Towards Understanding Epistemological Assumptions of History Teacher Educators: My Experience With Phenomenological Enquiry

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This paper draws upon the methodological aspect of my thesis project completed in June 2007. At the center of the research problem was the question: How do history teacher educators (HTEs) in Bahir Dar University comprehend the sources and nature of historical knowledge? Phenomenological approach to research was employed in an attempt to explicate invariant structures of their epistemic assumptions of history as a school subject. Accordingly, with six purposefully selected educators as research participants, in the two-month time field work, in-depth interview and essay questions for personal text were used to gather qualitative data. Then, the data were analyzed thematically using an adapted six-phase model and interpretive themes emerged as findings of the study. And it was learnt that the educators have a very muddled conception and unquestioned assumptions on the nature and

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sources of historical knowledge. With this, also phenomenological enquiry, with difficulties and rewards of its own, was found to be an appropriate strategy to understand personal meaning and beliefs of the educator with regard to disciplinary knowledge of history. The paper, therefore, describes the way I employed phenomenological research approach to understand the case, and presents my personal experience of it as a beginner education researcher.

Key words: epistemology, historical knowledge, phenomenology, lived experience

As a discipline, history has purposes to address, body of knowledge to offer, and its own mode of enquiry to construct and reconstruct knowledge worth disseminating to its attendants. One of the fundamental natures of history is that it is a construction of the human past and is subjected to multiple interpretations and reconstructions due to social, political and cultural backgrounds and personal interest of the historian, incompleteness of evidence available, and time factors. Consequently, historical claims happen to be tentative, incomplete, unstable, debatable and open to reinterpretation. History has a strong evidential foundation too.

Unlike story or myths, historical accounts are founded on traces left back by historical actors. Every historical claim should be evidence-based if it has to be called as such "historical" and be worth knowing.

Historical knowledge has two dimensions (Brown 1996): body of knowledge and form of knowledge. Body of knowledge refers to the content or factual knowledge that students may learn from a lecture, discussion with others, or personal reading on historical issues and events — e.g., knowledge about causes of World War I. On the other hand, form of knowledge denotes to knowledge of concepts, habits of mind and methods of enquiry in history as a discipline. Danis Shemit (1983), a prominent British history education researcher, outlines domains of form of knowledge in history as distinctive sets of concepts, approaches to relating these concepts, and ways of adducing evidence in support of claims. That is, while a body of knowledge constitutes the factual and conceptual aspect of historical knowledge, form of

knowledge is the knowledge on method, principles, logic of history. It is a disciplinary knowledge. The two dimensions are interdependent. Disciplinary or procedural knowledge is crucial to produce and get access to a valid body of knowledge; and concepts and facts (including evidence) are indispensable inputs in the process of knowledge construction.

Disciplinary knowledge of history constitutes both the subject matter and the pedagogical content knowledge basis of history teacher educators (HTEs). As such, epistemological assumptions of the educators play a crucial role in shaping choices of curriculum and methods of teaching. Epistemic assumption is a belief system on the nature of knowledge and how it is gained (King & Kitchener, 2004). It deals with such questions: is knowledge handed down by the authority (e.g., the teacher) or is it constructed from evidence and reason? Is knowledge certain or a tentative interpretation?

Epistemological assumption one holds is well expressed as he or she makes judgments on controversial issues and open-ended claims (King & Kitchener, 2004). Epistemic meaning perspective of a history teacher educator, for example, can be shown by his or her beliefs and assumptions on the nature and sources of historical knowledge, and modes of thinking specially required in history that can be manifested as one gets engaged with such disciplinary-based approach of history learning as sourcing, account evaluation, context framing, etc. Underlying epistemological assumptions of the educator highly affect whether or not such aspects of historical thinking skills as making use of evidence, establishing causal links between events, understanding change and continuity, making context-sensitive judgments, criticizing sources, working with controversial claims and incomplete accounts, and identifying biases and propaganda in historical accounts constitute classroom practices. Epistemic distortions can be explained in terms of unquestioned, uncritically assimilated beliefs and assumptions about nature, sources, and dimensions of knowledge (Kitchener & King, 1990, p. 160; Mezirow, 1990, p. 15).

What is the pedagogical implication of history teacher educator's conception of the nature, dimensions and sources of historical knowledge?

There exists evidence on the claim that epistemological assumptions of the teacher influence his or her pedagogical experiences. Research on the relationship between teachers' personal epistemological beliefs and their teaching behaviors suggests that epistemological beliefs influence the choices and decisions a teacher makes in the classroom, including teaching methods, class management and learning focus (Chan & Elliot, 2000).

Specific researches on history education (e.g., Evans, 1994; Shemilt, 1983; Taylor & Young, 2003; Yeager & Davis, 1995) also show that the way the history teacher understands the nature and purposes of the discipline directly influences his or her instructional practices in the classroom. According to Yeager and Davis (1995, pp. 5–7), one's "vision of history" — for instance understanding history as a human construction, being sensitive to and aware of the role of interpretation and multiple causation, and the importance of historical context — is an essence of a competent history teaching career.

For example, a history educator who believes that history is provisional, interpretive and open to debate, and who shares the fact that one's view of history is colored by social, political, psychological and ideological context where he or she finds his or herself, would encourage students to question accounts of the past, explore the tentative and "influenced" outcomes of historical investigations, view the significance of different perspectives in interpreting facts, and consider multiple causation and interpretations of an event by involving them in historical modes of enquiry (Taylor & Young, 2003). Historical enquiry as a learning process includes formulating historical questions, identifying and finding relevant historical data, interrogating the data, and drawing warranted conclusions. Such a learning experience is consistent with the assumption that learning history must entail some understanding of the procedures by which historians justify their assertions and construct a historical body of knowledge. On the other hand, the history educator whose disciplinary knowledge is unquestioned would regard a historical account as a complete presentation of the truth on the subject it treats, view history as a factual recount, and consequently, push students to emphasize the accumulation of historical data through rote learning (Taylor & Young, 2003). Hence,

one can safely say that epistemological misconception of the educator is a threat to real learning in history because such educational values of history as cultivating thinking and reasoning powers of students would not be realized without a facilitator who can be a model in "doing history" and help them practice historical knowledge construction and reasoned criticisms on claims and accounts.

In the case of teacher educators, the chain of influence becomes critical. Their professional lived experience — their conceptions of the nature and purposes of history, their expectations of students learning, their pedagogical strategies and practices, etc. — would directly affect and shape learning styles as well as conceptions and ways of teaching of the would-be school history teachers they are training. Inspired by my own experience as a History major student teacher in Bahir Dar University (Ethiopia), and sharing Lindseth & Norberg's (2004, p. 148) idea that "without such reflection on lived meaning it is difficult to become aware of unfortunate practices we are part of", on joining the Department of Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies (Addis Ababa University) for my masters' degree study, I was curious to understand epistemic assumptions of the educators, and if it has something to do with their pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and practices.

Choosing a Methodology: Phenomenology

Here methodology refers to the principles, process, and procedures by which I approached the problem and conducted the research. With the aim of explicating the essential nature of epistemological assumptions of the HTEs, the guiding question was: How do HTEs comprehend sources and nature of historical knowledge? That is, the project mainly focused on the nature of the phenomenon (epistemic assumption) as meaningfully and consciously experienced by the educators. After conceptualizing the problem to be researched, identifying an appropriate research methodology was a demanding task. I had to choose a proper research methodology that would give me guiding principles and practical techniques relevant to illuminate epistemological perspective of the HTEs. Because my target of enquiry was about understanding the personal meaning people held for their experiences, I had to use an

interpretive (qualitative) approach to research where, through interactive, flexible and open mode of enquiry, I could get access to subjective constructs and beliefs in relation to the phenomenon at hand.

For a social science researcher, reality is relative (Bender, 1993; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). For example, in investigating epistemic assumptions of the educators, realities could be of many kinds — as constructed by me, the researcher, as held by the participants, as invented throughout the investigation and finally as grasped by the readers of the findings. Furthermore, qualitative research assumes that the relationship between the researcher and the participants needs to be interactive because as Creswell (1998, p. 19) remarks, "Knowledge is within the meanings people make of it … [and] is gained through people talking about their meanings." According to its advocates, this closeness and interaction, unlike detached positions of an objectivist researcher, enables the enquirer to elicit and gain access to the subjectively held meanings that would be communicated in the process of interaction. The researcher has to approach the participants at their natural setting and respect their multiple perspectives. She or he needs to hold the research design open, flexible and emergent that runs inductively, and assume herself or himself as the primary research tool (Bender, 1993; Creswell, 1998; Flick, 2002; Flick, Kardoff, & Steinke, 2000; Holliday, 2002; Janesick, 1994). Therefore, methodologically the social researcher can invent knowledge through interaction with the subjects not via distinct, disinterested objective position from the sources of the data. Hence, in dealing with the project at hand, my epistemological assumption was that knowledge is subjective and socially constructed; that data for knowledge construction is contained in the HTEs' perspective and meaning; and that dialogic interaction and transactional relation with them gives me access to their beliefs, values, meanings and practices.
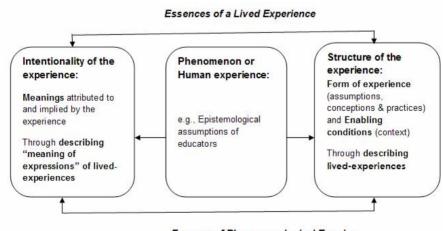
Under the umbrella of qualitative research paradigm, there exist different research strategies or traditions which share much in common yet get different in points like focus of study, place of theory in an enquiry, and styles of analysis and reporting (Creswell, 1998). Even though the classifications of qualitative research strategies have never been the same, five traditions remain essential: case study, phenomenology, biography (historical research), grounded theory, and

ethnography (ibid.). On reviewing varying traditions of qualitative research, I found the phenomenology method of enquiry appropriate to answer the question: What is the epistemological assumption of the educators like?

Phenomenology has its origins in the works of the German philosopher Edmund Husserl in the early 20th century being further developed by other scholars like Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, etc. (Creswell, 1998; Groenewald, 2004; Van Manen, 1997). Its philosophical orientation assumes that an object is real if one is conscious of it; and one is conscious of the object experienced if it makes sense to her or him and thus meaning is attributed to it (Creswell, 1998; Groenewald, 2004; Hitzler & Eberle, 2000). That is, as Denzin (2000, p. 82) states it: "Human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings the things have for them." This meaning is "signitive" — it manifests through signs and indicators (mainly through language) — which could be grasped, reconstructed, and described by going "back to the things themselves." Then it follows that meaning is subjectively held personal construct only to be understood and explicated by the researcher when s/he gains access to the meaning participants assign to their lived-experiences (e.g., conceptions on sources and natures of historical knowledge).

The methodology I applied can be related to hermeneutic phenomenology in a sense that it tried to describe both the lived experience and "meaning of the *expressions* of the lived experience" (Van Manen, 1997, p. 27). According to Van Manen (1997, p. 9), phenomenology, as a research method, "is the study of the lifeworld — the world as we immediately experience it." It has a wider application ranging across sociological to educational research (Denscombe, 2003; Hitzler & Eberle, 2000; Holroyd, 2001; Ilsley & Krasemann, 2001), and is best applied for descriptive and interpretive single-case studies (Lester, 1999). With phenomenological attitude (e.g., bracketing) as one of its essential features, phenomenological approach to research helps to understand meanings and assumptions underpinning human experience and illuminate specific quality of a phenomenon by setting aside one's preconceptions and theoretical understandings. He states that phenomenological enquiry enables the researcher to "explicate

meanings that in some sense are implicit in our actions" (p. xiv) and thereby to transform it into "a textual expression of its essence" (p. 36). Essential meanings of the phenomenon of epistemological assumption of the educator, as an intentional and meaningful act that constitutes the lived experience, can therefore be studied phenomenologically. That is, personally held meanings and assumptions could be accessed only through reciprocal and conversational interview and personal narrative accounts — devices and techniques well favored in phenomenology; and having a phenomenological attitude at the center, invariant structures of the phenomenon would be constructed through thematic analysis (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: A Framework for Phenomenological Study as Employed in the Project

Essences of a Lived Experience

Intentionality of the experience:

Meanings attributed to and implied by the experience

Through **describing** "meaning of expressions" of lived-experiences

Phenomenon or Human experience:

e.g., Epistemological assumptions of educators

Structure of the experience:
Form of experience (assumptions, conceptions & practices) and **Enabling** conditions (context)

Through **describing** lived-experiences

Focuses of Phenomenological Enquiry

The Process

Techniques, tools and procedures of data collection and data analysis were organized based on philosophical assumptions of qualitative inquiry and methodological orientations of phenomenology.

The Research Setting and the Participants

The research site was Bahir Dar University (BDU). BDU is one of the government-owned higher education institutions in Ethiopia. It is located at the southern shore of Lake Tanna, which is the source of the Blue Nile, and is named after Bahir Dar city, the capital of the Amhara National Regional State, one of the nine member states of the Federal Government of Ethiopia. The establishment of the University was inaugurated on 6 May 2000 with the merge of the two fraternal institutions: Bahir Dar Polytechnic Institute (established in 1963) and Academy of Pedagogy, later renamed as Bahir Dar Teachers College (established in 1972). Currently, BDU has come to be one of the largest academic institutions in the country. It has five faculties: Education, Engineering, Business and Economics, Law, and Agriculture. Founded in 1991 under the Faculty of Education, the Department of History has been in place to meet the demand for secondary school history teachers in the country. At the time of the study, it had 21 staff members: nine were on study leave while the rest six senior and six junior ones were on duty. For this study, I purposely selected the following six senior HTEs. Dukes (1984, as cited in Creswell, 1998) and Creswell himself (1998) recommend that an ideal number of participants in a phenomenological study to be from 2 to 10 persons. The participants were selected using the criterion of purposeful sampling, taking these who are supposed to be informative and relevant for their work experience, qualification, and senior class courses where they are expected to help students learn more critically.

Data Collection Techniques, Tools and Procedure

Qualitative data was needed to answer the research question of the project. Accordingly, with semi-structured and sometimes

conversational interviews as the main techniques to get lived experience descriptions (Van Manen, 1997), personal texts were also found to be a vital means for personal meanings could better reveal in freely composed narrative texts (Groenewal, 2004; Lester, 1999; Pieterson, 2002; Van Manen, 1997). Thus, the basic data collecting techniques and tools employed were:

1. In-depth Interview (with interview protocol as an instrument)

A reciprocal interview where the participants are engaged in dialogic communication with the researcher is believed to be a sound means to get access to the subjectively held meanings on one's life-world (Van Manen, 1997). For this end, I employed in-depth interview to collect phenomenological data. After getting them signed the Consent Agreement Form that explicitly informed them all about the purpose of the study, their roles, responsibilities and rights, I fixed two interview sessions each lasting about 90 minutes in two months of time with an exception of one informant who, due to inconveniencies, was met only once. As to data storing methods, I audio-recorded all interviews on their permissions; and I recorded each interview on a separate cassette and labeled each cassette with assigned pseudonyms. They were most of the time very reflective and informative. Most of the interviews were in dialogic form; and this has enabled me to reach deeper to their lived experience and get essences such as structure of their experience (both conception and practice), enabling conditions of the experience, and meanings they attribute to their experience. Besides, field notes — both observational and analytical ones — were used so as to complete the data and further clarify each setting.

2. Personal Text

On the assumption that it gives the HTEs both time and opportunity to freely reflect on their conceptions, beliefs, and practices, I requested them to give me their personal accounts on three essay questions (as supplementary instruments) that covered from theoretical to concrete experiences of historical method and enquiry. To avoid possible communication constraints, I also gave them a glossary-sheet that

included definitions and descriptions of some basic terms and phrases such as historical thinking, doing history, etc. The personal narratives still triangulated and supplemented the interview account and hence made my data *thick* and *rich.*

My Role as a Researcher

A qualitative researcher is part and parcel of the process of inquiry (Creswell, 1998; Flick, 2002; Holliday, 2002). I made all efforts to facilitate the site entry and establish trust with the participants. As a former student and current staff member of the department, I succeeded in setting up rapport with the HTEs, gaining smooth entry to the setting, and getting them signed the Consent Agreement Form by clearly informing them the purpose of the study, their rights as participants of the study and their required valuable contribution to it. My conscious presence in the research process was valuable. I had to be cognizant of my presuppositions, theoretical knowledge and common senses about the phenomenon throughout the data collection and analysis process. With this, having reflective and interpretive stances in the finding of the enquiry (as a conscious being), I turned out to be not only a crucial research tool but also a practitioner in meaning construction.

Data Analysis and Explication

In analyzing the phenomenological data, essentially I searched for invariant structures that have been embedded in verbal expressions and personal accounts of HTEs on their assumptions on sources and natures of historical knowledge. Based on approaches and models of phenomenological analysis suggested by Lindseth & Norberg (2004) and Van Manen (1997), and applied by Holroyd (2001), Pietersen (2002), Groenewald (2004), and Bednall (2006), I adapted a six-phase analysis model in explicating the data. The model enabled me to transform the factual data from ordinary expression of the participants into essences worth of scientific discourse by establishing patterns and thereby revealing meanings as attributed by the participants and implied in the narratives. Here is the adapted model:

1. Phenomenological reduction, Epoché.

To better understand the phenomenon in its own terms, avoid inappropriate subjective judgments and protect the distinctive and personal voices of the educators, I determined from the onset to control potential influences of all my presuppositions, theoretical knowledge and common sense conceptions about the object of the study throughout data collection and analysis processes. That is, I applied Husserl's *epoché*. Accordingly, I kept continuously thinking about possible biases of my own prior experience and maintained a research journal where I recorded personal impressions, commentaries and reflections as the field notes that I placed in bracketed relationship with the educators' accounts while explicating the meanings of the expressions of their lived experience at the interpretive stage of the study.

2. Thorough reading on field notes, transcripts and personal accounts.

This helped me to have "intuitive"/or "holistic" understanding of the experience and see evolving meanings in their own context. This again eased subsequent tasks of pattern making and meaning construction.

3. Forming central themes out of the data of each participant.

After thorough reading on the raw data, I extracted and listed significant statements from the vast data. Then, in light of their common elements to the experience of the educator (relevance to the research questions) and their compelling representativeness to the shared and expressed experience of the HTEs, eliminating repetitive and irrelevant statements, I reconstituted these significant statements to form central themes followed by appropriate descriptions.

4. Revisiting the data.

Respective data for each central theme were again summarized to check if the essence of the given phenomenon by each HTE was correctly captured.

5. Constructing general, interpretive themes.

After a careful search for commonalities and particularities across the emergent themes drawn out from the data of each participant, a set of interpretive themes, as findings of the study, were formed. Themes are basic structures or essences of experience as Van Manen (1997) defined it. Although I focused on themes common to most or all of the participants, I also gave due attention to minority voices to retain personal meanings and subjective constructs of the participants.

6. Presenting descriptions and interpretations.

This is, in fact, more of a stage of synthesis where each interpretive theme was followed by extended description of lived experience, and the description of the meaning of the expression of the lived experience, as Van Manen (1997) suggested. The latter form of the description represents the interpretive aspect of this phenomenological study, and is a mediated expression of my conscious self presence and the accounts of the educators. Thus, I presented both textual and structural descriptions on the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998) — while the voices of the educators are made loud through an extensive use of direct quotations, my interpretive and reflective presence was highlighted when necessary.

The findings showed that the educators have been working with unquestioned epistemic perspectives. The themes constructed, as essences of epistemological assumptions of the educators, were muddled conceptions on sources and nature of historical knowledge, skepticism towards the possibilities of historical enquiry, and emphasis on content over disciplinary knowledge of history. These findings of the study, the interpretive themes, were presented in a narrative way. While the "detailed descriptive portrait" (Creswell, 2003, p. 197), characterized by use of extended direct quotes, gives room for multiple perspectives (of the participants, researcher and reader), the interpretive aspect would help show meaning and implications of structures of the lived experience.

In ensuring the trustworthiness and authenticity of the finding, some strategies (as recommended by Creswell, 1998, 2003; Denscombe, 2003; Flick, 2002; Flick, Kardoff, & Steinke, 2000, etc.) were employed. Getting respondent validation was one of the mechanisms. I asked two HTEs to crosscheck if their ideas, explanations and views in relation to the phenomenon under investigation have been correctly captured and transcribed. Use of rich, "thick" description, in communicating the finding of the study, was another strategy. Each interpretive theme is extensively described using direct quotes from the participants. Reflective notes and remarks of the researcher were highlighted in the textual presentation of the findings. Finally critical consideration to ethical issues was also a concern as a pivotal step towards ensuring the credibility of the finding. Accordingly, I kept them informed about the purpose of and required activities in the study and got them signed a Consent Agreement Form to avoid deception; I kept their real names undisclosed by using anonymous ones; and thus I ensured them confidentiality and thereby establish mutual trust with them.

Challenges with Phenomenology

My experience of phenomenological enquiry was a mixed up story: both frustration and fascination. Phenomenological approach to research has much to reward to beginner researchers who believe that truth is a subjective construction and could be reached through an open, interactive and flexible way of investigation. Even so, there were a few troubles that I faced in the process of data gathering and analysis. First, especially during the first interview sessions I came to understand that it was not easy to get the lived experience descriptions as the participants tended to explain questions related to historical knowledge and historical enquiry as they know it theoretically instead of describing the phenomenon as they experienced it. As a possible solution, I insisted in encouraging them to describe their experiences related to the phenomenon rather than their theoretical knowledge about it. I did this through redirecting the conversation, seeking further elaboration, and calling for experiential examples from what they concretely experienced, for example, in teaching controversial historical claims in modern

Ethiopian history such as the question of Eritrean independence and Emperor Menelik II's (ruled from 1889–1913) military campaigns in the formation of modern Ethiopia.

Second, adoption of a phenomenological attitude was always demanding. One of the essential aspects of phenomenological enquiry is the transformation of the natural attitudes of the researcher into phenomenological ones (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004; Van Manen, 1997). In an attempt to reach the understandable meanings implicit in the experience of educators, through bracketing (by setting aside my theoretical knowledge and preconceptions related to sources and dimensions of historical knowledge, and history-specific pedagogy). Although my preexisting knowledge and assumption remained vital throughout the process since "we understand in relation to our pre-understanding" (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004, p. 152), I had to refrain from making judgments. According to Van Manen (1997), this process of phenomenological reduction would enable to understand the essential structures of "the expressed meaning" from the lived experience descriptions of the educators. However, at least for a beginner researcher like me, the task could be thorny. In many occasions in the first round of the interview process, I tended to interpret their words in relation to the established knowledge, and interrupt their flow of thoughts to question their expressions. It was only later that I came to understand the possible weakness of the data to be resulted from such disruptions made during the interview process. Even though I worked with the assumption that phenomenology would withhold evaluative judgments in favor of seeking understanding, I was not completely free from the risk of viewing their personal histories from my perspective. As a result, on reading the finding part of the thesis, an anonymous reviewer of a journal pointed out some weaknesses and one of them was that "at some points, the words of the participants are judged rather than illuminated."

Third, until I further went through the literature in the field and especially read the work of Max Van Manen (1997), I was not clear with the approach to the illumination of the phenomenon: description or interpretation of the lived experience? In studying the phenomenological structure of the lived meaning of the epistemology of history by the educators, I succeeded in gathering immense data. I went through it

within the framework of the above adapted model with the aim of identifying the invariant structures of their epistemic assumptions. Yet which one would best help to explicate the phenomenon: mere description or descriptive-interpretive narrative account? Phenomenologists have varying views on the desirability of interpretation. Husser's version of phenomenology advocates description over interpretation while others (following Heidegger) maintain that the two aspects are inseparable and important for understanding a phenomenon as a research target (Van Manen, 1997). As Van Manen (1997) and Lindseth & Norberg (2004) rightly state it, interpretation in a phenomenological study is unavoidable. In searching for underlying epistemic assumptions from overt statements on concert examples, constructing themes as findings and presenting narrative accounts under each interpretive theme, I was in some way interpreting the words of the participants. My theoretical knowledge and experiences on the phenomenon would inevitably illuminate the transcribed data as much as the data would bring insights for me. However, how can I maintain voices unpolished so that personal meanings too are presented via lived experience descriptions? And would my meaning extraction and reflective stances do justice to the educators' experience? Extensive direct quotes were used in the report of the findings as part of the efforts of making personal meanings loud enough along with reflective and interpretive accounts.

Conclusion

Primarily interested in pedagogical content knowledge of history teacher educators, and later inspired by insights from Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, in my MA thesis project, I sought to understand epistemic assumptions of the educators in light of its pedagogical values. Accordingly, the methodology to be employed had to be appropriate to explicate subjective meanings and personally held assumptions and beliefs with regard to sources and forms of historical knowledge. The present article is, therefore, an attempt to describe as to how I, as a beginner researcher, applied phenomenology as a methodology to study essentials of the epistemic assumptions of history

teacher educators (HTEs) in Bahir Dar University (Ethiopia). It is a personal account.

With six purposely selected participants a large amount of qualitative data was gathered through in-depth interviews and personal texts. On thematic analysis of the data using an adapted six-phased model of analysis, three interpretive themes emerged as findings of the study: muddled conceptions on sources and nature of historical knowledge, skepticism towards the possibilities of historical enquiry, and emphasis on content over disciplinary knowledge of history. My experience of this methodology, though fascinating enough to continue working with it, was not as such easy. It presented me some critical challenges. It was not always easy to get access to personal experiences of the phenomenon as participants tended to tell more from their theoretical knowledge than their own experience of it. Furthermore, phenomenologists emphasize that in order to attend the intentionality of the participants to the object, openly grasp insights from the narrative accounts about it, and better understand personal meanings attributed to one's experience of the phenomenon, the researcher needs to *bracket* personal conceptions and refrain from judgment. For a beginner researcher like me, it was not an easy task to adopt such a phenomenological attitude. Even though meaning formation and interpretations of themes of the phenomenon would not be possible without the researcher's subjective role, voices of the educators should not be judged.

In conclusion, as it gives an opportunity to profound understanding of personal meanings and beliefs that HTEs attribute to their experiences, phenomenology is found to be a pertinent methodology to study the essences of epistemological assumptions of educators.

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