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A Duoethnography on Duoethnography: More than a Book Review

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Abstract

Within this duoethnographic book review, we sought to carry out and compose our co-authored review of Norris, Sawyer, and Lund's (2012) edited text by using the method put forward within its pages. What follows is a duoethnographic book review. Through the processes of jointly reading, note taking, conversing, sharing, and negotiating, we have created a dialogic, multi-vocal, and candid review of this compendium. Throughout our now-public dialogue, readers will gain an understanding of both the book and the method on which it is focused. Completing this review in the fashion we did, we hope, provides readers with the needed information and motivation to indulge in this text's chapters in the way they see best suited for their purposes.

Keywords

Duoethnography, Dialogue, Book Review, Story Telling, Power

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A Duoethnography on Duoethnography: More than a Book Review

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Within this duoethnographic book review, we sought to carry out and compose our co-authored review of Norris, Sawyer, and Lund's (2012) edited text by using the method put forward within its pages. What follows is a duoethnographic book review. Through the processes of jointly reading, note taking, conversing, sharing, and negotiating, we have created a dialogic, multi-vocal, and candid review of this compendium. Throughout our now-public dialogue, readers will gain an understanding of both the book and the method on which it is focused. Completing this review in the fashion we did, we hope, provides readers with the needed information and motivation to indulge in this text's chapters in the way they see best suited for their purposes. Keywords: Duoethnography, Dialogue, Book Review, Story Telling, Power.

As illustrated in the title, what began as a book review ended up being something much more than monovocal writing based on an individual's critical reading of a specific text. What we have created here is a duoethnography on duoethnography. We started with the intention of producing a co-authored book review: straightforward and simple. But our process negated that original intention. We have created a text in the margins, which cannot be categorized as a book review or a research paper in a traditional sense. This work is a book review-duoethnography hybrid. Or in other words, it is a duoethnographic book review. We will explain.

Late this past spring, I (Mandy) received a message from Darren Lund via email in which he asked me if I would be willing to compose a book review on a recently published text: *Duoethnography: Dialogic Methods for Social, Health, and Educational Research* (Norris, Sawyer, & Lund, 2012). As both an editor and chapter author (Nabavi & Lund, 2012), he had played a significant part in bringing the text to publication. I, as someone interested in emergent qualitative methods and who had "watched" the evolution of duoethnography over the past few years through conference attendance, was almost immediately compelled to write back with a resounding yes. So, here I am. Well, here we are. Let me explain.

I asked my doctoral assistant (Jennifer) if she would be interested in working on this review along with me and she agreed. For the most part, we decided to work at a distance. Jennifer lives about two hours from campus, and I live just outside campus. After we each read a chapter or two, we wrote independent notes on what we had read which we shared via email. We also met in person and on campus a few times to have lunch or coffee and discuss our progress. As a (primarily) qualitative researcher, I saw the joint composition of this review as a form of qualitative research, just as recommended by Chenail (2010). That said, I saw my notes as analytic memos (Charmaz, 2006). At the start of the process, Jennifer suggested we craft the review as a duoethnography, brilliant. So again, here we are.

What follows is a duoethnographic book review emblematic of our dialogical process of making meaning of the text reviewed herein as well as our joint process. In keeping with the tenets of duoethnography, we saw ourselves certainly not as the topic of this review, but rather as the site of this book review. A summation of our notes or analytic memos, or dialogic writing communication, is presented below. It should be noted that our exchanges were truly dialogic (Bohm, 2004), rather than just casual conversation.

Our Dialogic Exchange

Mandy: I have really enjoyed this text so far. The first chapter provided a necessary contextual background for what follows. The explanation of the methodological lineage of duoethnography was fantastic. As someone who “knows of” these researchers and has seen, albeit in part, this methodological evolution through readings and conference presentations, the methodological mapping was quite interesting to “see” in full. At this point in the review process, I find myself oscillating between a review of the methodology and the book. This is a book review, not a methodological critique. Mindfulness of this is key, but I am questioning whether or not there should be overlap.

Jennifer: I also had this sense of uncertainty about the way to do this review. The first chapter explains duoethnography but does not show it, except for a brief poem where a researcher plays on words from Dr. Seuss, although I don’t consider this to be true duoethnography because it was not done jointly between the two. As I was reading the first chapter, I found myself itching to see it in action. The chapters in the middle are where I really get to see it in action and feel a part of it.

Mandy: Duoethnography, in my own words, involves two researchers in dialogue about some topic. Each researcher/dialoguer uses his or her life’s curriculum, which is inevitably steeped in some “culture(s),” as a starting point for dialogical contributions. For example, if I were to engage in a dialogue with another person/researcher about what it means to be an athlete, I would draw upon all I know about being an athlete from my own experiences as an athlete. Stories about my (former) athlete life would be presented as data. These data would be re-presented from my memory. They would be subject to meaning making and re-meaning making. As is outlined in the first chapter, my research partner ought to be different than me in some way. Through this difference, new interpretations of my/our life’s curriculum, as well as my/our stories/data, would be possible. Thus, new narrations, perhaps counter narratives, of my/our stories might be created. In dialogue with another, I/we would be able to re-vision, re-tell, and re-understand my/our stories – something not possible through self-reflection alone. We would create space for re-meaning-making and possibilities for the construction of new knowledge. At this moment, I am unsure of a topic “out of bounds” for this type of work. Quite a pastiche of topics is represented within the middle chapters.

Jennifer: What really fascinated me was the possibility of transformation as one researcher learns about who she is against the backdrop of the Other (researcher) and vice versa. In re-telling my story to another, I learn about myself, and when I see the

similarities and differences of my story in the story of the Other, I must rethink my own meaning. There is no teacher here. Only two (or more) sojourners searching for meaning in their journeys, which are defined both by the person and by juxtaposing the story against that of another. But it is still the person telling the story who will find her own transformation. It is not for the Other to dictate this.

Mandy: Quite right. Both of us, with some of our research tentacles reaching into the discipline of adult education, have interest in transformative learning (Mezirow & Associates, 1990). Becoming strange to self (Greene, 1973 as cited in Norris's prologue to Chapter three of the text) through reflection in dialogue can certainly be a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow & Associates, 1990). I found it interesting that each of the 13 chapters begins with a prologue written by Norris or Sawyer, two of the editors. The prologues situate each chapter within the larger narrative goals of the whole text. While I appreciate the prologues, some part of me wanted to speak back and say: allow me to make my own meaning of this.

Jennifer: I didn't think about it until reading your notes, but I mostly enjoyed reading the prologues but did feel they put a distance there by telling instead of showing me how to do duoethnography.

Mandy: Yes, the prologues felt a little authorial, but I gained from them. I was really struck by the idea of becoming strange to myself (Greene, 1973), as previously noted, which the writing of duoethnography can catalyze. In reading your "notes" I have become strange to myself as I questioned my positionality within this process and question whether or not I had any business asking/telling you to do this with me as a component of our (inorganic) partnership.

Jennifer: In reading your question to yourself regarding positionality, I thought I should remind you that although I was not sure how we could do the duoethnography as a review, it was my suggestion as one possible way to do this. Of course making this suggestion made me nervous and a little insecure, but maybe I am at a place in my life where I am ready to be braver and to take more risks, to step outside of my comfort zone. In other areas of my life, I realize I want to make my world grow bigger. Perhaps that need has spread to this academic/professional life too. I have been too long in the shadows; it is time to move forward. But having you write the first set of notes helped me to take the next leap with less trepidation.

Mandy: As we have learned through the reading of this text, research partner trust is critical within the duoethnographic process. We had to address the ways in which power operated in this process to write this review. I feel proud of us for addressing the power imbalance implicit in the professor-assistant relationship. This writing and the readers of it will benefit.

Jennifer: There is some natural tension there when the relationship is uneven. I have worked with professors before on an article but that was much more impersonal and academic. I see now the authors of Chapter one were right: duoethnography requires

trust. While I was taking notes, it was only after reading your notes that I felt comfortable enough to type mine up and offer them for what they are. I think sometimes, when we are ready, introspection, especially the amount required in duoethnography, leads us to action, to make changes. I get the idea that these duoethnographies, those that comprise the bulk of the book, take place over a longer period of time – longer than a few weeks. I wonder how writing this will change us, if at all. I mean, will there be any changes that continue long after the completion of this book review in the way we read non-duoethnographies, write our own articles, and just view conversations with others as a way to shape us and help us better understand ourselves?

Mandy: I love, love, love these questions. We will have to wait and see. Let us get back to the book. This edited text contained two chapters on duoethnography written by the editors – the first and last chapters – and 11 duoethnographies, or chapters, in between. I read this text cover to cover, in order. My reading of the text was for the purpose of this review. During the middle chapters, I experienced some fatigue in my reading. When we discussed my fatigue, you helped me realize something. Even for the neophyte duoethnographer, a complete reading of this text is unnecessary. The first and last chapters are critical as are a few selected chapters in between – based on reader interest in the topics of the dialogue. When we chatted, you suggested Chapter five as a “must read” too because it introduces trioethnography – basically a duoethnography plus an extra person who differs from the pair in some way. In this case it was sex; the two male duoethnographers were compelled to find a female researcher/participant.

Jennifer: Your fatigue comment is often true with anthologies: there are a variety of stories but after awhile I lose my excitement while reading them just like you described. I don't think such books are meant to be read from introduction to conclusion. Instead a reader chooses - generally the introductory and conclusion - but also those stories that seem compelling for some reason. If I were teaching multiculturalism or doing research on it, I would choose a few of the curriculum pieces, the power pieces, the patriotic songs, the multicultural ones, and the beauty chapter. But if I wanted to read this to know how to do duoethnography, I would choose the first and last chapters, a couple of articles in the middle and the trioethnography chapter, like you mentioned. I would not force myself to read each and every chapter. We are all busy, but I might choose to return to the others as needed or desired.

Mandy: I agree completely with your assessment. It has been very cool to see this text through your eyes as a novelist as well as a researcher. I am stubborn and sometimes disciplined to a fault, so I “made myself” read the whole thing. Moreover, my reading of the duoethnographies was inseparable from my socialization as an academic who reads academic writing. The desire to see and read traditional manuscript headings such as introduction, literature review, methods, findings, discussion, and conclusion were so strong that I wrote these words in the margins on occasion to allow the piece to “fit” my academically socialized consumption of the work, even work within the qualitative research paradigm. I am left to wonder about how the data are analyzed in this type of research? Is there room for creative blending? There is certainly a difference, often,

between methodology and frames of analysis. Frankly, I wanted methods sections. I did not always get what I sought.

Jennifer: I had none of your desires to turn the chapters into a more “academic journal article.” I was happy with the absence of scholarly words and tiresome explanations of methods. I did not feel any tension within me about the format. I, too, enjoyed the stories. I am in the process of finishing a novel manuscript, and so telling a tale (or reading one) feels natural to me, much more so than journal article writing. When I was reading these chapters, I wanted to try my hand at being the participative reader who is a joint researcher (although I prefer the vernacular of storyteller).

Mandy: Fascinating. I was reading as an introspective analyst, I think. I was trying to “do” qualitative research “on” the text. Alas, I quite enjoyed the cultural artifacts included in chapter three. A whole host of elicitation devices may be necessary for the duoethnographer. It is nearly impossible for most of us to recall all the many details of our lives, but a photograph, smell, letter, or even a dream can bring memories back to life.

Jennifer: I am always amazed when talking to family or friends about the past, how our memories are divergent about the same situation. Sometimes I have absolutely no memory of the event that seemed significant to them and vice versa. I always thought it was strange how my dad quizzed me about memories of eating at restaurants from when I was in high school. I thought, wow, eating out must really be important to him. Maybe this was because he was from a poor family and hardly had the opportunity. And yet, while having dinner with a few friends recently, I discovered that they claimed to remember which booths they sat in on previous visits, even from years ago. I thought, really? You remember that? But on recollection, there are times that even I can remember eating at a particular restaurant and maybe in the right moment I could remember the booth too or at least the general area. Still, memories are strange - both in the ones we keep and the ones we lose, in the details and the vagueness.

Mandy: So interesting. Memories are a critical component of duoethnographic work. Memories are so strange; I have never really thought much about this before. I suppose this is the beauty of the duoethnographic process: thinking of things differently, giving new meaning to past experience, and doing so through dialogue. This leads me to another question, what are the attributes of a “good” duoethnography partner? Rick’s excerpts in chapter three made me consider accountability within duoethnography. He said: “Her [Tonda’s] thoughts push me deeper into an analysis of my own story” (Sawyer & Liggett, 2012, p. 81). Are duoethnographers accountability partners? In what ways does the work of the Other push us to move further, deeper? Does the entrance into a duoethnographic partnership include (automatically) being challenged, pushed, torn, supported, heard, and so on depending on who the Other is? Is this implicit or explicit? How is the push and pull negotiated, if at all?

Jennifer: Duoethnography, as this book shows me, is about seeking out that voice that will offer dissent, to dare to enter into dialogue with someone who does not share your

views and experiences about a given topic. It is about letting go of both our need to hold tight to our own beliefs and our instinct to push away new beliefs that challenge us. Our perception of our own truth changes so often depending on our moods and our current goals. I think sometimes it is necessary to tell the Other about our thoughts because in the telling, we are better able to understand what we need to know now and this is when transformation occurs and with it our view of truth. But trust in the Other is essential to take such a risk to open ourselves up to the challenge.

Mandy: Maybe there is something to be said about notions of support and challenge. We need to strike a balance within the conversations.

Jennifer: I am now beginning to think about the utility of this text from my vantage point as a doctoral student. This is important in our “review.” Is it just one more book to read or one more method to learn? While I am curious about it, I struggle with the idea of using this method now. In class, most of our work is our own, and that goes double with the dissertation. I could see perhaps if an instructor assigned this method for a class paper. Even then though, our partner would probably be one of the 12 other students or so in the class, and how would I go about finding someone different from me whom I could trust? And if we went outside of the class for our fellow researcher, could we find someone willing to do this kind of work when they didn’t have to?

Mandy: These are such great questions. The examples within the text paint a picture of an organic commencement of the duoethnographic research process. Duoethnography cannot be forced, and duoethnography seems quite risky on a number of levels. There’s an unaddressed assumption within this text. We have been led to assume that all co-researchers engaged in this work will get along. How is conflict between researchers handled? Perhaps the methodology is too new to have existing models for conflict resolution with these contexts. I think in this direction because I believe I am a fairly reasonable person. I can listen and make every attempt to understand rather than judge. However, I was frustrated with Darren’s shame and guilt expressed in Chapter eight. I thought about what I would do if I were to be in conversation with him about this topic.

Jennifer: An interesting question. Presumably these researchers vet each other out before making the commitment. Perhaps they know each other beforehand or are introduced by someone they trust.

Mandy: Absolutely.

Jennifer: But what if one person with difficulties being unkind or saying no is asked by a colleague or at a conference and he says yes and regrets it immediately but is unwilling to make waves by backing out? We often do not perceive each other correctly because so much of our true personality is below the surface.

Mandy: There will be a lot to learn from writings on duoethnography attempts that “fail.” Hardly a failure at all – just more to know about the method! We, as qualitative researchers, need to know more about the murky waters through which we wade. This

methodology is too new to know the full repertoire of possible issues. Here is a question: How might duoethnography serve as a form of reflexivity for other qualitative research projects? There is utility here, I think. I am imagining two graduate students working through dissertation research and engaging in duoethnography as a means of peer debriefing. This ought to be explored.

Jennifer: As I was reading through the book, I thought of other non-academic ways of putting duoethnography to work. I had not considered using it as reflexive tool while working through the dissertation. I have heard how difficult it is for a student to make it through this process and most drop out. Perhaps this deep level of engagement of another doctoral student would help keep both students on track as they share their frustrations, cheer each other on, help to discover possible answers to their problems, and generally add accountability to a process that (depending on the level of involvement of the committee) is a very solitary one.

Mandy: Last time we talked in person, we realized something in the process of conversation. We have amassed so much “data” through this process that we ought to create a duoethnography on the process of completing this duoethnographic book review. Within the process, we have created new knowledge on the power dynamics involved on professor-doctoral assistant co-writing, our own stories related to each of the topics of the 11 duoethnographies within the text we reviewed, and how we might analyze our co-reading of the text through the lens of reader-response theory (Tompkins, 1980). Perhaps we should end our (now rather lengthy) review here and move on to the next duoethnographic project prompted by this one?

Jennifer: Sounds good to me!

Summary

Within this duoethnographic book review of Norris et al. (2012) edited volume, we have provided an overview of the text and illustrated the methodology to which the text is dedicated. Our joint reading of the book and the composition of this piece were transformative for both of us. What began as the relatively simple endeavor of writing a co-authored book review turned into a full duoethnographic experience. And our plans within this research methodology have since expanded. We believe this expansion speaks volumes regarding the efficacy of this text and its potential impact on those who read it.

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