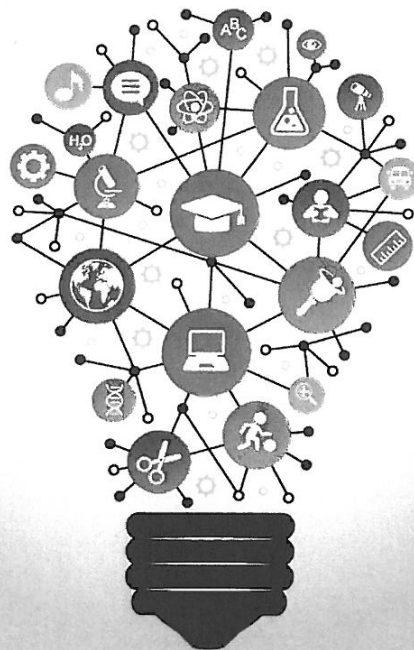


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WHAT IS THE NARRATIVE GENRE?

INTRODUCTION

Narrative has had a rich intellectual tradition. Many disciplines believe that human experience is a narrative phenomena that is best understood through story. This includes researchers in the disciplines of anthropology, linguistics, literary theory, philosophy, psychology, theology, women's studies, organizational theory, psychotherapy, geography, history, law and medicine (Craig, 2007). Narrative tradition can be traced back to Aristotle (Bruner, 2002) with the importance of lived experience. Some researchers suggest narratives goes back further to when early humans began grunting and creating senses of their experiences around camp fires (LeGuin, 1989).

This chapter will explore the concept of lived experience and the relationship to the narrative genre. It will explore the pillars of narrative and provide the reader with a better understanding of lived experience as a personal research method.

CONSTRUCTING AND CO-CONSTRUCTING LIVED EXPERIENCE

Bruner (1986) describes narratives as forms of oral discourse that characterise and facilitate culturally determined ways of communicating lived or imagined events to others. As such, narratives are the way in which individuals represent and make sense of past experience, evaluate experiences in the present and plan and anticipate future experiences. The intersection is also based on the scientific potential of exploring children's narratives to show relationships between human experience and narrative. Narrative research is often inspired by a view of human experience that is based on John's Dewey's pragmatic philosophy (Clandinin, 2006). Children's experiences in their everyday life are represented in the form of narratives and stories (Riessman, 1993). Starting from this point of view, narratives allow researchers insights in the experience of a child or adult's world. In a developmental sense, it also represents the current state of the child's development by showing representation of the child level of understanding. The child is considered competent and capable in displaying how they come

would like to communicate this meaning to adults.

The process of narration is also a culture-specific process that can represent a potential framework for enhancing contextualist theories of development (Bruner, 1990). Narrative can bridge cultural modes of thinking and the ways in which children come to reasons and behave in culture-specific ways. In this way, children's thinking reflects the modes of thinking of those who collectively make up a particular cultural group in which the children collaborates. Contemporary issues of place become important in analysis. The concept of place becomes a key feature in how children interact and communicate with each other.

Narrative is considered a 'universal mode of thought' and a 'form of thinking' (Bruner, 1986; Nelson, 2006). According to Haakaraenen et al. (2013, p. 215), "from the cultural-historical perspective, a narrative could be defined as a psychological tool formalising and unifying human thought and knowledge into thematic units- units of thought". Accordingly, narrative is the smallest cell of human thinking, providing insight into the child's experiences. As Vygotsky described (1978, p. 126), "thought undergoes many changes as it turns into speech. It does not merely find expression in speech; it finds reality and form".

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Narrative research in contemporary times can also free social scientists from the rhetorical forms (Emihovich, 1995) that alienate children and families from their own traditions. Through the use of narrative we are able to recognise the power of subjectivity in allowing open dialogue and co-construction of meaning. Becoming comfortable with narrative research also means accepting ideas that the world has no fixed rules for assigning behaviour (Emihovich, 1995). This means that open dialogue is required to build consensus around shared meaning and to ensure the inclusion of multiple voices. Thus as Bruner (1986, p. 144) notes, "narrative structures are not only structures of meaning but structures of power as well".

TERMINOLOGY

There is a distinction between *Narrative*, meaning both a story and its telling; the process of constructing story. *Narrative methodology* will refer

to research in the scientific landscape where narrative is used in ways that differ (for example as the products of anthropology and case studies, and as methods like in ethnography and in interviews). *Narrative analysis* will mean an approach where the researcher narrates based on data. Since analysis always will be the researchers construct, this will also include *analysis of narrative*, which is also a certain approach, where the researcher analyse stories (Polkinghorne, 1995). *Narrative inquiry* will here refer to a method of investigation into a problem, following pragmatism, inspired by John Dewey. Following this tradition, narrative inquiry will also mean a way of knowing by telling and reflecting. *Narrative inquiry* is a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researchers and participants, over time in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). In this particular focus on narrative constellations, narrative inquiry is the focus.

NARRATIVE INQUIRY

The collective case studies are informed by the narrative approach. As an epistemological approach, narrative inquiry seeks to understand human subjective experience by making people's stories a central focus of research (Clandinin, 2006, 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Clandinin and Connelly have conceptualised narrative inquiry as:

a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix ... in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social. Simply stated, ... narrative inquiry is stories lived and told. (2000, p. 20)

It is through the processes of telling and listening to stories that people narratively construct, and continually re-construct, who they are (Bruner, 2002; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Kenyon & Randall, 1997; Mishler, 2004; Sørdeide, 2006; Watson, 2006; Wortham, 2000). Additionally, narrative inquirers argue that, given that storied experience is so essential to identity and self (McAdams et al., 2006, p. xi), human experience is best understood through narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20).

The use of narrative inquiry across disciplines stems from the realisation that traditional empirical research methods "cannot sufficiently address

issues such as complexity, multiplicity of perspective and human centredness" (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 31). These issues can be more adequately addressed through narrative inquiry (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Narrative inquiry therefore is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Since values and beliefs are based on experience, a narrative approach is ideally suited to inform this study.

In the field, researcher-participant relationships underpin much of what narrative inquirers do (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), because entering the field to investigate the lived experience of participants means entering their social world and being in it with them (Ezzy, 2002). Narrative inquirers are therefore said to live and work alongside participants in their stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Accordingly, it is this living and working alongside that makes narrative inquiry "the most compelling and appropriate way to study human interaction" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, as cited in Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 6).

The primary research products of a narrative inquiry are constructed, or co-constructed, accounts that re-present people's personal and professional experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Reading these accounts offers an opportunity for others to develop insights into, or come to understand, the ways in which particular individuals have been affected by the happenings in their lives (Dunn, 2003; Kelchtermans, 1993; Trzebiński, 2005).

INTERACTIONS

Narrative research often relies on verbal language through interaction. Children will use a range of narrative means to share, express and organize their experiences (Aln & Filipenko, 2007; Engel, 2006; Puroila, Estola, & Sryala, 2012). This type of multimodal expression from children requires sensitive listening from the adult's side. The role of the adult is to analyse and explore the narrative constructions of the child.

One theory useful for adults to understand is interaction theory. Interaction theory is described as a larger enactive or phenomenological approach to social cognition (Gallagher, 2012). Interaction theory (Gallagher, 2013, p. 5) relies "on developmental studies that demonstrate that our encounters with others are best characterized in terms of embodied interactions rather than the kind of mind reading defended by simulation theory or other theory-of-mind approaches". While there is much potential for the intersection of narrative perspectives with developmental perspectives, there is still a lack of empirical base research to support this combination (Bruner, 2004; Habermas

& Bluck, 2000; Mulvaney, 2011). The narrative perspective has potentially broad implications for developmental theories but requires additional types of research to fully exploit its potential.

RESEARCHER'S ROLE

Part of the narrative genre is also exploring the role of the researcher. Often in quantitative research the role of the researcher is not important to the research. In narratives studies, the role of the researcher is important for all elements of the study as the researchers shapes and interprets all areas.

Part of the researcher's role also includes their credibility to the participants they are involved with. As a teacher of seven years experience who has worked in four different schools, I am viewed as credible by the teaching profession when researching education. I do not encounter problems of accessing the setting, understanding the language and culture of the respondents and deciding on how to present oneself (Fontana & Frey, 2000). I do however need to gain the participants' trust. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 110) suggest, "the way an interviewer acts, questions and responds in an interview shapes the relationship and therefore the ways participants respond and give accounts of their experiences". I draw on personal experiences of teaching to put the participants at ease and provide an encouraging environment. By illustrating my experience and understanding of the phenomenon from a 'teaching perspective', I was able to build respect and trust with the participant rather than provide a set of examples of what I was looking for.

Researcher-participant relationships underpin much of what narrative inquirers do (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Subsequently, the quality of the relationship between the researcher and the participants can determine both the quality and the quantity of the data generated (Kelchtermans, 1999). Participants who trust the researcher and feel safe in the relationship are more inclined to share their stories (Kelchtermans, 1999). The quality of the relationships that are built, and the stories that are shared, tend to reflect the depth of the personal, emotional impact on researchers who choose to study social processes (Chambless & Schutt, 2003, p. 174).

Establishing good relationships with participants is essential to the conduct of the best qualitative research, because it is not possible for researchers to understand people by being distant from them (Ezzy, 2002). Narrative inquirers "recognize and embrace the interactive quality of the researcher-researched relationship" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 7). This means

that throughout all stages of the research project, the researcher must be continually focused on relationships and the importance of relationality. It is through building relationships that participants can trust and start to share their real stories of lived experience.

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Narrative analysis is used within narrative inquiry. Narrative analysis is appropriate because it “allows for systematic study of personal experience and meaning” (Riessman, 1993, p. 70). Narrative researchers construct stories from descriptive data relating to the phenomena under study (p. 15). According to Polkinghorne (1995, p. 15), to begin this process, the researcher asks:

Questions such as “How did this happen?” or “Why did this come about?” and searches for pieces of information that contribute to the construction of a story that provides an explanatory answer to the questions.

My initial search is for “chunks of interview text about particular themes,” that are meaningful and relevant to the study and figure “importantly and repeatedly” (Riessman, 1993, p. 67). I try and work these themes over and over again to find these ‘meaningful chunks’. It soon becomes apparent that a “theme is worked over, again and again” (Riessman, 1993, p. 67) in each of the interviews. Initially my analysis is inductive (Janesick, 2000, p. 389). It is concerned with locating thematic elements and the “narrative threads” or “story lines” interwoven and interconnected throughout the data sets (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, pp. 131–133).

Analysis becomes an “increasingly complex” task, involving reading, and “relentlessly rereading,” the field texts (interview transcripts and observational field notes) of each participant, in order to “narratively code” the data (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 131). I begin to see meaning in the field text. However, Clandinin and Connelly argue that no matter how compelling our narrative inquiry field texts are, we need to “fight against our desire to let [them] speak for themselves” (2000, p. 130; see also Gough, 2003, p. 30). Rather, Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 130) advise that we must go further, and reconstruct our field texts (e.g., field notes and interview transcripts) as research texts (scholarly accounts) because “our inquiry task is to discover and construct meaning”. Through an ongoing process of construction and reconstruction of meaning, field texts are able to be turned into publishable research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994).

The next stage of analysis is broadening, burrowing, and restoring’ (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) interpretive devices used in order to create the form of the story constellation. Each of the interpretive devices allows the triangulation and transformation of field texts into research texts (Garvis, 2010).

Broadening can be described as the small picture. In this, the general context of where the relationships and partnerships take place is set up. Broadening helps to explain the socio political, physical and structural (Craig, 2007). Burrowing (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) is going deeper into the ‘big picture’. This involves listening closely to how individuals string their life experiences together to make personal sense of them (Craig, 2007). Finally, restoring captures the transitions in how the story is told and retold, the competing commitments underlying how people make sense of the shared interaction (Garvis, 2010).

VALIDITY

Validity in narrative research refers to the “believability of a statement or knowledge claim” (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 474). Thus, readers will judge the validity of our work as researchers; they are the people who must be convinced that a knowledge claim is justified. Differences emerge however based on people’s view points. It is for this reason traditional understandings of validity may not represent the postmodern world. Alternative notions of validity can be used such as trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), “verisimilitude” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 751), “truthlike observations” (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 74) and “crystallisation” (Richardson, 2000, p. 934). For example, Richardson’s (2000) notion of “crystallization- deconstructs the traditional idea of ‘validity’” by recognising that there are more than three sides (reliability, validity and generalisability) from which to view the world. Polkinghorne (2007) further suggests that in narrative research readers are asked “to make judgements on whether or not the evidence and argument convinces them at the level of plausibility, credibility, or trustworthiness of the claim” (p. 477). Validity therefore relates to personal meaning drawn from the narrative stories, not to a measurable truth.

CONCLUSION

Narrative inquiry offers many possibilities for researchers. This chapter has shown understanding of narrative inquiry. The importance of narrative as a research method becomes known. The next chapter focuses on constellation

narratives. It will explore the details of data collection, analysis and creation of the research text. It will attempt to answer the 'how questions' of constellation narratives. Chapter three, four and five provides examples of the constellation narrative approach. As you read the constellations, you will notice the different context as well as the different voices within each of the constellations. In chapter three there is one voice, in chapter four there are two voices and in chapter five there are three voices in a practice triad. The final chapter explores the possibilities of narrative constellations in research.

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WHAT ARE CONSTELLATION NARRATIVES?

INTRODUCTION

Constellation narratives are part of the narrative genre. I consider that constellation narratives are located in the interpretivist paradigm. My approach to research, then, is one in which knowledge is considered to be a subjective “human construction” (Hatch, 2002, p. 13). As an interpretivist researcher, I understand that “knowledge is socially constructed” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 8).

An interpretivist approach can facilitate insights into emotions, meaning and reasons for actions. As Schwandt (1994, p. 118) suggests, “to understand the world of meaning, one must interpret it”. An interpretivist position therefore suggests that:

[m]eaning – and hence, reality – is constructed through the social interaction of people within a social setting. Meanings change in the course of interaction because the participants hold different perceptions; thus, reality is flexible and based on interpretations, rather than fixed. (Bennett & LeCompte, 1990, p. 32)

Interpretivists believe that reality is not objectively determined, but is socially constructed (Husserl, 1965). As an interpretivist, I recognise that multiple realities exist (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Bruner, 1986; Hatch, 2002; Polkinghorne, 1988), and I understand that these realities are “inherently unique because they are constructed by individuals who experience the world from their own vantage points” (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). This view is always filtered through the lens of the social world to which the individual belongs (Bruner, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). In narrative constellation study, I am seeking an understanding, through a search for meaning (Barone, 2001).

This chapter will provide a detailed understanding of constellation narratives. It will describe the ‘how to’ of the research process and discuss important considerations including the research text and leaving the research field.

Through living and telling, and re-living and re-telling, beginning teachers' stories of experience and their personal practical knowledge can be expressed. Indeed, narratives serve as a method of interpretation and reinterpretation of experience (Carter, 1993; Huber & Whelan, 2001). In this study, I have chosen a story constellation approach to help interpret and reinterpret the experience of beginning teachers with the data gained from the case studies.

In a story constellation, an individuals' narratives of experience relate to each another (Garvis, 2010). Their narratives of experience are always shifting, "each with a unique spiralling pattern, necessarily involving many plotlines, which, in turn, bring multiple meanings to bear on teachers' knowledge as shaped in their reforming school contexts" (Craig, 2007, p. 4). Through this approach, "a constellation of factors ... including the moralities and mores of teachers" (Schwab, 1970, pp. 8–10), is brought to the surface for discussion and analysis. Through this approach, key ideas become known for discussion and analysis (Garvis, 2010).

The story constellation approach attempts to locate teachers' knowledge in the multiple contexts within which it is created. According to Craig (2007, p. 6):

Constellations allow for school life to be characterized without the flattening or dismissing of teachers' and principals' knowledge and their relationships and interactions amid the flow of events in the educational enterprise ... [where] ... the constraints of both formalist and reductionist investigations are avoided.

The story constellations approach opens out in a three-dimensional space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and is comprised of: the temporal (past, present, and future), the personal and social (interaction), and the contextual (situation and place). The stories that people tell are influenced by each of these dimensions. Researchers must therefore pay particular attention to these dimensions in their research and the way they present research texts.

Clandinin and Connelly (1996) suggest many plotlines can be presented as paired narratives. Among these narratives, stories of teachers/teacher stories and stories of school/school stories stood out (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). Teacher stories are stories told by teachers, whereas stories of teachers (the partner story) are stories told about teachers. Similarly, stories of school are stories given to schools, whereas school stories are stories told by schools. In the story constellation approach, Craig (2001) introduces two other sets of stories to the matrix: stories of community/community stories and stories of

reform/reform stories. Accordingly, stories of community are the stories told about communities, whereas community stories are stories that communities tell (Craig, 2007). Stories of reform are stories told about school reform, whereas reform stories are stories educators tell about the human experience of how reform stories become lived in school contexts (Craig, 2007). By providing these extra paired stories to the matrix, additional perspectives are offered on the complex influences within the school. When the stories are juxtaposed with one another, they create story constellations that capture unique combinations of narratives lived and told within school landscapes (Craig, 2007).

The strengths of the story constellations approach are its sensitivity to both teachers' developing knowledge and schools' shifting contexts and the way the approach enables researchers to follow where an unfolding story may lead (Craig, 2007). Moreover, it allows teachers' practical experiences, rather than researchers' theoretical perspectives, to take the lead in the 'methodological dance' (Janesick, 1994).

This approach however does have drawbacks. The most obvious is the lack of generalizability to other teachers and other school contexts – although the possibility of transferability exists (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While Stake (1995, p. 7) acknowledges "case study seems a poor basis for generalization", he acknowledges that from a collection of case studies we may make 'petite generalizations'. In this study, I shall make several 'petite generalizations' that are possible with collective case studies.

Craig (2007, p. 203) suggests that "the ultimate danger (some might say promise) of story constellations as a form of narrative inquiry lies in the fact that when it is done well, people are likely to be disturbed by it and the disequilibrium that ensues may lead to change – though not always in ways that can be predicted" (Lincoln, 2003 cited in Craig, 2007, p. 14). In my narrative constellation studies, I endeavour to create story constellations that provide a comprehensive account of people's beliefs, values and experiences. I have used narrative constellations in early childhood, primary school and secondary school to highlight educational spaces.

COLLECTING DATA FOR THE STORY CONSTELLATION

Interviews

I considered interviews to be effective means for researchers to understand the meaning that participants make of any experience, as "the very process of putting experience into language is a meaning-making process" (Vygotsky,

as cited in Seidman, 1991, p. 12). Interviews are an established method of gathering data in the social sciences (Fontana & Frey, 1998, 2000; Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). Interviews involve individual, face-to-face verbal interchanges (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

Often multiple semi-structured interviews are used in story constellations. By having two semi-structured interviews, I want to "establish a substantial relationship with participants over time" (Seidman, 1991, p. 15). The advantage inherent in this relationship is that interviewees come to better understand the value that researchers place on their participants' "experiences and points of view" (Kirkevold & Bergland, 2007, p. 73). This relational understanding between researcher and participants is congruent with the philosophies at the heart of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and acknowledged my need to find an appropriate and sympathetic means of generating data for the purpose of this study.

In my story constellations I adapt the three interview series (Seidman, 1991). Seidman (1991) describes this process as a series of three (90-minute) interviews conducted with individual interviewees. The design of each interview is based on the belief that "people's behaviour becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them" (Seidman, 1991, p. 10).

Because of time factors and the diverse geographical locations of the participants, I have sometimes turned the three interviews series into two interviews. The first interview is often designed around the personal experiences, values and beliefs of the participant. It is designed to elicit contextual data from participants by taking a life history interview approach (Seidman, 1991) of their lived experience. The interview is conducted at the educational context at a time convenient to the participant. The second and third interview are designed to investigate the professional beliefs, values and experience. During these interviews, I want participants to "reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them" (Seidman, 1991, p. 11). Seidman (1991, p. 14) suggests follow up interviews should be spaced "from three days to a week apart". Subsequently, I often have to plan well in advance the interview series.

Sometimes I also engage in artefact elicitation to help prompt discussion within the interview. Participants are invited to bring an artefact from their professional engagement. No boundaries are imposed on the choice of artefacts. This process of artefact elicitation enables participants to "externalise their knowledge that would otherwise remain inaccessible" (Teeavarunyou & Sato, 2001, p. 1). Through this process, participants reflect

on their own experiences. Artefact elicitation therefore provides a means of eliciting knowledge and attitudes that may have remained hidden during the interview process (Barrett & Smigel, 2003).

Conducting the Interview

After finalising the interview process, appointments are made with each participant. By allowing the participants to be in their natural context, it allows them to express themselves more fully (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Adopting Kvale's (1996, p. 4) metaphor of a "traveller" on a journey gathering stories, I was able to collect stories from educational contexts.

Believing that "interviews are social interactions" (Mason, 1998, p. 40), I adopt a conversational style throughout the interviews where I share my stories, as well as actively listen to the participant. This approach generates "long and uninterrupted narratives" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003, as cited in Kirkevold & Bergland, 2007, p. 68), although this outcome is reliant upon the narrative competence of the participants, and the restraint of the interviewer, to at least some degree. The conversational nature of the interviews actively encouraged participants to elaborate further on their experiences (Kirkevold & Bergland, 2007).

Recording Interviews and Field Notes

I arrive early at each educational context to ensure I am prepared. During this time, I also take field notes on the physical description of the educational context to help me remember the school context. The field notes help me develop a greater understanding of the context.

I always digitally record interviews. All of the participants I have interviewed have never had a reservation about being digitally recorded. I believe part of this is because interviews questions are shown in advance.

The digital recorder is placed on the table so that it can pick up voices clearly, yet be unobtrusive to the interview. The presence of these recording tools during the interviews is "routinely ignored" by participants (Chambliss & Schutt, 2003, p. 180). I also take written notes during the interviews, observing the movements and gestures of the participants as they communicate what is being said.

At the end of an interview, I have found that participants regularly add to interview conversation as they walk out of their office, school or classroom (Chambliss & Schutt, 2003, p. 180). Afterwards, I would record as much as I could recall of these continuances as field notes.

After the Interview

The recorded interviews are transcribed in their entirety, word for word as spoken, that is, "with no respect for the rules of written language" (Rosenthal, 1993, p. 71). The transcriptions are checked against the audio recording for accuracy, "establishing dependability and confirmability" (Easton et al., 2000, p. 707). Listening to the interview conversations during the processes of accuracy checking is the next cognitive step in my analysis (Kvale, 1996, p. 16).

I often send the transcripts to the participant for member checking. This process results in a few minor corrections to the transcript from interviewees. I also allow participants to choose a pseudonym for themselves and their educational context. The participants appear to thoroughly enjoy this process of creating a fictional identity. As one principal once commented, "this is all really exciting to choose another identity. I can be anyone I want" (Garvis, 2010).

THE PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE LANDSCAPE

By narratively constructing constellations, it is possible "to elaborate on the professional knowledge landscape conceptualisation" (Craig, 2003, p. 176). In narrative constellation studies, each educational context has a different backdrop, with different school procedures, timetable and philosophy. Each educational context also approaches concepts of teaching and learning in different ways highlighting differences created by lived experiences. These combinations of exploring a range of educational contexts bring new perspectives about educational contexts and their role within society. It shows the complex relationships between children, teachers, schools, administrators, policy makers, and parents that influence teaching and learning within educational contexts.

CONSTRUCTING AND (RE)PRESENTING THE RESEARCH TEXT

An important elements of narrative constellations is the construction and (re) presentation of the research text. This is not the interview transcript, field notes or other raw data sources. Rather it is all of the data written together into a meaningful explanation of the context. Research texts "grow out of the repeated asking of questions concerning meaning and significance" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 132). In this way, writing, too, can be viewed as an interpretative process (Ezzy, 2002). Writing must remain close to the

data (Janesick, 2000) and, importantly, allow the voices of the participants to be heard (Ezzy, 2002; Goodson, 1992; Schultz, 2006) in each of their individual narrative accounts.

Research texts are usually quite large. Many of my research texts are usually between 6000–10000 words as they need to cover the complexities within educational contexts by representing children, families, teachers, principals, communities and policy makers. This can sometimes make them problematic for publication in traditional forms of journal publications that do not allow large word counts. While it is possible to publish constellations in journals (see for example Garvis & Pendergast, 2012), it is often more likely that narrative constellations are represented in book publications.

Below is a list of important areas to consider in the research text. These need to be acknowledged throughout all research texts and provide the importance of the individual and context to become known. There are:

1. The Importance of Context

According to Ezzy, "the parts of the story become significant only as they are placed within the context of the whole narrative" (2002, p. 95). Context is therefore "ever present" in narrative thinking, and includes "temporal context, spatial context, and context of other people," and its inclusion in any research text is essential for meaning-making (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 32). It is important to try and construct educational contexts in each of the narrative accounts to provide a clear understanding of the relationship between context and experience.

2. Voice

Participants' voices carry "the tone, the language, the quality, the feelings" (Butt, Raymond, McCue & Yamagishi, 1992, p. 57), informing readers not only about participants' experiences, but also about their values and beliefs. As Richardson (1990, p. 12) states, "when we write, not only do we speak about the people we study, we also speak for them. This is an important statement for the researcher to always consider. As we inscribe their lives, we bestow meaning and promulgate values". Subsequently, as Bruner (1986, p. 121) notes, "language can never be neutral" it "necessarily imposes a perspective in which things are viewed and a stance toward what we view". For this reason, I make sure that the voices of the interviewees are heard in their individual narratives (Ezzy, 2002; Goodson, 1992; Schultz, 2006). My writing has remained as close to the data as possible (Janesick, 2000). This is not an easy task and will often require a large amount of time. However the essence of

acknowledging the importance of voice is a key characteristic of the narrative genre.

3. *Cleaning the Text from Speech to Written*

The spoken text of some of the participants appears inherently messy in transcripts, field notes and observations. For this reason, Elliott believes that it is preferable to “clean” or “sanitise” written texts, because it renders them easier to read, in that the focus can be on content meaning rather than on the confusion of directly transcribed verbal utterances (2005, p. 52). I personally edit some of my participants’ spoken language by “adding appropriate punctuation, removing [some] pauses and false starts, and editing out [some of] the messy features of everyday speech” (Richardson, 1985, p. 137 as cited in Elliott, 2005, p. 52). I then return the original transcript to the participant for checking, to ensure that what has been changed is in agreement with the participant.

4. *Changes of Fonts*

In a narrative constellation, the spoken text from the interviews is interwoven with the researcher’s thoughts of the story. This is an important characteristic of the narrative constellation approach. It is however important to distinguish the two sets of perspectives. In the story constellations that I have created, my thoughts are represented in Garamond font to represent my voice. I will then use *Garamond italics* to represent the direct voices of the participants. When the two are written side by side it becomes easier to see the two perspectives. Examples of the changing of the fonts is shown in chapter 5, 6 and 7 that are examples of narrative constellations.

5. *Creating Belief Statements*

In her story constellation methodology, Craig (2003) uses metaphors to describe the relationship between teacher knowledge, the school context and reform initiatives. The influence of the metaphor “cumulatively makes bubbles to the surface” (Craig, 2003, p. 191). Metaphors reveal educators’ knowledge lived in and over the continuum on the professional knowledge landscape of each schooling context. Moreover, they provide greater understandings of the underlying tensions within the complex contexts and the influences of these on teachers. Not only are the “educators’ metaphors explicitly connected to known plot lines, each carried strong moral messages as narrative phenomena are included to do” (Gudmundsdottir, 1991, cited in Craig,

2003, p. 198). While some researchers use metaphors, I use belief statements to conceptualise the different educational contexts. The creation of belief statements are created after a search to identify the over arching statements that capture the beliefs, perspectives and values presented. Belief statements are created after the research text has been written. They are used as headings or titles to introduce the research text and provide important perspectives to the reader. Belief statements carry critical points to the reader, helping make the excavation and establishment of meaning possible.

6. *Negotiating the Research Texts*

The constellation approach is always respectful of the participant. The final step in the research text is to return to the field to share the narrative accounts (story constellations) that have been written with all participants. Uncertain of how they will be interpreted, I always have some “doubt and uncertainty” on my part (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 173). I want to see how my participants would respond to the texts I have constructed (Mishler, 2004, p. 118) and if they consider a true representation of who they are. More importantly, I also want to show my respect for the participants. Many qualitative studies do not show this detail of respect to participants, with many researchers never contacting participants again once data has been collected. While this is common in some research approaches, it is also important for researchers to consider the ‘coldness’ of their conduct and how they may also further shape the participants understanding about researchers and research documents. I always want to create an honest and open relationship with the participants. I ask participants to respond to the questions: “Is this you? Do you see yourself here?” and, “Is this the character you want to be when this is read by others?” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 148). It is important that participants are able to see themselves within the narratives. When all participants are happy, the research process can then proceed.

7. *Leaving the Field*

Part of the research approach within narrative constellations is also to acknowledge the concept of leaving the field. I believe that many researchers do not provide enough consideration to the ending of the research process and relationship. Hatch suggests (2002, p. 66) that leaving the field “is an especially sensitive issue when participants and researchers have formed close bonds” and he acknowledges that

an abrupt departure from the field as “ethically unacceptable when participants have made themselves vulnerable through close personal contact with researchers”. Having a close bond with the research participants can make it difficult to leave the field. I still receive occasional emails from research participants.

TRUSTWORTHINESS

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), for each quantitative methodological procedure for establishing reliability and validity, qualitative inquiries have aligning and parallel procedures. Trustworthiness refers to the ways in which the research may be judged to be credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In a narrative constellation, these criteria to increase the trustworthiness of the research are considered throughout the research process (Harrison et al., 2001, p. 324).

Credibility

The act of attending to a study’s credibility “refers to the conscious effort to establish confidence in an accurate interpretation of the meaning of the data” (Carboni, 1995, as cited in Whitemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001, p. 530). The techniques employed in narrative constellation study to ensure this credibility are prolonged engagement, member checks, peer debriefing and triangulation of data. Spending time to build strong relationships with the participants allows proper trust to be developed, leading to more honesty, frankness, and completeness in the participants’ responses (Glesne, 1999). Repeat interviews throughout the study help in developing rapport and increased the believability of the interviews (Glesne, 1999). The on-going interviews also allow the participants time to think more deeply about their own feelings, reactions, and perceptions.

After the transcription of the interviews, I check the transcription against the recordings as a step in ensuring the accuracy of the transcription. Transcripts are then returned to participants for member checking for accuracy and palatability of the data (Stake, 1995). It also gives the participants “a chance to comment and add materials, change their minds, and offer their interpretations” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 751). Member checks attempt to bring the voice of the researched into the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), but the researcher has the complete responsibility for the analyses and interpretation of the data.

I debriefed with colleagues about my narrative constellations. This increases the likelihood of producing credible findings. Unlike member checks, peer debriefing provides the perspectives of a peer who is not involved in the research project (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through various meetings, peer debriefing enabled me to question methods, assumptions and representations throughout the study. Credibility is also improved by using structural corroboration, a qualitative parallel to triangulation, called structural collaboration.

Transferability

The design of most qualitative studies has a focus on particularity, and does not usually attempt to be generalisable (Maxwell, 2002; Seale, 1999). Therefore, the point has been made that, rather than being an issue for researchers, transferability is an issue for readers, who assume the responsibility of deciding whether any study can contribute meaningfully to the contexts of their own study (Burns, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While I try to demonstrate greater insight and understanding about the phenomenon, readers must make their own judgment regarding the applicability of this study in their own context (Seale, 1999).

Dependability

To improve dependability, I create an audit trail. It consists of well maintained careful documentation of field notes, audio files, transcriptions and data analyses. This lay open for inspection of “the researchers’ documentation of data, methods and decisions made during a project, as well as its end product” (Seale, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The aim of an audit trail is to leave behind “footprints to allow others to judge the utility of the work, and to profit from it” (Huberman & Miles, 2002, p. x). Every month I would review the audit trail.

Confirmability

The confirmability of qualitative research parallels the objectivity of quantitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Any research based on the recollection of a participant within a study is ultimately a study of perceptions, therefore “in valuing the first-person account, one must equally assume certain unknowns” (Huberman, 1993, p. 22). Data confirmability is ensured through structural corroboration of multiple sources (interviews,

field notes and observations) and using member check, peer debriefing and the co-construction of narratives.

Structural Corroboration

Historically, researchers have used *triangulation* as a means to improve the validity of studies. Triangulation is the process of using multiple reference points to establish a singular "truth" (Denscombe, 1998; Richardson, 2000). It is used by positivist case study researchers to verify and confirm their findings before offering them for widespread dissemination, review and reaction (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

I choose to use a qualitative alternative to triangulation, known as 'structural corroboration' (Eisner, 1991). According to Eisner (1991) *structural corroboration* is a criterion for assessing coherence. 'Structural corroboration occurs when multiple types of data are related to each other to support or contradict the interpretation and evaluation of a state of affairs' (Eisner, 1991, p. 110).

In my narrative constellations I use 'multiple forms of data' to 'structurally corroborate' interpretations. Often meaningful connections are made between my field notes of participants in and their accounts during interviews. These corroborations assist a broader interpretation of the beliefs, values and experiences of each participant.

REFLEXIVITY AND SUBJECTIVITY

In narrative constellations, I examine and disclose my own reflexivity on my research. I believe that 'subjective researchers cannot separate themselves from the phenomena and people they study' (Toma, 2000, p. 178). Unravelling what we bring to the research in terms of our own biographies, "our emotions, intuitions, experiences, meanings, values, commitments, presuppositions, prejudices and personal agendas" (Finlay & Gough, 2003, p. 40), biases and baggage, the limitations of understanding and their influence on our data interpretation, is crucial to producing trustworthy qualitative writing (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997; Finlay, 2003; Josselson, 2007).

Like Kvale's (1996, p. 4) "traveller metaphor", I explore different contexts entering into conversations with the many participants encountered. Conversing with these participants in the "original Latin meaning of *conversation* as *wandering together with*" (Kvale, 1996, p. 4), the journey leads not only to new knowledge, but instigates a process of reflection creating new ways of understanding the phenomenon. As Russell and Kelly

(2002, p. 11) suggest, "when we are reflexive, other human participants join us in being reflective as well".

My approach became that of a "virtuous researcher" as being "synonymous with thinking critically about one's research practices ... wherein one identifies possible sources for the anxiety of influence" (Maton, 2003, p. 55). I decided to write myself into the text, becoming a visible partner in the co-constructed narratives. I subsequently find myself to be inextricably part of the research process (Mantzoukas, 2004). I become "the research instrument" (Gilbert, 2001, p. 4; see also Josselson, 2007). I realise that I am grounded in all parts of the research, including choices about methodology, data generation methods, subject selection, data selection, analysis and interpretation (Finlay, 2003; Gough, 2003).

My voice becomes present everywhere – "overarching and undergirding the text, framing the piece, naming the metaphors and echoing through the central themes" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 85). My voice reflects my interest in authorship, interpretation, relationship, aesthetics and the narratives. I always attempt to demonstrate the extent of my reflexivity by incorporating useful contextual information, and allowing readers access to my relevant cognitive and affective responses throughout this research text (Gough, 2003). Consequently, readers will be able to evaluate for themselves "the adequacy of the methods employed" in this study (Stevenson & Cooper, 1997, p. 160).

LIMITATIONS

While the narrative constellations illuminate participants' unfolding contextualized experiences over time, they do not produce "a script to be followed nor plans to be implemented" (Davis, Jr., 2003, p. ii). The constellations only provide snapshots of the teller of that story. They operate in a Bakhtinian spirit of *novelness*, where they may "inspire readers to enter into dialogue with them" (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 75). The narratives avoid the *epic* texts approach where the purpose is "to impart the final word, to shut out other voices, to close down interpretive options" (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 75).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown the importance of narrative constellations in research and provided details about the research process. This has included a focus on data collection, research text, and the validity of the data. In any narrative

constellation it is important to also engage in a reflexive approach to continuously question all stages and analysis. It is important for continual critical reflection in a narrative constellation. The next chapter provides an examples of a narrative constellation.

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