**To Think is to Experiment, 30th April , 2014**

**Abstracts:**

**The road to subjective belonging: the travels, travails and realization of a narrative PhD**

Dr Nicola Samson, CNR

**Development of a multi-layered narrative approach to analysis in order to make sense of men’s caring experiences**

Ann Stokes (Trinity College Dublin)

My narrative inquiry focused on the stories told by 16 men who were providing care to a loved one with dementia. I sought to gain an insight into how they made sense of their experiences of caring. Each narrative was collected through in-depth individual interviews.

The aim of my presentation is to provide an account of the key challenges that I tackled while analysing the narrative material. I will describe and situate the framework that I developed to analyse men’s stories. All 16 stories were analysed through multiple perspectives focusing on the what, how, why, where, and when of each story. Thematic, structural, performative and dialogic features were examined. Emphasis was placed on how I positioned myself as both an insider and outsider and contributed to the co-construction of individual stories. I will provide an account of the key patterns of meaning across men’s stories that my multi-layered approach to analysis revealed and how men were experiencing a ‘constant balancing act.

Through situating my approach to analysis, I will demonstrate how I constructed a narrative understanding of men’s stories of caring in the context of dementia. Deep emersion from a narrative perspective also challenged wider societal and cultural stories.

**Reflections on transcribing for narrative analysis**

**Catherine Walker, Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education**

Following Ochs’ (1979) seminal chapter *Transcripti* *on as The* *ory,* a growing body of literature has reconceptualised the transcription of qualitative data as an integral part of the analysis process. Within the field of narrative research, however, the process and production of transcriptions are often little discussed when compared with the volume of literature analysing the research encounter, and subsequent analysis of completed transcripts.

In this presentation, I would like to focus on the process and production of transcriptions for narrative analysis, reflecting on my experiences of working with others to produce dual and single-language transcripts for my PhD and the wider project to which it is attached. In line with the ‘problem-based’ theme of the day, I will discuss some of the ethical, practical and methodological challenges encountered in the production of transcripts, particularly when working within the time constraints of a funded PhD project. Questions I would seek to address and subsequently discuss on the day are: How much detail can/should one go into in transcribing for narrative analysis? What is feasible and necessary, given the time one has to conduct analysis? What strategies can help to make transcription both manageable and productive, in terms of subsequent analysis?

**About working titles, abstracts and narrowing your research focus - A personal narrative on writing a PhD**

Kerstin Meißner (Free University Berlin)

It was the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard who once stated: “We live forward, but we understand backwards”. Following this very true statement I will tell a story on my personal path to what interests me in research on education and culture in general and my PhD project about belonging in particular. I will do this by combining academic work with my experiences of activism and educational practice.

Focusing on the influence of cultural studies on intercultural education issues of identity and how our ideas about culture(s) are expressed in educational settings arise. In that context we can barely get around the questions “who is WE” and “who is THEY”? Or, to put it in other – less identity focused - terms, “Who belongs? Who does not? And who decides that?” Speaking from a German urban context, as an educator and academic, I was always intrigued by existing (pre-) conceptions on what it means to be “German” and how the imagination of a Nation as community (Anderson, 1983) is perpetuated in every day practices. In my educational work I have started to raise that question, with teachers and students, in- and outside of schools and especially in my work for the transatlantic Documentary Initiative “with WINGS and ROOTS”. Within these contexts concepts of identity, space, place and belonging had been discussed.

I am understanding belonging as a critical approach which is probably “more justice to the complexities, dynamics, and subtleties of human interrelating, […] than that of ‘collective identity’” (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2013). In that sense I am following Nira Yuval-Davis´ ideas on “Politics of belonging” and the proposal of Ann-Dorte Christensen to differentiate three main levels of belonging: the macro level (nation, religion), the meso level (political parties, social movements) and the micro level (local communities, lived lives). To examine the relevance of these levels for individual´s everyday life I am focusing on concepts of belonging within personal narratives. In a comparative study I am interviewing young adults from Berlin and London who participate in a youth project funded by the European Union. They are besides all artists who use Rap, Spoken Word or Poetry to express themselves. Assuming that the performance of personal stories in art pieces gives insights to narrations of belonging and self-positioning I am using the interviews as well as some of their creative texts to examine notions of belonging.

With referring to the possibilities of narrative practices to express, maintain or modify existing discourses I am interested in the open question if notions of belonging can lead “beyond communities of identity” (Antonsisch, 2010).

**“Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans” – When the story of a research project`s becoming is inseparable from the subject you plan to study**

Sabrina Koepke

In narrative research, the life history of the researcher and the subject of research are often very intimately linked. This means that the subjective, personal dimension has to be actively dealt with and integrated. This is a complex undertaking as this dimension is not static: Life keeps happening and contexts, experiences, observations and thoughts continuously alter the process by which meaning is constructed by the researcher, by which one story line is followed rather than another and this then applies to the subject of research as well. In my presentation I will consider the process of becoming of a narrative research project as a meaningful narrative in itself that cannot be isolated from any data and analytical outcome generated in the project.

Specifically, I will relate to my present, first narrative research project based on a specific storyline in my own life history: Identity development in female academics from a non-academic family background. Starting from how I first came up with the idea over three years ago and leading up to the present state of initial interview conduction, I will use my written reflections, email exchanges as well as pieces of the first interview(s) in order to illustrate and open up for discussion selected critical issues that I am dealing with, such as:

- Developmental change: What if I feel like I am falling out of the frame of my own story because my life moves on, I rethink about my project / myself and the story that once offered a clear line of explanation does not look so convincing anymore?

- Self-locating & perspective: Who am when I work on my project, from which standpoint do I write, observe, judge, reflect, in which situation and for which audience?

- Self-judgement: Do I really have a valuable point of greater interest and concern in studying this subject or is this a mere expression of my self-centeredness? Why do I consider my story worth telling? Why should my experience be speaking to others, in particular those that I choose to study?

- Studying others: How do I select, address and interview others without imposing my own story and expectations on them, without being too close or too far away - not too much of an intimate like- minded peer, not too much of an objective and blank observer?

- Discrepancies: What if the story I hear from someone else is not the story I secretly expected? How and where do I place a new focus? How do I integrate my interviewees in the analytical process?

**Gendertelling in Academia: Narratives from Male-Dominated ‘Worlds’**

***Emanuela Spanò, University of Naples, Italy***

The aim of this contribution is to reflect critically on the ‘problems’ connected to the use of narrative inquiry for connecting the past and the present of the social actor, and for connecting those two apparently ever-divorced categories – ‘the individual’ and ‘the collective’. Conceptualising interview accounts in terms of co-produced narrative, I will discuss some fragments of the interviews taken from my PhD research project on the academic women leaders in male-dominated departments. Considering that there are several ways in which those narratives could be interpreted, I will focus on the issue of interpretation – the ways in which those women use (culturally circulating) stories to interpret their lives and, more specifically, their gender.

Starting from the Ricoeur’s idea of ‘narrative identity’ (Ricoeur 1991), I will argue that narratives – which I define as accounts which contain transformation (change over time), some kind of ‘action’ and characters, all of which are brought together within an ‘overall plot’ – are a central means by which people connect together past and present, self and other. In fact, those stories are *neither* expressions of an ‘authentic’ and unitary identity, *nor* ideological ‘traps’. Rather, stories are actively interpreted by social actors but not from an endless repertoire of social narratives: only some things can be said at all; and only some things can be said from any specific social, historical and gendered location (Lawler 2002).

**Narratives of Colombian teachers of English in rural areas in Colombia: An understanding of the their professional growth**

**Sandra Ximena Bonilla Medina, University of East London, UK**

**and**

**Ferney Cruz Arcila, Kings College, London, UK**

Through a policy of bilingualism in education in Colombia, special attention has been paid to privileged urban contexts, leaving aside the realities of disadvantaged and rural areas. This presentation attempts to show how narrative accounts emerged in a research analysis as a result of an open interview with 5 rural English teachers of Colombia. The findings in the study led us to understand their professional practice considering the particularities of their local work settings. As narratives were not intentionally developed by researchers, the data revealed how they can naturally occur. This confirms Miller’s (2000, p 311) idea of narratives being “interpersonally constructed as people make sense of what is happening to them in relation to past events and future expectations…”. Particularly, these narratives facilitated our understanding of how teachers mediate between local and global tensions, how they have dealt with critical socio-cultural factors in the classroom and how those factors have framed both teachers’ labour and their needs in terms of professional development.

***Emotional education through narratives about the Basque conflict: a critical understanding of political violence.***

Irene Gantxegi, University of Deusto, Bilbao (Spain).

Narratives of fiction are closely related to ethics. Literature about social and historical conflict may play a role in fostering the development of moral emotions and of a critical understanding of political violence due to the process of “empathetic imagination”. This imagination allows the reader to connect deeply with the narratives and enables to imagine other realities and ways of conceiving the world.

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 facilitate a book club meeting once a week for four months, time during which 12 participants will read and discuss four novels about the Basque conflict. A pedagogical tool has been developed to orient the process of narrative imagination and reflection. I will look at how those narratives spark and develop moral sentiments pertaining to the experiences of the victims of violence, and then examine how those sentiments interplay with participants’ critical reflection about the Basque conflict. Data will be analysed drawing upon models of discursive psychology and critical inquiry.

**The Narrative of Thought Experiments: How Philosophy Examines the Nature of Consciousness Through Story**

Sophie Ward, Goldsmiths University of London

Centuries of investigations into the nature of human consciousness have polarized the divisions between the sciences and the humanities. The materialist model of mental content as represented by philosophers such as Daniel Dennett, dominates the debate while anyone who questions the physicalist orthodoxy, such as Thomas Nagel, is regarded with intellectual suspicion. The debate between materialists and dualists sees the reduction of the argument to an artificial opposition of matter against mind, science against art, fact against fiction.

But what if, instead of exorcising the ghost in the machine we embraced the elusive phantasm? The possibilities of exploring consciousness through narrative have not been lost on the philosophers. It is notable that, as Ian Watt explains in The Rise of the Novel, the development of the novel and of philosophical investigations into the interiority of the self happened simultaneously. Indeed, if our sense of self is a narrative created for survival, it follows we should discover this narrative drive through story.

In this paper I will look at some of the uses of narrative in philosophical thought experiments and will share my narrative response.

**Stories of professional care: Narrative analysis of accounts from people with dementia**

**Tessa Hughes, UEL**

Much of current UK dementia care policy is constructed around the narratives of decline, deterioration and the requisite ‘management’ of the person with dementia.  From a social constructionist perspective such collective narratives create the space in which individual experiences take place. In a dementia context listening to the experiences of people with dementia is potentially compromised by the ‘narrative dispossession’ of people with dementia, particularly when ‘narrative’ is narrowly defined in regards to structural coherence (Baldwin, 2006).

This research elicited narrative accounts of professional care experiences across voluntary and statutory dementia services via three one to one unstructured interviews, and a group of five. The subsequent narrative analysis attended to the value of co-construction of narratives between people with and without dementia, for example in piecing together seemingly fragmented narratives and the negotiation of a final narrative. The data was analysed using an integrated approach to ‘narratives in context’ (Phoenix, 2008; Stephens and Breheny, 2013), i.e. attending to the interplay between the personal stories told, the dialogical relationships between narrator and audience and the broader socio-political context. The narratives are intended to contribute to the development of a dementia care context which is based upon, and responsive to, individual experiences.

**Mature students’ stories: a study investigating the complexity of interpretation**

Eva Mikuska and Andre Kurowski, *University of Chichester*

Recent evidence (UCAS, 2013) shows that in terms of participation, students over 20 years old are under-represented in Higher Education. The focus of this study was to investigate the effect of relevant existing policies on ‘non-traditional’ students and to highlight the possible emotional impact caused. The aims were to find out if, through narrative enquiries, whether the application and admission policy best suits the needs of this ‘group.’ Also, greater understandings of those who wish to apply from employment to HE were sought, and how emotionally demanding the process of becoming a university student can be. Our reflection on the study shows the complexity of the interpretation of narratives due to the fluidity and multi-layer nature of the emotions, and the difficulties in recording and categorising the data. For example, many participants reported that applying through the ‘unknown terrain’ of UCAS was initially a real challenge that generated negative emotions. However, these emotions were transformed into relief after attending an interview.