

Narrative Inquiry as a way of knowing

Ahmad Almufarreh

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Dr. Galluzzo

Narrative Inquiry as a Way of Knowing

The majority of people grew up with stories, told to them at their mothers' knees, read in books, relayed by their teachers, watched on films. They may learn valuable information by studying facts, abstract and procedures of theories, and such learning is extremely importance for them. However, they empathize with one another and they develop a profound understanding of the world when listening to stories. Indeed, knowledge has been passed from one generation to another in stories in order to help societies conserve their knowledge based on their experiences. Various things we have learned and studied are contained within narrative representation or stories (Brophy, 2012, p.33). Narrative inquiry was defined as the study of how individuals live, face different situations, cope with issues, and relate to other individuals (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). The narrative characteristics provide us with a framework that link a chain of events throughout cause and effect. Narrative inquiry provides also a starting and middle point, a telling of what happened, where and when, to whom, and how it ended. Thus, studying and learning what was told in the story is a way of understanding reality and revealing the meaning under the surfaces of events (Brophy 2004, p. 188). Polkinghorne showed that narrative inquiry is a form of meaning making. Narrative researchers recognize the meaningfulness of peoples' experiences by noting how the experiences function and act as parts of the whole (1988, p. 157). The schemes of narrative serve as a lens throughout which the clearly disconnected and independent elements of existence are seen and considered as related parts of the whole. Narrative inquiry has honored the tradition of telling stories in order to transform this information into knowledge.

Historical Roots of Narrative Inquiry

The positivist researchers often use words to explain numerical data in their research analysis, and they construct or collect stories about their studies. They set up rules, guidelines, and particular steps for finding the truth. However, narrative researchers are studying stories or describing a series of events. These researchers embrace the assumption that stories are the fundamental unit that account for part of the human experience. Reading about narrative inquiry, it became obvious that there existed several historic accounts for narrative inquiry. Polkinghorne (1988) showed a detailed analysis with careful scholarly and theoretical defenses of narrative inquiry. Bruner (1986) argued for two different ways of knowing in the human sciences. The first way is the paradigmatic knowing, which is the traditional and narrative positivistic research in social science. The other is articulating the historical basis for the credibility of narrative inquiry. Sarbin (1986) discussed narrative knowing in several chapters of his book, *Narrative psychology: The storied nature of human conduct*. These chapters outlined the history behind narrative knowing in psychology. Martin (1986) presented using social science analysis as a way to understand narrative in literature. Iannacci (2007) discussed critical narrative research (CNR), which is a new approach of narrative inquiry. It draws from many theoretical traditions and accepts the thought that multiple experiences create knowledge. It addresses a particular phenomenon of language, culture, and power to assure social justice on behalf of the researchers and the subjects that being studied. Therefore, critical narrative research provides the reflection, agency, and collaboration that are importance in activities of meaning making.

In contrast to these philosophers, Clandinin and Connelly (1999) showed their development as narrative researchers in more personal and intimate way. Their work

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with teachers showed that a classroom is a setting for telling stories. These stories can help educators to recognize what they know and then understand how they know it. Hence, narratives can help educators to develop their practical knowledge, which illustrates how experience impacts and influences current thoughts and future actions in the classrooms. However, theirs is a solid approach to studying how narrative inquiry became an appropriate and compelling way to study interactions of human.

Assumptions of Narrative Inquiry as a Way of Knowing

There is a unity among practitioners of narrative research on key points of arguments, philosophy, or methods. This can be both a strength and weakness for the shift toward narrative inquiry. It can be a strength because the various views lead to closer attention to a variety of individual's experiences. It can be a weakness because it means narrative inquiry will never become the leading approach in academic research in the same way that positivism has in the 20th century. Although narrative inquiry is still in the beginning of its development as a research method, practitioners of narrative research will have to come to grip with this issue. They will have to rethink the social and political impact of their work, or to accept the place of narrative inquiry on the margin of academic research. Thus, in the shift to narrative inquiry, there are four essential assumptions that result in what Bruner calls a paradigmatic shift.

Since narrative inquiry turned from number to word data, there will be an important assumption underlying how narrative inquiry relates to reliability. The turn toward words as data instead of numbers in narrative inquiry is not a rejection of numbers. It is a recognition that translating the experiences of humans to numeric codes causes us to lose the nuances of relationships and experiences. Smith (1983, p.7) states that instead of relying on numbers as research data, what researchers

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choose to study could be considered as having an independent existence with no intrinsic meanings. When researchers study social facts they can number and measure them. They believe these studies can create various trails that allow them to measure thinking, feeling, and caring and to be accurate and consistent. The basic use of numerical language clearly appears in probability and statistical inferences, which provide fundamental criteria for knowing. However, what differentiates narrative inquiry is an understanding that all studies are based on language, whether it is numerical language or researchers' discourse. Kuhn (1970) assumed that the narrow and antiseptic definition of scientific discourse that was heralded as essential for social science was insufficient. Thus, narrative researchers embrace the quality of metaphoric languages, coherence of the extended narrative, and discourse of the stories including exposition, description, and **argumentation**.

Another assumption of narrative inquiry is to understand that there are multiple ways of knowing the world and human experience. This understanding of the diversity of ways of knowing will lead researcher away from a secure base. Thus, renew understanding the validity in narrative inquiry is a basis of this assumption. Indeed, social science has been anchored in numeric codes and focused on a phenomenon with proving facts. These facts lead to the developments of theory and law in order to have a secure and solid basis for asserting a particular view of how the ways of things are. Dependence on the positivistic and post-positivistic assumptions allows researchers to assert and claim that their findings are valid. Nevertheless, accepting the various ways of knowing the world and human science is a turn to establish findings throughout resonance, trustworthiness, or authenticity (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The acceptance of the use of stories and interactive and relational nature of human science research are hallmarks of knowing in narrative inquiry.

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Daynes and Pinnegar (2007) state that narrative researchers recognize that executing and embracing the narrative inquiry methodology, rather than reliance on positivistic assumptions, provide resonant and authentic findings. Thus, narrative researchers recognize the variable and tentative nature of knowledge. They value and accept the ways in which narrative inquiry will allow tentativeness, wondering, and alternative view to exist as part of research accounts.

Another assumption of narrative inquiry is turning researchers from generalizability toward a focus on the particular. This assumption signals their understanding of the importance of a specific experience, in a specific setting, involving specific people. Coles (1989) illustrated the power of focusing on the particular through explicating and revisiting the story of one child from an earlier study. In capturing the child's story he instantiated the difficulties rising from poverty in such circumstances. The accounts provide readers with a deeper and valuable understanding of the effects of poverty on lives of children. In addition, Kitchen (2005) provided an example of the power of studying and focusing on the particular to understand the development of teachers. Throughout his careful narrative of experience of working with a teacher who transforms his teaching, educators come to greater understand the importance of relationships in bringing about deep changes. His accurate description of the setting and people involved provided us with a secure anchor for using what was learned in his narrative inquiry in another setting.

A popular assumption of narrative researchers is related to the ethical framework of how to develop and acquire the stories interpretation without creating a bias. In 2007, Iannacci asserted the significant of limiting individual bias in how narrative researchers interpret stories as fundamental in maintain the fairness and ethical credibility to the research. Caine and Estefan (2011) have also emphasized the

importance of recognizing the contextual factors of each story include social interactions and cultural knowledge. Thus, narrative inquires developed their systems with a careful awareness for coping these ethical concerns in such complicated research environments.

Implications for Research

One of the main difficulties in discussing research from a perspective of narrative knowing came from the revisions of formal science by the positivists. They have assigned technical meaning to many of the concepts that are related to epistemology such as cause, justification, validation, and explanation (Polkinghorne, p.161). These concepts were refined to limit the knowledge to whatever these concepts might pass the test of certainty. However, narrative research can no longer seek logical and mathematical certainty and should aim at producing verisimilar and believable results.

The investigations related to narrative inquiry can be distinguished whether the research purpose is to describe the narratives that are already held by groups and individuals, or to explain throughout narrative why is something happened. The first approach of narrative research is the descriptive research. The aim of this kind of research is to render the narrative accounts that already in place and used by groups or individuals as their means for making meaning of temporal events. The second approach of narrative inquiry is explanatory research. The aim of this kind of research is to explain "why" an event or situation involving actions of human has happened. Freidus (2002) illustrated the importance of the "why" of the story, the reasons for conclusions come throughout the information that we get from the when, the what, the who, and the where of the stories. This information comes easily throughout the research of positivists. However, the "why" is a different matter because the

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processing that takes to transform fact and observation into meaning, which depends on mental activities promoted by reflections and narrative.

The first approach of narrative inquiry is the descriptive research. The aim of this research is to produce a document describing the stories for groups or individuals use. This document makes up sequences of past activities and events in their lives meaningful and anticipates the consequences of possible future actions. Then descriptive narrative research attends to collect narrative schemes that operate for groups or a person to the situations or events that draw particular narratives to interpretive expression. Polkinghorne (1988, p.163) illustrated that:

The essential source of evidence in descriptive narrative research is the oral stories (interviews). For instance, the question "*Why did it happen?*" elicit and extract narrative explanation. However, this context is different from the context of typical interview, in which interviews are controlled by interveners whose ask particular questions and intervene when the answers are off track (p.163-165).

Researchers have to collaborate and share experiences with oral story tellers in order to understand what their stories are about. Operative narrative of individuals is not directly apparent to the researcher. This narrative research could be reconstructed from story fragments. Thus, a researcher has to move from particular stories of individuals uses to account for specific episodes to general life stories that provide unity to the individual's whole existence.

In (1988) Polkinghorne presented the final research reports of descriptive narrative research (p.169). These research reports are not the presentation of the stories of individuals. They are argued essays that conform to the roles of scholarly

presentations. Alternative interpretations and narratives are recognized, and evidences from the text of interviews are used to argue for the conclusion that researcher has achieved. The point of story (theme) is not directly presented by texts. It requires interpretation and inference on the part of researcher such as selection and detection of the data. Thus, the point of descriptive narrative is to show the narrative schemes that have been intended by storyteller. It also provides information about events that were undertaken on the story. In addition, descriptive narrative eliminates other possible plots that are less effective in supporting the correctness of the account of researchers.

Explanatory narrative research is another approach of narrative inquiry. The result of this research gives narrative explanations to the same as one of the answer to a question of why an event or action that has involved human actions happened. Polkinghorne states that narrative explanations sort out the multitude of decisions and events which are significant in the conclusion (1988, p.170). They draw together the various actions and episodes to stories that lead throughout sequence of events into the end. Explanatory narrative also emphasizes the importance of particular events and decisions and their effects in final outcome. An example of this approach will look like a historical account of why such country has lost a war. Therefore, historians as well as therapists use this approach to explain events or states by recounting significant past episodes. However, this approach has not been adopted by some disciplines of human as a model of research (Bruner, p.152).

A New Way of Knowing

The extended adoption of using the Web as a daily medium for communication and creativity, coupled with wide use of many virtual environments

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such as computer games of multi players, has introduced new narrative forms. This is particularly true where a great deal of people making contributions and building up shared narratives. Services of social networking in specific have encouraged interactive narrative structures in which fragments of autographical are brought together to create various expressions. The use of these services has moved of academic institutions to include professional groups, so it becomes obvious that narratives are a part of social and occupational dialogs. Thus, narratives are becoming a daily experience for many of us, even if we would not ourselves characterize them in this way or state to be authoring contents. As educational software developer, I think I have always depended on my previous experience and expert experience to inform and improve my current practice. Perhaps this way of knowing is importance for me as an instructor and IT designer.

Well-presented, Ahmad. You seem to have gained a good grasp of this way of knowing. I do hope it is useful to you as an instructor designer.

I made some APA edits along the way to get you to start thinking about using the Manual. Please keep practicing. I also made edits on your reference list. This area still needs some work. A

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