This book provides important insights into narratives and young children. It is structured to help others learn more about the importance of narrative approaches and early childhood education. The first section of the book explores the concept of narrative across the current research field. The second section explores a range of different narrative methods related to young children.

Readers will discover how narrative methods empower children to be heard and respected by adults. They will also discover the importance of narrative methods in allowing a sharing of understanding, knowledge and trust in contemporary times.

Overall, the book aims to encourage readers to critically reflect on new ways of thinking about contemporary research and young children.
Beyond Observations
Beyond Observations

Narratives and Young Children

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables and Figures ix

Chapter 1: Contemporary Early Childhood Education 1
   Introduction 1
   Contemporary Theories 1
   Children’s Involvement in the Research Process 4
   Informed Consent 5
   Voice 7
   Context of Research 7
   Data Collection 8
   The Use of Narratives in Contemporary Times 10
   Validity of Narratives 11
   Our Stance 11
   Conclusion 12
   References 12

Chapter 2: Traditions and Turns—Pathways in Narrative Methodology 17
   Introduction 17
   Narrative Methodology—A Blurred Landscape 18
   Origins 20
   Approaches to Narrative Methodology 24
   Analysing Critical Events 25
   Analysis as Ethnographic Narrative 28
   Analysis of Children’s Narrative Play 29
   Sociolinguistic Narrative Analysis 30
   Narrative Dialogic Analysis 31
   Conclusion 33
   References 33

Chapter 3: Future Challenges for Narrative Research 37
   Introduction 37
   Voice—Holistic Calls for Acknowledging Young Children and Their Voice 39
   Voice—Listening, Consultation and Participation 42
   Respect of Voice and Ethical Considerations—Care of the Young People 44
   Entering the World of the Participants and Selecting Appropriate Methods 47
   Conclusion 48
   References 49
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 4: Narratives for Children  
Introduction  
The Intersection between Developmental Theories and Narratives Approaches  
Interaction Theory  
Creating Spaces for Children’s Narrative  
Future Research  
Flipping the Concept—Narratives for Adults  
Limitations  
Conclusion  
References  

Chapter 5: Narrative Research with Children  
Introduction  
Knowledge from a Co-Narrative Approach  
Narrative Research as a Dialogical Co-Construction  
Understanding Meaning in Context  
Creating a Pippi Longstocking Story  
Conclusion  
References  

Chapter 6: Narratives about children  
Learning Stories? Student and Staff Stories about Children  
Families and Staff’s Stories about Children  
Concluding Remarks—Strengthening Pedagogy from Narratives about Children  
References  

Chapter 7: Narratives by Children  
Introduction  
Narratives by Children—Devices in Story Telling  
Richness of Children’s Visual Narratives  
What Might Narratives by Children Look Like?  
A Case of Tell Me What Is Important to You  
The Visual Narratives by Asham, Five Years of Age  
The Visual Narratives by Gurjot, Six Years of Age  
The Visual Narratives by Chantelle, Six Years of Age  
Conclusion  
References  

Chapter 8: Narratives between Children  
Introduction  
Constructing and Co-constructing Narratives  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sharing Stories in Early Childhood and School Settings</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artfulness</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementing Artfulness</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 9: Narrative without Children</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consideration of Photography in the Learning Environment</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photography as a Language of Teacher Inquiry</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective Practice and Images Generated by Children</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Generated Images—Photographs for Reflection</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Case of Investigating Young Children to Investigate a Problem</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the Authors</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

TABLES

Table 1. Analytical approaches to narrative analysis 26
Table 2. Overview of children’s co-narratives and relation to texts and contexts 71

FIGURES

Figure 1. There were five in the bed 56
Figure 2. Five little ducks 56
Figure 3. Snail, snail 57
Figure 4. Miss Lemon (Gemma) 92
Figure 5. Olive (Gemma) 93
Figure 6. Jane teaching (Rose) 93
Figure 7. Gemma (Ben) 94
Figure 8. Recycling, reducing and reusing (Hannah) 94
Figure 9. Predictions (Hannah) 94
Figure 10. James and his brother 95
Figure 11. James teaches the class with his brother 95
Figure 12. Parent helping (Charles) 96
Figure 13. Parent visitor (Olive) 97
Figure 14. A teacher from another grade (Cameron) 97
Figure 15. German language teacher 98
Figure 16. German language teacher 98
Figure 17. German language teacher 98
Figure 18. Luka (Asham) 100
Figure 19. Packing up (Asham) 100
Figure 20. Luka is my friend (Asham) 100
Figure 21. Kicking balls (Gurjot) 101
Figure 22. Siena (Chantelle) 101
Figure 23. Siena holding up her work (Chantelle) 102
Figure 24. Heva (Chantelle) 102
Figure 25. Heva’s drawing (Chantelle) 102
Figure 26. Mea (Chantelle) 103
Figure 27. Dog in park with tennis ball 113
Figure 28. Playground equipment 114
Figure 29. Class sitting on the floor 127
Figure 30. Bashir has a timer 128
Figure 31. Bashir asks the teacher about the timer 129
Figure 32. Bashir is still considering the timer 129
Figure 33. Bashir discusses timer with classmates 129
LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Figure 34. Bashir shows another classmate 130
Figure 35. Shantell alone at reading table 130
Figure 36. Shantell flicking through picture book 130
Figure 37. Jaden & Austin 131
Figure 38. Jaden & Austin looking at Australian song book 131
Figure 39. Gabriele working at whiteboard 132
Figure 40. Gabriele places magnetic letters 133
Figure 41. Gabriele writes between magnetic letters 133
Figure 42. Mia with ‘chocolate cake’ 134
Figure 43. Sharing ‘food’ 135
Figure 44. I’m painting 135
Figure 45. Painting 136
Figure 46. I’m blowing bubbles 136
Figure 47. Siena’s ‘lights’ 137
Figure 48. Careful, Mia 137
Figure 49. Siena rebuilds her ‘lights’ 137
Figure 50. Siena 138
CHAPTER 1

CONTEMPORARY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, a growing body of literature examining children’s perspectives of their own lives has developed, following the emergence of the ‘new social studies of childhood’ (James et al., 1998) and the children’s right discourse (The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). Children are therefore viewed as social actors who are experts in their own lives and understanding of the world (Kellett and Ding, 2004; Mauthner, 1997). This new approach towards childhood has also meant a methodological shift towards the emergence of ‘participatory’ research methodologies. Until recently, research was based fundamentally on children rather than for children and with children (Darbyshire et al., 2005; Mayall, 2000; O’Kane, 2000).

This chapter will provide an up-to-date examination of the new directions for contemporary research perspectives, with a specific focus on how the role of children’s participation in the research process has evolved. The chapter aims to encourage readers to critically reflect on these new ways of thinking and discuss the future for research with children, with acknowledgement of what narrative research can offer in contemporary times.

CONTEMPORARY THEORIES

There have been many social, economic and technological changes in the late 20th century and early twenty-first century across the world, resulting in a change of experiences for childhood. For children in developed countries, most children now experience a range of technologies as part of their everyday lives. Books, magazines, television programs, movies, internet sites, food, computer games and collectables are all increasingly connected to children’s popular culture (Buckingham, 2000). Popular culture provides many children with a shared frame of reference that is drawn into play with reinvention of characters and plots (Jones Diaz et al., 2007) and contributes to identity construction (Kenway & Bullen, 2001).

These changes have also influenced the way children’s learning is viewed. In particular, contemporary perspectives of children’s learning are influenced by socio-cultural theory, postmodernism, the sociology of childhood, poststructuralist theory and the reconceptualising early childhood movement. All of these contemporary perspectives recognise the “meaning-making competences of children as a basis for learning” (Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 81). The child is therefore positioned as strong with
agency on their own learning within intricate and rapidly changing contexts (Clarke & Moss, 2001; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Gutierrez et al., 2007).

Socio-cultural theory “challenges us to examine our ideas and assumptions about traditional early childhood practices to analyse how relevant and useful these are for children from diverse families and cultures” (Arthur et al., 2012, p. 14). This perspective recognises the family context as the site where children learn ‘cultural tools’ (Vygotsky, 1978). It is for this reason that the social interactions of family life have become highly significant (Rogoff, 2003). For example, in the family context children will learn about having a meal, interacting with others, shopping and working. Children learn how to look, talk, act and think from participating in the family practices.

Under this perspective, learning differs for each child and needs to be understood within particular cultural and social contexts (Rogoff, 2003). Through engagement with families and communities, children establish their ‘funds of knowledge’ (Moll et al., 1992), becoming knowledgeable and skilled in ideas that are practised by their family. Social cultural theorists suggest children therefore learn best when the curriculum is connected to their everyday lives.

Postmodernism perspectives identify changes in society while poststructural perspectives recognise transformation for each person (MacNaughton, 2003). Both perspectives explain concepts of ‘family’ and ‘community’ as contexts for children’s learning. Both focus on social practice through habitus, social capital and social field based on Bourdieu (1993) and/or ‘discourse’ based on Foucault (1978).

With a postmodern perspective, there is considered no single pathway of development for every child and that there is no corresponding set of appropriate practices. Some therefore argue that learning should only be understood within local contexts (Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001; MacNaughton, 2003). Postmodern theorists challenge taken for granted assumptions and the privileging of certain domains such as developmental psychology and work to “expand the range of perspectives possible for early childhood education” (Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001, p. 4).

Poststructuralist perspectives “address the complexities of the relationship between the child, the adult and their cultural context…[and] focus attention on the constitutive roles of gender, race, class and disability in children’s learning and development” (MacNaughton, 1995, p. 36). Poststructural theorists believe people have agency in their lives, so they are shaped not only by their environment but by their own identities and actions. Both postmodern and poststructural theorists argue that everyone has multiple identities that are socioculturally constructed, shifting and multifaceted (Dahlberg et al., 2007).

The sociology of childhood perspective (James et al., 1998) critiques the term ‘development’ for its emphasis on the differences between children and adults that result in the views of children as ‘needy’. Rather, a sociology of childhood perspective focuses on valuing the child’s current experience and understanding. Children are able to take actions and establish their own experiences that will affect their lives (Lehtinen, 2004). Young children are aware of how to understand and make
decisions. Learning is therefore focused on competencies, with acknowledgement of the child’s strengths, agency and voice. Curtis and Carter (2000, p. xiii) write:

If we begin to value who children are, not just what we want them to be, a shift happens in the way we think about learning and teaching. Our jobs become more engaging and fulfilling. We also begin to envision a larger purpose for our profession—making children visible and valued for the ways in which it can enrich our humanity and contribute to our collective identity.

This perspective seeks children’s perspectives about issues in which they are involved, or issues that impact upon them. The United Nations Conventions of the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) and the sociology of childhood offer theoretical support for approaches that regard children are competent commentators on their own experiences where their views are considered valid and reliable and deserve to be taken seriously (Freeman, 1998; Mayall, 2002). From this perspective has grown the importance of researching with children and listening to their views (Alanen et al., 2005).

The reconceptualising early childhood movement grew in the 1980s as a critique movement to the dominance of developmentally appropriate practice in the early childhood field. The reconceptualist perspective challenges “dominant knowledges, ideologies and practices” (Jipson, 2001, p. 4). Traditional early childhood understanding such as child development theory and curricula is challenged and critically examined from cultural and historical lens.

One area of reconceptualisation is the image of the child. The concept of a ‘universal child’ that was constructed through developmental theory has been challenged, critiquing the prevailing view of childhood as a “Golden Age of life” (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 49). Cultural artefacts such as books, greeting cards and movies portray children as ‘sweet’ and ‘innocent’. Hilton (1996) suggests this mythological idealised view was laid down at the turn of the 20th century and does not reflect the reality of most children living in a contemporary society.

Children have also been viewed as ‘evil’ and ‘out of control’ (Prout, 2003), where the role of the traditional educator is to exercise power and control over children (Woodrow & Brennan, 2001). Another image has been of the child as ‘embryo adults’. This image draws on developmental theories and the concept of children becoming an adult. The role of the educator is to facilitate the child’s development to becoming an adult. The child is views as a “labour market supply factor” (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 49). The three images (innocent, evil and embryo adult) have “shaped dominant discussions, policy and practice” (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 43). These views of the child blind us to the lives children lead in a contemporary world and reinforce stereotypes and existing power relations (Woodrow & Brennan, 2001).

Postmodern, poststructuralist, sociology of childhood and the reconceptualist movement challenge the traditional notion of ‘childhood’ as a universal concept. Rather the similarity is that the perspectives support the view that images of children are created by communities and differ based on culture, context and period of time.
Arthur et al. (2012, p. 20) suggest “the fact that children’s lives differ in different cultures and in different centuries supports the view that images of children are created by communities”. All of the perspectives recognise the rapid changes taking place in children’s worlds and challenge dominant perspective. In practice the contemporary theories are employed in early childhood settings when educators find ways to work with children and families that (Arthur et al., 2012, p. 20):

- Engage in reflective practice, critical action and change
- Understand the importance of cultural contexts in children’s learning
- Respect diversity and focus on equity and social justice
- Build effective partnerships with families, children and communities
- Enhance relationships and collaborative learning environments
- Focus on dispositions and processes of learning
- Provide meaningful curriculum that connects to children’s social worlds and extends learning
- Engage in intentional teaching drawing on a repertoire of pedagogies
- Document children’s learning in ways that acknowledge children’s strengths and make children’s thinking visible to children and staff.

Young children are therefore considered competent and capable who have many strengths. They are active actors within their contexts and actively work to understand the world in which they exist and, at the same time change the world through participation and interaction.

**CHILDREN’S INVOLVEMENT IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

Historically, children were viewed as objects to be studied and considered incompetent, unreliable and incomplete (Fargas-Malet, Dominic McSherry, Larkin, Robinson, 2010). The importance of children’s involvement in the research process was not considered, providing a disempowered social position of children.

With contemporary perspectives about the childhood and childhood, so too have come new perspectives in children’s involvement in the research process. For some traditional methods, this has included the adaption of traditional techniques such as observation and questionnaires (Punch, 2002), while there have been new developments of method such as the ‘mosaic approach’ (Clark & Moss, 2001) and narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 1986). Punch (2002) identified three different approaches to research with children:

1. Children are viewed the same as adults and the approach employs the same methods as those used with them,
2. Children are viewed as completely different to adults and the approach uses ethnography (participant observation) to examine the children’s world,
3. Children are viewed as similar to adults but with different levels of competencies. The approach has developed an array of innovative and adapted techniques.
Castelle (1990) stated that when the researcher listens to children as part of this enterprise, it acknowledges the human rights of children to actively participate in relevant social processes. As Cannella (1997, p. 10) agrees, “the most critical voices that are silent in our construction of early childhood education are the children with whom we work. Our constructions of research have not fostered methods that facilitate hearing that voice”.

In recent years children have become more involved in the different stages of the research process, including the formation of research questions, planning, methodology, collecting data and analysing data (Coad & Evans, 2008). How a researcher views childhood will inform the choice of method, ethical practice, analysis and interpretation of the data (Christensen and Prout, 2002; Mayall, 2000; O’Kane, 2000; Punch, 2002).

There have been some attempts to increase the agentic potential of children in research (Chin, 2007; Kellett, 2010; Veale, 2005). Designing the research process to include children as active participants and collaborators recognises the inherent competence that children can offer (Blasi, 1996). Children may either become co-researchers or primary researchers. If young children become co-researchers, they are offered opportunities to make some (but not all) decisions about the research (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). If young children become primary researchers, they are in charge of identifying research questions, deciding on methods, collecting data, analysing data and reporting and disseminating the findings. The kind of research is seen as offering ‘insider perspectives’ from the child (Spyrou, 2011). As Kellett (2010, p. 105) argues:

Children observe with different eyes, ask different questions—they sometimes ask questions that adults do not even think of—have different concerns and immediate access to a peer culture where adults are outsiders. The research agendas children prioritize, the research questions they frame and the way in which they collect data are also quintessentially different from adults.

Though children’s voice is sometimes presented as ‘speaking for themselves’, a form of analysis is always undertaken to allow an interpretation of what young children mean. For example, a reflexive approach to data analysis asks what kind of analytical frameworks the researcher imposes on children’s voices. In some research with young children, often despite good intentions, researchers may simply fall back on their own adult semantic categories for analysis to make sense of what the child is telling them rather than having a clear understanding of the child’s own semantics. Spyrou (2011) suggests that what children say means what the researchers understands rather than what the child means.

INFORMED CONSENT

Undertaking research with children takes place within a context of ethical practice and protection for the rights of the child. This approach is situated within the United Nations’ Convention of the Rights of the Child in which it states:
CHAPTER 1

Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. (Ibid, Article 12.1)

The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child’s choice. (Ibid, Article 13.1)

Embodying these ethical articles requires the researcher to abide by the principles and ensure children’s rights are respected and upheld.

Researchers must gain the co-operation from a range of gatekeepers (such as school staff and parents) when undertaking research with children (Cree et al., 2002). Informed consent should be freely given, without threat, persuasion or coercion by children who are able to make an informed decision. It has often been assumed that children are not competent enough to give their informed consent, and that is needs to be gained from a more competent adult (Kellet & Ding, 2004). Children are then positioned at a simpler level of agreement to participate or “assent” (Kellet & Ding, 2004, p. 166). However, competent young children can give their informed consent with competence defined as having enough knowledge to understand what is proposed and enough discretion to be able to make a wise decision in light of one’s own interests (Alderson & Morrow, 2004). There are examples of where researchers have sought active consent from children and passive agreement from their guardians (Morrow, 2001; Thomas & O’Kane, 1998).

It is also argued that the notion of consent might exclude some children (such as disabled or refugee children) where informed consent may not be possible to obtain in particular contexts (Cocks, 2006). Cocks (2006, p. 257) argues that concept of ‘assent’ is sensitive and an appropriate option to include all children in research on issues that affect them, “removing the reliance on the child demonstrating adult-centric attributes such as maturity, competence and completeness”. Children’s assent can therefore be assessed by the researcher being attentive to the children’s behaviour and response towards them at all times.

Information about projects and informed consent have been given as information leaflets, tapes, letters and oral presentations to children, their families and other gatekeepers (Barker & Weller, 2003; Morgan et al., 2002). The quality of the information provided within the materials is important as the ability to give informed consent depends on the quality of the explanations (Bogolub & Thomas, 2005). In printed material, this includes the use of simple language (short sentences, no jargon and the use of requests rather than demands). It has also found to be useful for information to be broken up into short sections, with subheadings. It is advisable to run through draft printed material with children and ask for their views (Alderson, 2004).

In a recent study Harcourt (2011) created a research partnership with young children before gaining informed consent. Within the context there were many
discussion with the children over the roles and responsibilities of those participating in the research project in order to develop intersubjectivity (Rogoff, 1998). Once information about the project had been carefully considered by all of the potential research participants, discussion moved to documenting consent. Children in the early childhood service decided to write ‘ok’ as their signature for consent. The children also decided to write ‘ok’ each time they agreed to work with adults.

VOICE

The concept of ‘children’s voice’ has received greater focus in child-centred research. Many studies have recognised the competence of children as informants (Christensen, 2004; Danby, 2002; Forrester, 2002). Recognising children as competent verbal and nonverbal communicators allows for new insights of how they construct their social worlds (Christensen & James, 2000; Danby, 2002). Spyrou (2011, p. 151) suggests that “one could argue that the interdisciplinary field of childhood studies has built its very raison d’être around the notion of children’s voice. By accessing the otherwise silenced voices of children—by giving children a voice—and presenting them to the rest of the world, researchers hope to gain a better understanding of childhood”.

The concept of children’s voice is further strengthened by a moral perspective when children’s voice is considered to empower the social position of children and childhood from a social justice and rights perspective.

Researchers have explored different ways of eliciting children’s experiences and voices that do not necessarily depend on interaction with an interviewer. Some of these methods include scenarios, vignettes and sentence completion tasks or methods which use technology (Greene & Hill, 2006). Other techniques include role play and drama (Christensen & James, 2000), the use of digital spaces where children might feel more comfortable (McWilliam et al., 2009) and the use of radio discussions (Young & Barrett, 2001).

In a study on children’s view on starting school in Australia, Dockett and Perry (2003) remarked that including children in dialogue on their direct experiences had the potential to inform adults of the implications and outcomes of these experiences for young children themselves. By involving children in these open discussion, adults are coming to regard children as “competent and interpretive social participants” (2003, p. 12). Farrell et al. (2002, p. 28) states that listening to children is imperative as children’s “own accounts give voice to their distinctive experience”.

CONTEXT OF RESEARCH

With any research project, it is important to understand the importance of context and how this might influence what children talk about (Hill, 2006; O’Kane, 2000; Punch, 2002). When considering context it is important to consider privacy for the child and how to ensure a strong level of confidentiality. For example, some parents may tent to ask their child or the researcher about the interview of data collection. This
process may place stress upon the child (Masson, 2004) or the researcher (Bushin, 2007). Confidentiality has been expressed by some researchers with phrases of “this is just between you and me” stated to the child at the commencement of the data collection (Thompson & Rudolph, 2000, p. 35).

A possible context for exploration could be the child’s own home. Research collected from the child’s home however may be more time-consuming and costly (Scott, 2000). In the child’s home, the researcher needs to negotiate their social position as a guest (Mayall, 2000). Also, the parent or guardian may wish to be present in the data collection, which may influence the child’s responses (Scott, 2000).

Another possible site for data collection is the school, however different problems have been identified regarding the school setting. These include:

- The setting of the school such as limitation of the timetable and difficulties in finding available space (Kellet & Ding, 2004).
- Even though the vast majority of children may agree to participate, a minority of children may just write and/or say barely anything (Morrow, 2001).
- Risk of children interpreting participation in the research project as ‘school work’ (Kellet & Ding, 2004).
- The role of the researcher perceived as a ‘teacher’ by the child (Hill, 2006).
- Children might say what they think adults want them to say (Clark, 2005).

Researchers have tried to minimize these risks by emphasising to young children that there is no right or wrong answer (Punch, 2002a). Certain rooms in the school may represent a suitable world for the child between the formal and informal worlds of the school. For example, the arts room (Darbyshire et al., 2005) or the storage cupboard (Jones, 2008) have found used by researchers as more of a neutral space. This is an important consideration when conducting research with young children in school settings.

DATA COLLECTION

Researchers may engage with children to explore their own voice. This process requires a level of rapport to be established. When establishing rapport with young children, it is recommended to start with a period of ‘free narrative’ when starting an interview to allow the child to settle into the setting and also to allow the research to grasp the child’s communication style and concerns (Cameron, 2005). The researcher can also ask the child about things they already know that appear relatively unthreatening (Cameron, 2005) such as specific daily events, routines or feelings (Mauthner, 1997).

The role of the researcher in conversations with a child should also include suitable non-verbal behaviours (e.g., eye contact, head nods) and verbal prompts (e.g., ‘tell me more’) which indicate that the interviewer is listening and wants to hear the child’s story (Cameron, 2005). Cameron (2005, p. 603) suggests phrases such as “great” or “cool” may not be suitable as they “may discourage the child from telling the whole story which includes the non-cool parts”.

8
Researchers with young children are recommended to avoid using closed questions with young children and instead use a wide range of open ended questions (Waterman et al., 2001). An understanding of the child’s interests and experiences is also important. Young children tend to give monosyllabic answers to questions they do not consider relevant to them (Morgan et al., 2002).

A wide range of activities and techniques have been used in interviews and focus groups with young children to make them more enjoyable and interesting and to also allow the child to take control of the focus and agenda (Kay et al., 2003; Sanders & Munford, 2005). Some researchers have used refreshment breaks (Morgan et al., 2002) or food breaks (Goodenough et al., 2003) to keep children engaged and focused, as well as allowing extra non-structured informal time. Using a mixture of materials and techniques during the interview process also allows young children time to think about what they would like to communicate so they do not feel pressured to give a rapid response (Punch, 2002b). The processes also give children choice and control over how to express themselves (Morgan et al., 2002). After an interview of focus group, it may also be appropriate to have some sort of debriefing (Clark, 2005).

In a recent study of Chinese school aged children, Morrison (2013) developed a list of ten strategies to help ease interview situations with children even when the interviewer did not speak the language of these children. These strategies included:

1. Good relations between educators and children and between parents and the school.
2. Interviewers used several deliberate tactics to put the children at ease (such as open ended questions, verbal and non-verbal positive reinforcement, and understanding that not all questions had to be answered).
3. The interviewer had deliberately dressed formal to send a message to the children that the research was important.
4. The research assistant was a native speaker of the children’s language and had a friendly disposition.
5. At the start of the interview it was set out clearly how it would operate, creating an atmosphere of positive feedback to the students. The interviewer was also careful not to take children and was always aware of time.
6. The interviewers were careful about proxemics in two main ways: the use of physical space and the use of non-verbal communication.
7. Care was taken with the question structure, terminology use, the question wording and the sequence of the interview.
8. The interviewers made the interview situation very concrete.
9. The interviewers were acutely aware of, and looking out for, hesitancies, one-word or one-phase answers, silences and the nonverbal behaviour of children.
10. The interviewers were visible in the school throughout the year of the project, so that the children would see them outside the interview situation.

The strategies allowed the interviewer to operate in the child’s frame of reference. The strategies and structure provided security to children by making what begins
as a strange situation become as familiar as possible in the setting of the children’s experiences.

THE USE OF NARRATIVES IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES

Children’s experiences are organised in narrative form within the memory. Narrative is considered a ‘universal mode of thought’ and a ‘form of thinking’ (Bruner, 1986; Nelson, 1998, 2007). According to Haakarainen et al. (2013, p. 215), “from the cultural-historical perspective, a narrative could be defined as a psychological tool formalising and unifying human thought and knowledge into thematic units—units of thought”. Accordingly, narrative is the smallest cell of human thinking, providing insight into the child’s experiences. As Vygotsky described (1962, p. 126), “thought undergoes many changes as it turns into speech. It does not merely find expression in speech; it finds reality and form.”

Narrative research in contemporary times can also free social scientists from the rhetorical forms (Emihovich, 1995) that alienate children and families from their own traditions. Through the use of narrative we are able to recognise the power of subjectivity in allowing open dialogue and co-construction of meaning. Becoming comfortable with narrative research also means accepting ideas that the world has no fixed rules for assigning behaviour (Emihovich, 1995). This means that open dialogue is required to build consensus around shared meaning and to ensure the inclusion of multiple voices. Thus as Bruner (1986, p. 144) notes, “narrative structures are not only structures of meaning but structures of power as well”.

The use of narrative as a contemporary research technique allows young children to share their experiences with others. Bruner (1990) tells us that small children are interested in human interaction and activity, the temporal sequences and unexpected turns of events. Narrative descriptions exhibit human activity as purposeful engagement in the world (Polkinghorne, 1995). The research technique is respectful of the child’s voice and allows the child to choose what they would like to share with others (participation). Contemporary research can choose many different approaches to collect narratives and analyse narratives that will be discussed in later chapters in this book. Greater awareness and understanding however is needed for the widespread importance of narrative as a sense-making form for young children (Bamberg, 2007; Bruner, 1990, 2002; van Oers, 2003).

This book helps to fill this void, by providing detailed evidence of the importance of narratives when researching with young children. Narrative research is an important methodology that ultimately collects stories as well as creates stories. You will discover is a tool for data collection as well as data analysis. Chapter 2 provides an overview of narratives approaches, exploring the different rhetorics. In the rest of the book you will also learn more about ways of working with narrative approaches and young children. You will come to understand the importance of implementing narrative approaches in contemporary times to provide new meaning of children’s lives.
Validity in narrative research refers to the “believability of a statement or knowledge claim” (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 474). Thus, readers will judge the validity of our work as researchers, they are the people who must be convinced that a knowledge claim is justified. Differences emerge however based on people’s viewpoints. It is for this reason traditional understandings of validity may not represent the postmodern world. Alternative notions of validity can be used such as trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), “verisimilitude” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 751), “truthlike observations” (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 74) and “crystallisation” (Richardson, 2000, p. 934). For example, Richardson’s (2000) notion of “crystallization—deconstructs the traditional idea of ‘validity’” by recognising that there are more than three sides (reliability, validity and generalisability) from which to view the world. Polkinghorne (2007) further suggests that in narrative research readers are asked “to make judgements on whether or not the evidence and argument convinces them at the level of plausibility, credibleness, or trustworthiness of the claim” (p. 477). Validity therefore relates to personal meaning drawn from the narrative stories, not to a measurable truth.

Our stance

In the book we will show the importance of narrative and young children. The intention is to highlight a variety of ways narrative can be used as an analytical tool by educators and others working with young children. We believe narratives are an important contemporary approach for understanding young children and their understanding of the world. We also believe that narratives provide important insights into the cultural contexts in which children live.

All of the authors have come to know the importance of narrative with children during their PhD studies. The chosen methodology allowed the authors to create new understandings about children’s understanding in contemporary times. From this experience we have become advocates for narratives approaches as contemporary ways to work with young children. We believe that narratives are able to extend our understanding about early childhood and provide new ways for exploring meaning. We also realise that there is much work yet to do with narrative research and young children, however this book allows others interested to come to know the current research field.

We also acknowledge that the narratives that young children tell may sometimes be fragmented and not linear. This is highly important for understanding the different structures of narratives and to acknowledge each narrative has a unique form and presentation. Children’s narrative may be similar or different to an adult’s conceptualisation of a narrative.

The chapters in this book will show how understanding narrative and young children also provide opportunities to explore themes of place, generation, gender,
CHAPTER 1

ethnicity, democracy, digital technology, ableness and sustainability. These themes are important for the daily lives of young children and those who work with young children. New insights are shared from children’s perspectives that may otherwise have been left un-analysed in early childhood settings and schools.

CONCLUSION

Researchers conducting research with young children have developed and continue to adapt social research methods and tools to achieve the aims of their study with the characteristics and needs of young children. The new approaches allow new understanding of children’s perspectives and experiences and provide greater insights into children’s worlds and meaning-making. While they achieve greater empowerment for children, it is important however to consider that methods and techniques with young children still need to be reflexively and critically approached. As Punch (2002a, p. 33) questions, “are certain methods being used with children purely because they are fun, or because they also generate useful and relevant data?”

This chapter has provided an overview of current contemporary understanding of early childhood education and research. In the next chapter you will read of the importance of narrative as a method for research with young children. The chapter will provide details on the rhetoric of narrative and you will begin to explore the usefulness of narratives in modern times to understand knowledge and thinking. You will discover how the use of narrative as a contemporary research method empowers children to be heard and respected by adults. The approach also allows a sharing of understanding, knowledge and trust in the research approach. The new space for exploration allows narratives to be implemented by adults (including researchers and educators) to provide new ways to illuminate the children’s experiences and to challenge what is considered ‘normal’ from an adult perspective.

REFERENCES


CHAPTER 1


CHAPTER 1


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CHAPTER 2

TRADITIONS AND TURNS—PATHWAYS IN NARRATIVE METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

As pointed out by numerous researchers within the human and social sciences, narrative is ever present in human lives and a common mode of communication. For those reasons narrative genres has been found productive across a range of disciplines and in research fields like education, as well as in child, culture and society studies. Narrative methodology offers a range of ways for understanding children, their lives and what conditions them and illuminates children’s meaning-making, their activities and experiences. The consequence of such a methodology will hopefully be that children are valued as human beings in their own right and are approached in research as participants one way or another.

In the process of developing an appropriate narrative design, the advantage of taking informed routes and choices is obvious. The student researcher that finds narrative designs appealing and appreciates the rich potential sources for new knowledge and insights will easily, as a paradox, be more uncertain as the reading escalates. For the more experienced researcher, the number of different narrative designs can cause confusion and ambiguity in the process of designing a research project. In the practice of becoming a skilled researcher in narrative methodology, a number of diverse approaches are revealed and association with traditions and connections to earlier research are made. As researchers we easily find ourselves traversing borderlands and navigating from one paradigm to another (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). As narrative inquiry indeed is still a field in making (Chase, 2011), new pathways can be made as this book attempts to, by exploring narrative methodology designed to meet the contemporary research of children’s lives and stories in early childhood education.

This chapter will provide the reader with background knowledge on some relevant traditions in narrative research and hence new pathways and narrative designs can be developed. The field is too wide and complex for a complete genealogy mapping of all pathways and borderlands, divergences and newness in one chapter. Therefore the historical emergence will first only briefly be sketched. Turns, divergences and varieties will be discussed. We will see that what counts as stories varies, as do what kinds of stories have been studied and how the researcher designs the study.

Within the framework of narrative research, researchers have used different approaches, strategies and methods to collect or produce stories. Some narrative methodologies follow the traditions of language studies, while others follow
CHAPTER 2

psychological, developmental, anthropological, sociological and educational studies of didactics. The reader is encouraged to reflect on these different pathways in narrative methodology and critically relate to them in their own design and research processes.

In this chapter a distinction is made between narrative, meaning both a story and its telling, the process of constructing story. Narrative methodology will refer to research in the scientific landscape where narrative is used in ways that differ (e.g., as the products of anthropology and case studies, and in methods of ethnography and interviews). Narrative analysis will mean an approach where the researcher narrates based on data. Since analysis always will be the researcher’s construct, this will include analysis of narrative, which is a certain approach, where the researcher analyses stories (Polkinghorne, 1995). Narrative inquiry here will refer to a method of investigation into a problem, following pragmatism, inspired by John Dewey (1934). Following this tradition, narrative inquiry will also mean a way of knowing by telling and reflecting. “Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researchers and participants, over time in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20).

We would add to this quote that in efforts to understand children, their teachers and the teachers for early childhood teachers we need to manoeuvre to and fro researching the individual stories and the macro social stories. Our position in contemporary research, as we will elaborate throughout this book, is that we are widely inspired by narrative traditions. As we will see throughout the book, we view children’s personal narrative as co-constructs situated and belonging to a larger community, both on a personal as well as a discursive level. This book presents many examples where some form of polyphonic representation unfolds (Craigh, 2007; Garvis & Dwyer, 2013), which gives us a critical, pragmatic and a poststructural touch.

NARRATIVE METHODOLOGY—A BLURRED LANDSCAPE

Certain traditions belong to and have origin in a certain kind of research paradigm, which come with a suggested methodological approach and underpinning philosophy, therefore it could be useful to look for distinction and differences, as well as shared commitments. Traditions and their borderlands are, however, never clean cut and completely clear—the borders are rather blurred, traditions overlap and come together. Recent narrative methodology does not come from a singular continuous tradition, nor do the turns follow a one-way path, therefore the attempt here is rather to construct clusters of traditions and developments and turns, marked by familiarities and point to some borderlands.

Science is not necessarily cumulative, meaning that science does not follow a linear development, as pointed out by Kuhn in The structure of scientific revolutions (1970). He argued that what is considered scientific knowledge is dependent on human motivation and knowledge rather developing as paradigmatic shifts in three stages. Questions, problems and vague understandings are considered to be
“pre-science”, science without paradigmatic theories and connected methodology. Researchers motivated to solve problems and searching for new understandings can cause paradigmatic shifts if they are successful. “Normal science” can be productive to researchers following the paradigm. Kuhn’s scientific view is not instrumentalist as he sees theories as tools for disclosing the world through their own conceptual articulation in the reflexive practice of research. His thoughts are relevant for this chapter as we can, through his guidance, view narrative research as a source for more than a personal single anecdote and more than historical chronology.

Understanding children is, for us, about understanding how the socio-cultural world shapes conditions for children’s stories and narrative constructs in meaning-making and in shaping identities, in activities like play and learning. New knowledge of children belongs to the awareness of both the personal experience and the contextual relationships. How we understand the interconnectedness (or not) is all about concepts of human practice and how practice go hand-in-hand with bodily, visual or oral language, how the articulation belongs to scientific communities that uses one or assembled languages.

Let us illustrate the blurry landscape with a classical case study of children’s oral narratives: Katherine Nelson’s *Narratives from the Crib* (Nelson, 1989b). A variety of studies were conducted on an empirical base made from transcripts from audio recordings of bedtime conversations between 2-year-old Emily and her parents and Emily’s pre-sleep monologues. The empirical data were collected over a period of 15 months. This collection of studies is organised in three paths, all from data of one talkative child:

1. **Constructing a world.** The study shows that a child represents real-life experiences and that her monologues can be seen as re-creation of her experiences. The cultural analysis is conducted by Katherine Nelson (Nelson, 1989b) and by Jerome Bruner and Joan Lucariello (Bruner & Lucariello, 1989). Carol Fleisher Feldman (1989) shows how Emily uses the narrative monologues to solve problems in her recent life experience.

2. **Constructing a language.** The study demonstrates how Emily’s language develops and how this is done through monologues and dialogues. We learn that a child’s monologues can be studied as a speech genre by the work of Julie Gerhardt (Gerhardt, 1989), and that the child uses what John Dore conceptualizes as *re-envoicement* (Dore, 1989) when she takes up words and sentences from her parents’ talk. This is a concept inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin (Bakhtin, 1986).

3. **Constructing a self.** Rita Watson’s study shows how a child regulates herself by monologues and participating in dialogues (Watson, 1989). Nelson reveals how Emily’s narratives are a linguistic construction of self in time (Nelson, 1989a). Daniel Stern approaches the crib monologues from a psychoanalytic perspective, illuminating how a child at the age of around 15–18 months begins to construct a “verbal” sense of self and later how the narrative self emerges (Stern, 1989).
CHAPTER 2

What we can learn by the case study of Emily’s talk, is that it becomes obvious that Emily early in life represents events in which she participates, and we are offered detailed information about how the narrative language emerges and develops over time and how this is entwined with her life experiences and her dialogues with her parents. To make sense of the world Emily narrates important happenings—happenings that have taken place, which may take place and of uttermost important to Emily, what should take place. We learn that Emily’s monologist narratives are not individual narratives, but rather socially and relationally conditioned. The study weaves together thematic analysis, content analysis, and structural analysis with relational analysis. Psychoanalytical perspectives here are related to socio-linguistic analysis.

From this classical example, together with a range of new research contributions, we can also learn that the ability to understand narrative emerges at a young age, and that the art of narration might be a predisposition to construct mental stories, but first of all that children learn and develop narrative structure through participating in a culture (Bruner, Feldman, Hermansen, & Molin, 2006; Wells, 1987).

The discourse of children being a participant in research, as we referred to in Chapter 1, is more common in contemporary research than when this classic research was conducted. Such ethical issues are addressed in the new edition of this book. In a foreword to the new edition, Emily Oster, the child being exposed in the studies, writes about the remembering of a recorder at the age of two, being observed and being exposed through analysis. Emily at age 25 writes that she has always known that there is a book about her. As she grew older, she paid more attention to what the book told her about her parents, then about herself. Furthermore she says:

People sometimes ask me whether I plan to tape my own children, if they talk to themselves. I suppose I am still not sure. I love to read about what I was thinking as a toddler, but will my own children feel the same way, or might they prefer to talk to themselves alone? At the very least, just as my mother did, I plan to ask first. (Nelson, 2006, p. vii)

In our attempt to organise different narrative research traditions, we are, of course, not objective and write from contemporary issues and knowledge available at a certain time in research history. As researchers and authors, our approach is coloured by working in the landscape we are mapping. Our map is a construct where we aim to sketch out narrative methodology with relevance to the participants in the early childhood educational field. We will locate research in this field as we know it and as we find it productive for normative reasons, narrative methodology will help researchers in describing educational experiences from the perspectives of the agents there.

ORIGINS

The story of origin to the analysis of narratives varies in the methodologies literature. Some begin with the hermeneutic studies of religious texts like the Bible, the Talmud and the Koran, others start with studies of the antique Greek myths and philosophical
anecdotes. In modern times, it is possible to point to the Russian formalist Vladimir Propp to set a starting point. In 1928 he published his *Morphology of the Folktale*, in which he analysed the underlying structures of the Russian folktales, also called the “wonder fairy tales”. Postformalists such as Mikhail Bakhtin continued to develop narrative analysis from this source among others in Russia. After the Russian revolution in 1917 the East-West cooperation ceased for decades. Both of them were first translated into English and French in the 1960s and even later to other languages.

Eastern European traditions continued to be developed in the west by intellectual immigrants like the linguist Roman Jacobson and the literature theorist Tzvetan Todorov. This literary source of narrative studies was developed as contrary to traditional hermeneutics. It was the text as such that was of interest to the researcher, not the author’s intentions or the circumstances of the text production (Czarniawska, 2004; Polkinghorne, 1988). New methodology was developed, for example Gadamer’s hermeneutics. Such a critic is what Wolfgang Iser opposed when emphasising the relationship between the reader and the text. Propp’s formalist analysis was taken up in the 1970s by William Labov and Joshua Waletzky. They suggested that sociolinguistics could be studied by syntagmatic analysis and argued that this would lead to understandings of simple as well as complex narratives (Labov & Waletzky, 2006).

The interest in narrative research spread rapidly beyond literature theory into the humanities and social sciences. Catherin Kohler Riessman traced the narrative turn to the United States and to *Chicago School of Sociology* where a group of researchers studied letters from Polish farmers and immigrants, urban boys and deviant groups from the beginning of last century. The Chicago school was central to the development of narrative research in anthropology, ethnographical writings (Atkinson, 2001; Riessman, 2008). Studies of communities, social, political and economic aspects of everyday life as well as social relationships were written as narrative analysis. For instance William Whyte in USA wrote the classic *Street Corner Society*, a narrative analysis that gave descriptions of criminal life spans in 1930s. Later came the critics of beliefs in narrative truth and the argument that narratives are constructed and anthropologists are authors. Clifford Geertz strengthens this argument in *Works and Lives: The anthropologist as author* (1988). The historical realism used narrative descriptions to situate the narrative in a certain context. Pierre Bourdieu has criticised claims that the researcher can narrate a self-biographical story as a narrative truth. He claims that self-narratives can construct illusions and strengthen conventions (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Grenfell, 2008; Stenensen, 2007).

At a general level these recognitions illustrate some of the turns in research in which narrative methodology is a part. Stefinee Pinnegar and J. Gary Daynes suggests four historical thematic turns in research that can be seen located in narrative inquiry (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007):

1. The attention to relationships among the researcher and the researched,
2. the move from the use of number as the only relevant data source to the acceptance of words and language as data,
CHAPTER 2

3. a change from a focus on the general and universal towards an interest of the local and the particular, and
4. the recognition of blurred genres of knowing

Positivist methodology is designed in beliefs that research is about finding certain truths. Consequently there will be concerns about reliability, about how to conduct the research appropriate. Focus will be on numbers and what they tell us. The researcher is not important, rather a sign of solid research is that the same result can be found if a new researcher can duplicate the design. The importance of the author of the research becomes an issue in postpositivist paradigms, as well as cultural studies and poststructuralism. This issue is well elaborated in *Writing Culture* (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). Jerome Bruner (2006) has referred to the differences of rationale between a *paradigmatic* and a *narrative* way of knowing. While the latter is a common way of capture a great variety of local practices and experiences, the former refers to a form of knowing that can bring overviews and statistical knowledge. The move towards narrative methodology is a turn from paradigmatic way of knowing towards narrative knowing.

Donald Polkinghorne points out that the term *narrative* has been employed by qualitative researchers with a variety of meanings. In the context of narrative inquiry, *narrative* refers to a language form in which events and happenings are organized into a temporal unity by means of a plot. He refers to Bruner’s two types of cognition (1985). On the one hand is the paradigmatic, in which the researcher will search for resemblance as members of a category. On the other hand is the narrative, in which the researcher will shape a story by combining elements into a story that includes a plot. Polkinghorne argues that narrative inquiries are divided into these two distinct groups. The first one is *analysis of narratives*. The other is a *narrative analysis* (Polkinghorne, 1988, 1995). We notice that Polkinghorne makes a clear demarcation. As we shall see some researchers mix these and new narrative methodology will point to the blurred borderlines between these and other traditions.

Jean Clandinin & Jerry Rosiek explore a conceptual border between narrative inquiry following Dewey’s theory of experience and three other philosophical traditions that all occasionally will use stories in one way or another. These are postpositivist research, critical theory following Marxist ideas and poststructuralism. All four traditions have shared commitments and operate in a landscape of borders.

**Critical realism.** A postpositivist methodology will operationally seek to produce data that can be observed. The idea is that something is real if can be observed. An effort will be made to search for a reality that we all share. Stories will be collecting in such designs in order to identify common themes and universal narrative structure. The narrative data does not reveal a personal continuing story, but the data are treated as fixed, often decontextualized.

**Critical theory** will strive for methods that can help people develop a more robust sense of reality and seek to analyse false consciousness. The philosophical roots could be traced back to Marxist philosophy. The individual perspective is
TRADITIONS AND TURNS—PATHWAYS IN NARRATIVE METHODOLOGY

not considered as valid, rather the important perspectives will be the macro-social story—how the material social life conditions the lives and thinking of humans. In analysis critical methodology will see experience as closely connected to ideologies. 

Poststructuralism focuses on the linguistic and narrative structure of knowledge through opposing the idea that there is such a thing as one-to-one correspondence between a word and its object. On the contrary, a word will have normative binaries built-in before a study starts. Words hold relatively stable meanings because they are embedded in a larger system of social discourses. Following this tradition, individual story will be related to a broader context. Social discourses are seen as conditioning and shaping the individual’s story of experience.

Pragmatism begins with the ontology of experience following Dewey. In this tradition the researcher focuses on the way the relational, the temporal and the continuous features of experience manifest in narrative form. The foci point is the living narrative experience. The researcher takes into consideration that narrative unfolds over time. Therefore events are connected, each event has a past, a present as it appears and an implied future. Doing narrative inquiry following this tradition, the inquiry is not transcendental, rather it is transactional meaning relational and social.

We have described and given some examples of how traditions align and misalign. Differences between these four traditions is shown by different focus and belief in the personal story (from reality or fiction) and how much on focus is given the social discourse. It also follows a line of difference between following a temporal continuous and coherent line in presenting data or allowing disconnected and contrasting stories to be presented beyond narrative coherence (Hyvarinen, Hyden, & Saarenheimo, 2010). At last we can see difference between traditions when it comes to what degree a personal story is co-narrated. Some researchers will strive for coherence, they might also add complexity. Others will challenge canonical stories and lives by telling highly surprising, contradictory and possible stories.

According to Clandinin and Rosiek, borders between traditions must be seen as borders on a map, they are only clear demarcations on the map, and they can be seen as abstractions. Following one tradition the researcher easily bumps up against another tradition. Rather than mark the territory in a design too clearly, a narrative research project could work on selected concepts and elaborate on what they will mean and how they will be used in the analysis. Kinships and relations to the blurred landscape of traditions can be notified. This is also supported by Barbara Czarniawska who states:

Rather than striving for a rigorous narrative analysis or for purity of a genre, reading and writing of narratives will remain a creative activity, based on bisociations and hybridizing. (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 664)

Despite the philosophical origin of narrative approaches, the central point is that researchers discuss people’s lives in ways that represents them. In the following, we follow and develop the thread of children’s interests and of contemporary early childhood education.
CHAPTER 2

APPROACHES TO NARRATIVE METHODOLOGY

Following the model of Aristotle, the sequential, chronological and completeness in narratives are central. This model encourages cracks to be hidden from the writing. As the editors of a recent book in the series *Studies in Narrative, Beyond Narrative Coherence* (Hyvarinen, Hyden, & Saarenheimo, 2010) point out, meaning is made in a social context and the researcher is an agent that can strive to create coherence or decline coherence in the writing. Incoherent narratives, however, can present more challenging cases. This is in line with Jerome Bruner’s distinction between scripts and narrative (Bruner, 1990) and his claim that it is “only when constituent beliefs in folk psychology are violated that narratives are constructed” (1990, p. 40).

The vitality of narrative research can, as earlier stated, play an important role in understanding complex issues like everyday life experiences in early childhood institutions. Complexity points to the necessity for a spectrum of narrative approaches following different philosophical and disciplinary traditions and fields in order to understand contemporary lives. A narrative approach can be appropriate if the research interest lies in understanding children in institutional life on a general level by making cases. For political or cultural reasons this can also be done from a certain perspective or motivated from the urge to shed light on a special area where the public have low level of insight and knowledge. Narrative approach can give voice to those often invisible, as children in general and special groups of children. Furthermore the approach can create new insights, reveal surprises and build new innovative models of thinking and understandings of early childhood education. The sector is in need for continuously inquiring how, for example, play, development, learning, equity, law, pedagogy, didactics, curriculum, belonging to families, communities and places differ and unfolded in local settings. Narrative approach can also create insight into unknown or vague phenomenon, routine or events where children take a part. A narrative design can also be appropriate for contextualising children’s experiences and conditions for living their life, shaping identities and build knowledge about themselves, others and the world in an educational setting. That means that children’s personal experiences can be nested to one another in a kaleidoscope of stories (Craig, 2007). In this way children can be part of historical, cultural issues, media, health, global sustainability and political knowledge.

Stories about children, events and cases where children take a part as well as children’s stories are data for narrative analysis. While stories about children can be studied by interviewing, analysis of text or visual or sound material, analysis and participant observation, children’s stories and culture can also be elicited by an approach where the researcher participates in children’s creative activities like writing, drawing, photo stories, children initiated role playing and structured or led drama play. Spending time with children in participant observation will often be appropriate whether the researcher follows characteristics of critical realism, critical theory, poststructuralism or pragmatism.
Data can be treated as belonging to a respondent’s subject, where the aim is to write up a certain person’s story, perspective on certain events or phenomenon or voice. Data can also be treated as co-constructed by the respondent and the researcher and further narrated by the researcher. When narrative research follows the traces of structuralism, narrative analysis will deal with a spoken or written text where the researcher’s task is to present an account of an event or series of events, chronologically connected. Often then narrative will be defined as a semiotic representation of a series of events meaningfully connected in a temporal and causal way. Meaning, however, will always be a result from the interaction between the reader and the text and cannot be reduced to temporality and causality (Herman & Vervaeck, 2001, p. 13).

Following a postclassical perspective, narrative analyses is presented as a process where stories are seen as a co-construction and put together by the researcher. Barbara Czarniawska is close to a poststructural edge when she suggests such a way to go about narrative analysis. In a field of practice, as early childhood educations are, the researcher can create designs where you watch how stories are made, collect, elicit or provoke them. Later you study what the stories tell you (interpretation), then how the stories are told (analysis). The next step is to unmake them (deconstruct the stories). The researcher then writes up a narrative analysis as the researcher’s story. The researcher constructs a narrative following the logic of communication, telling a different story, underlining some crucial points, shaping cases to raise questions or be critical and so on. Validity could be strengthened by linking the researcher’s construct to more research in the field in question (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 652).

ANALYSING CRITICAL EVENTS

Within stories of experience there are identified critical incidents, considered plots of events. A critical event approach to narrative includes documentation over time. Following this approach to narrative data provides researchers with a broad view and allows change of experience (Webster & Mertova, 2007a). Specific events trigger our memory and how we recall events. In designs for analysing children’s stories and teacher’s stories about children it must therefore be taken into consideration how children as teachers might remember more, and therefore tell more by communicating with others. The story told is not just a container for the experience, but it also shapes how we will continue to remember the event. Memories provide material for story telling and narrative consolidates memory and makes it possible to communicate and negotiate meaning with others (Pramling & Ødegaard, 2014). To tell about what happened must be seen as an active and creative memory act that can sustain or change through the co- and retelling process.

In such a narrative approach Leonard Webster and Patricie Mortova suggest that the researcher establish a time frame and location of the event being investigated and propose some possible questions for the researcher (Webster & Mertova,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytic approach</th>
<th>Paradigm</th>
<th>Key features</th>
<th>Narrative knowledge</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical events</td>
<td>Socio-psychoanalytic, Pragmatic, Critical theory</td>
<td>Gather actual incidents and stories about children, interview, observation, text analysis, identification of themes, composing of cases</td>
<td>Personal teacher knowledge, development of professionalism and ethics, empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnographic narrative</td>
<td>Pedagogical anthropology, auto-ethnography, phenomenological, poststructural, critical theory</td>
<td>Participant observation, interviews, accounts, biographical writings, Composing narratives and cases</td>
<td>Researchers reflexivity, descriptive and detailed personal, situated and contextual knowledge, cultural formation, children’s culture, empowerment etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative play</td>
<td>Pedagogical anthropology, socio-cultural, phenomenological, poststructural</td>
<td>Participant observation, video-observation, children’s responses on video-observation, Composing narratives and cases</td>
<td>Descriptive knowledge on identity, meaning-making, learning, exploration, cultural formation, children’s culture, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-linguistic narratives</td>
<td>Pedagogical anthropology, Socio-cultural</td>
<td>Video-observation, audio-observation, Identifying learning processes and conditions</td>
<td>Descriptive and contextual knowledge on language learning and meaning-making, conditions for learning language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogic narrative</td>
<td>Dialogism, socio-cultural</td>
<td>Video-observation, Identifying dialogical processes and relational conditions, identifying chronotopes and intertextuality</td>
<td>Descriptive knowledge about connections, coherence, context, conditions for participation, play, learning, teaching, political, historical, cultural disclosure</td>
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Following these we propose some adjustments to the questions to invite children to tell about a critical event:

- Think of one memory you have on [context of investigation]. Can you tell me about it?
- Thinking back to [context of investigation], what do you remember or recall?
- What is it that you remember the most from [context of investigation]?
- Do you remember something from the [context of investigation] that scared you, made you angry or joyful?
- What do you think happened to you? How do you feel about what happened?
- What did your friends/parents/teachers do when this happened?
- Would you like to draw it?
- What is the drawing about? Where are you? What happened to you? Where are the others?

Informal communication adds opportunities to provide research data. The storyteller communicates the level of criticality when telling stories to the researcher and informal opportunities can be an opportunity to validate data. In the process of analysis the researcher must be aware that critical events are not necessarily told as such. A critical event could be communicated in vague and implicit ways. When identifying critical event narratives, the researcher can look for marks and signs within a specific community context like:

- events that have had an impact on the people involved
- have had life-changing consequences
- are unplanned
- may reveal patterns of coherence
- are identified after the event
- are personal with strong emotional involvement

Critical event narrative proved to be a very viable and productive tool for staff development in early childhood institutions, teacher training practice and in the work of newly qualified teachers in Scandinavia. In this work, both written and oral narratives about children have been a tool for professional reasons and for researching such processes (Birkeland, 1998, 2007; Ødegaard & Birkeland, 2002; Ødegaard & Økland, 2015). The identification of blunder stories where the turning point is emphasized, brought forth self-reflection with a potential to change practice. Blunder stories were identified in communities of practice characterized by reciprocal thrust and humorous atmospheres (Birkeland, 2007; Ødegaard & Birkeland, 2002). The Scandinavian experiences are associated with frequent references to the pragmatic tradition of teachers’ stories of identity and professional development (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Webster & Mertova, 2007b; Wilson & Ritchie, 2000).
ANALYSIS AS ETHNOGRAPHIC NARRATIVE

Ethnographic design is an established approach within classroom studies and the studies of early childhood education, which can be labelled pedagogical anthropology (Gulløv, Anderson, & Valentin, 2010). Such narrative research provides rich descriptions of teacher practices and children’s experiences often presented as case studies. However, explicit references to the process of research, the analysis of the empirical data on which findings and the new knowledge are based, have until now been insubstantial. A mapping of Scandinavian early childhood educational research for the years 2006–2007–2008 shows that pedagogical ethnography is a popular design, but that a huge range of published articles within the early childhood field contained little information about analytic and methodological issues (Nordenbo & Moser, 2009).

Pedagogical research studies using ethnographic design can therefore be claimed to be problematic when it comes to the new insights they bring to the table. Researchers following narrative and descriptive writings will nevertheless argue that the narrative itself is the answer. This is an argument close to what Geertz called the interpretive success (Geertz, 1973b).

One example of narrative analysis from ethnographic field work in own practice, is the works of Vivian Gussin Paley (Paley, 1979, 1986, 1990, 1997). On one level the reader will get the didactic story of how she works with a story table, writing down children’s narratives and giving the children opportunities for playing them out in structured drama activities as well as in by children’s self-organised activities. At another level her stories can be read as auto-ethnographic accounts, where she critically reveals for the reader her continued reflections and self-shaping as a preschool teacher. Paley’s descriptions of and reflections on teachers’ approaches to children’s stories are widespread in many Euro-American teacher communities and have inspired researchers to investigate children’s social and textual lives in classrooms (Dyson, 1997; Palludan, 2007; Sawyer, 1997; Ødegaard, 2007, 2011a).

In her first auto-ethnographic accounts (Paley, 1986a, 1986b, 1990), the methodological issues discussed are limited, even if the self-reflection, self-presentation and work in progress is present. In her book *Kwanzaa and me—a teacher’s story* (Paley, 1995), she describes a process of self-reflection over practice in her own classroom. In this account she foregrounds the critique raised towards her earlier narratives and her interpretation of what was going on and how she wrote about the children and her play-based curriculum and practice. Paley writes an auto-ethnographic account opening the narrative with the story about the teacher assistant confronting Paley with how she had narrated stories about her and incidents that she also had experienced. So Paley responds to critique of earlier ethnographic research work in this publication. By looking back with the insights from recent methodological discussions, she takes up issues of reliability such as the impact of context, the account’s agenda, the author’s/researcher’s rationale for choices made, contact with people to establish a motive for participating, trustworthiness and so on.
Even if such a posttransparency gives insights and inspiration for new views, reliability issues concerning empirical narrative analytic work are usually not elaborated in pedagogical ethnographies within the early childhood field. Both phenomenological as well as poststructural academic writings have elaborated self-reflexive analysis of the relationships between the researcher and the participants, where the researcher meets in the field (Atkinson, 2001; Atkinson & Delamont, 2008; Cannella, 1997; Charmaz & Mitchell, 1997; Delamont, 2002; Hatch, 2007). Considering the way we work analytically and the way we write up cases can illuminate relationships between text and context, analytic work, transcription based on video analysis and field notes, the process of transcription and coding and the researcher’s understanding of this process.

ANALYSIS OF CHILDREN’S NARRATIVE PLAY

Studies of children’s narrative play will often be inspired by methods from anthropology, where thick description is used to capture children’s imaginary narrative play in writing. Video observation and video transcripts are widely used.

When researching close to and along with children, it soon becomes obvious that children tell stories where the narrative can be seen as inspired by real events. Narrative play can be studied as children’s culture, fiction, representations and potential reality. The foci point is merely children’s artistic activities, their imaginative play, gaming and virtual reality.

Brian Sutton Smith states that the word *imaginary* means to be not real, fanciful and visionary (Sutton-Smith, 1997, p. 127). He traces the origin of such research to romanticism, art, literature and semiotics. Approaching play and possible worlds with narrative analysis, could be said to be following the root of pragmatism and transformed and intertwined with other roots. Whether something is true or false, can represent something else or should mean anything particular for someone, can be more or less of interest and addressed accordingly. Fiction, gaming and play can be studied in relation to other texts and so-called reality contexts. Fiction, gaming and play can, however, create narratives where whether it is true or false is of no interest. Play is then considered as a possible world or like an explorative improvisation, preparation or a dream. Bruner makes the distinction between two modes of thought, a paradigmatic and a narrative way of reasoning (Bruner, 1986). The paradigmatic mode is characterised by logic, as in the process of building arguments, while the narrative mode concerns people’s intentional actions and experiences. Different possibilities for understanding, meaning-making, remembering and construction of knowledge derive from these modes. Research occupied with studying children’s narrative play, we believe, will see some sort of transformation in the analysis.

The telling from the perspective of the child or for giving children voice or representation could moreover be studied in non-verbal approaches like the modality of the moving body and the rhythm in dance, representing as in picturing, visual as in photography and film and virtual as in creating stories in data programs and gaming.
In Annica Löfdahl’s study about play in kindergarten (Löfdahl, 2002) imaginative play episodes and both field notes, audio and video recordings were used. She included children in her process of making, analysing and understanding play events by asking children to comment upon the play during breaks in play. She also stopped the video camera, rewound and showed the children still photos from the imaginative play that had just happened. She chose to show still photos rather than video with sound because she had experienced that children would extend their telling more if they did not listen to themselves talking and playing. She approached the analytic process as a co-construction between the researcher and the group of children, a meta text was taped and added to the analysis of the narrative play. This added contextual information to the analysis (Löfdahl, 2002, p. 56–63).

Following a dramaturgic analytic model (Heggstad, Knudsen, & Trageton, 1994) and using concepts deriving from theatre and drama, the study found small children’s play as an arena for social and cultural meaning-making.

Löfdahl Found Two Mayor Themes in the Play:

1. **Survival.** How the children gestalted excitement and fairy tale, to be left alone and leave and to solve problems.
2. **Hegemonies.** How the children gestalted to be small and big, to be right and wrong and to be forceful or powerless.

Inspired by an analytic model traced to theatre and drama as referred to above (Heggstad, Knudsen, & Trageton, 1994), we suggest some added questions for an analytic process of the narrative data in studies of children’s play:

1. In order to shed light on the narrative play drama as content:
   - What is the fable about and what do the figures do?
   - Where is the narrative play situated?
   - When is it taken place?
2. In order to shed light on the narrative play drama as process and result:
   - How the children shape their imaginative play worlds?
   - How is the excitement constructed?
3. In order to shed light on narrative play drama as form, type or style:
   - How do children tell their stories?
   - What kinds of stories are told?
   - Is it absurd? Socio-realistic? Expressionistic?

**SOCIOLINGUISTIC NARRATIVE ANALYSIS**

Within the field of sociolinguistics we find origins back to the work of Propp’s (1968) study of Russian folktales and some would also say to Labov (Labov, 1972). Within this tradition researchers have been working with questions like:
• What is a narrative?
• How can we tell that this data that we have collected or constructed is a narrative?
• What form do stories have?
• What functions do they have?
• And how are they used by participants in the research project?

Stories are said to hold a form with beginnings, middles and endings (Thornborrow & Coates, 2005). Children's narratives are studied with focus on identifying the basic structural elements used by children in narration. Attempts are here made to link children's narrative abilities to the development of cognitive skills and are often related to aspects of sense-making and learning. The premise here is that children's narratives become 'more complete' as they get older. Children learning to narrate can be characterised as their stories move from brief, non-causally linked descriptions to more sophisticated, causally-linked stories as they grow older. According to studies in this tradition, where age has been considered important, young children will most frequently tell personal stories, while older children will add fantasy stories to their evolving narrative repertoire (Glenn-Applegate, Breit-Smith, Justice, & Piasta, 2010). Another example of this research tradition is McCabe and Peterson’s study, based on Labov and Waletzky’s (1967) structural analysis, with the main interest in mapping the function of clauses and how children link together a series of clauses that build up to a high point (McCabe & Peterson, 1991b).

Research concerned with narrative development has often been designed and studied in parent-child dyads (often mother-child). These studies have shown how maternal conversational discourse shapes children's use of genres and that dedicated mothers that engage their children in lengthy (narrative) conversations where they ask open-ended questions, provide narrative structure and supply rich information guides for their children to develop decontextualized language, a skill sociolinguistic researchers claim is necessary for successful schooling (Boyce, Innocenti, Roggman, Norman, & Ortiz, 2010; Reesea, Leyvab, Sparksc, & Grolnick, 2010; Schicka & Melzia, 2010).

This tradition is often connected to didactics aiming at school readiness in talking, reading and writing in education, where researchers’ work also includes reflections on didactic approaches for eliciting children's stories in teacher-led activities and discussions and making suggestions on how to organise rich language, narrative and literacy classrooms (Dickinson, 2001; Dyson, 1997; Gjems, 2006; Ochs & Capps, 2001; Pramling & Ødegaard, 2011). There is consensus among researchers that teachers should be close to children for an extended period of time in a language activity or during everyday activities and routine situations (Aukrust, 2006; McCabe & Peterson, 1991a, 1991b), as this conditions situations for telling, listening, writing and imaging and picturing stories.

NARRATIVE DIALOGIC ANALYSIS

This approach takes especially into consideration how play, activity and talk is dialogically produced and performed as narrative. Here the who is of special interest
in the analysis. Who is the utterance addressed to? And what are the relations between the utterances as they go about a person or a group? The context from where the utterance is performed is crucial. Utterances are fundamentally relational. They are performed from a certain position or perspective that is different from the one who listens. An utterance will be seen as a historical event, every utterance will have traces of many authors as every utterance is structured with ideology from previous usage. Form and meaning emerge between people in social practices and narratives can be seen as dialogical events. In educational institutions a story will be considered as co-produced in a complex choreography—in spaces between teller and listener, speaker and setting, text and reader (Riessman, 2008). The meaning of a narrative will therefore be considered diverse.

Asking children their opinion or listening to their initiatives and bodily movements are approaches already recognized as narrative research approaches in theme analysis, data from interviews and ethnographic accounts. The complex natures of early childhood settings challenge the researcher when it comes to researching the youngest children’s cultural formation, their perspectives, meaning-making, identity in everyday (play and learning) activities. When it comes to the youngest children, more methodological exploration is needed. In order to research how children participate and make meaning and how they participate in shaping local practices in the early childhood institutions from a very young age, co-narrative approaches were methodologically explored in the thesis Narrative meaning-making in preschool (Ødegaard, 2007). In a poststudy further investigations where organized around how to study children as cultural subjects in a web of structural and relational conditions. Observations from kindergarten activities in a co-operating fieldwork design included a combination of collaborative narrative and visual approaches and so on. The project follows officially recommended ethical considerations. Parents and staff have given their informed consent. Collaborative co-narrative combined with picture activities as photos and drawings. are experienced as an appropriate tool in researching very young children in institutional practice. Experiencing the practice of collaborative design with young children, studying co-narration and co-picture-making give dynamic and new insights and knowledge. The collaborative intergenerational view goes beyond listening to children’s own perspectives. Meaning-making is rather seen dialogically constructed in socio-historical-cultural endeavours.

Narratives are seen as multi-voiced and as a consequence must be analysed as poly vocal. In a recent comparative study of preschool teachers’ practice in Norway and China, how the idea(s) of individualization are constituted in preschool teachers’ practice was explored (Birkeland, 2012). Both researcher and kindergarten teachers used photos/videos as prompts in focus group interviews. This approach to narrative analysis contributes to collaboration in meaning-making between researcher and the interviewed. Findings showed that multi-vocal interpretations of the teachers’ practices, where photo elicitation can contribute to convey the hyper complexity of kindergarten teachers’ educational preferences. Further on, a poly vocal approach gave
opportunities for rich descriptions and a nuanced understanding of how cultural values influence the interpretations of the everyday curriculum in the educational institution.

With Bakhtin as inspiration a number of educational researchers have told stories from teachers’ classrooms. Despite the fact that Bakhtin himself practiced as a teacher and teacher educator, there is not any own Bakhtin’s philosophy of teaching. There are still a number of scientists worldwide that allows Bakhtin’s philosophy inform studies in pedagogical field (see for example Matusov, 2011; White, 2009; White & Peters, 2011). Bakhtin’s rich conceptual framework has been followed both to show how teaching takes place within complex relationships and how these are related to issues of social, historical, ideological and political character. Bakhtin’s rich conceptual framework has inspired various analyses used here, for example, the term author (Matusov, 2011), Carnival (Lensmire, 2011) and kronotop (Ødegaard, 2011b).

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have unfolded some traditions in narrative methodology relevant for studying contemporary early childhood education and children’s events situated there. The field is wide and the borders between the narrative traditions are blurred. While it is considered fairly easy to encourage people (that is, adults) to tell their stories (Baden & Major, 2013, p. 239), it may not be the same situation when working with children. Narratives about children must encourage the researcher to design studies where appropriate caution for the gathering and production of narrative data and ethics are taken. We have chosen some narrative approaches commonly used in the field of early childhood educational studies. From some selected examples we have followed origins and paradigms and briefly given some foundations for narrative analysis and analysis of narratives. The examples are following a postclassical trace where a narrative analysis is presented as a process where stories are seen as a co-construction and put together by the researcher.

NOTE

1 Could mean originality.

REFERENCES

CHAPTER 2


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