness of how transactions with my participants were shaping my understanding of the data. As I wrote these memos throughout the processes of data generation and analysis, I was able to come to a better understanding of how my participants' contexts and stories were shaping my worldview. Returning to these memos as I wrote about my data brought these moments of mutual shaping to the surface of my consciousness and made it possible for me to attend to these transactions as I discussed my findings.

For example, *Lack of Input on Policy* was another theme that I identified in my data. All of the

teachers used phrases like "top-down" or "coming down at us" to signify that they felt their administrators dictated policies without including them in the process of crafting policies. The directional quality of communication surfaced consistently throughout the interviews I conducted with each of the participants. As a former high school teacher, I have had experience with receiving policy mandates from administrators; however, prior to talking with the participants I had spent little time thinking about this facet of the discourse of policy. I had not thought about the reality that policy, like many unsavory things, flows downhill. However, as Walter and I were talking about the ways in which policies were discussed in his county, he brought the concept of top-down communication to the surface of my consciousness. I wrote about this realization in my dialogic memos; this ensured that I would revisit this concept with my participants during subsequent interviews. Moreover, writing these memos and reviewing what I had written helped me consider how this realization influenced my analysis of the data. During our second interview, I asked Walter to describe the opportunities for teachers to have input on the creation of new policies. He pointed out that his county is extremely large, and when I asked him to expand on that he replied:

> Oh man, I don't know. I think there are 150,000 kids in the system. It's monstrous. I think it is the biggest system in the state. And it's run like a corporation. And it's the top down approach. And it's uh…there are, you can get on committees that steer things. Or that they'll ask for two people to be from a certain school to go and meet with this group that's talking about this issue. And you can have some input, but largely it's just top down. It says this is the mandate from on high and you're just gonna deal with it.

Walter's use of the phrase "top-down" resonated with me. I found this concept of the top-down approach intriguing. During the memo writing process, it became clear that Walter's phrase prompted me to explore this theme more deeply. Instead of simply identifying a theme in the data, I was able to carefully consider how this directional quality of communication was influencing the experiences of my participants. Without TA as an additional tier of analysis, I would not have had a method for interrogating the implications of this theme for my participants' experiences.

Transcending Limitations

In my view, TA seems to be most useful as a tool for analyzing interview data. The dialogic nature of interviewing can lead to questions about the validity of the data. However, researchers can address the concerns of skeptics by ensuring that their work explicates and adheres to a sound theoretical framework. When addressing the issue of validity in interview research, Kvale (1996) used the metaphor of a miner looking to uncover information contained in the respondent as a way to conceptualize the potential for an interviewer's biases to corrupt the data he or she is seeking. Bias, however, "is a meaningful concept only if the subject is seen to possess a preformed, pure informational commodity that the interview process might somehow contaminate" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 18). I do not believe that participants possess information that can be contaminated during the interview process. Instead, I view the interview situation as an opportunity to facilitate the social construction of meaning. That is not to say that interviewers do not need to be wary of asking questions in ways that encourage participants to tell them what they think they want to hear. That would, no doubt, be problematic. However, the biases and perspectives that all parties bring to the interview situation are integral parts of the contexts that color the words they chose in an attempt to carry out their speech plans (Bakhtin, 1981) and describe their experiences in the world. Clearly, "all participants in an interview are inevitably implicated in making meaning" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 18). The biases,

opinions, and subjectivities of all parties involved will influence the data that is constructed during the interview situation.

My theoretical and methodological frameworks support the view that interview data are produced through dialogue and knowledge is socially constructed during that dialogue. Baker (2004) suggested that the interview process should be described as data "generation" instead of data "collection" (p. 163). From that perspective, then, I must also argue that the idea of uncorrupted data is a fallacy. I draw support for this perspective from Freeman, deMarris, Preissle, Roulston, and St. Pierre (2007) who argued, "There are no 'pure,' 'raw' data, uncontaminated by human thought and action, and the significance of data depends on how material fits into the architecture of corroborating data" (p. 27). In other words, the measure of a study's validity should not be the 'purity' of its data. Research should, instead, be judged on the consistency of the decisions made about generating, analyzing, and presenting data. Researchers who hope to conduct investigations that can be considered valid or trustworthy must work carefully to ensure that their theoretical and methodological frameworks are compatible and inform the inquiries. The question of how each decision made by the researcher fits within the theoretical and methodological frameworks that underpin the inquiry should be the primary concern. There is no simple formula for making this sort of judgment. Instead of drawing on some pre-determined formula or restrictive set of steps to be followed, I argue that researchers should remain reflective and interrogate how the choices they make throughout this process are aligned with their theoretical and methodological frameworks. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that the framework I offer in this paper is not a list of prescriptive steps. It is, instead, simply a scaffold that can be adjusted to meet the needs of individual researcher's theoretical foundations.

TA lends itself to the deep exploration of dynamic topics that are often addressed best using small-scale studies with a limited number of participants. A large number of participants would make it difficult to devote the time necessary to deeply explore the stories told by each participant. I should also point out that small-scale studies are not designed to produce generalizable results. Attempting to do so would be inconsistent with a theoretical framework that attends to the unique experiences that human beings have as they read the world around them. The production of generalizable results that can be extrapolated to larger populations is, after all, a statistical process. In my view, the processes of meaning making and dialogue are far too individual to generate results that can be generalized to large populations. TA is a data analysis tool that can be employed by researchers conducting small-scale studies designed to generate "conceptual inferences" (Riessman, 2008, p. 13). These conceptual inferences have much to offer researchers interested in learning about the social process of dialoguing and transacting with the world.

The fact that these sorts of projects are designed to create spaces for researchers to make conceptual inferences about a topic does not diminish the usefulness of their inquiries. Presenting data in the form of human experience, instead of raw numbers, can have powerful results—particularly in acrimonious debates over how schools should be run and evaluated. Patton's (1990) work demonstrated the compelling nature of data representing teachers' individual experiences with policy mandates. In his study, school board members were asked to read the pages of the teachers' open-ended responses to questions about a newly introduced accountability program in Michigan. They did and found "they could not so easily dismiss the anguish, fear, and depth of concern revealed in the teachers' own reflections. The teachers' words had face validity and credibility" (p. 23). The atmosphere changed from one of attack to dialogue. Teachers and administrators began to work together and used the evaluation report to rethink the accountability system. More recently, Olsen and Sexton's (2009) work highlighted teachers' voices and individual experiences to offer some insight into why centripetal policy discourse is unlikely to

"substantively increase teacher effectiveness and improve schooling" (p. 38). Teachers' words can be a catalyst for change and the negotiation of more palatable educational policies—if they are brought to the fore. I have found that TA functioned as an analysis tool that supported my goal of bringing teachers' voices into the dialogue of educational policy.

Creativity and Innovation

One of the most challenging and rewarding aspects of qualitative research is selecting methods that make it possible to accomplish research goals. When researchers find that existing methods do not meet their needs, they have the ability to use creative thinking and innovation to develop new tools which support their inquiries. The framework I have offered in this article is not designed to be a demonstrative, step-by-step process that must remain unchanged. In fact, offering such a formulaic plan would be inconsistent with my theoretical stance. Instead, I offer researchers a concept and a blueprint that can be adapted to fit with the individual theoretical frameworks that inform their work. Researchers interested in engaging inductive analysis of data that explores lived experience from a social constructionist epistemology can draw upon the framework of TA and craft a data analysis tool that will serve as the lantern they need to facilitate their understanding of human experience.

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