

Developing the method of dialogical autoethnography: An application to the experience of living with a sibling who has a disability

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1. What is Autoethnography?

Autoethnography is a method of qualitative research that explores one's own experiences and clarifies one's own life in the culture. Traditionally, the method has been widely known as the researcher's own recollective description (Ellis, 2004).

Autoethnography involves using the researcher's personal experiences to explain and critique cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences, focusing on one's personal life, physical sensations, thoughts, and feelings while respecting relationships with others.

It aims to balance intellectual and methodological rigor, emotion, and creativity, presenting autoethnographic stories as artistic and analytical interpretations of personal and cultural experiences (Adams, Jones, and Ellis, 2014; Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2004; Muncey, 2010).

Advantages of Autoethnography (Chang, 2008; Coia & Taylor, 2009; Fukushima, 2011; Morioka, 2007; Okishio, 2013)

- The researchers themselves are the data source.
- Strengths in drawing one's own life from the inside out.
- Causes self-reflection for both researcher and reader (narrative description).
- Self-reflection can also promote self-transformation.
- Can contribute to the generation of inductive knowledge, starting from personal experience.

Critiques of Autoethnography (Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2008; McIlveen, 2008; Okishio, 2013; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Smith & Sparks, 2008)

- (1) Lack of reliability: Data relies too much on memory.
- (2) Neglect of analysis and interpretation: Superficial narrative or reliance on storytelling.
- (3) Excessive focus on self: The relationship with others appears disconnected.

Difficulties in autoethnography (Ellis, 2004; Muncey, 2010; Murphy, 1987/2006; Okishio, 2013)

- (1) Objectification of self: Researcher is the subject as well as object being observed.
- (2) Mental distress associated with self-exploration: Fear and doubt about oneself and the hurt caused by exposing oneself. The life is being questioned.
- (3) Lack of anonymity: Secret is no longer a secret.

Attempts of this study – beyond criticism and difficulties

What we attempted is to actively incorporate the procedure of dialogue into the research process of autoethnography.

Initially, I started with the intuition that the participation of the interlocutor and the questioning of the interlocutor would deepen the discussion of my narrative and interpretation.

The purpose of this study

1. Introducing “Dialogical autoethnography” that is explained above.
2. Examining its usefulness and significance by practicing it interactively.

Table 1: Differences from other genres

genre	feature
Autobiography	Celebrities are the authors. Tends to portray the author's life chronologically and comprehensively.
Memoirs (memoir)	Tend to focus on one part of life, such as an hour or a minute, in a fragmented way on a subject
Journal	A record of daily growth, thoughts, and insights. Even more fragmentary than a memoir.
Diary	A record of what happened that day. More chronological and descriptive
Personal Essay (PERSONAL ESSAY)	Personal insights are drawn
Autoethnography	Done as part of the research and incorporates theory and interpretation



2. Method of Dialogical Autoethnography

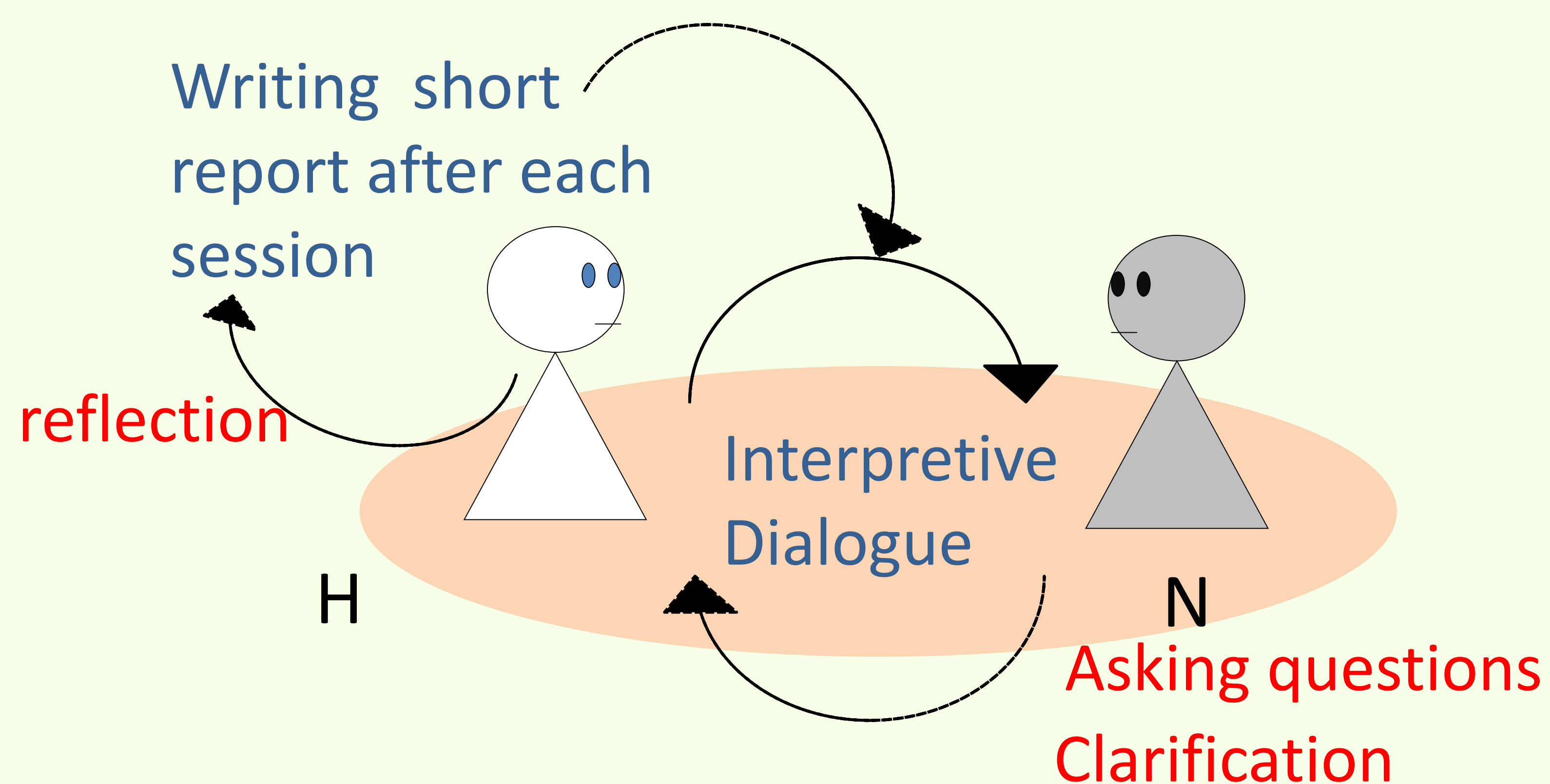
Researchers=Participants

H (auto-ethnographer, 1st author)

Her younger sister had intellectual and physical disabilities from cerebral palsy.
(H is her maiden name).

N (interlocutor, 2nd author)

H's academic supervisor for several years.
Clinical psychologist.



Data Collection

- 15 dialogical sessions (the average length: 90min., 24hrs in total).
- H made self-narrative about her life-story, and N made additional questions for clarification.
- Reading the transcripts, H reflected herself and wrote a short report to discuss with N distinct parts of her life-story.
- Some sessions were recorded with a video recorder for further analysis of their interaction.

Table 2: Summary of Dialogue sessions

	Date and Time	Hours.	Broad dialogue topics
1	2008/3/7	1:45	Narrating a life story centered on my relationship with my sister.
2	2008/3/27	1:25	
3	2008/6/25	1:00	Motivation for conducting autoethnography research
4	2008/7/3	1:45	What H noticed when I read the verbatim transcripts
5	2008/7/17	1:30	The feeling that H's sister went from being a child to an adult. The gaze of the people around us and our relationship with society.
6	2008/7/23	1:30	Summary of H's presentation on the discovery of her sister's "subjectivity"
7	2008/8/12	2:00	What aspects and research findings can be seen apart from the discovery of the sister's "subjectivity"?
8	2008/9/3	1:30	My view of society in the context of temporal change Transition of relationship with sister
9	2008/9/22	1:30	Synopsis of the conference presentation
10	2008/10/29	1:30	What it means to shed tears Direction of subsequent paper writing
11	2008/11/21	1:30	
12	2008/12/3	1:00	Sharing after conference presentation
13	2009/1/7	1:30	H and H's sister recently
14	2009/3/27	1:10	Concerns about Hand H's sister's future
15	2009/7/14	1:30	What it means to shed tears Meaning of Autoethnography

Data Analysis

- Analysis of the data was conducted during dialogue based on the short report that H wrote.

Perspectives on data analysis includes;

- Consider the meaning of what is being repeated
- Consider the meaning of what is being said
- Read the relationship with others (cultural context is involved)
- Organize chronologically
- Write down what H feels

Detailed analysis procedures

During the first 2 sessions H told a life story centered on the relationship between H and her disabled sister.

In the third session, N asked "Why did you decide to do autoethnography research? They then proceeded to discuss topics that both H and N felt could be further deepened.

In the course of the dialogue, one theme emerged from the various stories H told which seemed to appear repeatedly. It is H's viewpoint that regarded her younger sister as someone who was changing from a "child" to an "adult," and her "subjectivity" that was changing along with this change.

From this, they tentatively chose "discovering subjectivity" as the central theme of this study, which could be thought of as similar to the process of conceiving the core categories in the grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) .

3. Results

(1) Generating a narrative of the discovery of the sister's subjectivity

Through this autoethnographic project, H reported that she noticed her sister's "independency," or "subjectivity", which was developed before H knew.



- "My sister loves me" "I feel like I'm raising my own kids."
- Statements that seem to be based on the parent-child relationship



- Physically separated because of H's studying abroad, "My sister will be fine without me."



- I witnessed my sister's life outside the home, in workplaces and neighborhoods, interacting with and being supported by a variety of people.

- The development of the sister with interdependent "independence".
- The realization of a society in which people with disabilities do not become independent, but rather depend on and coexist with each other.

(2) Confrontation with the unexpected changes in self

H realized herself not expecting her sister's development

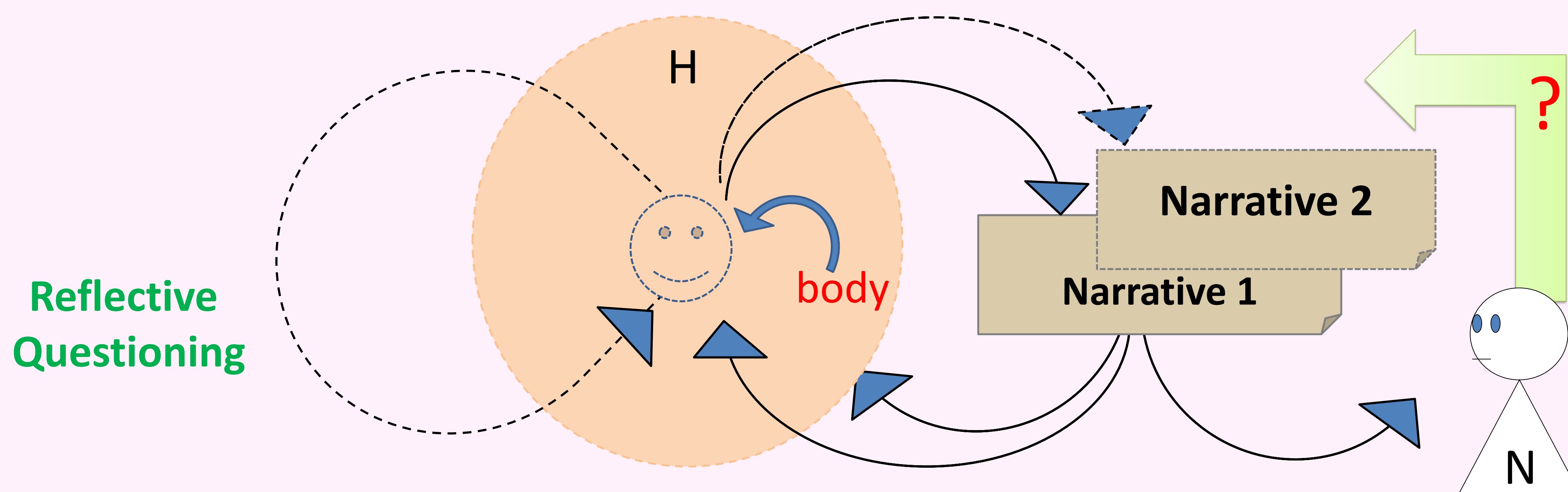
H: I realized that there was a contradiction between my desire to think that my sister was normal and her perception that she was not normal. When I talked about how her sister's uniqueness and independence came to be seen, N said, "That's just like normal development," and "It's not so different from baby development or normal human development." I couldn't put it into words at the time, so I couldn't say it, but it just didn't make sense to me, and she thought, "Well, that's not quite right. I realized that it was a discovery for me, that it was developing slowly, but it was developing slowly..."

N: The premise was that, because they had this image of something that would never develop, the change seemed wonderful, valuable, and different from others.

H: That's what I mean. And then I realized that I had that viewpoint, and I thought, on the one hand, there is a contradiction in my appealing to the fact that my sister is normal, or something like that.

H has changeable feelings towards future

H became concerned with an unexpected tears in this project, and she did not understand its meaning at first. After working through with N, H began feeling uncomfortable with the idea that she would part ways from her sister. Trying to reach a compromise, she found the 'interdependence' was more agreeable than 'independence' (Nochi & Harada, 2010).



4. The role of the Interlocutor

(1) Exploring the researcher's experience

In dialogical autoethnography, it is important to ask questions not only about the matters that are related to the research topic or that you have wondered about, but also to explore the researcher's experience from a different angle in order to broaden and deepen understandings of the data. Questions that dare to research one's own experience can actively make the researcher aware that this is part of the activity of research, not just telling the story.

N: Okay, just a little bit. Well, I heard a lot about you the other day, and I was wondering if you have any particular motivation for creating this kind of auto-ethnography?

H: What was the impetus?

N: Why did you decide to do this now?

H: Well, let's see, the main reason was that I was going to write a master's thesis, and I needed to know myself.

N: Well, what is it like to know yourself?

(2) Making the researcher examine the “here-and-now experience”

The researcher often shed tears during the dialogue. The dialogues encouraged reflection and insight during the dialogue by drawing attention to them and asking questions.

N: Well, also, I was wondering why it makes you cry when you talk about something rather methodological.

H: I also have my doubts. In the “Conclusion” section at the end, I mention the difficulty of doing autoethnography, such as **not being able to stop crying**, or not being able to transcribe the transcriptions, or even when I am interviewing someone, I am a little embarrassed to hear my own voice, I think.

(3) Creating a place where the researcher can talk in peace

Like the quotation of the dialogue above, H narrated the difficulties and perplexities of speaking of the self. The following is a related narrative.

H: I am a little afraid that I have trust and relationship with the professor, and I feel that talking about myself to him is different from talking about myself to a large number of people, as I will be doing in my poster presentation. I'm not sure if it's safe, and I'm a little worried about that.

N: Well, of course, the meaning is different, isn't it?

H: I think that nowadays there are places where people can feel safe, and in that sense, it may be possible to cry, hmmm...

H also showed an understanding that this ability to continue speaking despite tears was possible because of a secure relationship with the interlocutor and a safe place to do so. It is conceivable that these three roles played a role in advancing dialogical autoethnography, especially by bringing a meta-perspective to the situation at hand.

5. Conclusion: the effectiveness of the Dialogical autoethnography

		Characteristics of Conventional Autoethnography	Advantages of Dialogical Autoethnography
criticism	1	Reliability Issues	Data will be co-constructed. The present perspective enters the picture, as well as memories of the past. Consistency is easily ensured by the presence of interlocutors.
	2	Analysis and interpretation of neglect	The analysis naturally deepens with repeated dialogue. Analysis and interpretation from both emic and etic perspectives
	3	Excessive focus on self	By proceeding with the interlocutor... Involvement of others is essential. I can keep a perspective that is relative to the self.
difficulty	1	Difficulty in seeing oneself objectively	Dialogue provides an opportunity to look at the self from different angles. The interlocutor's questions generate new insights.
	2	Emotional Aspects	Interlocutors become supportive and more likely to move toward new understandings
	3	No anonymity	Same for both conventional and interactive

The key point of the dialogical autoethnography is the balance between reflection and dialogue. Insights are likely to come from short reports after each session, and in the dialogue that seed is sown.

Even when self-contradictions are noticed, the support of the interlocutor and the subsequent dialogue allows the main researcher to move on.