



The Value of Narrative Inquiry in Exploring Academic Identities

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'You do it with a story'?

'How to encompass in our minds the ~~complexity of some lived moments~~ in life? How to embody in language the mix of heightened awareness and felt experience?...You don't do that with theories. You don't do that with a system of ideas. You do it with a story' (Coles, 1989; 128)



The Story Continues....

- 'Who shapes the culture of learning and intellectual HE spaces and who determines the norms of discourse'? (Turner & Robson, 2008; 11)
- How are globalising processes 'mediated on the ground, in the flesh and inside the head...as these intersect with their lives and identities'? (Kenway & Fahey, 2006; 267)



The Story Continues...

- Interested in particular how 'globalisation' and 'internationalisation' affect learning, teaching and assessment practices in higher education
- Curious about the 'lived experiences' of the 'core players in the process' – students and academics?
- Little research on academic identities in diverse landscapes – focus tends to be on responses to managerialism/neoliberalism



Narrative Inquiry and Cross-Cultural Research?

- Important to conduct research within a paradigm (s) that took account of diverse ways of constructing knowledge and realities
- Researching across difference 'messy work' – celebrating the differences rather than seeking to find ways to bridge them
- Narratives provide a window to the contradictory and shifting nature of hegemonic discourses which are often taken for granted as stable monolithic forces - individuals' stories are constrained but not determined by hegemonic discourses



The Autoethnographic Turn

- Own beliefs and values became subject to interrogation
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- Eurocentric assumptions that inform many methodological approaches challenged
 - Challenged assumptions that inform dominant pedagogical approaches in higher education
 - Began to explore what it means to be a white British woman while recognising shifting nature of 'cultural identities'
 - Lived experiences of cultural diversity in higher education still rare – emphasis on 'international students', comparative - talking 'about' rather than talking 'with/in'



What is Narrative Inquiry?

- 'An amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and ~~both traditional and innovative methods~~ – all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them' (Chase, 2005; 651)
- 'Narrative inquirers tend to begin with experience as lived and told stories... Narrative inquiry characteristically begins with the researcher's autobiographically oriented narrative associated with the *research puzzle*' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; 40, original emphasis)



What is Narrative Inquiry?

- The methodological use of story
- Focuses on the ways in which people make and use stories to interpret the world - retrospective meaning making
- Narratives are not 'simply' a set of facts – rather they are social products produced by people within the context of social, historical and cultural locations
- Interpretive devices through which people represent themselves
- Rather than 'what happened' – 'what is the significance of this event'?




What is Narrative Inquiry?

- Narrative is - the ways in which people make and use stories to interpret the world
- Narratives express emotions, thoughts, interpretations
- Stories are both enabled and constrained by a range of social resources and circumstances
- Narrative researchers treat credibility and believability as something that storytellers accomplish
- A narrative is shaped by interaction with the listener – and the audience



Travelling in the Borderlands?

- Advocates 'pluralism, relativism and subjectivity' (Lieblich et al., 1988;2)
- 'Our constructions are the product of social forces, either structural or interactional' (Burr, 2003; 20)
- 'Local knowledge' – postmodernism
- 'bumps up against post-positivism, Marxism and post-structuralism' (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; 59)
- ...and critical theory e.g. Phillion, Andrews et al.



What is the Role of the Researcher?

- 'A different relationship between researchers and subjects and between authors and readers' (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; 733-5)
- Researcher's 'stories' are intrinsic to the research – they are not 'bracketed off' or separated
- Relationships with participants are foregrounded
- Authoritative voice?
- Supportive voice?
- Interactive voice?
- *Writing* becomes a crucial part of the process of *inquiry*
- Use of *literary devices* e.g. poetry, letters, dreams, flashback, fictionalising



The Narrative Inquiry Research Process

- Research process 'unfolds' – common *not* to have very specific research questions at the outset
- Discrete activities of research – theoretical frameworks, data collection and analysis, literature review – often woven together
- Research *process* itself is as important as the research – and often becomes a story
- Often begins with the 'researcher's autobiographically oriented narrative associated with the research puzzle' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; 40)



What are the Research Methods/Strategies?

- Gathering of stories in any form – visual, written, oral
- Narrative interviewing
- ‘Actions, doings and happenings’ – unanticipated narratives
- Reflecting team
- Collective biography (Davies & Gannon)
- Researcher’s reflexivity intrinsic



Narrative Interviewing

- Unstructured
- Invites stories that are meaningful for the narrator – rather than assume s/he has answers to questions researcher might pose
- A 'discursive accomplishment' (Riessman, 2004; 709) – two active participants produce meaning together
- Story will differ – depending on teller and listener



Narrative Interviewing

- Requires sophisticated skills in listening and probing meanings
- Interview data are not a report on an external 'reality' but a 'reality' constructed by both parties
- Considers how the 'interviewee' determines what is – or isn't – a 'good story'
- Acknowledges the shifting 'power' in a research conversation
- The interview has a life of its own - the 'inter' is important
- The 'Western' structure of a story



Dialogic/Performance Analysis

- Interrogates how talk is interactively ('dialogically') produced and 'performed' as narrative
- 'Performative' – identities situated and accomplished with an audience in mind
- Requires close reading of contexts, including the influence of researcher, setting and social circumstances on the production and interpretation of narrative



Dialogic/Performance Analysis

- The response of the listener and ultimately the reader/audience is implicated in the art of storytelling
- Intersubjectivity and reflexivity come to the fore – dialogue between researcher and researched, text and reader



Narrative Inquiry and Higher Education Research

Practitioner research rare – relatively few in depth accounts of interactions between ‘international students’, ‘local students’ and academics

Enables critical interrogation of own values, beliefs ‘culture’ – including learning and teaching ‘culture’



Narrative Inquiry and Higher Education Research

- Learning and teaching encounters in a multicultural landscape
- Experiences of academic staff in a diverse context
- Experiences and perceptions of British Black and minority ethnic postgraduates
- Intersections between 'internationalisation' and Widening Participation agendas
- Listening to Academic Voices



Some Challenges to Narrative

- Narratives are often collected and celebrated in an uncritical and unanalysed fashion
- A common failing is to imply that participants' voices 'speak for themselves'
- Autobiographical accounts are no more 'authentic' than other modes of representation
- Stories are shaped by cultural conventions and conform to conventions of genre
- Personal narratives, oral testimony and autoethnographies should not be treated as unmediated representations of social realities



Some Challenges to Narrative

- Narrative researchers are opposed to collective understanding being derived from their work
- They resist a 'globalised, homogenised, impoverished system of meaning' (Fox, 2008)
- Yet – 'stories are social artefacts, telling us as much about society and culture as they do about a person or a group' (Riessman, 2008; 105)



Some Challenges to Narrative

'How does this individual with whom I am speaking reflect wider social and historical changes that form the context of his or her life? I am convinced that if I can listen carefully enough, there is much to learn from every story that one might gather. For society really is comprised of human lives, and if we can understand the framework that lends meaning to those lives, then we have taken the important first step to being able to access the wider framework that is the binding agent of a culture' (Andrews, 2007; 491).



Some Ethical Conundrums

- If narratives are 'mutual constructions' – who 'owns' the stories?
- Is the notion of 'informed consent' culturally embedded? For example - Andrews' work with East German political activists – 'no one felt that they 'owned' someone's words'
- Use of 'real names' – others become visible



'Future Hauntings'?

'We learn how to recognise emotions and feelings as forms of embodied knowledge and how to name the histories and cultural inheritances that we need to come to terms with if they are not to produce future hauntings' (Seidler, 2010; 157)



'Perhaps one day I'll sort my identity out'

'I mean this whole stuff about identity nowadays. There seems to be a whole lot of angst about our identity, our academic identity, our cultural identity and all this – I hold 3 different passports and I've lived in 6 different countries. I'm curious about my identity but I don't angst about it. I read stuff about identity and I think "Oh yeah, that would be interesting", perhaps one day I'll sit down and sort my identity out'