## Centre for Narrative Research in the Social Sciences

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## NOVELLA ESRC Research Node

## University of East London and Institute of Education

***To THink is To eXperiment***

**Wednesday, 29th April, 2015**, **University Square Stratford**,

Room: USS 2.31

Directions: <http://www.universitysquarestratford.ac.uk/find-us.htm>

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| **9.45 - 10.00** | ***Welcome and Introductions*** |
| **10.00 - 10.40** | **Siyanda Ndlovu Memorial Lecture**  **Embodied Narratives: Live Art and the Artist's Life**  Dr Barbara Droth |
| **10.40 – 11.10** | **The plan in practise: Making sense of personal archives in a family home**  Noelle McCormack, Rix Centre, University of East London |
| **11.10 - 11.40** | **Diversity Training: ‘Race’, Space, Place and (Un)intended Consequences**  Lurraine Jones, Psychosocial Studies, *University of East London* |
| **11.40 – 12.00** | ***Coffee Break*** |
| **12.00 – 12.30** | **Approaching the field with creativity: conceptual-methodological reflections on narrative research into activism**  Alice Mukaka, School of Social Sciences, University of East London |
| **12.30 – 13.00** | **‘Voiced Stress in MS.’ An exploration of anonymous bloggers’ comments on stress and medical professionals’ responses in a blog on Multiple Sclerosis in the public domain.**  Sharmini Chaytor |
| **13.00 – 13.30** | **‘ Narratives impacted by acquired brain injury: barriers and opportunities in daily life**  Claire Brewis, Teesside University |
| **13.30 – 14.15** | ***Lunch Break*** |
| **14.15 - 14.45** | **Giving ‘them’ a voice: narratives of political violence in Portugal** Raquel da Silva, University of Birmingham |
| **14.45 - 15.15** | **The Ethical Potential of Narratives of Victimization in Novels about the Basque Conflict: A Narrative Approach.**  Irene Gantxegi, University of Deusto, Bilbao |
| **15.15 –15.45** | **Becoming a Woman by Practising Autofiction: Narratives of Memory Work Applied to the Vindication of a Female Identity**  Ignacio Diaz Vazquez/Veronica, School of Social Sciences,  University of East London |
| **15.45 -16.00** | ***Coffee Break*** |
| **16.00 -16.30** | **Meaning-making in the moment: Small Stories-in-interaction enabling critical reflection.**  David Gates, King’s College London |
| **16.30 - 17.00** | **Strategic narratives ‘from the ground up’? Investigating British public attitudes to the use of military force.**  Thomas Colley, King’s College London |
| **17.00 - 17.45** | Discussion over drinks |

**Abstracts:**

**Embodied Narratives: Live Art and the Artist's Life**

**Dr Barbara Droth**

My research looks at diverse texts such as interviews with artists, visual narratives of live performances and artists’ websites, in order to examine how artists make sense of their embodied autobiographical experiences during encounters with their audiences. A post-structuralist narrative analysis examines the live and online performance-narratives for their embodied continuity with the artists’ life histories. The talk aims to develop the understanding of contemporary performance art practice, and contribute to the audience’s meaning-making processes when engaging with Live Art. I will interweave the talk with ideas on remembering and my personal memories of Siyanda.

**The plan in practise: Making sense of personal archives in a family home**

**Noelle McCormack, Rix Centre, University of East London**

My research about how people with profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD) are living their lives and telling their stories involves spending a year in the homes of three families, all of whom live with an adult child diagnosed with PMLD. By the end of April 2015 I will have completed the first stage of fieldwork. Stage one, lasting for two months, focuses on the analysis of personal archives.

A large and diverse range of personal, archived material has been made available by the families of the three disabled participants. The material includes photos, videos and written records from a range of sources including school, college, adult services, projects, and family memorabilia. The life history materials will be used to reflect on and chart lifelines of the key participants with specific reference to visual and written narratives of communication. It is through the thematic analysis of this archived data that several areas for further inquiry will emerge.

Thematic analysis lends itself to this specific study due to the large quantity and wide range of data both available and generated, but also because of the transparency of the method. It is important that the research design and methodology is accessible and that those contributing to it are able to participate actively in a dialogue about the research process, analysis and findings. One of the aims of the study is that I adopt a research process that offers clarity, transparency and accountability. The six phases of thematic analysis as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) appears to provide a framework that fits my brief and this seminar offers an opportunity to reflect on how planned methods are translating in practice.

**Diversity Training: ‘Race’, Space, Place and (Un)intended Consequences**

**Lurraine Jones, Psychosocial Studies, *University of East London***

The purpose of my paper is to further develop relatively unexplored discourses surrounding diversity training, particularly surrounding the concept of ‘race’. Diversity training can be described as an employee ‘training’ programme which aims to influence participants to increase their positive, or decrease their negative inter-group behaviours, such that less prejudice or discrimination is displayed towards others perceived as ‘different’. An earlyliterature review suggests that far from valuing the topic of ‘race’ within diversity training, there is a resistance by employees to the concept of diversity training, culminating in a general ‘backlash’. In contemporary times not least because of austerity, diversity training has moved from a group experience to individual e-learning packages. My working thesis for this study is the need for better strategies and a review of the current status quo of training on and around issues of ‘race’ using a case study of one or two UK police services.

**Approaching the field with creativity: conceptual-methodological reflections on narrative research into activism**

**Alice Mukaka, School of Social Sciences, University of East London**

This narrative inquiry focuses on the stories told by women seeking asylum in the United Kingdom who have experienced dispersal, detention and destitution. These stories are collected as part of a wider investigation into political narratives of migrant rights activism.

In recent years, imaginatively engaging with the social world is increasingly seen as having effective emancipatory potential. In order to collect data, the research utilizes theatrical ‘performance’ techniques as one of many methods to engage with participants, followed by collecting individual stories through semi-structured interviews in order to explore how they narrate their world and how they make sense of their individual experiences.

In this presentation, I will discuss how theatre praxis as a field of knowledge (embodied, culturally located and socially distributed) is an accessible format with which to engage the audience on specific and sensitive topics. Then I explain how the ‘kind’ of narratives collected in this creative way present a particular portrait of the asylum seekers’ political worldview, and how such data can give us an insight into the ‘identity of marginalized groups as well as perceptions and experiences of social positionings and power relations in and outside community groupings’ (Kaptani &Yuval-Davis, 2008).

**‘Voiced Stress in MS.’ An exploration of anonymous bloggers’ comments on stress and medical professionals’ responses in a blog on Multiple Sclerosis in the public domain.**

**Sharmini Chaytor**

In this small study I explore anonymous life event stress narratives of people with multiple sclerosis (PwMS) and medical professionals on a blog site dedicated to MS research that is openly accessible in the public domain. A recurring theme of traumatic stress preceding relapses supported by studies (Mohr et al., 2004, 2012; Burns et al., 2013) is prevalent in MS. I use two narrative approaches, thematic (Squire, 2013; Riessman, 2002; 2008) and positioning (Murray, 2000; Bruner, 1990) to enhance readers’ understanding of bloggers’ stress. This dualist approach also increases our understanding of how bloggers and authorities themselves understand the concept of emotional stress in context with MS. I address the following areas: what is perceived as stressful to PwMS; how the concept of stress is dealt with by them; how the medical world respond to the conceptualisation of stress; how doctors respond to PwMS’ stories of stress.

In my presentation I will include reflections on how I arrived at ethical considerations and the difference between pedagogical and public domain ethics; data collection; the process involved in identifying themes and positions relevant to my choice of narrative approaches from data; the relevance of using two analytic methods. I will also discuss the limitations of my research not only methodologically but also in relation to sample size and anonymisation and finally draw conclusions about my processes and the findings themselves.

**Narratives impacted by acquired brain injury: barriers and opportunities in daily life**

**Claire Brewis, Teesside University**

The focus of this PhD study is in how people continue to engage in life roles and occupations following brain injury. Our individual repertoire of occupations is a fundamental part of life. It allows for social interaction and can contribute to spiritual well-being. It exercises the mind and body for the promotion of health (Wilcock, 2001) and influences the roles people hold within the family or wider societal structures (Kielfhofner, 2008). Ultimately this will impact on an individual’s identity (Rayner, 1995). The study adopted a photo-elicitation approach to gathering narratives from people whose lives have been affected by a brain injury.

The analysis in progress aims to follow the principles of the early writers on narrative such as Polkinghorne and Frank, plus the decision was made to adopt the structured narrative psychological approach of Crossley, (2000). It incorporates the photo-elicitation technique, allows for the reconstruction of the life story and portrays the specific occupational issues participants are presented with. This combination of approaches was constructed as a means of eliciting the barriers and opportunities to fulfilling life roles and engaging in daily occupations.

**Giving ‘them’ a voice: narratives of political violence in Portugal**

**Raquel da Silva, University of Birmingham**

My thesis is focused on the experiences of former political activists who used violence in Portugal during the pre- and post-1974 revolutionary eras. This focus on the actors of the violence, their experiences and meanings, is meant to answer the call for more in-depth studies on those carrying out acts of violence (Breen Smyth, 2007). The analysis of my data is shaped by three different aspects of the militant’s life cycle in the context of a political violent organization: engagement, life within a clandestine organization, and disengagement. In this sense, I intend to grasp the narratives of former political violent militants at the crossroad of their broader life story and the social, political and historical context of their time (Andrews, 1997). I am particularly attentive to aspects of personal experience related with generational issues (Manheim, 1952; Braungart and Braungart, 1988, 1989; Edmunds and Turner, 2002), to thoughts and feelings attached to past events (MacDonald, 1991; Chase, 1995) and to how people reframe their stories in order to create a narrative that make senses within the context of their present lives (Josselson, 1995). This in-depth analysis of the narratives shaping political violence in Portugal will take the form of a thick account of the experience of political activists who chose to dedicate part of their lives to a political violent organization, and hopefully this study will give a voice to these actors who have been silenced in past accounts of this turbulent time of Portuguese history.

**The Ethical Potential of Narratives of Victimization in Novels about the Basque Conflict: A Narrative Approach.**

**Irene Gantxegi, University of Deusto, Bilbao**

In this paper I will present the methodological approach of my dissertation. My thesis examines the process of emotional education of citizens that unfolds in a book-club reading literature about the Basque conflict (1960 to present). The project aims to explore empirically the theoretical assumption which holds that the reading of narratives about the experience of victims (of the Basque conflict), can provoke certain emotions in the reader that, adequately developed through pedagogical reflection, can transform into moral sentiments that enable a critical understanding of the political violence.

In order to collect data, I facilitated a book club meeting once a week for four months, time during which 12 participants read and discussed four novels about the Basque conflict. The aim of the book club as data collection was to generate process of narrative imagination in the reader, create a setting in which they talked with others about it, and express that in different written products.

My data consists primarily of transcriptions of discussion group and journal reflection about reading; I will use two different narrative approaches to explore specific narrative connections in my data. In this paper I aim to present a preliminary synthesis of the data analysis of my dissertation. The analysis highlights the transformation in participants´ understanding of political violence.

**Becoming a Woman by Practising Autofiction: Narratives of Memory Work Applied to the Vindication of a Female Identity**

**Ignacio Diaz Vazquez/Veronica, School of Social Sciences, University of East London**

Following Frigga Haug’s idea that people’s past experiences determine the way in which they construct themselves and make sense of their lives, this presentation will describe how its author has introduced an autofictional persona, called Veronica, to his readers in order to destabilise the stigmatisation and popular misconceptions suffered by people who question their gender identity. By presenting Veronica as a becoming process, nomadic since her self-realisation, the author will analyse three of his most popular opinion columns in [www.politicalocal.es](http://www.politicalocal.es) in order to show how Deleuze’s understanding of desire has helped him in the process of constituting a new becoming-self by reflecting on the in-between spaces, transitions and intervals which every becoming process entails. Veronica’s past and present experiences, narrated in the columns, will portray the author’s commentator work as the primary vehicle for his de-territorialisation claiming a female identity of continuity, multiciplity and reaffirmation by writing

**Meaning-making in the moment: Small Stories-in-interaction enabling critical reflection.**

**David Gates, King’s College London**

This paper sketches the territory of an ongoing PhD thesis analysis chapter. Its concern is with one of the conceptual spaces between big and small story research positions: *reflection*.

The research orients to a Small Stories position to account for the unrehearsed under-reported talk-in-interaction of a group of craft-artists. Protagonists of small stories have argued these to be the “real stories of our lived lives” (Bamberg 2004 p356) “easily missed by a lens which only looks out for fully-fledged stories.” (Georgakopoulou 2007 p146). Big stories, whether researcher-elicited, stories as resources, or autobiography necessarily inhere reflective distance and certainly allow space and time to get the story in order. But this also “creates opportunities for understanding that are largely unavailable in the immediacy of the moment.” (Freeman 2007 p155).

The data shows past events, oftentimes shared experiences, drawn upon and deployed in the ‘now’ of interaction. As isolated fragments they have low tellability, but unfolding as part the interactional business they enable critical reflection and the hypothesising of future actions.

Turning away from the relative-truth claims of big and small stories, and addressing the tension between big and small stories vis-a-vis proximity and distance in reflection and interaction, space can be found where reflection-in-interaction grounded in verisimilitude shows language as a contingent yet identifiable enabler of meaning-making in creative practice.

**Strategic narratives ‘from the ground up’? Investigating British public attitudes to the use of military force.**

**Thomas Colley, King’s College London**

This paper examines how far individual British citizens tell similar stories about Britain’s military and when it should be used. Existing research on public attitudes to military force has primarily employed quantitative methods to classify individuals into binary categories such as isolationist or internationalist. Instead, this study adopts an interpretive narrative approach, interrogating how similarly individual citizens construct narratives about Britain’s military role. This offers a fresh perspective on British attitudes at a time when ‘strategic narratives’ are considered integral to persuading publics to support wars.

Early findings suggest that while the range of individual narrative interpretations is theoretically infinite, British citizens tell strikingly similar stories about Britain’s military role, using similar emplotments, metaphors and analogies. However, this raises numerous challenges regarding data analysis. To what extent are individuals’ narratives shaped by knowledge of past wars, beliefs and values, personal experience or the media, and how far can these influences be identified? With such diverse knowledge and experiences, what can meaningfully be said about the military interventions people omit from their narratives? Through addressing these issues this paper will examine how far it is possible to generate a typology of master narratives concerning British attitudes to using military force.