CHAPTER 2

IMAGINING A METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides tools to equip the reader with a means of understanding the methods employed in this book. It also offers an important means of recognising my epistemological and ontological positioning. Here social and educational research is acknowledged as a political activity informed by the personal values, beliefs and experiences, introduced in Chapter 1.

Narrative, as social research, typifies many of the features of qualitative enquiry outlined by Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2000) who describe it as 'naturalistic', 'interpretive' and 'subjective', a set of descriptors that will be explored in this chapter. Interpretive approaches recognise participants as active in the ways in which they contribute to constructing their worlds, and an understanding of their context and perspective is prioritised, with the individual or particular story as a central element.

Denzin and Lincoln's (2005) notion of qualitative research as a 'democratic project' with a social purpose is recognised as a clear driver (see also Lincoln and Denzin, 2005), and narrative approaches, in prioritising the particular and individual, are discussed as particularly well placed as an emancipatory method. Eisner (2003:53) makes a convincing case for the relationship between interpretative inquiry and the arts for a shared capacity for 'nuance, particularity, emotion and perceptual fresh-ness' all of which are typified by qualitative research. The role of the imagination in analysis reinforces interpretive inquiry as an essentially 'artistic' and creative act. However, the justification for narrative as a methodological choice here relates to the role of 'plot' and 'story' as a means of making sense of the world.

The development of a narrative approach is informed by the critical tradition (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005:304) concerned as it is with cultural criticism, inclu-ding: the mediation of social and historical power relations; the connection between facts and values; a recognition that particular groups in society are privileged over others; and a recognition that language is central to the development of subjectivity. Of principal importance in making connections with the principles of critical theory is a concern that research practices are implicated in the reproduction of social systems and therefore of forms of oppression. Research from this critical standpoint is iden-tified as a first stage in political action in supporting and developing an understanding of complex power relationships of people in society, and it is the processes as well as the subject of the research that is significant. Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) explain:

> Research in the critical tradition takes the form of self-conscious criticism – self-conscious in the sense that researchers try to become aware of the ideo-logical imperatives and epistemological presuppositions that inform their research as well as their own subjective, intersubjective and normative reference claims. (p. 305)

The positioning and recognition of 'the self' as researcher is therefore a significant aspect in determining whose stories are told (Riessman, 1993) and which technologies are at work in interpreting, representing and therefore potentially creating 'the other'. Von Foerster (2004:6) argues that researchers, as observers, can only 'look *into* themselves' and describe their own world view. Gender, class, ethnicity, age and profession therefore become significant in the power relationships evident between researcher and participants.

A central concern in critical approaches is with 'technical rationality' (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005:308) associated with experimental research and defined by hegemonic methods that critical theorists argue may result in undermining the humanistic aims for research. The discussion of Foucault's work, further developed in Chapter 3, is worth drawing on here for the ways in which power and hegemonic practices are discussed in respect of normalisation, individualisation and dominant forms of representation where 'technical rationality' can be viewed as machinery that draws power from the forms by which knowledge and the subject are created.

This chapter provides a discussion of the role that interpretive research has in developing an understanding of particular contexts that can speak of the broader social circumstance. I will therefore include an examination of some significant characteristics of this aspect of qualitative research and the appropriateness of this approach from an ethical perspective. The role of the researcher in inevitably constructing and representing *their* observations of the world will be acknowledged in my justification of this approach.

Narrative, as a means of exploring individual experience has the potential for making the individual visible. A significant consideration in my choice of methodology has been the need to prioritise the experiences of those who may have previously been recorded, considered or discussed via official medical/educational discourse. This is therefore an attempt to give precedence to the voices of those whose experiences might previously have been considered to be 'naïve' or 'subjugated' within particular forms of knowledge (Foucault, 1980:82). Central to this project is an exploration of the multiplicity of experience rather than a pursuit of specific and definitive 'truths'. This exploration of methodology concerns finding an appropriate form to 'capture' this multiplicity without drawing up absolute boundaries. In considering narratives or the stories of participants, the problematic nature of a research methodology with story, and by implication 'fiction', at its centre will be explored as a means of providing a justification for prioritising the study of experience as a central component of the research.

SIGNIFICANT FEATURES OF NARRATIVE

My aim, in interviewing participants about their experiences of drawing from observation, was to gain an understanding of their recollections of this aspect of their experience of art education. Drawings, as artefacts for analyses, are not the main point for consideration in this book. I was particularly interested in the ways participants spoke of their situated experience, *their* recollections of events or incidents. From the outset I was compelled by the ways in which these memories were shaped, plotted and explained by the participants. A significant aspect of this

analysis of the narratives presented in this book centres on 'a breach between ideal and real, self and society' (Riessman, 1993:3) or, as Bruner (1990) suggested, 'breach and exception' and this provides a basic structure for a reading of the narrative case studies, a descriptor that will be defined later in this chapter.

Bruner (1990:43) describes the sequencing of events as a significant property of narrative where a story relates to a sequence of actions and experiences over time. He suggests that narrative 'specializes in the forging of links between the exceptional and the ordinary as an 'interpretive procedure' for explaining departures from the norm in a meaningful way (p. 46). He suggests that when people are asked to describe a remarkable event they automatically attempt to give reasons in order to give it meaning describing this as a 'unique way of managing departures from the canonical'. This is not only part of a 'natural' drive he claims, but an important aspect of human development that enables us to cope with the world around us:

> Children, I think are predisposed naturally and by circumstance to start their narrative careers in that spirit…Without those skills we could never endure the conflicts and contradictions that social life generates. We would become unfit for the life of culture. (Bruner, 1990:46)

Narrative is made up of the story (fabula), the typical or in this case 'ideal' experience and the plot (sjuzet) which is the 'twist in the tale' resulting in the breach from the ideal (Riessman, 1993:30). The plot unifies potentially disparate elements in order for sense to be made:

> the plot has the power to make a single story out of the multiple incidents or, if you like, of transforming the manifold happenings into a story; in this connection an event is more than a mere occurrence, something that just happens: it is that which contributes to the progress of the story as much as it contributes to its beginning and its end. (Ricoeur, 1987:426)

Here I have attempted to reflect this narrative feature by creating a hypothesis based on the 'dyspraxic ideal' and drawing from observation as an 'ideal' in art education. The personal narratives of the four participants offer plot lines through which breach and exception from these ideals can be identified. The distance between the real and the ideal identified through these breaches creates a space for interpretation and meaning making.

A CONTESTED METHODOLOGY

The Script:

> Somewhere in a small grey meeting room…
> (There is a round table, a flip chart and a grey metal bin.
> Four people sit around the table each with a note pad and pen.)
> BF – So…I thought it'd be really useful if this team could offer some help with the tender regarding the methodology section of the bid.
> (There is a pause)
> I thought at this first meeting we could talk about the types of research… the experience we have?

(pause)
CP – Well my research is based on a narrative approach, sharing stories of experience…
BF – they won't be interested in that…
CP – it might not be appropriate for this large scale project?
BF – No
CP – No?
BF – No (pause)
CP – No…except that…
BF – No…Mmmm (pause)… So what else have we got?

One of my own brief stories in the script above exemplifies this concept of breach and exception in order to introduce some of the problematic dimensions of narrative research. In considering a tender for a research project for a government agency the lead proposal writer, convening an advisory group, asked about our research experience. I outlined recent work I had undertaken employing narrative analysis. For this project it may or may not have been appropriate yet I was concerned that it had been dismissed as a way of knowing and I wondered how much knowledge that person had about the validity and rationale for employing a narrative approach. I also considered that maybe that particular government body, the Training and Development Agency (TDA) should be interested in the narratives of those who were experiencing particular changes in education policy. I lacked the assertiveness to suggest that the impact of other forms of knowing might in fact be diminished without these narratives of personal experience. Here there was a breach at the point where my own beliefs about and experiences of research were contested and dismissed in a claim for 'valid' knowledge by a senior member of staff interpreting the needs of a government body.

Choice of methodology is aligned to the types of research questions we pose yet these choices (and questions) emerge from the way we make sense of the world, our world view, as well as our concepts of what constitutes knowledge. 'Who' is making sense of the world and 'how' they are doing this has significance, particularly where research is publicly funded and therefore politically controlled. In the development of current educational initiatives there is evidence of a growing interest in the development of quantitative approaches to support government initiatives (Stronach, Frankham and Stark, 2007). Dyson (1998:2) outlines a perception of research in the field of 'special' education as relating to description, analysis and testing through scientific investigation by a process he describes as 'rule-bound, publicly testable and which therefore give access to some final or provisional truth'. This emphasis on the authority of the *real* and *publicly testable,* he suggests, results in both research processes and researcher becoming dangerously invisible as a result of unquestioned authority, yet such claims to real testable knowledge are perceived as embodying scientific rigour, validity and claims to truth.

This tension between authorised knowledge forms sits within a wider discussion of the relevance and justification for exploratory methods that contest the 'real' and the ways in which representations can be claimed as 'the truth'. Cannella and Lincoln (2004:7) discuss controversies regarding 'governmental regimes of truth' in the US

which both create and are created by the adherence to particular research practices suggesting that a new period of conservatism in research is attributable to a backlash against newer methods. They refer to Giddens' acknowledgement of the conservative nature of institutions as 'bastions of high modernism' unwilling to acknowledge anything other than a 'gold standard' of research defined by large randomized samples and based on clinical research models. They suggest that the decentering of research and the move towards the use of postmodernism, poststructuralism, critical theory, feminist theory , critical race theory, ethnic studies theories and queer theory as critiques of modernism and traditional approaches have resulted in a backlash against such diverse forms. They also suggest that 'new regimes of truth' are being established that produce and are produced by 'methodological fundamentalism' (p. 7) based on particular concepts of scientific knowledge.

Although legitimised by governmental and academic discourses that define research credibility, there are ethical issues that emerge from such dominant modes of inquiry. 'Experimental research' is defined by a clinical approach often identified as positivistic and quantitative. The apparent invisibility of the researcher in these approaches produces a privileged and legitimised space for the definition and redefinition of 'others'. However, it is also important to recognise that 'emancipatory research' based on interpretive and ethnographic studies can also privilege the researcher and contribute to the reinforcement of social types (Dyson, 1998). Slee and Graham (2008) and Stronach, Frankham and Stark (2007) explore the ways in which qualitative research can actively construct concepts of inclusion and exclusion by the reinforcement of hegemonic ways of knowing and being. Slee and Allan (2001:177) suggest such research can reinforce class, race and gender stratifications in society, for example, so emphasising the concept of exclusion as 'structural and cultural' (see also Clough and Barton, 1998). What appears to be significant is the appropriateness of methodological choice but that this should be judged in relation to a set of considerations broader than sample size, validity and claims to objectivity. Aligning research methodology with the purpose of the enquiry equates with the ontological and epistemic positioning of the research and researcher, and the acknowledgement of research as a highly political and potentially abusive activity is essential.

My aim here is not to represent methodological choice as an oppositional binary, but rather to offer an explanation of the reasons for my approach to this research and the purposes for employing narrative methodology. The narrative turn as a particularly flexible form of qualitative enquiry is contested in discussions around 'what counts' as research yet may be better placed than 'experimental studies' equated with 'the gold standard' particularly for exploring complex social settings. Lincoln and Cannella (2004) argue:

> Although experimental studies can and do produce some knowledge worth having , in some kinds of contexts, such studies are singularly ill suited to examining the complex and dynamic contexts of public education in its many forms, sites and variations, especially considering the farrago of subtle social difference …Indeed, multiple kinds of knowledge, produced by multiple epistemologies and methodologies are not only worth having but also demanded if policy, legislation, and practice are to be sensitive to social needs. (p. 7)

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The approaches that are taken to knowledge production through enquiry are subject to regulation that reinforces the validity of certain types of enquiry over others. Within this categorisation of research, narrative enquiry may be contested in terms of validity and rigour on the grounds of sufficiency of sample size, corroboration or triangulation of evidence and claims for 'scientific objectivity' (for example). However, such approaches, emerging out of the 'crises of representation' (Denzin, 1994), acknowledge the confusion in delineating between writer, text and subject matter (Clough, 2002) and aim to find a response that acknowledges particularity within contested truths. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe qualitative research as a situated activity that 'locates the observer in the world'. As such it has the potential to realise the democratic act in contesting traditional roles of the researcher as expert and participants as those subject to examination.

EXPERIENCE, FACT, FALSEHOOD AND FICTION

Employing a narrative approach is problematic largely since it draws on experience as a contested form of knowledge (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994). Although it can be argued that 'making sense' of experience via story is a 'natural' and/or cultural activity this does not necessarily provide a sufficient justification for employing it as a research approach. It does however connect it strongly with an interpretive paradigm where meanings are recognised as less firmly fixed by canonical frames of reference. If the interpretation of experience does not form a convincing landscape for research then stories of such experience might be considered to have a degree of fragility as sets of data, yet Riessman (1993) suggests that it is the prominence that narrative gives to human agency and imagination, and the specific and personal dimension that gives it value in research.

Bruner (1986:13) reduces this discussion to the binary of the head and the heart: he describes the paradigmatic mode (as the logico-scientific defined by empirical data, logic, maths and science) and the narrative mode (where there is human or human-like intention and a concern for the human condition). Bruner suggests that 'there is a heartlessness to logic' which offers conclusive or inconclusive conclusions, and a greater concern for human agency in narrative where 'stories reach sad or comic or absurd denouements'. In his argument Bruner suggests that there is strength in personal experience where the unremarkable can become 'epiphanies of the ordinary'. Ulysses (Joyce, 2000) can be claimed as an example of the richness of mundane human experience, yet this connection between qualitative research, experience and narrative and its relationships with the arts further distances it from traditional concepts of research validity.

We might be convinced by arguments that attempt to persuade us of the value of experience as the basis for research (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994; Eisner, 2003) but still remain doubtful that an individual could be called upon to create a reliable story. Reflecting on the 'meeting room' incident, I was conscious that I had used the word 'narrative' possibly to add credibility to my research. Although narrative is established as a research approach (Riessman, 1993; Hatch and Wisnieski, 1995; Chase, 2005), the researcher seems destined to spend time justifying their methodological

choice largely because of the space between traditional concepts of positivistic research based on knowing 'fact' (a word, ironically, derived from facere or factus 'to make') and the use of narrative forms as a means of interpreting experience. The suggestion of the use of 'story' as a means of inquiry may have felt 'flaky' and insubstantial yet the problem of 'research, truth and reality' offers a useful point for exploring narrative as a methodology.

Polkinghorne (1995) is reluctant to use the word 'story' with the implications it has of 'falsehood and misrepresentation'. In his discussion of this dilemma, he considers the tradition of academic research as rooted in logic through formal academic discourse. Bruner (1990) however, suggests that we use the same narrative form for fact and fiction indicating that narrative can be real or imaginary 'without loss of its power as a story'. Clough (2002) embraces this in writing powerful narratives to explore education and exclusion, creating texts fabricated from his own experiences and the stories of others that blur the distinctions between fact and fiction.

Traditionally, story, located within local oral traditions, could never be perceived as 'true knowledge' but as an emotional and possibly fictional response that suggests that stories can lack credibility. However, Beverley (2005) discusses 'testimonio' as politicised oral story telling from a feminist perspective where the personal as political has significance. Narratives, he suggests, refer to an oral tradition whose authority has been superseded in a text based society. This connection with the oral tradition of storytelling and the legitimacy of text is significant in a consideration of 'truth' and validity of forms of knowledge.

Within the qualitative ethnographic tradition, the 'voice' of participants has a significant role in representation, and it seems that, although the oral tradition has a contested lineage as 'research knowledge', it can be conveniently drawn on to support claims for authenticity. However, in providing text based representations of orality Beverley describes a 'reality effect.' (p. 549) He describes conversational markers in the narrative which suggest that the text represents the spoken voice which 'invokes the complicity of the reader' by making conversation evident. The reader is drawn in by a 'real' voice and the 'authority of the personal experience'. However, all research deals with different types of 'reality effect'. Truth in stories, as with ethnographic writing or case studies (for example), can only be partial since they represent only a partial telling (Bolton, 2006). It is important to acknowledge here that employing a narrative approach does not equate to making a greater claim to 'truth' or 'reality' but that in acknowledging the fragility of the demarcation between fact and fiction, one can employ an approach well suited to research where experience is the central concern and identity and representation are acknowledged as contingent, flexible and shifting.

THE 'NATURAL DRIVE' TO NARRATE

The main focus of this enquiry was to attempt to gain an understanding of participants' experiences of drawing from observation, and my early encounters with open interviews led me to become increasingly interested in the way in which events are remembered and recounted in narrative form. There is a 'natural' drive to story experience well documented by Bruner (1990), Ricoeur (1991) and Polkinghorne (1995)

for whom story is acknowledged as the most appropriate form for understanding human experience. Bruner (1990) argues that without the ability to organise experience by framing or schematising, constructing and segmenting occurrences, we would have what he describes as 'a murk of chaotic experience', and narrative appears well placed as a research approach that negotiates meaning making in this way. The focus on narrative research as a 'natural' activity, however, is misleading since any research approach creates artificial situations for estrangement in order to examine people or particular phenomena. Similarly the seemingly 'natural' occurrences of narrative are moulded and shaped as they 'are born again in an alien tongue' (Riessman, 1993:14), being analysed, segmented and written again by the researcher.

Narrative exists as a form of meaning-making outside the research context. Wood (1991) discusses its use as a means of untangling a 'multiplication of aporias'. Here the role of narrative is explained as an active process through which we seek to make sense of the world around us and the experiences we have. Referring to Ricoeur's description of 'emplotment', Wood stresses the need to make one coherent story out of multiple incidents. This moves beyond a discussion of the role of language as a tool for thought, towards the ways in which events are related and connected and therefore made sense of within a broader context or in relation to other stories. The ways in which we use language as a means of constructing particular 'truths' about events is also significant and although narrative may be promoted as a means for individual meaning-making, Ylijoki (2001) explores the social dimension to this construction of meaning. The ways that individuals situate themselves, and are situated by others, are also significant particularly in respect of the research act. Ylijoki suggests a continuous interplay between the public and cultural in the narrative construction of life. Personal stories emerge out of social contexts and shared meaning-making, and to make claims to personalised meanings may therefore be inappropriate and undesirable since the socially situated nature of narratives shift them beyond the local.

In addition to notions of 'naturally' emerging data, Denzin (1998) argues that the researcher creates narratives in the way in which they interpret events or texts. In an earlier work, Denzin (1994) discusses the central role of interpretation in the research process, maintaining that events cannot speak for themselves and suggesting that story has a central role for both participants and the researcher who are both inextricably written into the work. I am conscious of my role in recreating stories in order to make sense of my own experiences of the research process, attempting to understand a mass of interrelated strands and trying to create a whole from so many parts.

RELIABILITY IN NARRATIVE RESEARCH

A story of an experience is not the same as the experience, yet it may be argued that there must always be some distance between what is happening in 'real' time and our recollection of it. Riessman acknowledges this space as one of interpretation:

> Investigators do not have direct access to another's experience. We deal with ambiguous representations of it – talk, text, interaction, and interpretation. (Riessman, 1993:8)

Ricoeur (1991:20) explores the notion that 'stories are recounted and not lived; life is lived and not recounted'. The interpretive space between may suggest some un-reliability or even a lack of truth to the 'reality' of an experience, yet this space in narrative analysis creates room for 'meaning making'. Bruner (1990:16) reflects on this discrepancy between what someone says and what they do, and the need to give as much credence to what people *say* they do as what they actually do. The reasoning for an action after an event, what people *say* becomes as significant as the *truth* of what has made them behave in a particular way.

The dilemma of the reliable story-teller is illustrated here in my own early experiences at a first meeting with one of the participants, Matthew. I was conscious that there was an element of performance to some of the stories being recounted. Both his parents were present at this first meeting and initiating a dialogue relied on the ability to negotiate conversations as a four way rather than a two way process. The stories recounted were obviously for me as 'the audience' and researcher, but Matthew was also accounting for the presence of his parents. This had particular relevance when telling stories related to his school experience. Similarly there were times when Matthew's parents recounted a story and Matthew became the audience. His parents' presence inevitably created a different type of narrative 'truth' than may have existed had I spoken to him alone.

Some elements of school experience were given more dramatic emphasis than others and I thought that these tales had a sense of having been told before. They had a mythical quality to them. Matthew's mum mentioned an incident, offering an introduction to Matthew in order that he could recount what happened: "Tell Claire about the time when…". Bruner (1990) discusses his own experiences of a family recounting and developing their shared stories. It could be argued that all families have these and their shared nature do not necessarily contribute to or detract from their reliability. Here a story can operate as a myth or 'masked discourse' where the real meaning of the story is hidden (Kearney, 1991). The narrative as both masked discourse and shifting story might appear unreliable and implausible yet within the interpretative paradigm such stories can have multilayered readings with no fixed set of truths to prove. What we say we do and why we have done it may or may not be the 'truth' in terms of the 'real-time' event as it occurred yet it is in no way less significant.

A function of narrative is to explain breach and exception, introduced earlier, and the manner in which we negotiate our place in our culture by departures from what is considered to be the norm (Bruner, 1990). In terms of this reflective quality and the sense we make in retrospect, it is understandable that we might become removed from the event. To illustrate, Matthew was asked to cut a picture out of a magazine and the teacher emphasised it had to be cut out neatly not torn. He has difficulty using the scissors and the cutting was jagged and ripped. The teacher gave him a detention because she thought he had just ripped the picture out care-lessly and was unsympathetic to the reasons he gave. His mum contacted the school to complain and as a result Matthew did not do the detention. Referring to 'scruffy cutting', Matthew's story seems to have the right shape as an exploration of 'breach and exception'. Involvement in an activity was introduced, there was a twist and

a sense of injustice in the situation and it was ultimately resolved with mum as the hero. Matthew had been treated unfairly and the teacher had misunderstood the reasons why that activity had created difficulties for him. As a masked discourse, this story could be an example of an exploration of such a breach and could be described as a representation of the complex school-mum-Matthew, relationship. The reliability of it as a true account on a specific time and date starts to become irrelevant. Ricoeur's description of narrative as mimetic, in the re-presentation of an act in time, explores the space between event recollection and re-telling. The narrative is a mediated representation that has been interpreted and reinterpreted for a range of different purposes.

> **Drawing on mimetic practices -** Matthew described drawing form direct observation. He looked up at some objects and inadvertently moved his pencil. He looked back down at his drawing and attempted to 'make it up'. He described trying to 'trick the teacher' by making it up by not looking at the objects that were meant to be drawn. The teacher, looking at what he had done, asked him to start again.

There may be parallels here with the concepts of truth in representing a narrative. The notion of truth related to recording from direct observation relates to the honesty of recording as a direct response to that which is being observed. As a parallel, the story is a remembered account or a representation. The element of not 'getting it right' was given significance in the story, as was Matthew's aim to 'trick the teacher' by making up part of the drawing. He was aware that making it up was not what observational drawing was about. Matthew resorted to a remembered image rather than a directly observed representation and then made connections with this as a trick or con. Both acts, the drawing and the story, may be undermined by the claim that they do not adhere to a 'truth'. It is difficult to be certain whether or not Matthew had an original aim to 'trick the teacher'. This may have been added to his re-telling of the story, as an embellishment or addition. The point for discussion therefore does not relate to the truth of the story but the implications for the basis of the recounted version.

As the narrator of this tale I have also created a story, a representation of three hours of conversation edited for a purpose and concerns over the validity of the narrative and the responsibility to provide a reliable story does not sit with the participant. This is essentially a dilemma for the researcher, and the representation of the narrative by the researcher is subject to these same questions regarding truth and validity. These considerations are not only limited to the story as it is told. The way in which participants narrate their experiences and how these are recreated as written narratives is one concern yet a further consideration relates to the role of the reader. It is the final act in the making of a meaningful story that will come from the reader and in bridging the gap between fiction and life the reader also has a significant role.

A further concern in relation to concepts of truth and reliability relates to the production of the narrator's identity. Matthew does not have a static identity but one that shifts, represented through this range of stories. Identities are not stable (Atkinson, 2004; Plummer, 1995) and many stories can arise out of the same event.

Although Ricoeur (1991) sees this as a limitation, in being unable to fix meaning, Wood (1991) suggests that an advantage of narrative is in being able to create and interpret these flexible identities. It was difficult to disassociate the Matthew in his art and design lesson from the Matthew, a thirteen year old with a reading age of 17.9 who was in a lower set for English because of the physical demands of handwriting. Although asked specifically about drawing, his school experiences generally appeared to focus on other more dominant issues.

The range of stories explored in my first meeting with Matthew was over-whelming. As I sat and listened I was presented with a range of incidents that related to his school experience. These seemed tied together as a 'multiplication', with his experiences of observation within other art and design stories told via a design techno-logy lesson, with the undertone of poor parental relationships with the school and a concern about the 'unfair' treatment he was receiving in his English lessons. Editing the stories to focus only on the detail of his experience of observation in his art lessons would fail to take these complexities into account. Blumenreich (2004) argues that life history and, by implication, narrative demands contextualisation, the alter-native being the creation of an autonomous individual with compartmentalised experiences. The socially situated nature of narrated experiences is also recognised by Plummer (1995) who argues that a denial of this 'situatedness' might result in a dominant research voice which, in turn, could be interpreted as unreliable. There are, however, obvious tensions for the researcher pursuing specific research questions whilst attempting to create natural opportunities for conversation. Getting participants to focus on specific questions or issues can be very demanding until you realise that it is they who should be defining the points for discussion.

NARRATIVE CASE STUDIES

The focus for this enquiry relies heavily on narrative analysis, but the organisational structure involves the development of four cases. I refer to 'narrative case study' since I am conscious that the data included for consideration of each case make the stories. Smaller narratives are analysed but each case study as a whole can be read as a narrative of experience for each participant. The separation of participants and the bringing together of other sources, drawings and school reports, for example, mark the data representations as case studies, referring not to the methods of analysis but to the 'choice of what is to be studied' (Stake, 2005:443) and the way that this is grouped for focussed attention. A case study is an organisational structure, grouping information together and separating it out as distinctive and separate in order to optimize what can be found in individual rather than generalised experience.

The focus on the individually defined case has resulted in case study methodology being described as the poor relation of social science research methods, contested for a lack of rigour. Yin (2003) suggests that case study has been challenged by traditional concepts of the aims for research to produce replicable studies and generalisable findings, yet it is this characteristic that is most appealing for those wanting to explore the particularity of specific situations and circumstances. Yin and Stake both advocate case study as well suited for exploring individual complexity.

As an organisational device, the separation of the participants into case study chapters has allowed me to explore each of the individuals, acknowledging their particularity. The four cases are individual, although the final discussion in Chapter 10 emerges from common threads pulled as the cases rub against one another and the theoretical framework. Each case speaks of the others and to the others and some comparisons are made between participants, but the cases are marked more by the ways in which they differ than the ways they are similar. Each chapter is also only a partial telling, restricted as it is by the focus of this research and the limitations of representation.

Ylijoki (2001), referring to the work of Mishler and Polkinghorn, makes the distinction between 'narrative analysis' and the analysis of narratives, where data do not need to be identified as narratives, defined by plot and sequence, but can be examined from a narrative perspective. Here it is possible to group collections of data for a narrative reading:

> … narrative analysis follows the logic of a narrative mode of thought. Researchers collect descriptions of events and happenings, and configure them into a story or stories. In other words, the aim is to discern a plot that unites and gives meaning to the elements in the data as contributions to a specific goal or purpose. (Ylijoki, 2001:24)

This has formed the basis of the presentation of a collection of data in the form of the case study chapters where a range of data is presented as an individualised narrative shaped by the particular stories of each of the participants. In some cases stories emerge with a very clear narrative form yet in others, a range of different experiences form the basis of narrative themes that have emerged from the data.

I have been able to draw on pieces of documentary evidence in addition to verbal testimony. This has related to drawings and sketchbook material offered to me during my conversations with participants which, in some cases, included grading information and teachers' comments. It also included, in the case of two of the participants, old school reports. These additions to the personal narratives allowed for the reflection of an 'official discourse' which added a further dimension to the stories. These reports, as reifications of teacher and school-based discourses, provided additional public, reductive accounts as data to be written into participants stories embodying a language of normalisation in grading information and descriptions of pupil performance that could be drawn on in a consideration of the breach between 'real' and 'ideal'.

THE PARTICIPANTS

The number of participants was limited from the outset and by design, with a small number identified. Miles and Huberman (1998) outline this as the initial stages of data analysis, by limiting the scope of the research prior to undertaking the data collection. In work that prioritises the individual and particular there is little advantage in exploring multiple perspectives via an extended sample. Although Charmaz (2005) questions the rigour attached to the development of theories based on small samples that do not even attempt to reach saturation in terms of emergent ideas and theories,

the concepts of saturation and generalisation are rejected here in favour of the particular and specific with the focus on narrative and case study, both selected for the appropriateness of a consideration of individual experience as has been previously discussed.

The complexity of the field of special education and, more specifically, the literature relating to dyspraxia is explored in Chapter 4, with comorbidity and subjectivity both key factors in identifying, labelling and researching individual characteristics and experiences. Four participants of a similar age with an officially recognised diagnosis may be perceived to have created a tidy project, yet my random group has its own validity in respect of the locus of power for self definition and the nature of comorbidity and the problematics of a 'clean' sample (Geuze, Jongmans, Schoemaker and Smits-Engelsman, 2001). The four participants included three adults and one adolescent: Craig, an adult, fully embraced his identity as dyslexic and is self-diagnosed as dyspraxic; Alex, another adult, claimed to have a degree of scepticism regarding his recent 'official' diagnosis of dyspraxia and the implications this might have, claiming 'I'm still not wearing the T-shirt'; the third adult, Elaine, was the only practising artist who acknowledged that her dyspraxia was unofficial in status; Matthew was an adolescent boy 'officially' recognised as 'dyspraxic' by the relevant school authorities. All participants' were white and could be loosely defined as middle class, given their careers or parents' occupations.

Narrative research has a specific focus on the particular experiences of the individual. Thus, although comparisons might be drawn in the analysis of the narratives, the aim is not to identify commonality or make generalisations but to focus on the particular. The identification of a 'clean' sample, as it is described in some existing studies (see Chapter 4), also renders the aim to identify a large number of pupils with similar characteristics, futile. The participants are markedly different in age, experience and gender. They do not all share a formal diagnosis of 'dyspraxia' either and this is significant in terms of the power/knowledge discourse and concepts of labelling. This challenges the assertion of the legitimate and authentic voice as one that is defined only by those with the authority to identify differences as individual and medical deficits. The choice of participants is an active one that creates a challenge for the research but this reflects an aim to embrace the complexity of definitions of this field of inquiry and to contest accepted definitions of 'clean' samples in order to acknowledge the messiness of categorising lived experience.

Craig, although 'officially' recognised as dyslexic, with an educational psychologists report as 'evidence', identifies himself as dyspraxic and dyscalculaic. In my initial interview with him he confessed 'I've got a provisional educational psychologist report saying I'm dyslexic but nothing to say that I'm officially dyspraxic …that was from my own reading, so I'm self diagnosed.' I was, at first, concerned that I would be unable to draw on his experiences since he lacked 'professional authentication' of being dyspraxic. Similarly, Elaine raised this issue in an initial email saying 'I am not actually diagnosed with dyspraxia therefore it is unclear whether my coordination difficulties are a result of undiagnosed dyspraxia or of my muscle condition (which is neurological).' I wondered whether either narrative was valid and whether I should have included only those with 'officially' recognised dyspraxia,

yet this would seem to run contrary to the political motivation of the inclusive nature of this work, the complexity and flexibility of labelling (Norwich, 2008) and the positioning of the research within the power/knowledge discourse (Foucault, 1980).

There was a further ethical dilemma in selecting the participants, which related to my own reservations about the ways that adolescents might talk about their experiences. I had spoken to a very articulate adult who seemed to relish the prospect of talking about his own educational history but wondered how a young adult would engage in this process. I was concerned about Matthew's ability to story his experiences and was aware that a different approach might be required.

My own reactions and preconceptions are interesting on reflection. It now seems curious to me that I had worried about an adolescent's ability to recount his experiences, and I am conscious that this speaks more of my own preconceptions and understanding than the ability of young adults to make sense of their experiences. Matthew spoke easily and confidently. My experience however, was different to earlier interviews with adult participants. There was a distinct power imbalance and my attempt at naturalistic conversation felt inappropriate, particularly in the earlier interviews. He gave his consent but the original contact was made via his parents. The adult contacts by contrast were made on a personal and professional level, with one relationship starting from my attendance at a dyslexia awareness session lead by the participant. The conversations were very different in style and the adult/child relationship cannot be ignored no matter how democratic the aim of the process. It is possible that Matthew may have felt an obligation to his parents to be involved in the research project. It was difficult to know whether or not he could have declined his parents' request or suggestion that he talked to me.

The role of the participants and my engagement with them has therefore been a significant factor in the way my understanding of methodology has developed. The power dynamics between researcher and participant are always there and should be acknowledged and explored. The differences in the power relationships between researcher/researched and adult/adolescent seemed to emphasise the particular nature of differences between the participants since each one is an individual and the nature of the relationship between them and myself is therefore appropriately different. Fine (1994) suggests that the spaces between the researcher and participants need to be acknowledged and explored in order to avoid what is described as 'the imperialism of scholarship' (p. 73). She suggests that 'working the hyphen', acknowledging the space between the self and other is essential. She says:

> Working the hyphen means creating occasions for researchers and informants to discuss what is, and is not, "happening between", within the negotiated relations of whose story is being told, why, to whom, with what interpretation, and whose story is being shadowed, why, for whom and with what consequence. (p. 72)

The shadowing of the story, I would argue, is an inevitable consequence of the research process as 'real life' experiences are converted into academic text.

The aim of the research is to explore and question social and educational practices, yet I was conscious of the potentially negative effect that this may have

for participants, since their involvement could have been perceived of in relation to a 'special educational need' or them being regarded as 'less' able. There were clearly ethical considerations in relation to how the research would be experienced by these participants as a 'vulnerable' group already 'othered' (Fine, 2004) by their experiences of being dyspraxic. It was important to develop an open relationship with participants and explain the focus of my research as on educational systems rather than personal deficits. I was anxious to develop methods that would not require any direct performance or 'testing' of the drawing ability of the participants. One pupil had agreed for me to talk to him but was explicit in his demands that I did not come to see him at school in front of his 'mates'. In addition to this, my initial reading regarding alleged difficulties for those with dyspraxia, meant my observation of their drawing performance seemed highly inappropriate. The research approach therefore demanded that I consider the meanings participants made of their personal experiences within the social/cultural context of their education rather than attempting to measure any individual 'difficulty'.

Research Method

Clear guidance on specific methods for narrative studies are difficult to find since there are no rigid and standardised procedures and the approaches are particularly flexible (Manning and Cullum-Swan, 1998). The work of Catherine Kohler Riessman (1993) has been particularly significant for me in finding my own working methods and I have drawn on her work significantly in this section. I have adopted the three stages she outlines (p. 54–63) to explain facilitation or narrative telling and gathering data; transcription of interviews; and the analytical approach to the narratives I have constructed from interviews and other data included in the case studies.

Facilitating Telling

The open interviews were based around the concept of a conversation in order that the narratives would emerge and to some extent be 'naturally' occurring. The interviews could be described as conversations, in that the aim was for communication to take place in a 'naturalistic' way although my role as researcher, the use of note taking to record, as well as the use of recording equipment, contradicted the ways I had advocated this as a 'natural' process. Although there may be a 'natural drive' to develop a narrative, the attempts at conversation were obviously contrived.

The naturalistic character of narrative was apparent, as stories surfaced when participants appeared to be more relaxed, and explanations of experience began to emerge out of conversation. In my earliest interviews, I was not committed to employing a narrative approach, yet the first conversation and subsequent transcription created a real sense of curiosity for me. A story was often employed by a participant in order to provide exemplification of a particular argument or offered as an example of a specific type of event or happening, and as a means for the participant to explain or represent certain ideas. This was at once appealing and compelling.

Participants appeared to turn to story as a means of explaining their experiences. Indeed, the first interview flowed so well from story to story that I rarely interjected since the participant was commanding and highly motivated to speak about his experiences.

This method corresponded with my role as a researcher, finding 'data gathering' to be most effective through conversation and personal contact and 'the spinning of a good yarn', significant for the socially situated nature of these stories (Ylijoki, 2001). One person's experience sparks off a recollection of your own which you might quite naturally want to share and in that way you begin to contribute to the development of the stories that emerge. Goodson and Sikes (2001) suggest this degree of empathy and story sharing is highly appropriate in developing life stories. The personal and particular is as relevant to the researcher as it is to the participant. However, the degree to which the researcher might become complicit in creating and contributing to the narratives is problematic.

There are difficulties in the ways that participants could talk about their experiences, since explanations via language are always removed from physical experience. The confusion and uncertainty expressed by Craig, for example, in the extract below emphasises the separation of experience and articulation as he attempted to describe the process of observing an object. The difficulties were in expression and translation from one form of understanding to another culminating, in the need for reassurance that this was making sense, reassurance that I falsely gave because it was difficult to make sense of what was being said:

Craig: the thing is
– I would more likely
– to view it consciously
– I wouldn't be viewing it
– it's very difficult to describe
– it's not
– to talk about it being sort of like a 3D model in your head is a bit of an exaggeration but to say that it's a static thing
– that's not how I view it
– it's not a
– it's
– it's very difficult to describe
– it's not
– do you?
– does this make sense?

Claire: Yeah

Further to the facilitation of narratives was the collection of other data including school reports and any available drawings. These add a richness to the stories and are drawn on for the ways in which they speak to the narratives and offer points of departure from what is said, yet they are not as readily analysed in narrative terms. They have been inserted in the case studies at significant points to punctuate and enhance the narratives and subsequent analysis.

Transcription

The ways that the spoken word is represented in text always involves 'selection and reduction' of an initial interview (Riessman, 1993:56) and there are a number of ways that this work can be approached. Initially I made field notes during my first meetings but full and comprehensive reflections afterwards. I wanted to have a first meeting with participants without the pressure of recording the conversation and was able to use this as a point of reference for the next recorded interview. Some stories were revisited during the second meeting but there were also points of departure where stories were omitted or appeared to change in the degree of significance accorded them by the participant. Reflections from these first stories allowed me to develop potential avenues of enquiry and prompts in the second interview. The interim analysis which took place whilst gathering data informed the interviews that followed as a process of inductive analysis, and Huberman and Miles (1998) support this iterative process as a means of strengthening the internal validity of a project when data is collected in response to emergent themes.

The second meetings were recorded and fully transcribed firstly as a structured means of listening again, and also because this offered a piece of text that could be annotated at a further stage of analysis. Initially the transcripts included pauses and 'disfluences' (Riessman, 1993) but later versions included in conference presentations and seminars were 'cleaned' and distanced from 'real talk', not only to make them accessible but also because I was conscious of the ways in which participants would be represented. Riessman is critical of this approach, exemplified in her critique of the work of Ginsburg (Riessman, 1993:26–33), who focuses on specific aspects of plot rather than a detailed narrative analysis. This cleaning of the text and representation of analysed chunks of story summarizes and glosses over, making the details of language less visible. This approach to narrative analysis is identified as a significant tension between a content focussed approach and one that reflects a detailed analysis of form.

At the point of transcription I was aware of 'visual chunking' in the text which corresponded with extended conversation more easily defined as narratives. The early stages of conversations often included very brief exchanges. However, later sections of interview started to become extended and these aspects of the narrative were more easily recognised. Again this experience encouraged me to revisit the other transcriptions with this notion of visual chunking in mind and this assisted with the identification of more extended sections for analysis.

Advised by Riessman's approach, I revisited the most significant aspects of narrative to develop a second transcription in order to consider pauses and disfluences that may have been significant in forming the ways the stories were told. Again, the plot features of breach and exception were significant but on this second transcription the form that the narrative took became more significant, where the form and structure of the telling informed the definition of a breach in the story. The narrative extracts are represented as 'cleaned' text but I have applied Riessman's use of line separation to indicate pauses and disfluences to assist in identifying where the form of the text supports breach and exception in the subject content. This is the form in which they appear in the book.

Approaching Narratives Analytically

Manning and Cullum-Swan (1998) refer to analysis of narratives as being part of a subtle theoretical framework in comparison to harder edged positivistic, technical or statistical work. Narrative analysis ranges from thorough analysis of linguistic features to approaches described as 'loosely formulated, almost intuitive' (p. 246) and I am conscious of having leant towards this 'intuitive' means of interpretation. Early analysis took place during the transcription process and notes were made on initial ideas about the narratives. Annotations were also made in the margin of verbatim transcriptions, passages re-read, and summary sheets developed from the interviews. Although a distance is created between the original conversation texts, Riessman (1993) describes this process of translation and interpretation as necessary and productive (p. 14). Further to these techniques for analysis was the development of 'conceptual/theoretical coherence' identified by Miles and Huberman (1998:187). The analysis is not derived solely from the data or from a purely empirical source, since the derivation of the theoretical aspects relates to other reading and existing concepts (those related to inclusion for example) as well as the power dimensions and hierarchies and hegemonies of existing art and design educational practices. The analysis was undertaken with these aspects in mind.

Themes were grounded from an initial analysis, yet I am conscious that grounded theory does not accurately convey this process of analysis, since 'theories' have not been grounded from the data. I prefer to refer to the products of this analysis as grounded narratives based on this process being a method of analysis rather than a means of deriving theories (Charmaz, 2005). The theoretical framework for analysis outlined in Chapters 3 to 5 creates a context by which breach and exception in the narratives became particularly relevant. The conversations were open interviews that meandered sometimes aimlessly off the point but, at the first stage analysis, points that had seemed irrelevant became significant when read through the structures of breach and exception. It was during these conversations and the subsequent re-listening that the theoretical framework for the work began to become informed and shaped. The conversations became very much a part of an iterative process and this stage of the analysis draws on a grounded approach as a tool for flexible analysis described by Charmaz (2005).

Further to the inductive analysis outlined above has been the role of writing in analysis of the literature as well as the narratives. Bell (1999) suggests that the majority of reading should be done at the beginning of a research project and should take the form of an 'extensive study of the literature'. However, this work reflects a piecemeal approach via an initial serendipitous delving into the literature followed by a more recent and systematic search. My initial engagement with the literature can effectively be seen as a means of establishing the direction of the literature search, but this process has also been influenced by conversations with participants and colleagues. As such the literature search has been much more of a recursive process than Bell (1999) suggests, informed by the reading, but also the 'thinking writing' that has developed my analysis (Adams and St. Pierre, 2005). For example, an early decision to disregard clinical research because of the sociological nature of this work has been dramatically revised, since it is the emphasis on the medical model

of dyspraxia that provides a substantial aspect of the discussion and it needs to be presented and referred to. It is important that these discourses are made visible. Bell indicates that a review should provide the reader with a picture of the state of knowledge and the major questions related to the subject being studied. It may therefore be argued that there was clearly a place for the clinical research from the outset and that I have taken the long way round, yet for me this has confirmed the reading, writing, thinking loop that is key to the iterative and reflexive nature of the qualitative research process.

The writing process, as a means of thinking and actively constructing ideas, has been significant, and this process of writing as a form of enquiry is advocated by Richardson and St Pierre (2005:279). Informal and formal writing has been significant with regular writing in a research journals, field notes and reflections on reading or on the development of my own thoughts and ideas. I have been heavily influenced by writers who, writing about the writing process, acknowledge, celebrate and promote the use of writing as a tool for thinking (see Watson, 2006 for example) and I am increasingly drawn to the ways that free writing or generative writing (Elbow, 2001) can be utilised as part of the research process. The writing, research and analysis processes of qualitative research are inextricably linked and I acknowledge the contribution that writing can make as part of the research process as well as a means of generating this representation (Wolcott, 2001; Penketh, 2008).

Qualitative research, in interpreting the world, has the capacity to be a creative and imaginative practice. The particular focus on alternative approaches in the writing of autoethnography, for example, reflect both the dilemmas and opportunities open to those in pursuit of this form of enquiry (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, Holman Jones, 2005, Richardson and St Pierre, 2005, Maclure, 2006). I am conscious that for me the data collection, analysis and writing acts owe as much to what can be imagined as they do to empirical forms of visual, oral and text-based evidence. This may be a point for debate, in view of the traditional epistemological perspective that equates knowing with a highly empirical and scientific truth seeking. In a climate of methodological conservatism, it is not necessarily an advantage to acknowledge the connections between the art of the imagined and educational research, yet I would argue that the connections and mental leaps that need to occur in narrative analysis owe much to what can be imagined. The connections we make between shared colloquial stories and established theory demand that we can visualise what might not be immediately evident in order to comprehend aspects of our lives. We can read, theorize, talk, analyze, and write about research but we might also draw in order to transform our understanding. The challenge lies in communicating that transformation, and the written and spoken forms can be as elusive as the visual in that respect.