

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Including Foucault

Definition and Purpose

■ Narrative research

– Definition

- The description of the lives of individuals, the collection of individuals' stories of their experiences, and a discussion of the meaning of those experiences

– Purpose

- An attempt to increase understanding of central issues related to learning through the telling and retelling of participants' stories

Kim Etherington

- Narrative inquiry is an umbrella term that captures personal and human dimensions of experience over time, and takes account of the relationship between individual experience and cultural context (Clandinin and Connelly 2000).
- Narrative inquiry is a means by which we systematically gather, analyse, and represent people's stories as told by them, which challenges traditional and modernist views of truth, reality, knowledge and personhood.

Definition and Purpose

- Narrative research
 - *Reasons for its popularity*
 - The increased emphasis placed on therapist knowledge, professional development, and decision-making
 - The increased emphasis on empowering client voices in the research process through collaborative research efforts

KE: Why stories?

- Subjective meanings and sense of self and identity are negotiated as the stories unfold,
- ... bearing in mind that stories are reconstructions of the person's experiences,
- ... remembered and told at a particular point in their lives, to a particular researcher/audience and for a particular purpose.
- This all has a bearing on how the stories are told, which stories are told and how they are presented/interpreted.
- They do not represent 'life as lived' but our re-presentations of those lives as told to us.

Bruner (1986): different ways of knowing

- 'Paradigmatic mode of thought'
- ...draws on reasoned analysis, logical proof, and empirical observation - used to explain 'cause and effect', to predict and control reality, and to create unambiguous objective 'truth' that can be proven or disproved.
- 'Narrative knowing'
- Narrative knowledge - created and constructed through stories of lived experiences, and the meanings created. Helps make sense of the ambiguity and complexity of human lives.

What do we gain from narrative knowing?

- Memorable, interesting knowledge that brings together layers of understandings about a person, their culture and how they have created change.
- We hear struggles to make sense of the past and create meanings as they tell and/or 'show' us what happened to them.
- Shape of a story helps organise information about how people have interpreted events; the values, beliefs and experiences that guide those interpretations; and their hopes, intentions and plans for the future.
- We find complex patterns, descriptions of identity construction and reconstruction, and evidence of social discourses that impact on a person's knowledge creation from specific cultural standpoints.
- Knowledge gained in this way is situated, transient, partial and provisional; characterized by multiple voices, perspectives, truths and meanings.

- There are different forms of narrative analysis – some focus on 'content' of stories; others on 'meaning' (maybe both). Depends on philosophical position.
- Stories can be viewed as a window onto a knowable reality and analysed using concepts derived from theory e.g. thematic analysis, or concepts derived from the data e.g. grounded theory – analysis of narratives
- Or stories can be viewed as socially situated knowledge constructions in their own right that values messiness, differences, depth and texture of experienced life – narrative analysis (Polkinghorne 1995).

- Analysis (meaning making) occurs throughout the research process rather than being a separate activity carried out after data collection (Gehart et al 2007).
- The emphasis is on co-construction of meaning between the researcher and participants. While being involved in/ listening to/reading the conversations, researchers take in what is being said and compare it with their personal understandings, without filling in any gaps in understanding with 'grand narratives', but rather inquiring about how pieces of the stories make sense together.
- The process of 'data gathering' and 'analysis' therefore becomes a single harmonious and organic process.

Re-presenting narratives

- The stories are re-presented in ways that preserve their integrity and convey a sense of the 'irreducible humanity' of the person.
- Narrative analysis treats stories as knowledge per se which constitutes 'the social reality of the narrator' (Etherington, 2004:81) and conveys a sense of that person's experience in its depth, messiness, richness and texture, by using the actual words spoken. It includes some of researchers part in that conversation in order to be transparent about the relational nature of the research, and the ways in which these stories are shaped through dialogue and co-construction, as well providing a reflexive layer with regard to researchers positioning.

Philosophical roots and influences

- Postmodernism
- Social constructionism
- Constructivism
- Feminism

Postmodernism

- Calls for an ideological critique of foundational knowledge and privileged discourses ('grand narratives');
- Questions notions of 'Truth', certainty, and objective reality;
- Examines taken-for-granted assumptions;
- Views knowledge and language as relational and generative – contrasting with Western ideas of the individual as an 'autonomous knower' who can create or discover knowledge that can be passed on to others

Social Constructionism

- Views knowledge and knower as interdependent and embedded within history, context, culture, language, experience, and understandings
- Dispenses with notion of 'absolute Truth' and takes a pluralist position suggesting critical reflection on our truths.
- Values local knowledge constructed between people who actively engage in its development - participatory or relational knowing
- This kind of knowledge has relevance for participants as well as researchers – and can be transforming

Constructivism

- ...often used interchangeably with social constructionism but they differ.
- Constructivism is based on the idea that reality is a product of one's own creation; each individual sees and interprets the world and their experiences through personal belief systems.
- Narrative inquiry allows us to hear how individuals construct meaning from within these systems of belief; their attitudes, values and ideas that shape sense of self, identity.
- NI moves between the internal and external world of the storyteller, across time, within their environments (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

Feminism encourages us to ...

- View research relationships as consultancy and collaboration
- Examine power issues within research relationships with a view to greater equality
- Help create a sense of power and autonomy – especially for marginalised groups – by providing a platform from which those voices can be heard
- Shows transparently how we discover what we know through reflexivity
- Share ownership of data with participants, thereby undermining the bias of dominant paradigm and opening up its assumptions to investigation i.e. professionals are the experts.
- These are moral and ethical issues

The Narrative Research Process

■ Eight basic steps

- *Identify the purpose of the study and identify the phenomenon being explored*
- *Select an individual in order to learn about the phenomenon*
- *Pose initial narrative research questions*

Objective 2.1

The Narrative Research Process

■ basic steps

- *Describe the data collection methods with particular attention to active interviewing*
- *Describe appropriate strategies for the analysis and interpretation of data*
- *Collaborate with the participant to construct the narrative and to validate the accuracy of the story*
- *Complete the writing of the narrative account*

Objective 2.1

The Narrative Research Process

- Similarity to the steps discussed for all other research designs
- An interactive, personal, collaborative process characterized by a caring, trusting relationship between the researcher and participant
 - *The researcher's intent is to empower the participant to tell his or her story*
 - *The participant must have equal voice in the relationship*
 - *The researcher must actively listen to the participant's story before contributing his or her own perspective*

Types of Narrative Research

Autobiographies	Biographies	Life Writing
Personal Accounts	Personal Narratives	Narrative Interviews
Personal Documents	Documents of Life	Life Stories and Histories
Ethnohistories	Ethnobiographies	Autoethnographies
Ethnopsychologies	Person-centered Ethnographies	Popular Memories

Objective 3.1

Characteristics of Narrative Research

- Six key characteristics (continued)
 - Uses *restorying* as a technique for constructing the narrative account
 - Incorporates context and place in the story
 - Reflects a collaborative approach that involves the researcher and the participant in the negotiation of the final text

Objective 4.1

Characteristics of Narrative Research

- Sources of data
 - Participant's recollections of events or experiences
 - Secondary sources such as the participant's journal entries, artifacts, etc.
 - The nature of these sources implies the researcher must interact at a very personal level with the participant to collect data
 - The need for a relationship based on trust, caring, respect, and equality to facilitate collecting data as well as analyzing and interpreting it

Objective 4.2

Narrative Research Techniques

- Empirical data is central to narrative research
 - *The interpretive nature of narrative research presents concerns for credibility of the study*
 - *Implies the use of multiple data sources, triangulation, and collaborative negotiation of the written account*

Narrative Examples
