

FLIRTING WITH THE BOUNDARIES: ARTISTIC SPACES, SOCIAL SCIENCE SPACES AND NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Narrative inquiry is a subset of qualitative research design, which is increasingly flourishing in constructing knowledge, especially in the field of social science. Nevertheless, narrative as an approach to doing social science research is still in the making and this leaves the narrative researchers with multiple meanings and ambiguities in relation to using narrative inquiry in scholarly research. Significant questions are raised regarding the possibility and the applicability of using narrative as a mode of social inquiry. Often, it is argued that narratives inhabit artistic spaces as well as social science spaces and hence, application of narrative as a method of inquiry is questionable. The main focus of this article is to explore how far narrative inquiry represents artistic worlds in terms of its main characteristics and the criteria which are significant in considering it as a social science inquiry. The main argument is that narrative inquiry inhabits dual spaces; the social science and the artistic. It critiques the idea that narrative research is mere fiction and concludes that it should rather, be understood as an alternative mode of knowing the world, to the widely accepted, formal, positivistic ways of coming to know.

Introduction

Within the current framework of human science, there are multiple types of ontologies, epistemologies, ethics and methodologies, which reflect different paradigms; positivism, post positivism and critical theory (Heron and Reason, 1997). The notion of paradigm here refers to the basic set of beliefs that guide action while ethics are related to the question of how one will be as a moral person in the world. Epistemology is related to the questions of how one will know the world as well as the relationship between the inquirer and the known. The basic questions about the nature of reality and the nature of human beings in the world are addressed by ontology. It is through methodology that we try to focus on the best means of knowing about the world (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Based on these varying perspectives, epistemologies, and ontologies, different disciplines have come out with diverse ways of making sense of the world.

Within this context, the narrative construction of knowledge has begun to play an increasingly important role in the field of qualitative inquiry, especially in the field of human science. Before going any further, it is important to raise the question, what do we mean by narrative inquiry? The meaning of narrative itself as well as narrative inquiry has always been flexible and different authors seem to make sense of narrative inquiry using varying lenses. In this article, I describe

narrative inquiry as a subtype of qualitative inquiry. Agreeing with Chase (2005), I believe that narratives can either be written or orally constructed during field work, an interview, or during a natural conversation. Adding a little bit more to Chase, I contend that narratives are jointly constructed by the researcher and the respondents during any particular act of constructing knowledge, within the process of researching.

The Narrative Turn and the Storying Man

The recognition of the significance of narrative in human life seems to have a long history. For instance, Hans Vaihinger has mentioned that human beings live their lives by means of 'functional stories' in 1876 (Mahony: 1991:1). At present, support for narrative understanding as a major mode of making sense of human life and experience appears to be permeating many fields of scholarly inquiry. As Liebllich et al., (1998) mention, narrative studies are flourishing among a wide spectrum of disciplines during the recent history of research, as a means of understanding the personal identity, life style, culture and historical world of narrators. This increasing interest in narrative in the field of social science research may have sprung basically, from the understanding, that people are meaning-generating organisms and that they are storytellers by nature. Polkinghorn (1988) and Sarbin (1986) speak at length about the storied nature of human conduct. According to Polkinghorn (1988), human experience is meaningful and human behaviour is generated from and informed by this meaningfulness. He therefore explains that the study of human behaviour needs to include an exploration of the meaning systems that form human experience. He moves on to claim that narrative is the primary scheme by means of which human existence is rendered meaningful, a fundamental structure of comprehension that bestows meaning on life and human action.

Similarly, shaping of human experience by narrative has been the main focus of Bruner (1987), in his shift to narrative psychology from cognitive psychology. Bruner notes that "Story telling is life making: we are our stories: a life as led is inseparable from life as told" (Bruner 1987:31). In Bruner's point of view, human beings are the stories they tell about themselves. Accordingly, "...we represent our life... (to ourselves as well as to others), in the form of narrative" (1996:40).

Thus, the growing reflections on the embedded nature of story telling and human life, the development of the narrative perception of life, together with other epistemological and methodological debates about knowledge construction have lead narrative inquiry to flourish in the social sciences. Especially in the West, narrative inquiry seems to attract increasing attention as a mode of social inquiry. However, I perceive narrative inquiry is still in the process of developing as an approach of constructing knowledge. Researchers who are new to narrative inquiry

will find it a rich way of constructing knowledge reflecting multiple methodologies. Nevertheless, there is the possibility of understanding narrative as a diffuse tradition with ambiguities in relation to its legitimacy in presenting the 'truth' of the world (Chase, 2005). Frequently, the ability of narrative research to represent the 'scientific' and 'standard' ways of knowing the world is questioned. One of the major criticisms raised against narrative inquiry is that it is more art than scholarly research. Hence comes the question of the legitimacy of narrative research in constructing 'accepted' world knowledge. Especially, those who advocate the positivistic world view and the standard ways of going about research, claim that narrative inquiry is a sloppy way of constructing subjective knowledge, and that it lacks validity and reliability. The basic premise of this kind of criticism is the idea that narrative research is more art than scholarly research.

The following section of the article explores the embedded nature of narrative in artistic worlds. I frame my argument around the increasingly debated characteristic of blurred boundaries between narrative research and art.

Inhabiting Dual Spaces: Is it More Art than Research?

The term narrative has always been there in societies, providing expression to multiple aspects of human life and nature before it began to be significant in the field of research. People are more familiar with narrative as a creative means of constructing and reconstructing life, rather than understanding narrative as a refined mode of conducting research. Human beings more easily make sense of narrative as a form of art, rather than a mode of research. Hence, narrative inquiry can not and does not escape dwelling in dual spaces: art and research. This leads us to the more fundamental question: are we constructing fiction or authentic world knowledge in doing narrative research? This article aims at exploring this particular issue in some detail, drawing on the main characteristics of narrative inquiry, considering the ontological, epistemological, methodological aspects as well as the issues related to the textual structure. This said, I emphasize that in narrative inquiry (or in any other inquiry) the epistemological–ontological divisions are, of course, questionable, since both these aspects are intertwined and they both reflect on methodology.

Multiple Versions of Truth or Truth-likeness

The notion of truth in terms of doing research very often brings into mind considerations about verification by appeal to formal verification procedures and empirical proof. It reminds us of the narrow epistemological question of how to know the truth, which worries the researcher right from the beginning of a research process. However, in the narrative approach, the researcher embarks on research with different views about truth. In this section I argue that narrative researchers do not attempt to discover an ultimate truth. This argument is premised on two views

that are prominent among narrative inquirers. First, the belief that narratives which are constructed by human beings about human experience, are time-bound, contextual and non-rational. Hence, constructing an ultimate truth out of stories, which are only human constructions, will not be authentic. Second, since the main vehicle of constructing narratives is language, narratives are always value-laden.

Like the artist, the narrative researcher believes that the knowledge claims we construct about the world, about human experience, and life can not articulate timeless and rational truths. This means, that human beings act within social-cultural contexts and hence actions are shaped by the contexts. In the meantime, narratives articulate temporary stories which occur within a particular place during a particular time. These stories are thus time-bound. Narrative inquirers assume that knowledge, which is constructed through stories, is personal as well as social. Therefore, rather than aiming at finding the truth regarding a particular issue, narrative researchers seek explications that are context sensitive and particular. Accepting narrative ways of constructing knowledge means understanding that the world has not got fixed rules for assigning meaning to human behaviour. The narrative inquirer does not attempt to find 'the' truth in a fluid world with multifaceted realities (Emihovich, 1995). For him, the act of knowing is a process, constructed and reconstructed from personal and social meanings which are shared and conveyed through narratives. The fundamental issue behind this is that the narrative researcher believes that human beings are story tellers who act and make sense of their actions within contexts. Hence, truths are constructed by people and truth is not supposed to be 'just there' to be discovered by the researchers.

Apart from the contextual, time-bound nature of narrative inquiries, the central role played by language in the construction of knowledge, results in multiple versions of truth regarding the kind of the knowledge that is created through narratives. As we all know, narratives are consciously constructed by human beings, using language. When narrators employ language, either written or spoken, in the telling of their stories, they convey only a representation of the experience they want to tell. They choose their own words, similes and metaphors. And also they can omit what they do not want to reveal, while the possibility is there to add what they desire to highlight in their narrative. Thus, stories constructed by the tellers are not value-free. The very idea of construction itself is not value-free. What is constructed or narrated is not the truth about any particular experience. Rather, narratives always comprise the truth which the individual teller or the tellers jointly wanted to reveal as the truth. Therefore, it is only truth-like. That means narratives do not portray life as it is, but they construct only life-like portrayals.

Another argument here is that language fails to function as a picture or a map of an independent world. Rather, language operates constitutively, and is employed by communities of interlocutors for the purpose of carrying out

relationships (Gergen, 1997). Hence, language always reflects social, cultural and political contexts within which it is used and shared. In the case of constructing meaning within research processes, the stories narrated by the respondents will inevitably be shaped by multiple other factors rather than the mere language exchanged between the researcher and the respondent. For instance, narratives constructed during the research process will be shaped by the researcher-respondent relationship, the selection of the kinds of stories the researcher wants know, the stories the narrator is willing to tell, and the way the researcher understands the stories of the respondent. There is no guarantee that the teller's tale and the researcher's interpretation of the tale will construct similar meanings. The reason is that humans tell and understand narratives within the discourses that are available to them. Therefore, what is ultimately constructed as narrative is not the truth about any particular situation or experience, but a distilled selection of representations of the primary truth.

This particular characteristic of truth-likeness brings narrative research very close to artistic worlds in which, truth gains multiple meanings depending on the social, political and cultural readings of the artist as well as the audience. People are not rational but emotional, 'linguaging' beings (Maturana, 1988:78). Human beings do select and give their own interpretations to texts they encounter in life. That is the very nature of man who uses language for making sense of the world. Therefore, the social scientist's ability to discover the truth is highly contested, especially in the present super-complex world. According to Postman (1992:151):

[S]ocial science research never discovers anything. It only rediscovers what people once were told and need to be told again.

This is one of the major assumptions in narrative inquiry. In my view, this particular assumption brings narrative inquiry closer to art than natural science. For instance, let us take an oil painting, a poem or a short story. A painting is much more than a particular combination of some colours on a canvas. A poem more than a mere set of words written in a particular manner. Instead, paintings and poems tell different stories to different people with different life experiences. Sometimes, the same person will make sense of one particular poem in multiple ways through multiple readings. How many times have we watched the drama *Maname*? We may have read the story of *Maname* even before we watched the drama. We know what is happening in the drama and still we tend to watch it several times. Here we are not motivated to see *what* happens, but we want to know *how* it happens, we want to rediscover things, and reinterpret. And we can rediscover things since we are passionately and imaginatively engaged in living the story within the discourses available to us. The narrative researcher is quite aware of this human desire for

rediscovery and the human capacity to be emotionally engaged in human experience and life. Therefore, narrative research does not expect to construct claims which are universal. Instead, they construct life-like portrayals or truth-like stories about the world through their research. Bruner (1985:97) refers to this quality as 'verisimilitude'.

Another significant aspect worth discussing is how narrative research resembles art in relation to the researcher's relationship with the known.

Subjectively Objective Engagement: the Researcher and the Known

The relationship between the researcher and the known or the knowledge that is constructed through a research process in narrative inquiry has always been questioned. Of course, the relationship between the researcher and constructed knowledge in natural science research is very simply and easily defined. It is based upon categorization or conceptualization and the operations by which categories get established and relate to one another to a particular system. Its domain is basically defined by observables and by the set of possible worlds that can be logically generated and tested against these observables. Truth is a clear matter that is decided by testing. Within this context, the researcher is considered only a disengaged outsider. The researcher is supposed to distance the self as well as his or her assumptions about the world from the act of research. The researcher can only have an objective relationship with the research process. What is expected from this kind of objective engagement is to discover the ultimate, replicable, value-free truth regarding the area of research. On the contrary, the narrative inquirer accepts that research is an ongoing process within which theories emerge, and are not discovered. In this process, just like the artist, the researcher acts as an active participant, selecting, taking decisions, getting confused and surprised by what he or she comes to know and what is already known about the research process or the respondents. Narrative inquiry never pushes the main narrator aside. Instead, his or her presence within the process of doing the research is accepted and explicitly portrayed in the written research.

The multiple presence of the narrative researcher in the research process is understood and revealed through many strategies. The self of the narrative inquirer is always considered to be embedded in the process of knowing and hence, what is known is not a mere distant abstraction from the cultural, intellectual, and political as well as the personal locations of the researcher and the respondents. At this juncture, it is worth noting that while accepting the embeddedness among the tellers and the told with the constructed written narrative or the research report, I disagree that the narrative researcher is only subjectively engaged in making sense of the world. Rowen (1981, in Lincoln and Guba 1985:116), questioning about how researchers should think, what logic they need to bring to bear in the research

process, and how they can move back and forth between theory and research, draws upon a proposal of consciousness. Elaborating on this proposal, Rowen suggests that the nature of carrying out inquiries needs to highlight the quality of being 'subjectively objective'. In his view, to be subjective is to be at the mercy of our feelings, and to be open to manipulation by dominant personalities. Being objective is to be interested only in facts and what can be proved or false in a mechanical manner. Hence, I argue that narrative inquiries are not mere emotional accounts of the world. Instead, the researcher is at once detached and embedded in the process of research. I call this a passionately distanced engagement between the researcher and the known. In my view, this is true also of artistic worlds. For instance, Wallace Steven's poem, 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Bird' is about seeing birds in a natural landscape and how that seeing is shaped by the landscape of the beholder's mind. This is not only a poem about a looking at a black bird within a particular context. It is also contemplation on the meanings of the acts of looking, knowing and seeing. While the narrator of the poem surveys the landscape, the 'eye' gets embedded in the 'I' (May, 2002). However, in representing this oneness between the 'eye' and the 'I', the author uses the accepted kind of norms and rules of the discourse, and further, distances his 'self' or the 'I' from its embeddedness in the 'eye' for the purpose of understanding the very nature of it. Thus, creators of meaning, whether artists or narrative researchers, have to objectively distance themselves from the process of creation while, at the same time, being passionately engaged in the process.

Narrative researchers employ certain ways of explaining this passionately-distanced engagement with the process of knowledge construction to readers. Reflexivity is one of the most significant aspects through which researchers recognize the multiple relationships in which our knowing activities are embedded. I now turn to how narrative researchers make use of reflexivity to construct and maintain a subjectively objective relationship with the research process.

Locating Stories: Taking One Step Back

I think it is important to explain what I mean by reflexivity in narrative inquiry. The notion of reflexivity has been defined in diverse ways in the literature of qualitative inquires. However, I feel most comfortable with the way Steier (1991) makes sense of reflexivity in research. In his terms, reflexivity refers to a turning back onto a self and a way in which circularity and self reference appear in a particular inquiry. The significance of Steier's understanding of reflexivity is that it highlights the relatedness and the connectedness of our knowing and how it is embedded in the stories the researchers tell. It is a kind of taking one step back, while in the process of doing the research, to understand the personal, intellectual and political locations of the researcher and also to know how these multiple locations can shape the

process of research. Accordingly, the omission of this relatedness leaves the constructing activity in the research process unacknowledged. Thus, reflexivity helps relate research stories that allow the teller to tell stories, which encapsulate the researcher's construction process as well as that of the teller. Hence, a reflexive narrative researcher will understand that right from the beginning, from the selection of a topic for a particular research project, choosing methodologies, ontological and theoretical assumptions, personal and interpersonal emotional issues, are all intertwined with the kind of knowledge he or she is going to construct in the process of research. This is true regarding any piece of artistic work as well. It is difficult to deny that any artist can distance his or her self completely from the multiple contextual meanings, which shape the story of their being in the world, in the process of making sense of life through art.

Narrative inquiry resembles artistic worlds in terms of its capacity to address multiple realities by using only representations of reality rather than real replicas of the world. It should be mentioned that the discussion which follows can overlap with the views I have expressed in the section above, since it is really difficult to talk about the nature of narrative inquiry in separate segments.

Interpretive Portrayals of Re-presentations

In this section I argue that narrative inquiry shares the characteristics of art due to its specific ways of addressing the question of different voices that are present within a particular process of doing research. To put it simply, narrative inquirers do not try to pretend that they are presenting an exact value-free replica of the world they have discovered by doing research. Instead, they highlight that narrative inquiries bring about only representations of the reality of the world. Representations take place at several stages of the research process, distancing the researcher, respondents as well as the research process from reality. Putting all these together, I argue, that representation occurs due to two main aspects found in narrative research. These are the presence of multiple voices and the process of continuous selections done by the researcher and the respondents during every step of the way.

Re-presenting in Terms of Multiple Voices

What are the voices that dwell in a process of conducting scholarly research? Of course we know if we read a novel or a short story, we do hear, see and feel different locations and the contexts of the author as well as of the other actors or the characters in the story. We begin to feel varying voices within the actions and reactions of the actors, with the help of the discourse used the actions and the reactions of the characters in relation to different life situations. For instance, whenever we read poetry written by Amiri Baraka, we feel the voice of the African, the voice of the African American, as well as the voice of the American who is

sensitively aware of his political, social and cultural location as a man. Similarly, narrative inquiry also comprises many voices; the voices basically constructed through the multiple locations of the researcher and the respondents as well as the different contexts they belong to. For instance, the locations of a particular narrative researcher as a mother, a wife, an Asian or a Black, shape what kind of knowledge she or he wants to explore through research and how it can be explored. Moreover, the diverse contexts—cultural, political, social and economic—to which a researcher belongs can shape a particular research process considerably. This is true regarding the multiple positioning of the respondents as well. In narrative inquiry, unlike in natural science inquiries, respondents are not pushed backstage. Instead, they actively and visibly dwell in the process of the narrative inquiry, jointly constructing versions of the world with the researcher.

The possibility of the contextual and cultural shaping of various stages of research has been described by Holliday (2002). She describes how Shamim, an American woman doing a PhD, who went to collect data from a Pakistani secondary school, reconstructed her relationships with the respondents by consciously using her personal context. At the beginning she had formally introduced herself to her respondents, the staff of that particular school, as an American woman collecting data from the staff for a PhD. However, she points out that at this stage there had been no positive response from the staff who had merely looked at her as an American woman who will flirt with any man. Later, Shamim has disclosed that even though she is American, she is married to a Muslim person. Surprisingly, this uncovering of her civil and personal location had completely changed the relationship between the respondents, who were very cool towards her at the beginning. They had then accepted her as a part of their own cultural and social context, and had contributed actively to the data construction process. I mention this story to highlight that the locations of the researcher and the respondents always shape how and what we construct as knowledge through narrative research (or any other kind of research, even though it is not openly accepted). Therefore, what is assembled as knowledge at the end is not a 'pure', 'innocent' replica of the world. Instead, it is only a reconstruction of the realities that have been shaped and reshaped by the researcher-respondent joint action and interaction with their own, multiple voices.

Re-presenting through Continuous Selection

Apart from the presence of different voices, the act of selection also makes the constructed knowledge in a narrative inquiry a representation of the existing world. Selecting and taking decisions take place during different stages of conducting an inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). I only highlight how choices made at the stage of data collection and analysis can lead to multiple interpretations of the realities

constructed in narrative research. Data collection is considered a much more meaningful and complex act than merely collecting some information from informants who are supposed to be waiting to give the kind of knowledge the researcher needs to collect (Kvale, 1996). In narrative inquiry, the assumption is that data collection situations are active encounters, where realities are co-authored and co-constructed by the joint interaction between the researcher and the respondent. During this encounter, on the one hand, the researcher chooses what stories to construct, how to construct them, and how not to construct. On the other hand, the respondents also choose what to say and what not to, how to say and how not to. These selections result in producing a kind of condensed, representation of stories.

After collecting data, a further process of selection is carried out while analyzing data. Researchers now select the amount of data they intend to analyze, which methods to use to make sense of them, why a particular method and not others, and when to analyse. Each selection condenses the data and takes the research process away from the originating site, those who participated in constructing them. Thus, the narrative accounts (which are themselves representations of the experiences of respondents) are reduced and shaped into particular representations during the several stages of the research. The most significant aspect is that all these selections require considerable craftsmanship, imagination on the part of the researcher. Like the novelist or the poet, the narrative researcher also employs imagination and creativity while constructing narratives with the respondents and restorying them to make sense of them.

Thus, as Rose (1987) sums up, research becomes a way of imposing order on an external world rather than replicating reality. She describes the way researchers construct or craft representations by reducing the parts of the existing world into notes, tapes, pictures, or numbers. As Latour (1987) points out, interactions and events in research become transcripts and field notes and they are later coded and then combined with other accounts. Finally, these representations are again represented in the form of written texts, which again will undergo continuous interpretations by the readers as well as by the author.

What is important here is to know that narrative research openly accepts that knowing is a process of multiple representations rather than a replica of a slice of life. According to Geertz (1975), research is fiction, which constructs an 'as if' kind of picture of the world. His argument is that research is something which is made and fashioned.

So far, the article has discussed how certain characteristics of narrative inquiry reflect artistic constructions. However, the long held traditions in relation to research emphasize positivist, formal characteristics, which are different from those of narrative construction of reality. The criteria used to understand the standards of scholarly research are based on positivistic and structuralistic views about the world

and the capacity of finding the truth about life. However, narrative inquiry stands as an alternative mode of making sense of the world to that of the received, objective ways of knowing the world. Hence, the following section argues that the criteria which are applicable in understanding narrative inquiries are different from those which are used to make sense of conventional, formal and 'standard' research.

Alternative Ways of Constructing Knowledge: Which Criteria Matter?

The main focus of this section of the discussion is to examine the criteria which are considered significant in understanding narrative inquiry. I suggest here that these criteria draw narrative research closer to art than to the 'standard' conventional types of scholarly research.

Plausible Stories

The naturalistic inquirer soon becomes accustomed to hearing charges that naturalistic studies are undisciplined: that he or she is guilty of 'sloppy' research engaging in 'merely subjective' observations, responding to indiscriminately to the 'loudest bangs or brightest lights'. Rigour, it is asserted, is not the hallmark of naturalism (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:289).

As has been pointed out by Lincoln and Guba, charges have been leveled against naturalistic inquiries. In my view, even more charges have been made against narrative inquiry, which is a type of naturalistic inquiry. However, such criticisms result from a lack of understanding of the ontological and epistemological issues related to alternative ways of knowing the world, which do not replicate the 'standard' and conventional ways of knowing. According to Bruner (1985), each of the ways of knowing has its own operating principles and its own criteria. Accordingly, the criteria that are applicable to paradigmatic and narrative ways of knowing differ radically in their procedures for establishing truth. For instance, the paradigmatic ways of doing research looks for formal verifications of truth explications which are context and time free. The search for truth is explained in terms of formal, depersonalized discourse. Notions such as generalizability, validity and reliability are prominent in the vocabulary of paradigmatic studies. These studies also emphasize 'objective truth', 'causality' and 'rationality' during the process of researching as well as during the act of writing about the study.

I would argue that in narrative inquiry, on the contrary, researchers do not pretend to highlight objective, rational, truths, which are context free. Instead, they consider criteria which can successfully address plausible stories. While the imaginative application of the paradigmatic mode of research leads to good theory, logical proof and empirical discovery based on hypothesis, the imaginative

employment of the narrative mode results in “good stories, gripping drama” (Bruner, 1985:99). Therefore, the qualities that are expected to illuminate narrative research stand in contrast to the qualities that are accepted within the formal ways of constructing knowledge. I now discuss the criteria which are considered important in the narrative mode of knowing under two major aspects: trustworthiness and temporariness.

Trustworthiness

Like novelists, poets, or painters, narrative researchers alternate the concepts of validity and reliability with trustworthiness. What is trustworthiness? The basic argument in understanding trustworthiness is simple; how can an inquirer persuade him or her as well as others that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to? What criteria are invoked, and what arguments are mounted? (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). As Lincoln and Guba establish narratives are believed when they can be credited with conveying convincingly that the events occurred, and were felt, in the ways the narrator is asserting. For instance, the researcher should be able to make the readers or the audiences feel that he or she is presenting them with a believable construction or a representation of a context-bound, reflexive slice of human experience storied by human beings. As we know, the stories we tell can be plausible, but not necessarily universal. Stories are personal as well as social. Hence, they are contextual, cultural, political and not time-free. Stories are complex and interpretable. We listen to stories, construct stories or we reconstruct them. For instance, while watching or reading the drama *Singhabahu*, we rarely argue about the truth regarding the family life between a human and an animal. Instead, we believe this within that particular context, based on the authenticity of the narrative that is written or acted. We take the story to be life-like, considering the narrative point of view. Inside the theatre, we meander between life and life-likeness of the story being enacted because we begin to feel that human actions are very complex to be defined in terms of the truth principle.

Bruner, describing the intricacy of understanding the truth aspect in narrative research mentions that narratives operate within two landscapes simultaneously; the landscape of action and the landscape of consciousness. He claims that these two landscapes are essential and distinct and that this is the difference between Oedipus sharing Jocasta’s bed before and after he learns from the messenger that she is his mother. Thus it is clear that even though truth is a simple, clear matter in paradigmatic research, narratives find it a very complex issue. Thus, the narrative researcher is only interested in constructing stories with verisimilitude. As Hatch and Wisnieski point out, the narrative researcher alternates the idea of ‘truth’ with fidelity and betweenness.

Contextuality

The other significant criterion applicable to narrative inquiry is the contextuality of the stories constructed and narrated by narrative researchers. The subject matter of narrative is human experience, which are treated as unique, inconsistent, time-bound and contextual. Unlike the researchers who advocate the paradigmatic ways of knowing the world, the narrative researchers refuse the idea of decontextualised knowledge. Thus, one of the basic premises of narrative research is that human experience is constructed and reconstructed as well as shaped and reshaped by multiple contexts such as cultural, social, political and psychological. Owing to this prominence given to the contextuality of human experience, narrative inquiries construct worlds which are not necessarily replicable.

Since the knowledge constructed through narrative research is contextual, the process of doing narrative research does not seem to convey causalities, which lead to a single truth. Instead, the narrative researcher believes that human experiences are unique and complex and hence, cannot be easily replicated. Therefore, the narrative researcher would not claim that the knowledge they construct about the world, are generalizable across cultures and contexts. Moreover the narrative constructions of the world would not come out with models highlighting 'right' and 'wrong' in relation to any particular issue.

In my view, this way of interpreting human experience within specific contexts is quite significant among creative writers and artists. For instance, we do not attempt to evaluate whether it is right or wrong for Macbeth to murder king Duncan. Instead, we reinterpret this particular act considering all the other available cultural, political, historical, psychological or supernatural contexts in the text. We would try to understand why Macbeth behaved in the way he did and who or which powers influenced that particular behaviour, rather than judging his behaviour. We empathize with his dislocated self, to which he gives birth after murdering King Duncan. This kind of emotional and intellectual engagement with the text is possible since we make sense of it as a unique human experience. In the same manner, narrative cognition provides us with explanatory knowledge about a particular human experience without trying to generalize across stories which are unique. What is significant to note is that these characteristics of narrative reasoning highlight that the stories researchers construct about the world knowledge are temporary and they are not easily generalizable across cultures and contexts. Rather, narrative inquirers understand that knowledge is only a human construction and that it is ongoing. No conclusions are given. Therefore, claiming universal truths in relation to constructed worlds is not accepted as authentic.

Thus, the criteria that apply to narrative inquiry resemble the criteria which matters in understanding a piece of art: a novel, a short story or a painting. Artistic

portrayals are unique, life-like, and authentic. They delineate themes which are time-bound and contextual. So do narrative inquiries.

Finally, the article examines how the narrative researchers portray the research process in the form of a written text. It explores whether the textual structures of narrative research also inhabit artistic worlds.

Writing the Narrative Research Process

As discussed in the above paragraphs, the narrative inquirer constructs plausible, life-like, contextual representations of slices of the world through narrative research. Significantly, the narrative researcher has to employ a discourse which articulates the fluidity and the plausibility of the representations of the world he or she constructs. Hence, the narrative researchers do not essentially depend on any one particular expressive form. That means, as in the case of art, narrative inquiries can be presented or articulated through different or mixed genres. Thus, a narrative researcher would write about the process of conducting a particular item of research in the form of a poem, or in any other 'aesthetic' form of prose. Of course, before the 17th century, all forms of writing had been clearly divided into two major kinds: the literary and the scientific. Writing about research necessarily belonged to the category of scientific writing. However, by the beginning of 20th century, the fine line between social science writing and literary writing began to get blurred. The demarcations between 'fact' and 'fiction' were questioned (Clifford and Marcus, 1986). The question of blurred boundaries between 'fact' and 'fiction' began to receive more attention when narrative researchers started writing about their constructed worlds in different genres, which do not replicate the 'standard' ways of writing research.

In this article, I bring to light two issues that are significant in writing the narrative research text. First, the awareness that texts are open for multiple interpretations and that language fails to act as a complete picture or a map of an independent world. Second, writing should reflect the process of doing research since in narrative inquiry, the process is the product.

Multiple Interpretations

No language operates within a cultural-social vacuum. Language, especially in its written form, is never innocent. Language always creates a particular view of reality and of the self. Moreover, it constructs one's sense of self within particular social and historical contexts.

Therefore, written texts about narrative research will be open to multiple interpretations. Interpretations or representations of texts of narrative studies are two fold: representations constructed by the researcher narrator himself or herself, and the interpretations of the readers. Thus, the narrative text evoke the deeper parts of

the author's self due to the embedded nature of the social and cultural locations of the producer. In my view, the narrative researcher, similarly to the poet or the novelist, uses his or her imaginative powers in telling about their constructed worlds in written form. What is significant in this telling is that the writer-researcher is present in the text in terms of *how* and *what* kind of representations he or she constructs through the discourse chosen to describe the research. Moreover, the narrative researcher explicitly explains how a particular way of interpreting the research experience was chosen over other ways, by writing reflexively about his or her multiple locations as a researcher, professional, woman or a mother. Writing thus, the narrative researcher highlights that the written text is only a re-presentation of his or her interpretation of the knowledge constructed during the research process.

In the meantime, the written text of the narrative research provides the landscape for the readers to make sense of the particular part of the world constructed by the producer in terms of their personal, cultural and historical locations. For instance, an audience reads a particular narration of a research journey using different lenses, different world views as well as with varying understanding of the particular issues portrayed in the text. Similarly to any piece of art, the written narrative text does not intend to provide conclusions regarding the knowledge issues it describes. Instead, the process of doing a particular research is being explicitly described so that the audience or the readers can construct multiple interpretations out of the written text. Hence, the narrative researcher's written production is multi-layered in terms of meaning.

Apart from the representative quality of the text, the narrative researchers' textual structure reflects the process of coming to know. It is in a way an aesthetically constructed landscape where the tellers, the told and the telling get merged. Hence, it becomes a landscape which is very complex where there is no one 'correct' way of telling. However, one thing is significant. The attempt of representing the process rather than the product demands that the writing should reflect characters, puzzlements, insights, limitations stances (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Therefore, the researcher can not write as an omniscient, dislocated, disembodied outsider, claiming universal truths. Narrative inquiries are about human actions and experiences. Hence, the written texts should let the reader feel, hear and visualize the process of the action that has taken place within the process of doing the research. It invites the writer to be reflexive in writing.

Use of Different Techniques

The complexity of the process of doing narrative research is brought to light by the narrative researcher through different techniques, which are also used by the artist. Referring to the qualitative researchers' task, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe that they use the appropriate aesthetic as well as material tools in constructing

interpretive texts. They refer to the qualitative researcher as a maker of quilts and describe the act of presentation through the concept of montage. In my view, the techniques of quilt making and montage are employed especially by the narrative researcher. Montage is used as a method of editing cinematic images. In this technique, several different images are juxtaposed or superimposed on one another to create an emotional gestalt. The use of montage creates the sense that images, sounds and understandings are blending together. The images shape and reshape one another (Cook, 1981 in Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). It further creates and brings psychological and emotional unity to a particular piece of writing.

Apart from montage, a narrative researcher can use flash back, flash forwards, comparison or contrast to provide a strong aesthetic meaning to his or her writing.

Conclusion

This article has explored how far narrative research inhabits artistic worlds in terms of its main characteristics as well as the criteria that are used to understand narrative as a form of social science inquiry. What emerged is that the boundaries are somewhat blurred between art and narrative as a mode of social science inquiry. Nevertheless, this mode should not be understood as mere fiction. Narrative inquiry dwells in artistic worlds, in the form of a social science inquiry and not as art itself. Narrative research has different purposes and a different audience in the process of making sense of the world. Hence the norms and traditions of the performing arts may differ from those of narrative inquiry. For instance, the narrative researcher has to follow a certain set of discipline-based ethics and procedures in constructing knowledge, whereas the artist has more autonomy and authorship over his or her work of art. In the meantime, the two genres have different kinds of impact on their audience.

However, in the present post-modernist context, the artist and the social scientist have more flexibility to cross boundaries and learn from each other, while retaining their uniqueness as social science and art. And currently, the narrative researcher seems to be benefiting from this flexibility as opposed to other kinds of conventional or paradigmatic researchers. Hence the criticism that narrative research is more art than research.

The article concludes that narrative research, which is a type of qualitative social science, can reflect artistic worlds, and still be a scholarly mode of constructing world knowledge as an alternative to the widely accepted, objective ways of knowing the world.

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