Title: **Teachers' Voices/Stories: Dilemmas in representing the research data**

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Abstract:

The article discusses the issue of how to represent teachers' stories and narratives in the arena of performance management. It is argued that at a time when 'teachers' voices are being enthusiastically pursued and promoted, teachers' work is being technisized and narrowed' (Goodson, 1998). Arguably, teachers' knowledge regarding their work processes and practices is being neglected resulting in teachers' stories 'becoming less and less promising as a focus of research and reflection' (Goodson, 1998). Within this context, 'stories and narratives therefore, can form an unintended coalition with those forces which would divorce the teacher from knowledge of political and micro-political perspectives, from theory and from broader cognitive maps of influence and power. Hence new modalities using teachers' stories and narratives as a starting point need to embrace wider historical and political discourses' (Goodson, 1988, pp. 111-117). To this end, teachers' voices must be represented in a manner that values their understanding and thinking in relation to performance management, and for critically examining and challenging dominant narratives and discourses of performance management and teachers' work.

Teachers' Voices/Stories: Dilemmas in presenting the research data

Dr Sham Naidu

> [Stories are] the ultimate context within which knowledge is to be understood. (Rorty, 1979, p. 389)

Introduction

According to Kooy and de Freitas (2007), the creation of voices/stories for teachers become 'telling' to both the writer and the reader. Likewise, Geertz (1973, p. 436) speaks of the power of voices/stories, noting that [teachers], as 'symbolizing, conceptualizing, meaning-seeking' animals, are driven 'to make sense out of [their] experience, to give it form and order'. For Bruner (2002), the use of teachers' voices/stories is significant in that it serves as 'a construct for finding, rather than merely or more simplistically, solving problems. This "finding" suggests an active process, a way to make meaning through constructing narratives' (cited in Kooy & de Freitas, 2007, p. 868).

Kooy and de Freitas (2007, p. 868) argue that:

> Narrative is the very stuff of teaching. Teachers tell and hear stories in hallways and staff rooms. Even in such brief encounters, tellers set the stage, construct a plot, and provide characters and a real-life problem.

In a similar vein, Carter and Doyle (1996, p. 120) suggest that '"narrative" [is] the centre of teaching practice, the study of teachers, and the teacher education process'. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state that narratives have become legitimate and valuable research texts in the arena of teachers' work because they provide holistic accounts and acknowledge the interconnectedness of the intellectual, social, emotional, and moral aspects of teachers' lives. Furthermore, narratives provide a richness and comprehensiveness of detail well suited to the description of [work] experiences (Carter, 1990, 1993; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Kooy, 2006).

Whilst acknowledging the importance of teachers' voices, it is also important for researchers to be wary of the manner in which they place the voices/stories in their

social and political contexts, participate in the collaboration through which the voices/stories are generated and figure out the ways of presenting the voices/stories. This is easier said than done. Thus, within the context of performance management for teachers, it is important to pay attention to the following:

1. How does the researcher interpret the moral and political implications as well as the ideological positions that could be teased out of teachers' voices/stories on performance management?

2. Should the researcher grapple with the question of whether female teachers' voices/stories on performance management differ from those of their male counterparts?

3. Would it be fair to suggest that conversing with a small number of teachers was representative of the thousands of voices/stories involved in performance management?

4. How is the researcher going to 'honestly' represent teachers' voices/stories in a manner that would not silence or marginalise them but would reveal the 'reality' of performance management?

It is suggested that in order to better understand teachers' voices/stories on performance management and address the abovementioned concerns, the researcher has to adopt a mode of representation that 'would "come close" to apprehending and representing the richness of their [evaluation] experiences' (Cole & Knowles, 1995, p. 121). The researcher has to render teachers' lived experiences within a text. 'The experience of [teachers'] lives is, therefore, rendered textual by an author . . . the text becomes the agency that records and re-presents the voices of the [teacher] . . . the [teacher] becomes a person who is spoken for . . . [teachers] do not talk, the text talks for them' (Goodson, 1997, p. 112). Denzin (1993) argues the point that this arrangement can lead to a crisis in representation because the author has to comprehend teachers' words, thoughts, intentions and meanings. What this means is that the author now colonises the teacher's mind where the '[teacher] becomes an extension of the author's voice. The authority of [teachers] "original" voice is now subsumed within the larger text' (Goodson, 1997, p. 112). However, the counter argument that a researcher may make is that teachers' voices/stories are captivating and compelling and may serve as catalysts towards change and a better understanding of teaching and teachers' work. The researcher's role is important here because

researchers place teachers' voices/stories in their social and political contexts and participate in the collaboration through which these voices/stories are generated. In this instance, authors 'strive to distil the heart of the matter, knowing all the while that creating exact copies of what [they] have studied is . . . impossible' (Ely, Vinz, Anzul & Downing, 1997, p. 38). Also, it must be emphasised that:

> As researchers our stance, our angles of repose, do affect what we are interested in, the questions we ask, the foci of our study, and the methods of collection as well as the substance of analysis. And the meanings we make from our research project are filtered through our beliefs, attitudes, and previous experiences as well as through both the formal and informal theoretical positions we understand or believe in. As researchers we bring multiple stances to our studies—in degrees of conscious and subconscious awareness—as we choreograph, depict, and resculpt stories and meanings from what we are examining. (Ely, Vinz, Anzul & Downing, 1997, p. 38)

Following other scholars writing on teachers' voices/stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Beattie, 1991; Witherell & Noddings, 1991; Goodson, 1994, 1995, 1997; Jalongo, Isenberg & Gerbracht, 1995; Thomas, 1995), it is suggested that the use of narrative and narrative inquiry is the heart of the researching process. Through the use of narratives and narrative inquiry, researchers can possibly address all of the previously mentioned concerns and present teachers' voices/stories in a multi-dimensional telling. Thus, adopting this particular mode of representation will influence what and how the researcher will present the data collated. Another motivating factor is to challenge readers to examine their own meanings and voices in relation to what teachers are saying about performance management. On a personal note, the researcher's writings of teachers' voices/stories forced him to recall and reflect upon his own experiences of evaluation thereby relocating himself in the research process. Furthermore, the researcher related to Goodson (1997, p. 113) who stated that 'the argument for listening to teachers is therefore a substantial and long overdue one—narratives, stories . . . have all contributed to a growing movement to provide opportunities for teacher representations'.

The narrative and narrative inquiry in ethnographic writing
In this section of the article, the writer [researcher] will explain what is meant by narrative and narrative inquiry, discuss the literature pertaining to meaning, and outline relationships among knowledge, power and narrative.

Explaining narrative and narrative inquiry

Cole and Knowles (1995, p. 122) refer to Beattie (1991) and offer this definition: 'Narrative [can] be used to illuminate the ways in which we can understand ourselves as teachers, appraise ourselves and our experiences and evoke and bring to life the meaning of those experiences'. Furthermore they maintain that:

> Through telling, writing, reading, and listening to life stories—one's own and other's—those engaged in [the work of teaching] can penetrate cultural barriers, discover the power of the self and the integrity of the other, and deepen their understanding of their perspective histories and possibilities. (p. 122)

Thus, narratives can be viewed as both a process and a product—as argued by Polkinghorne (1988) and Richardson (1990). In advancing this view, Polkinghorne highlights three key features of the narrative: ascribing meaning to temporal experience and personal actions; synthesising everyday actions and events into episodic units; and structuring past events and planning future events (cited in Jalongo, Isenberg & Gerbracht, 1995, p. 4). For Richardson (1990, p. 21), 'narrative is both a mode of reasoning and a mode of representation', through which individuals empower to reform or transform themselves or their communities. In other words, narratives can be considered as tools for constructing one's self. While telling our own stories, we reassess our own lives, and while listening to others tell their stories, we achieve professional growth and development.

However, regardless of the form it takes and the effect it has, narrative provides a picture of the way people construct their reality through their expression of their ideas, feelings, images and aspirations. It is a mediating form through which people represent the experiences of their lives, explore the meaning of those experiences and come to some understanding of their experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Witherell & Noddings, 1991).

Determining meaning through narrative and narrative inquiry

The main claim for using narrative inquiry is that people are storytelling organisms who lead storied lives and tell stories or narratives of their lives. Narrative inquiry produces a storied account of ideas of human encounters, assumptions about people's relationships with each other, and human interpretation of the standards a society imposes on the way in which people live. In other words, narrative inquiry is a tool of

social studies used by the researcher to know and make sense of the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Bruner, 1996). Further, narrative inquiry attempts to record the culture of a group as it is lived and spoken.

Narrative has both a scientific and a political use. It is scientific as a research method when used to explore teachers' interior lives and identify those forces that shape their identity (Graham, 1984). In doing so, it attempts to overcome the silence of those who have previously been inarticulate (Greene, 1991). For the purposes of this article, the writer makes use of narrative inquiry as an appropriate open-ended method of exploring and understanding the lived experiences and their meanings of teachers who have been subjected to evaluation. Often, what is absent from a teacher's voice/story is the interpretation of his/her own experiences expressing his/her own perspective on life. Accordingly, narrative or storytelling becomes political when used as a means of challenging the silences of teachers, and affirming and validating their experiences.

For example, in this article, the narrative described is personal experience narrative (Denzin, 1989). Personal experience narratives are based on teachers' experiences that may not always position the teacher at the centre of the story but may provide an interpretation of how he/she makes sense of an issue like performance management. The way in which the teacher sees this form of evaluation represents his/her culture of work. For Stewart (1996), this refers to:

> a texted interpretive space [that] contains all the dismembering and remembering of things, people's eccentricities amassed over the years, the automatic scanning for signs, the continuous imagining of the 'real' through the mediation of stories of things that happen. (pp. 26–27)

The stories of the culture of work represent 'a confabulation of social and discursive practices' (Stewart, 1996, p. 27) as witnessed by the teacher who is caught in the midst of his/her culture of work in which he/she impacts on and is impacted by it. Because stories are ongoing comments that people tell to help them understand their way of life, it follows that the culture of work is constantly changing. However, by remembering things and giving them forms, stories become powerful tools of narrative, especially stories by those who occupy marginalised spaces in society (Stewart, 1996, p. 3).

It must be emphasised that voices/stories need not be coherent or linear accounts as they are often about life experiences that the narrator considers critical life events. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) regard this process as multi-levelled as the informant retells the stories of the past, relates stories of the present, imagines the future and restories the past, present and future, while gaining insight and understanding from their storytelling. This is the spatio-temporal aspect to storytelling that reflects the way in which the narrator can only refer to the past from the vantage point of the present and in so doing give some meaning to the past (Ricoeur, 1984; Steedman, 1986). Hence, the narrator is able to establish some casual connection between events as they themselves become the story they tell in the struggle to give shape and meaning to the lives they lead (Denzin, 1989).

Although the voices/stories, which can be represented in the form of vignettes, are not based on the lines of narrative, having a beginning, middle and an end, they are voices/stories that always have more to say. According to Ricoeur (1981), this is because stories are re-descriptions of a world that is endlessly changing and capable of being redescribed. In the struggle to make meaning of their lives, the experiences that the narrator selects both to 'unforged' (Stewart, 1996, p. 71) and to story, represents a world that can only be known in relation to those experiences that are meaningful or not meaningful to the particular teacher.

Likewise, the empowering effect of narrative occurs when it is validated as a means for teachers to explore and comprehend their experiences and acknowledge the pivotal role they play in authoring and re-authoring their own lives (Greene, 1991). To help the informant develop a sense of voice it is necessary to first believe that what they are saying is the truth. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) observe that this does not mean that the researcher is silenced. In the case of teachers it means they are asked to relate their voices/stories of evaluation and discuss how these experiences have constructed them. It entails the researcher listening to the teacher's voice/story to acknowledge the authority and validity of the voice/story.

The technique of narrative also seems appropriate for some research projects because it takes on an empowering and emancipatory role that seeks to provide teachers with a voice and to assist them to author their stories. For example, if a the researcher makes use of a vignette of stories with teachers, it can be viewed as a way of helping them

explore their lives and understand their lives as teachers who are subject to bureaucratic modes of accountability. Furthermore, the use of voices/stories assists teachers to acknowledge the strategies and learning they have acquired, not only meeting the challenges of evaluation, but also in coping with a society that has disenfranchised them as competent teachers. Voices/stories then can be used as a means of provoking teachers to new ways of thinking so they can discover and affirm the knowledge they have acquired regarding the effect that evaluation has in relation to teacher competency.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggest that a good narrative is one written according to a sense of the overall whole story that has been told and provides a plausible account of life of which a reader can make sense. That is, rather than judging narratives according to their factuality, they are best judged according to their contextualisation, coherence and pragmatism.

The power of a story-based approach to teacher evaluation

The arguments promoting the power and the place of teachers' stories and storytelling in schools are well established in the literature (Lortie, 1975; Witherall & Noddings, 1991; Goodson, 1992; Carter, 1993; Connelly & Clandinin, 1994). A general theme emanating from this literature is that teachers store their life experiences, attitudes, values and beliefs in the form of stories, not in detached lists of facts and figures. It is for this reason that Sarbrin (1986, p. 8) proposes that '[teachers] think, perceive, imagine and make moral choices according to narrative structure'. Witherell and Noddings (1991) maintain that stories embody teachers' understandings about work on both an organisational and an individual basis.

The argument is that schools, like all social structures, are made up of the lives and experiences of teachers and students who comprise them and that these are most accurately communicated through stories (Quong & Walker, 1999). The latter are supported by Danzig (1996), who advocates that: 'Issues related to school culture, personal relations, values and beliefs, and rituals and myths, take on more meaning as they are presented in stories of practice' (p. 129). Thus, stories are true reflections of peoples' beliefs about the organisations within which they work, in this instance, schools.

According to Clandinin and Connelly (1992), stories hoard knowledge and experience; by recalling and retelling stories, personal constructs are communicated, developed and refined. This process of development and refinement, in turn, influences the shape of our personal life story. Further, the process of storying and re-storying is a fundamental method of personal and social growth because it helps (teachers) to construct meaning and make sense of new life experiences. These in turn influence teachers' beliefs of the future. Thus, stories provide insights into a teacher's intuition and the factors that influence his/her beliefs about a certain role, an organisation or an event. As such, McCollum (1992) suggests that organisational stories can help to establish and identify, and create and maintain, interpersonal relationships.

While reviewing the organisational stories and storytelling literature through the guises of social constructivism, interpretive organisational symbolism and critical theory, Boyce (1996) proposes seven reasons why shared storytelling is important in (schools) and, by implication, the potential role it plays in organisational and attitudinal change:

- Firstly, telling stories allows teachers to express experience.
- Secondly, storytelling can confirm the shared experiences and meaning of teachers and groups within an organisation.
- Thirdly and fourthly, stories are also devices for orienting and socialising teachers, and, importantly, for altering or amending organisational reality.
- The fifth reason is that telling stories allows organisational purpose to be developed, sharpened and reviewed.
- The sixth reason holds that storytelling can compare teachers for planning and decision-making in line with shared purpose.
- Finally, storytelling can play a major role in co-creating vision and strategy (pp. 5–26).

In a similar vein, Greene (1991) argues that storytelling can influence the understandings of both teller and listener in an organisation, and that telling stories establishes a commonality of experience which allows attitudes to be communicated and shared. In research exploring the place of narrative in school reform, Clandinin and Connelly (1998) provide a practical example of how stories can spread and lead

to change. After describing how teacher stories influenced the reform process in one school, they concluded thus:

> These stories are rooted temporally as individual stories shift and change in response to changing events and circumstances. Changes in the story of school ripple through the school and influence the whole web of stories. Others, such as parents, also influence, and are influenced by, the shifting story of the school. (p. 162)

Building on the ideas of writers such as Greene (1991), McCollum (1992), Boyce (1996), and Clandinin and Connelly (1998), it could be argued that stories can not only help to establish identity, create and maintain interpersonal relationships, but can also be used as vehicles for change. Given that stories appear to form an integral component of organisational culture, the story-based approach holds that effective researchers are good listeners who actively encourage storytelling, and retelling, in order to bring about change.

Thus, in this article the writer advocates what he terms 'specific techniques' to allow readers to experience the vivid life of the teachers and not to view them only from a distant theoretical perspective. The writer now describes these specific techniques that can be employed to describe the conflicts and battles confronted by teachers in the turmoil of performance management.

Specific techniques of representation: Making meaning through vignettes

Vignettes 'are narrative investigations that carry within them an interpretation of the person, experience, or situation that the writer describes' (Ely, Vinz, Anzul & Downing, 1997, p. 70). In other words, vignettes are short stories—ranging from a single line to a few paragraphs—that are written to reflect, in a less complex way, real-life problems of education and equity. Although short, vignettes are not too short to present an issue or issues. They are also detailed, but not so detailed that the underlying issue gets lost. Furthermore, a vignette presents an issue, such as the issue of performance management, in a context with which individuals identify. The main purpose of a vignette is to serve as a springboard for discussion on the part of the author and the reader (Campbell, 2002, p. 1).

Ely, Vinz, Anzul and Downing (1997) highlight some of the key features of vignettes by stating:

- Vignettes are compact sketches that can be used to introduce characters, foreshadow events and analyses to come, highlight particular findings, or summarise a particular theme or issue in analysis and interpretation.

- Vignettes are composites that encapsulate what the researcher finds through the fieldwork.

- Vignettes demand attention and represent a growing sense of understanding about the meaning of the research work.

- Vignettes, used as an interpretive tool, help the researcher tap into what you are learning as well as help to identify gaps, silences, and contradictions you might address.

- Vignettes offer an invitation for the reader to step into the spaces of vicarious experience, to assume a position in the world of the research—to live the lived experience along with the researcher. (pp. 70–72)

In this article, the writer advocates the use of vignettes because it allows experiences in context to be explored; to clarify teachers' judgements of performance management; and to provide a less threatening way of exploring sensitive issues in the performance management policy. In relation to narrative and narrative inquiry, vignettes help to give voice to the research participants, act as a 'figurative device' by using part of the discussion 'to represent the whole idea' and to 'reveal implicitly the significance of the story told' (Ely, Vinz, Anzul & Downing, 1997, p. 72).

Conclusion

Navarro (1992, p. 1) maintains that 'welcoming the voices of teachers beyond their classroom doors is an essential step toward creating positive enduring change in education'. However, she argues that very little thought has been given to the nature of teachers' stories; the dilemmas that might arise when their voices are considered in the context of educational reform; 'and whether, if by bringing teachers' voices into the educational hierarchy, the education of children will improve' (p. 2). Thus, within this context, it is argued that the manner in which researchers represent the voices of teachers is of the utmost importance.

Thus, in order for teachers' stories to make a meaningful contribution to the educational reform movement, researchers must be *au fait* with some of the perspectives on 'voice', namely: voice as personal/private development; voice as

representative action; and voice as a collectively critical (Navarro, 1992, p. 3). To elaborate:

- Voice as personal/private development

In their study on ways of knowing among women, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986, p. 18), found that women used voice as a metaphor to 'depict intellectual and ethical development; and that the development of a sense of voice, mind, and self (are) intricately intertwined' (cited in Navarro, 1992, p. 3). These writers also concluded that knowing one's voice was synonymous with determining and claiming the power of one's own mind resulting in women overcoming their own silence. Thus, voice in this context is personal.

A similar study by Gilligan (1982), on women's moral development, revealed that 'voice' referred to the manner in which women spoke about their life, the language they used and the connections they made. In this context, 'voice' is a 'vehicle to think about, learn, and describe how different [women] come to think about their moral world' (Navarro, 1992, p. 4)—an empowering personal awakening.

According to Navarro (1992, p. 4), the above two examples use voice as a metaphor to describe personal development. She adds that:

> In an educational setting this voice metaphor could be used to describe the developmental process of teachers becoming empowered, autonomous, efficacious, and discovering a sense of their own agency. It represents the potential for action, the potential to participate in the transformation of self, teaching, and schooling.

- Voice as representative action

Navarro (1992, pp. 4-5) states that 'voice as representative action is having a say in a public process that may or may not lead to change'. She maintains that in democratic societies, 'voice is the process through which citizens can take political action by attempting to influence those who have power'. In other words, voice is an effective tool where individuals [teachers] can register agreement or opposition with current educational policies. Within this context, Navarro (1992, p. 5) states that:

> In an educational setting using voice in this way would indicate that teachers would be welcome to have dialogue, write letters, or otherwise express their views, however, the basic hierarchical bureaucratic structure of decision making would remain the unchanged. Members of the

educational community not traditionally part of the bureaucratic elite would not ordinarily be included in the actual decision- making process.

- Voice as collective critically political

Navarro (1992, p. 5), states that 'as collectively political, "voice" is the development of a critical individual voice that makes possible a collective critical voice, which makes structural transformation possible'. She elaborates by stating that 'as collectively critical, becoming literate is the vehicle for gaining a voice, which is the vehicle for transforming society … in collectively critical voice, social structures that systematically prohibit certain groups of people from fully participating in the system are recognized' (1992, p. 5).

Citing Gitlin (1990, p. 460), Navarro (1992, p. 5), maintains that teachers are an 'oppressed group', 'disenfranchised' and have limited opportunities of 'acquiring voice' in an educational setting. It is for this reason that she advocates 'teachers attaining the right to use their own stories "to enter into policy debates and challenge the authority of others …. such as state policy makers—to tell the educational story'.

In conclusion, it must be stated that researchers should present teachers' voices/stories in 'a real reform context where issues from the broader reform agenda are played out in the multilayered context the envelopes' (Navarro, 1992, p. 5) teachers' lives.

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