There has been a major ‘turn’ towards narrative, biographical and life history approaches in the academy over the last 30 years.

What are some of the new directions in narrative research? How do narrative research approaches help us to understand the world differently? What do we learn by listening to stories and narratives? How do narratives extend our understanding that other research approaches do not? This collection of work grows from a symposium organised to explore new directions in narrative research.

What emerges is a fascinating, innovative and generative series of essays, generally exploring narrative enquiry and more specifically themes of culture and context, identity, teacher education and methodology.

This book will be useful for students and researchers using narrative and biographical methods in a range of disciplines, including education, sociology, cultural and development studies.
Explorations in Narrative Research
STUDIES IN PROFESSIONAL LIFE AND WORK
Volume 6

Editor
Ivor Goodson
Education Research Centre, University of Brighton, UK

Editorial Board
J. M. Pancheco, University of Minho, Portugal
David Labaree, Stanford University
Sverker Lindblad, University of Gothenburg
Leslie Siskin, NYU/Steinhardt Institute for Education & Social Policy

Scope
The series will commission books in the broad area of professional life and work. This is a burgeoning area of study now in educational research with more and more books coming out on teachers’ lives and work, on nurses’ life and work, and on the whole interface between professional knowledge and professional lives.

The focus on life and work has been growing rapidly in the last two decades. There are a number of rationales for this. Firstly, there is a methodological impulse: many new studies are adopting a life history approach. The life history tradition aims to understand the interface between people’s life and work and to explore the historical context and the socio-political circumstances in which people’s professional life and work is located. The growth in life history studies demands a series of books which allow people to explore this methodological focus within the context of professional settings.

The second rationale for growth in this area is a huge range of restructuring initiatives taking place throughout the world. There is in fact a world movement to restructure education and health. In most forms this takes the introduction of more targets, tests and tables and increasing accountability and performativity regimes. These initiatives have been introduced at governmental level – in most cases without detailed consultation with the teaching and nursing workforces. As a result there is growing evidence of a clash between people’s professional life and work missions and the restructuring initiatives which aim to transform these missions. One way of exploring this increasingly acute clash of values is through studies of professional life and work. Hence the European Commission, for instance, have begun to commission quite large studies of professional life and work focussing on teachers and nurses. One of these projects – the Professional Knowledge Network project has studied teachers’ and nurses’ life and work in seven countries. There will be a range of books coming out from this project and it is intended to commission the main books on nurses and on teachers for this series.

The series will begin with a number of works which aim to define and delineate the field of professional life and work. One of the first books ‘Investigating the Teacher’s Life and Work’ by Ivor Goodson will attempt to bring together the methodological and substantive approaches in one book. This is something of a ‘how to do’ book in that it looks at how such studies can be undertaken as well as what kind of generic findings might be anticipated.

Future books in the series might expect to look at either the methodological approach of studying professional life and work or provide substantive findings from research projects which aim to investigate professional life and work particularly in education and health settings.
Explorations in Narrative Research

Edited by
Ivor F. Goodson, Avril M. Loveless and David Stephens
University of Brighton, Sussex, UK
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PREFACE

The genesis of this book—or perhaps back story—is a University of Brighton research grant awarded to the editors early in 2011. The grant was to support a number of initiatives related to the development of narrative research, particularly in the field of education. Since then the Education Research Centre at Brighton, where the three editors work—has seen the emergence of a strong interest in exploring new directions in narrative research.

Two major initiatives have been the establishment of an international network of narrative researchers and the holding of a symposium on ‘narratives and learning’. This ‘Narratives, Context and Learning’ symposium took place on the 16–17th May 2011, hosted by the editors of this volume. Leading academics, some of whom have contributed to this book, came from Asia, Latin America, Northern Europe, Ireland and universities in the UK.

This book grows from this symposium not only in its content but also in the process by which contributions were presented, critiqued and finally published.

Participants to the symposium and subsequent contributors to this book were invited to discuss their own and each other’s work in a collaborative and collegial manner. All discussion was transcribed and then offered to each contributor to this volume as a resource to use in the redrafting of the subsequent chapters.

As a result, though each chapter represents the particular interest of the author, it also reflects the wisdom and critique of the symposium members gathered together to explore new directions in narrative research.

What has emerged is a fascinating—and we hope useful—body of work generally exploring narrative enquiry and more specifically themes of culture and context, identity, teacher education, and methodology.

The symposium, this volume and the inauguration of an international network of narrative scholars are forming the basis of a future story we hope to tell.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank a number of people and our own institution who helped in the production of this book.

AFFILIATION

Ivor Goodson, Avril Loveless and David Stephens
University of Brighton
1. Investigating Narrativity

An Introductory Talk by Ivor Goodson, Professor of Learning Theory,
University of Brighton

Introduction

In this chapter I have followed the format of the symposium on which the book is based. We began with the following talk which tries to set the scene of some recent investigations into the nature of narrativity. In this chapter we have chosen to stay with the conversational tone to capture the kind of interactions which went on as papers were delivered at the symposium. The talk has since formed a part of the book called Narrative Pedagogy (Goodson and Gill, 2011) and will be further developed in a forthcoming book, Developing Narrative Theory (Goodson, 2013).

Spencer Project 1998–2003

I shall be describing the kind of projects I have been involved in over the last ten or so years to show how I have arrived at my understanding of how narratives themselves get differentiated. Not a great deal of work has been done on how narratives can be differentiated or asking the question, ‘Are there different types of narrative, different types of narrative character?’ and I wanted to talk through how I got to that place. I mean it started really with a project I was doing when I was in North America (we talked about border crossings yesterday—well one of my more problematic border crossings was when I was spending a bit of time in North America after the miners’ strike collapsed). I went there in 1985 and was there till 1996 and right up to 2000—in Rochester, New York.

The first project in which I became involved in narratives was during a project I was doing with Andy Hargreaves, which was funded by the Spencer Foundation. It was essentially looking at ‘Education 2000’, a Bill Clinton initiative—the purpose was to find out why all the money they were spending—billions and billions of dollars—was not emanating into any serious reforms in schools. They got so desperate in the end that they started inviting quite radical theorists to come in and help. We then sat around chatting and decided that the best way to understand how and why educational reform processes were foundering was to conduct life history interviews with a whole set of teachers in schools, together with life histories of the schools themselves, to see how longitudinally, over time, reforms either succeeded or did not succeed—were embedded or dis-embedded. So we started to collect these very detailed life histories of teachers in a variety of schools in the New York State and in Toronto and what we discovered was in itself really interesting. The
specific thing we discovered was that there was a clear spectrum (and this is no surprise in many ways), a clear spectrum of teachers—from those who complied fairly closely with any reform to those who developed a more personalised response. The first group accepted their role as technicians, following government guidelines… when a new script came they then followed this script just as obediently as they had followed the earlier script. This in essence is the history of the way teachers responded to neoliberal reforms in England. Many of them, probably more than any country in Europe have been compliant. Although we can talk about variations of resistance and decoupling, basically they have been complying. That is one end of the spectrum. The other end was a group of teachers who actually we could itemise… they were in some sense the best teachers. What they do in North America is that they give awards for the most creative teachers so you know pretty quickly who the elite, the vanguard of teachers—is. Now the vanguard of teachers were the more creative ones and if you talked to them about their life histories they had a very self-defined, quasi autonomous, ‘elaborated’ life history. They were in touch with their life history not in a ‘scripted’ way but in a partially self-defined way. Those people of course responded to reforms and scripts in a completely different way—though of course in the end many of them did give up, simply resign and retire in the face of being told that they had to become technicians following strict government guidelines.

DEVELOPING PERSPECTIVE: THREE STORIES

This had started me thinking about the different kinds of ‘narrative character’ and how that leads us to understand differentiated forms of social action and social response to particular social situations and curricular reforms. And then what always happens with me… I think it is because of what I said yesterday… I grew up in a family where everything was narrative but it was not a literate family… when I get a new idea it is very seldom from reading a book. It is more likely to be from a random conversation or something very concretely personal. I have learnt over time that if I have any ideas, that is where they come from. They don’t come from some review of literature but rather, I tend to learn from a particular conversation I’ve had. And there are two conversations which after the Spencer project—we are talking 2003 now—which started to get me thinking about ‘narrative capacities’, ‘narrative character’, ‘narrative elaborations’. The stories were these… and I have to mention my mum because I mentioned her yesterday (my mum died aged 104 last week and I am partly grieving and she comes into all my stories… anyhow…)-I was talking to her when she was 99... and to recap, she was 75 and she started to write poetry and that is how she defined herself—as a poet. And the main problem with her poetry was that it was absolutely dreadful! It was like, ‘the cat shat on the mat!!!’ kind of stuff. It was really a poor kind of poetry. And anyhow… when she was 99 she said, ‘I’ve got a really interesting weekend, me duck. I am going to a poetry gathering in Torquay. They have a poet in residence and we are all going to gather round and give our poems, you see?’ So I went down that weekend and said to her, ‘How did the poetry weekend go?’ She
said, ‘It wasn’t good duck, it wasn’t good at all. They all gave their poems—very elaborate poems… all sorts of complicated things that didn’t rhyme properly and then I gave my poem and there was a terrible silence at the end of it and I said, “Oh!” And you wouldn’t believe it, they invited all the people to come to the next poetry symposium and they didn’t mention me’. So I said, trying to soften the blow to her sense of identity and aspiration, ‘Mum I think it is just possible that you are not going to make it as a poet’. She was 99. She looked at me and said… there was a long pause… and she said, ‘Yeah you could be right’. And I realised that this 99 year old woman was still in the process of aspiring and becoming and that was her narrative.

The second story is about somebody who colleagues here know—a Chinese guy called Rocky who I was in Beijing with, walking around… I had been talking all day and was fairly tired and he said, ‘Let’s have a walk round Beijing’. So we are walking around and after three hours I am tired and I said, ‘Can we go and have a beer?’ So we sit down and have a beer and he has a Coco-Cola and all that while he has been telling me the story of his life. I have been asking him his story and it is basically a fairly conventional Chinese cultural storyline of ancestors… what happened during the Mao period and so on… a fairly sequential, conventional story and I am struggling with his name which is Gaozheng and he said, ‘Well you can call me Rocky?’ And as we are having a Coke I said, ‘Does Rocky have a different life story?’ And he said, ‘Oh yes’. And then he told me a completely western version of the life story.

What this hints at is that this spectrum of different narrativities means that people appropriate and work with domination, colonisation and individualisation in very different ways. So we have to… rather than assert that there are over-arching dominant western narratives that dominate everybody, we have to look at how different forms of narrativity respond, refract and generally re-interpret and redirect this domination. Domination is not a unilateral discourse. It is a discourse that is responded to, reiterated, reflected, refracted in different ways. And what I wanted to argue is that to understand people’s narrative character and capacity is to understand how they appropriate and respond to discourses in different ways. A long time ago I wrote that domination is less about domination by dominant interest groups—more about solicitous surrender by subordinate groups. I always had this rather different view of domination.

THE PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE PROJECT

When I moved to Brighton to work in 2003 more by luck than judgement I got funding for two very big projects. One was funded by the ESRC which was called the ‘Learning Lives’ project and one called the ‘Professional Knowledge’ project (the latter is a study of restructuring of seven European countries funded by the EU). And both funded by a million pounds… big projects and we have big research teams and we have to think hard about the methodology and in both cases we use a methodology that is broadly looking at life history. So let’s take the ‘Professional Knowledge’ project first. This is a study of Finland, Sweden, Greece,
Portugal, Spain, Ireland and England—seven countries and it is looking at how teachers, nurses and doctors respond to restructuring… in each of those countries we are looking at a neoliberal world movement and how the different work-life narrative of teachers respond to it, are juxtaposed with what we call the ‘systemic narratives’, which are the rhetorics of reform. So what we are able to do there at a fairly simple national level way is show how a lot of… what we had there in terms of data is a range of quite detailed work life narratives from a range of teachers and doctors and nurses and we are showing the collision between different forms of narratives and reform initiatives—the systemic narratives. It was looking at how people’s narrative character led to different responses to systemic reforms. So this was not some kind of arid discussion of narrative. It looked at how particular narrative predispositions often lead to particular political orientations and responses to systemic change and we… I could take you through the charts I have here but I won’t because I want to stay with the narrative idea. Getting back to the ‘Professional Knowledge’ project—that was a high level attempt to understand how different work life narratives and different cultural narratives lead to very different national responses to systemic reform. So you take two examples… if you look at the spectrum of those seven countries—the most compliant country in terms of their implementation of neoliberalism was the British (very odd given our history). By far the most compliant of all the European countries in terms of neoliberalism by a long way, while the most resistant to the reforms were the Finnish. Now interestingly to make a political point here—if you look at those two countries and then you look at the PISA Table of Performance—which I don’t trust—you find the country that is most compliantly following neo-liberalism comes bottom of the league in performance and the country that has most resistant to it comes top. Now that should tell you that a lot of these neoliberal forms have very little to do with educational performance and everything to do with economic restructuring. I mean you don’t have to be a brain surgeon to work out that this is an absurd situation—sorry to make a rather cheap party political point here—but it can’t be ignored...

THE LEARNING LIVES PROJECT

Time is running out so let us move onto the second research project, the ‘Learning Lives’ project. This is the one where so much of the kinds of theorising came up. We were given four years and the basic… I’d better fill in the gaps… what it was, was the New Labour project called ‘The Teaching and Learning Program’… this had three phases and was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. What we really wanted to do was find ways of reconceptualising teaching and learning. That was the stated aspiration and we came in with a quite large bid. It was based on four universities: Leeds, Exeter, Brighton and Stirling and it was going to look at how people learnt throughout the life course—particularly interested in lifelong learning and particularly interested in the kinds of transitional moments of people’s learning. And what we wanted to do was to talk to a cluster of ordinary folk—if you can put it that way—who talked to us about their lives.
When I say in detail... we were doing three-hour interviews, often eight times with each person... so we are talking seriously detailed life history stuff. And we had a big team of people across the universities. I think at different times we had about 18 people working on this and our particular set of tasks here in Brighton was to look at migrant groups. So we looked at a group of people, from asylum seekers through to a more privileged set of migrants, through to homeless people, through to a wide range of working people, farmers and others. We had members of the House of Lords. We had some very famous creative artists. We had a pretty interesting bunch of people of all sorts and the first thing that came clear, and I think this is a reminder that cultural storylines do not monolithically impinge on social groups... if you were to characterise their different social character... there were just as many people of ‘one kind’ at one end of the social spectrum as at the other. You had just as many ‘elaborated life stories’ among working groups as you did among members of the House of Lords. It wasn’t in that sense socially stratified, rather a random scatter of different narrativities. And I would say that there was a random scatter of narrativities across cultures as well. Our initial finding was that once again, the spectrum of ‘scripted’ versus ‘elaborated’ narratives emerged. One type of narrative was what we called the ‘describers’. Describers tend to describe what has happened to them in a kind of... this was who I was, this is what I am... I was a housewife, I was a farmer, kind of way... it is a kind of acceptance of a birthright script that society assigned to them and they work with that script, and when they talk about their life story they describe it in a kind of retrospective description of what had happened to them. In other words it is less active. It is a description rather than what I called an ‘elaboration’. ‘Elaborators’ are ones who... I mean who would be a quintessential elaborator? Obama would be one. Bill Clinton would be one. Those kinds of people in a sense invented a persona then they became it. You know—one of our key informants was a guy who had grown up with two alcoholic parents and had basically decided aged seven he would become the best puppeteer in England and that was his script from very early on and that is indeed was what he became. He kind of defined a narrative for himself and then in a sense inhabited it. He became it. He kind of self-defined himself, in a sense, using all the scripts that are out there. This was not a complete act of self-invention, it was in a sense an act of ‘collage’. It was an act of mosaic. It was an act of creating a coat of many colours which is you. So there you have ‘description’ and ‘elaboration’.

With this project what I was trying to work out was the relationship between narrativity and what I call ‘courses of action’. The project was called ‘Learning Lives, Identity, Agency and Learning’ and we were looking at the relationship between ‘agency and learning’. How do these descriptions of ‘narrative character’ emanate in the delineation of ‘courses of action’? How do we become active in the world? How do we put our imprint on the world? My initial assumption seems commonsensically sustainable... it was that the ‘describers’, since they seem to have passively accepted a script, would not be practiced in a ‘course of action’. They would be more passive. And the ‘elaborators’ because they are active in the construction of their narrative would be more active in the world. Strangely that
proved to both true and false because as you see when I… let me show me this table… (see TABLE 1)

TABLE 1
NARRATIVITY, AGENCY AND KNOWLEDGE

...as you see here this is a relationship between knowledge and agency—knowledge being in a sense 'narrative knowledge'. Far from there being a monolithic relationship between knowledge and agency it falls into four different clusters.

What I began to realise as we revealed people’s narrative lives was that there was a spectrum—from those people who essentially described their lives as something that had happened to them—to others who elaborated their own story, drawing on a range of storylines and cultural resources to develop their own personal ‘mosaic’.

But the distinction between ‘describers’ and ‘elaborators’ was only the beginning of our analysis. Once you analyse people's actions in the world their capacity to delineate courses of action—the narrative map becomes more complex.

Looking at the chart—on the left you have ‘describers’. In the top left you have ‘describers’. They normally accepted a role early in life—a kind of ‘birthright script’—be it a farmer or hairdresser or policewoman—and stuck with it. Whilst the script worked they were fine but because they were unpractised in defining their own courses of action sharp transitions often left them in difficulty. Their main commitment was to an ascribed role and their learning stayed close to that role. We came to see this group as ‘scripted describers’.
But commitment to a script did not always mean a limitation of agency. Other people, in the bottom left of the chart, whilst embracing a script nonetheless often moved from script to script, even from country to country. We called this group ‘multiple describers’. Their learning was most often focussed on their life role but as they changed scripts so they flexibly embraced new learning strategies. We studied a number of migrants who whilst primarily ‘describers’ of their life had embraced new scripts and new challenges throughout their lives.

On the right hand side ‘elaborators’ were similarly complex when their agency was analysed. In the right bottom corner were what we called ‘focussed elaborators’. These people seem to spend a good deal of time working on their narrative and linking it to their activities. Often a narrative of aspiration led onto a life vocation. An example would be Barack Obama—who has written eloquently about his developing life narratives and his hopes and dreams. This narrative facility provides him with huge ‘narrative capital’ for the task of developing political narratives for his country. Bill Clinton is similar in his elaborative facility.

In case you’re wondering, David Cameron seems to me the opposite—born into a birthright script he has had little practice in elaboration. Whilst he has high ‘cultural capital’ he has low ‘narrative capital’. No wonder people find it hard to know what he’s trying to do. His one attempt ‘The Big Society’ provided definitive evidence of this lack of narrative facility. This reminds me of Sylvia Plath’s mother’s complaint to Ted Hughes, sitting in her privileged affluent home where Sylvia grew up. She complains to Ted, ‘Well she never had your advantages’. Son of the proletariat Hughes asks, ‘And what might they be?’ She replies, ‘The need to fight for everything you’ve got and to know its value’. Hughes likewise knew how to command and elaborate a narrative storyline.

The capacity to link an elaborated storyline to a course of action means these narrators can respond flexibly to new situations. They are practiced in what I call ‘re-selfing’ and continuous learning.

However not all elaborators are like this. Some are brilliant at developing narratives—seem almost to live ‘in narration’. They talk at length, and lucidly, about their views and dreams and experiences. But for some this is not successfully linked to the development of ‘courses of action’. We call them therefore ‘armchair elaborators’. Their learning likewise is not related to new courses of action of the development of new identity projects. Their learning is often instrumental, often linked to other peoples’ plans from whom paradoxically autonomy is sought. Armchair elaborators find transitions difficult and their narratives have a somewhat circular character—often revolving around some initial obstacle or trauma.

The key thing for me is... what I am writing about at the moment is... if you think about the seismic changes and shifts in the world at the moment and all of that stuff about flexible labour forces and flexible manpower and flexible accumulation... one of the key things I am interested in is ‘flexibility of response’ to situations. But I talk about that as a capacity for ‘re-selfing’. As conditions change you get a flexible response for ‘re-selfing’ (I call that ‘re-selfing’). We were talking earlier Molly, about where self-belief comes from. We were saying, and both of us agree, that partly, self-belief is related to people’s ‘narrative’
capacity. In other words—the capacity to delineate paths of action which they believe in and then making those ‘courses of action’ happen. When that happens you build up your self-belief and part of that is your capacity to respond flexibly to new situations and to find a new narrative and a new form of self that represents the passage within. It relates to learning styles... and remember that this was a project about learning as well as narrativity. So if you go through some of the things here... for me, learning... what constitutes learning? Is it something defined by somebody else that you take into yourself and then it is learnt? That is the cognitive model of learning. What I am wanting to put in my narrative book is that learning... there is another form of learning which I would call learning where there are substantial shifts in the self. When the self shifts the sense of the self shifts—that is learning as a primal epicentral kind... so behind the debate here is... what constitutes learning? And I think there is the most interesting work going on here at our research centre on narratives. In different ways Avril, David... everybody... Tim certainly is... looking at how one re-conceptualises learning styles? How do we reconceptualise a learning theory to come up with a more conclusive modality for learning? So there is this whole debate behind this about what constitutes learning... when you start looking at narrativity you start to embrace the notion that the process of becoming somebody and the process of re-selting is in itself learning. I mean commonsensically learning is more than learning a few bits of Latin and a few bits of history... isn’t it a finding of a way to shift your whole narrative self?

There are other ways I think that having this more differentiated view of narratives helps us. I mean think about professional development... if we, instead of assuming that people are monolithically similar in terms of their narrative capacity, if we have a more differentiated view of professional teaching development and learning, it is much more likely it will be targeted in a more personalised way. So there is an argument for a much more distinctive, a much more person-centred education than the conventional notion of education which is cognitive and which assumes a kind of homogenised sense of the learning audience. I think we can examine the many implications of differentiation... in terms of political activism, in terms of political orientation... in the way whole nation states respond differently (to go back to Carl Anders thing and the different notions of nationhood). All of these things... but that is enough from me! I’ve said enough and time is ticking on... I’m looking forward to what you all have to say... so I’ll stop here!

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INVESTIGATING NARRATIVITY

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AFFILIATION

Ivor Goodson
Education Research Centre,
University of Brighton
2. URGENTLY IN NEED OF A DIFFERENT STORY

Questioning Totalising Frameworks

A question is by definition something that comes before an answer. If it is not, it is rather, a proposition. All knowledge starts from a question bordering on unknown territory. If that territory is already known the case is, so to speak, closed. To paraphrase Richard Rorty (1980) science has through history tried to close the case, to find the final truth. Every such attempt, though, has later been proved to be wrong. Two things follow from this. First, if the moment comes when there is a final truth, it would be awfully quiet thereafter; all would be said and done, all communication coming to a halt. Secondly, what researchers need, is not yet another truth. What they need, is therapy in order to be able to live with contingency. I think that in addition to it, the researcher needs to look into his or her preconceptions of things while exploring others. So in exploring the shortcomings of totalising frameworks in what follows, I start with questioning one of my own—my nationality.

Nationality is never so important as when one is crossing borders. At the border it is decided who can enter and who cannot. But also, entering that ‘passage’ turns you from being self-evidently ‘in your nationality’ into a stranger. Yet, in addition to becoming a stranger, the passage itself opens the possibility to perceive one’s nationality from within and from without simultaneously—it creates a space for reflection. In the first section of this chapter I recount a memory of a story that made me reflect on national identity. It is a story of an experience/memory in which what ‘being Swedish’ means is seriously challenged. I tell this here in order to discuss the limits imposed on education by totalising frameworks, such as national identity. I discuss how these frameworks limit the very possibility of a democratic citizenship. Even though I specifically use Sweden as an example I’m not arguing that Sweden is a special case, it just happens that I’m Swedish, which means whatever that means—it is in ‘my soul and bones’. Therefore, reflecting on being Swedish means that I cannot stand entirely outside that experience but am somewhat also in it—there is no outside, I’m included by definition. Just as (good) humour is a way of creating cracks in the surface of living—narratives and narrative research can be an effective way of exposing that surface and making it visible for in-depth analysis (see also Gill & Goodson, 2011). That is what I’m doing in this chapter, through my story, I’m exploring the limits of a totalising frame, regardless of if that frame is being imposed by others or not, or being held to be a truth in my life. That is to say, it is the ‘figure’ of nationalism as a totalising framework—that is my target to expose, since it takes away the possibility of politics and the possibility of having another idea, another worldview, another life.

Ivor F. Goodson, Avril M. Loveless and David Stephens (Eds.), Explorations in Narrative Research, 11–20. © 2012 Sense Publishers. All rights reserved.
other than the one prepared for you, by birth, by culture, by context, by school and society. There is no other possibility within a totality, just variations within the same framework. Once I have told my story and distanced myself from it by treating it as a conceptual story for analysis I move on to a conceptual context in which totalising frameworks are deconstructed.

In the second section I identify what I will call the story of ‘one’, the idea that societies develop and grow organically, that they are natural expressions of certain characteristics, that all those who are ‘counted in’ belong to—share in. I also introduce a distinction between distributive politics and the political, in line with Chantal Mouffe (2005). This distinction is introduced so as to pinpoint a fundamental division in society, beyond the story of ‘one’, between those who have access to power and wealth and those who have not. I also in this section demonstrate how political discourse is turned into moral discourse, again taking Sweden as example, and discussing some of the consequences of such a discourse.

In the third section I draw on Jacques Rancière’s (1999) critique of the unequal society as being upheld by a political fiction, in order to specify the terms in which society is divided. I suggest that citizenship, insofar as it is a product of the idea of ‘one’, is basically apolitical and that schooling ends up preparing for such citizenship through a curriculum that emphasises national identity as an impossible framework for democracy and democratic citizenship. Curriculum is one of those useful plastic concepts which I take for meaning both the actual national curriculum of Sweden, but also a concept any school in any society has and which confirms the reality of that society, large or small in which schooling takes place. It confirms a reality already in place (see also Goodson, 1988).

In a concluding section I summarise my attempt to re-politicise the story of society beyond the totalising one of national identity and highlight some of the moves that need to be made in order to tell another story of education and democratic citizenship.

A STORY OF QUESTIONING NATIONAL IDENTITY

I’m sitting on a plane to Canada. It is my very first visit to that country. I’m nervous. It is not flying that makes me tense, though. I have been flying more times than I can remember. But what makes this flight different is that for the first time I am going to meet my beloved one in her country—a country I have little knowledge of. The plane is an ordinary Boeing operated by Air Canada. The service onboard is relaxed and very friendly. On the usual in-flight movie screen there is a film about Canada, of the sort where everything seems to glow if in an early morning mist or painted in red by a sunset. The film is about Niagara Falls, about ice wine, about hockey, about the CN tower in Toronto, the beauty of Vancouver which encapsulates the grandness of sea and mountains, and about the cultural mix of Montreal shown through its languages, architecture and public life. Since this is my first Air Canada flight I do watch with interest, and there is not much else to do anyway as I am too tired to read or write. The film is instructive, though, in telling me how the country wants to picture itself in ideal terms. Near the end of the film a narrator talks about what it means to be a
Canadian, a citizen of a country neighbouring the USA and which got its flag as late as 1965 and which just twenty years later reclaimed its constitution from the Queen of England and which has two official languages, French and English. ‘To be Canadian is foremost to ask oneself just one question—what does it mean to be Canadian?’ Isn’t that just great! The very foundation of national identity is a question and not an already defined answer, even in a very polished PR film. Coming from the ‘old world’ this is simply astonishing. The very definition of nation states in Europe, seem on the contrary to be claiming to have an answer to precisely this sort of question. Or perhaps it is rather that the question does not really exist at all among the nation states since the answer is too self-evidently rooted in our minds and souls that people tend to believe, in the strongest sense of that word, that what they are is what the nation is. Presenting the nation in question is to present who they are. That this is the case is quite clear for me, particularly after a teaching incident with a group of student teachers. I gave a lecture discussing national identity by asking students to name so-called national characteristics. What we came up with was, of course, just superficial things such as: midsummer, snuff, certain types of food etc… and general things that can hardly be attached just to Swedes but rather are characteristics of humankind in general. Near the end of the lecture one young woman exploded, actually screaming on the top of her voice, ‘Everybody knows what being Swedish means!!!!’ The anxiety the question provoked was palpable in the room. To ask, ‘What does it mean to be Swedish?’ is clearly not the foundation of what being Swedish means. Posing the question produces anxiety, not only about one’s identity as defined by nationhood, but about who you are, in a deep existential sense. For if being Swedish had no fundamental meaning for the young woman then her existence seemed to have no fundamental meaning, and who can live with that?

Landing in Canada went smoothly. The airport looked in some respects like all other airports in the world. If there is an identity of airports, they seem to share it. Lining up to show my passport and landing card my anxiety swept over me again. In my excited state I had marked not the usual ‘business’ but ‘private’ for my reasons for entering the country. The border official asked me my reasons for visiting the country, and I said, in my nervous state (severely increased by the sharp look from the officer) that I was there to meet my girlfriend (said with a certain pride). Well, the officer was not impressed. He stamped my card with what looked like a red big F (I always wondered if that meant Failure!) and sent me over to immigration. There was a row of chairs in front of some serious looking immigration officers. In the room, except for the officers, was me and two other unfortunate people from somewhere else in the world. I sat down where I was directed to sit (I tell you, there is no fooling around in an immigration office!). The immigration officer started to question me right away. ‘What was the nature of my visit? How long did I intend to stay? What was my work?’ And a series of other standard questions for an immigrant suspect. My nervousness started to vanish and instead there was a growing irritation on my part. After being harshly questioned for maybe ten minutes I had had it. I said strongly and with a great sense of indignation, without thinking what the consequences could be: ‘I have come from Sweden, why on earth do you think I would want to stay in Canada?’
A remarkable thing happened, I was not sent to jail, or taken into a dark room to be beaten to a pulp or sent back to Sweden. The officer seemed to think; ‘He is right, why on earth would he want to stay in Canada if he is from Sweden?’ I was let off the hook and could go and pick up my bags and finally enter into Canada.

So what do I take from this story? Clearly immigration works differently for different people. Coming from the ‘old world’ to the ‘new world’ and from a country with a reputation of having an ideal welfare state can be handy in certain circumstances. The other two people in the immigration office were not, as far as I could see, let off the hook so easily and they didn’t seem to come from Sweden. But who knows? What is clear is that the word ‘Sweden’ was a key for opening up the professional doubt of the immigration officer. ‘Sweden’ is a country you don’t migrate from. It is as simple as that and as complicated.

National identity in nation states such as Sweden seems to be strongly and deeply rooted in the very sensible formation of meaningful lives. National identity cannot be reduced to a pose or something you choose, or something you learn in schools—rather it seems, comparable to the very air one breathes. Being Swedish is, in its fullest sense—‘one’ identity—as I realised with the immigration office at Pearson Airport. It is an identity you are supposed to share with all the other people living in that space called Sweden, without asking the fundamental question of how that even is possible—and what being Swedish means?

Being Swedish should be understood in terms of a story one has to believe in, in order for it to be meaningful at all. How can such an abstract conception of being Swedish be anything else other than a fiction, even though this fiction has real consequences for many people? Society, in the words of Castoriadis (1987), is an imaginary concept, upheld by institutions, like immigration offices, and in this case when they are marking its borders. National identity as an expression of a particular society is therefore a fantasy, but a fantasy one holds as a life. The nature of such an identity is to be shared, it has to be recognised as the same identity of each and every one.

National identity is in the final analysis though, dependent on the idea of ‘one’, not many. Being Swedish means one thing, and that thing is reproduced through generations as a story. It is a story simply because there cannot be a ‘thing’ that all Swedes share, no molecule that distinguish someone as being Swedish—no gene. To be Swedish then is to be in the story, to love it as the truth of one’s life. This story though, seems to be a story with no beginning or end, no clear characteristics making it unique in relation to other types of stories defining other national identities. The girl in my class was screaming, but inarticulate. The anxiety seemed to be based on the sudden insight that she was not able, in any clear cut way, to pin down what being Swedish could possibly mean, other than a superficial thing. It became rather a fundamental question of Being (Swedish) or Being Nothing (at all), to paraphrase Heidegger.

In relation to the Canadian experience it became clear to me that the story of being Swedish is an answer to an old and forgotten question: What is Swedishness? National identity is an answer to a forgotten question and it makes it impossible to really enter into that ‘story’ from the outside because it is beyond
something one can learn or know in a rational way. National identity becomes more of a moral obligation without a rule defining it (and therefore essentially irrational). Canada has its own problems, of course (as was demonstrated at the airport) but asking the question so openly of who you are as a Canadian invites people to give different answers. The idea of a country is not the only one possibility but also many others. In Sweden, as an outsider you are always a ‘failure’ since you are not born into the nation story, but in Canada you are asked to contribute to the meaning of such a story.

THE IDEA OF ‘ONE’ AND MORAL POLITICAL DISCOURSE

As far as schooling is aimed at incorporating the young into being a certain type of citizen, different modes of being in a country’s framework moulds citizenship differently. A Swedish national curriculum educates the young within a framework of national identity as being essentially ‘one’. It is the idea of one organically developed society, of society as *Ochlos*, indivisible and total in its enclosure of everyone in its totality. Every Swede is what he or she is, against the backdrop of an idea of a totality in which everyone has his or her place. Individualism itself is to be understood in relation to such an idea. That is to say, the individual ‘identities’ are already defined within an idea of ‘one’. This totality is the story that frames the national curriculum because curriculum is first and foremost an expression of the society’s image, of how it understands itself. It defines the space and the story occupying that space. The national curriculum ensures that national Swedes are made and reproduced. It is an expression of how the state will ensure its own continuation (Popkewitz, 2008).

In curriculum this is called the basic or central value that has to be transmitted to each and everyone: ‘The school has the important task of imparting, instilling and forming in pupils those fundamental values on which our society is based’ (Lpo94, 2006, p. 1). Schooling then, as a fulfilment of curriculum, is a confirmation of an already on-going socialisation of living in the story that is Sweden. Schooling does not create national identity—schooling confirms what is already the case. One is born in the story. Therefore Swedish schools are for Swedish children, like British schools are for Brits or German schools for Germans. Immigrants are by definition outside of that story, and consequently experience systematic exclusion (Skolverket, [Board of Education], 1997). In Sweden this is most apparent in the language itself. You are labelled an immigrant even if you are born in Sweden a third generation immigrant (see Further Säfström, 2011).

My point here is that totality is one of inequality, but it is an inequality that is contained within a framework. In Rancière’s (1999) words, the poor are included and excluded. That is, each and everyone is supposed to have his or her place within this framework which is unequally distributed in terms of power and wealth. Because this basic social inequality is distributed against the backdrop of the idea of ‘one’ there is no position from which politics can appear. Politics can only happen when *ochlos* is divided, when there are antagonisms between positions that are absolutely different to each other and where there is not a common frame
neutralising them (Rancière, 1999; Mouffé, 2005). Such a framework reduces antagonisms to variations of a theme that has already been given meaning within the framework. It becomes fundamentally apolitical. That means, amongst other, things that if the idea of schooling is defined by a national curriculum, neutralising the possibility of antagonisms between different ‘hegemonies’—democracy cannot be contained within such a framework. Democracy can only happen when the idea of a totality of society as ochlos, is divided. Therefore there are no democratic schools in Sweden, even though democracy can happen within them.

Using Chantal Mouffes’ (2005) distinction between politics as distribution on one hand and the political on the other, as a confrontation of antagonisms on the other, one can say that in order for democratic citizenship to be political it needs to be divided. That is, it is only when distributive politics (to give each and everyone what he or she ‘deserves’ in the unequal organised society) is confronted with the antagonism of the political that it can really be democratic. It is only when one acknowledges that positions are not variations of the same theme but represent profoundly different world views, that the political can exist as such, that a political democracy can exist at all. For Mouffe, it is a question of transforming antagonisms into what she calls ‘agonisms’, that define ‘the core’ of a democratic citizenship. This agonism emerges when adversaries are acknowledged, when there is space for legitimate antagonisms rather than some kind of neutralising framework as, for example, national identity is.

If being Swedish can be understood in term of a moral obligation of being in the story, as suggested above, it is a story in which the inside is understood in terms of a fundamentally good story against the outside evils (Mattlar, 2008; Säfström, 2011). In a study of textbooks for teaching newly arrived immigrants and high school students the subject ‘Swedish as a second language’, Mattlar (2008) shows, how the evil coming from ‘the outside’ is characterised in terms of dictatorship/oppression, socio-economical segregation/misery, conflict/war, oppression of women, irrationality/chaos etc. Foreign societies are sharply distinguished from the good Swedish society in the same textbooks, as the latter is described as democratic, equal, peaceful, rational etc.

This means that what would be in a well-functioning democracy a legitimate political adversary is instead in the moral society reduced to an evil enemy which is in need of being dealt with in special way, so as not to contaminate the one good society itself. The one which in a proper democracy would be a legitimate adversary acting on the basis of a different hegemony becomes instead an absolute enemy whose legitimacy is not only seriously questioned but is turned into an evil threat to humanity itself. The moral political discourse dehumanises its enemies and therefore carries with it the seed for violent reactions that threatens to destroy political institutions. But the threat to political institutions is not only, for Mouffe (2005) coming from the outside but also from within. That is to say, political institutions can less and less account for and guarantee antagonistic political relations. Schooling is a paradigmatic example of that. In Sweden this is most apparent in the transformation of class conflicts, ethnic conflicts and gender conflicts into a question of discipline and order in schools (Månsson and Säfström, 2010). The ordered school is one in
which the teacher is supposed to be the strong leader who moulds the students into ‘good’ citizens—that is, citizens that accept their given place within the story of the moral ‘one’. And in as far as society and schooling reflect each other, what we are moving towards is a society in which the poor are as included as they are excluded. They are questioned on moral grounds as to whether they have the right to be supported by the state at all—as if they are enemies of the good (rich) citizen. So I do think we need to start to ask ourselves ‘What does it mean to be Swedish?’ or ‘what does it mean to be English, or German?’ or a member of any strongly defined nation in Europe. What I realised when confronted by the Canadian experience was that I do not know the country I live in just because I’m living in it. To know that, one would need to find a position outside the given story that presents itself as ‘nature’ rather than ‘culture’.

THE POLITICAL FICTION CHALLENGED

The story of the ‘one’ establishes itself as a political fiction, which neutralises the political and turns democracy into the domain of rhetoric. The political fiction establishes itself as a rhetoric at war, rather than a reasoning one, according to Rancière. In rhetoric, one is not searching for real understanding—its sole aim is to take over the will of another person. Rhetoric is speech that revolts against the poetic condition for the speaking being—it is speech to silence someone else: ‘You will speak no longer, you will think no longer, you will do this—that is its program’ (Rancière 1991, p. 85). And it is only by being taken over by such a program that one becomes a part of the apolitical fiction of being a citizen in a post-political state as opposed to being a political subject. Or as Rancière (1991) formulates it:

We aren’t saying that the citizen is the ideal man, the inhabitant of an egalitarian political heaven that masks the reality of the inequality between concrete individuals. We are saying the opposite: that there is no equality except between men, that is to say, between individuals who regard each other only as reasonable beings. The citizen, on the contrary, the inhabitant of the political fiction, is man fallen into the land of inequality (ibid, p. 90).

Apolitical citizenship is foremost the result of a political fiction which from ‘time immemorial’ has been an expression of a passion for inequality (Rancière, 1991) — through what he calls a reciprocal subjugation: a subjugation, which has alienated the power from the people as the people have been alienated from the power. ‘This reciprocal subjugation is the very principle of the political fiction whose origin lies in the alienation of reason by the passion of inequality’ (ibid, p. 90).

Citizenship within the framework of national identity is also irrational because it tends to be based on a moral obligation without a rule. It is also unreasonable because it takes the political away from the subject and throws him or her into the land of inequality. For Rancière it is human beings that can be equal, not social structures. And it is social structure that defines the nature of citizenship. What I have been arguing is that this social structure is based in the idea of ‘one’. Being a citizen is neutralised by a story of nationhood and a moral obligation to be within
that story or forever doomed outside the sphere of the good citizen. What is urgently needed is a story that it re-politicises not only democracy but also what it means to be living in a divided society, which turns the rich into the good citizen and the poor into bad ones.

The poor, says Rancière, are both included at the same time—nothing. The poor are included as part of ‘the people’ and have as much freedom as anyone else but they can in no way possess it. Therefore the poor are ‘the part who has no part’, the part, which is included in the whole but count for nothing. Rancière (1999) says ‘… through the existence of this part who have no part, of this nothing that is all, the community exists as a political community—divided by a fundamental dispute’ (ibid p. 9). The political is a fundamental dispute over the division between those who have and those who do not have access to power and wealth. This fundamental division Rancière (1999) calls ‘wrong’ and becoming a political subject means challenging this wrong with claims for equality. When the singular being claims its right to speak, to be heard as much as anyone else, it also attaches itself to ‘the conflict between the parties in society’. (ibid, p. 39)

By asserting the singular, universal ‘wrong’ the subject appears in democratic politics emancipated from the supposed naturalness of an unequal social order brings to the fore an essential conflict, namely, ‘the very existence of something in common between those who have a part and those who have none’ (ibid, p. 35). Such subjectification, according to Rancière (1999) leads to a basic ‘reconfiguration of the field of experience’ (ibid, p. 35). Specifically it leads to a reconfiguration of the story of ‘one’, in my view, in such a way as to seriously question identification with national identity as a natural order, defining society in its totality. Political subjectification is a ‘dis-identification’, a removal from a place given to the subject and defined through national identity in the supposedly natural order of society. Instead it leads to an ‘opening up of a subject space where anyone can be counted since it is the space where those of no account are counted’ (ibid, p. 36). In other words in order to appear as a political subject, to be counted in, one needs to separate oneself from the story of national identity—a story which is nothing other than an expression of a neutralisation of an unequal society of rich and poor. And from this position one should ask, not what being Swedish means, but what living in a democratic society means? Such a question has to be asked openly.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have told a story which made me reflect upon what being Swedish could possibly mean, not just for me, but for others—as was reflected back to me by the point of view of the young woman screaming in my class or the immigration officer at Pearson airport, for example. I have suggested that being Swedish can be understood as an answer to an old and forgotten question, making citizenship apolitical to its core. Apolitical citizenship is both a condition of and a framework for the idea of schooling, as it appears in the national curriculum. That is, insofar as schooling is a reflection of a certain society, it carries with it the founding ideas of that society. The founding values of the Swedish curriculum refer to the
UGENTLY IN NEED OF A DIFFERENT STORY

Swedish national identity as a story of ‘one’, which neutralises the unequal society of the rich and poor. In order for the political to take place at all, I have claimed that there is a need to divide the idea of society as a story of ‘one’, and to acknowledge different stories as not simply being variations of a common theme, but as representing radically different world views. It is also here that we can start to talk about the beginning of a different story, a story of politics proper. What instead takes place, as I have shown above is, by taking Sweden as an example, a moral discourse defines what is good and evil on the political stage—it discourages any possibility of legitimate confrontation of different world views. That means that in order for democracy to deal with multiple world views, to be at all possible in school and society, we urgently need a different story other than the one based on national identity that is a totalising framework that deprives the other of its otherness. Or differently put, what we need, I think, is to revitalise the art of asking questions about how to live with others in a way that does not deprive the very otherness of that other, regardless of how he or she supposedly differs from me. Totalising frameworks are contexts that suck the air out of any culture and, to return to the beginning, close the case for good—our task, as educationalists then is to throw any finality back to its contingent state of origin.

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AFFILIATION

Carl Anders Säfström,
School of Education, Culture and Communication,
Mälardalen University, Sweden