

Chapter 11

The Power and Possibility of Narrative Research: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract From the very conception of this book project, we have been concerned about the confusion that can arise for novice researchers due to the lack of transparency in the various ways narrative methods are theorised and applied. As we have seen in the previous chapters, research that is informed by narrative can take a variety of forms, and may be called any number of things (narrative inquiry, narrative studies, narrative research, narrative focus). As Rachael and I pointed out in Chap. 1 (this volume), this can be viewed as either a strength or a weakness; as diverse applications of a flexible approach, and/or as inconsistent interpretations of theory. There are certainly examples of both, and the difference is not always clear. Our intention in this chapter is to explore the current and future perspectives on working with narrative methods, by drawing on the perspectives of leading scholars in the field.

Keywords Narrative methods • Narrative research • Narrative inquiry • History of narrative • Narratology • Future of narrative

Introduction

From the very conception of this book project, we have been concerned about the confusion that can arise for novice researchers regarding the lack of transparency in the various ways narrative methods are theorised and applied. As we have seen in the previous chapters, research that is informed by narrative can take a variety of forms, and may be called any number of things (narrative inquiry, narrative studies, narrative research, narrative focus). As Rachael and I pointed out in Chap. 1 (this volume), this can be viewed as either a strength or a weakness; as diverse

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applications of a flexible approach, and/or as inconsistent interpretations of theory. There are certainly examples of both, and the difference is not always clear. Our intention in this chapter is to explore the current and future perspectives on working with narrative methods,¹ by drawing on the perspectives of leading scholars in the field.

With this in mind, we approached three established scholars of narrative research—Michael Bamberg, who is currently Professor of Psychology at Clark University (United States) and editor of the journal *Narrative Inquiry*; Maria Tamboukou, who works from the University of East London (UK) and heads up the Narrative Research Centre there; and Debbie Pushor, who is based at the University of Saskatchewan (Canada) and previously worked with Jean Clandinin. The interviewees were chosen to, we hoped, represent a diverse range of perspectives regarding the history, practice and future direction of narrative methods.

Questions for the interviews were developed to elicit stories from our participants about their own experiences, histories, views and use of narrative methods. We also included questions about the various strengths and challenges of using narrative methods, and what each interviewee saw as possible directions for the future of narrative research.

The interviews were transcribed and form the basis for this chapter.

Interviewees articulated their specific concerns relating to three main areas. Firstly, the tensions that arise when considering definition and delineation of the terms, and approaches concerning the use of narrative methods as a research tool. Secondly, the differences, both ethical and practical, in how narrative data is collected and used. And finally, the differences in the historical trajectory of how narrative methods have been utilised in research.

The following chapter is divided into three key sections broadly following the pattern of how each of the interviewees were questioned. In the first section we investigate the *stories and histories* of our participants and how their own histories have influenced their own incorporation of narrative methods into their work. The second section discusses what each interviewee considers to be the *strengths and challenges* current in working with narrative methods. The third and final section reveals what our interviewees consider to be new and *emerging developments* in the field of narrative research and briefly discusses both the potential and the difficulties present in these initiatives.

Stories of Histories, Divisions and Boundaries

When asked to speak on what they felt was the history of narrative inquiry, all of our interviewees expressed caution: they each stated that there is not just one history, and that different histories are allied to different disciplines; as Maria reminded us

¹A term we use in this chapter to inclusively to encompass any research that draws upon narrative as data, means of interpretation or re/presentation.

“stories have many and multiple beginnings”. A need to distinguish a narratological view from how, for example, narrative is used in the Social Sciences was key in establishing boundaries, our reading of the interviews also suggests that there are significant divisions within the disciplines of linguistics and the social sciences in terms of how narrative methods are used.

Maria talked to us about her introduction to using narrative methods. She discusses how a focus on the narrative method was often occluded by the subject or indeed the research position. In her description, as she admits, there appears to be little understanding that narrative methods were perhaps an expression of an ontology in itself.

MT: I looked at women teachers’ autobiographical writings, and these included the autobiographies, memoirs, diaries, letters, and tried to understand through these writings how they were creating themselves in the way that Foucault has talked about in his late work in the technologies of the self. So I guess it was this effort of mind to see whether what Foucault was talking about could be applied to women teachers and my only source then was the personal narrative. At the time I had not really understood the importance of narratives themselves.

Narratology is a field dedicated to the study of textual narrative, which is often defined in highly technical ways. As Michael suggests, narratology concerns itself with “trying to figure out what is a narrative ... what kind of formal aspects and structural components make a narrative, and possibly even a good narrative...”. He proposes that the tension arises because of a lack of understanding of the differences between narratology and what is commonly referred to as “the turn to narrative in the social sciences.” He goes on to suggest that, “within the social sciences we are forced, occasionally at least, to define narrative and that is where we borrow structural and formal principles and components”.

Maria agrees with this difficulty arising from a lack of knowledge about the different disciplines in which narrative is used:

MT: people who do narrative studies in the humanities or literary studies most probably will know very little about what is going on in the social sciences, for example, or people who do mostly digital narratives or other kinds of new media narrative. We know very little sometimes about some of the histories of narratology. So I think we should try to be more serious when doing interdisciplinary narrative. We need to have more connections across disciplines

The “turn to narrative in the social sciences”, a phrase that was originally coined by Norman Denzin (2000), is considered to be a defining feature of the history narrative, taking the focus away from purely textual investigations and into the process we now refer to as narrative inquiry. Maria proposes that within a sociological frame, this trend has a much longer history.

MT: Denzin thought these turns happened around in the 1980s but actually as a sociologist I think it goes back to the beginning of the twentieth century. I think that if we think sociologically about the history of narrative studies I would locate it in the publication of the Polish peasants in between 1918 and 1920: this is where these letters of Polish immigrants to the US were published, and Thomas and Znaniecki (1996/1918) considered these letters as important in understanding issues around migration and the lives of these people. I think there is a rich history in the US that goes through symbolic interactionism, the words of Cooley (1902) and Mead (1913) ... and of course a very important influence for me is C. Wright Mills and the *Sociological Imagination* in 1959, and

this idea of how we can think together through biography, history and structure. And I think these are the important moments in the history of narrative studies that eventually brings us in the 1980s and, you know, a very significant turn. That was a moment when the social sciences in general turned to language.

In the broader social sciences however, Michael suggests that narrative research is far more focused on identity, and

MB: questions around identity, but very broadly defined... we are much more turned toward the functions that these narratives serve when it comes to reflection, looking at who we are and what holds us together in terms of our identity, and also what drifts us into different groups, into different organisations, you know, what keeps us apart.

Michael believes that a concern with identity “has unified, to a degree, this narrative approach”. However, in some branches or strands of narrative inquiry, it would be more common to read of a focus on Dewey’s notions of experience than identity. When Debbie spoke about the history of narrative, a vastly different story emerged:

DP: I guess for me, given that I’m a Canadian, I see story really arriving from our First People. I see it as an oral tradition of telling stories, of teaching through story, that was in place well before our country was settled by Europeans ... And I think with industrialisation ... the scientific push, that wanting to be first, wanting to make a mark, that we really lost some of what we knew. We moved to a place of ... reductionism, of objectivism, and felt that we could capture things more effectively with a quantification. And so I think a lot changed and I really do think when we look back to the roots of Dewey, and we look at the work of Schwab, and we look at the work of Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin, it was really a push against that way of thinking, against that lack of humanism in what we did. And so I think it was a hard fight for a long time to establish narrative knowing as a legitimate way of knowing and as one that had value and was valid.

The Ontological Significance of Boundaries

Rachael and elke put forward in the opening chapter of this volume that a single definition of narrative methods is not necessarily possible or even desirable. Rather, an open acknowledgement of the differences, particularly how the same terms are used in different ways, is a necessary development in how we can more fully understand narrative methods. While the different strands and sub-strands of narrative methods were not a specific question in our interviews, different views did emerge.

Michael raised the question of narrative inquiry losing its meaning due to an *anything goes* attitude. Michael discusses the idea of working towards a “core around which the narrative work can oscillate”. Alternatively, he suggests that perhaps it is more productive as it is, a methodology that has no centre but is instead with a “free floating innovative interdisciplinary orientation”. Michael further explains that if we remain where we are, although currently a dynamic space, it could result in the purity of narrative “ultimately, potentially at least, disintegrate[ing]”. From what appears to be quite a protective position Michael is concerned that unless we find, or at least seek to find, a central set of beliefs and actions in relation to narrative methods we will ultimately continue to “talk past

each other not making any sense to the outside world when we use the term *narrative*”.

MB: So that, I think, should be a challenge right now, but at the same time there’s the counter position that these narrative approaches are sitting in the social sciences nicely between all these different fields and do their innovative work there, but in a way they are not going anywhere. So there has to be something like an interesting important integration and differentiation of narrative moving into the discipline, but not too much so that they are not absorbed, but not staying totally in this free field of non-disciplinary alignment.

For Debbie, the diverse, innovative and creative use of narrative inquiry is its strength:

DP: What I love about it [narrative inquiry] is all of the ways that people are using it creatively, artistically, for varied kinds of purposes. I think it’s really an exciting time ... we’re in a place where we can be imaginative and creative and we can play with that work so much more.

However, Debbie also cautions that creativity should not mean a disregard for methodological rigour; in whatever way that may be defined. Like Michael, she is concerned about the anything goes approach and what it might mean for those using narrative methods.

DP: My interest in narrative is particular to narrative inquiry, the kind of Clandinin and Connelly school of narrative inquiry, and one of the things that I think sometimes people struggle with is the idea that narrative inquiry is more than telling stories, that narrative inquiry is both the telling of the story and then the enquiring into the story ... And so I think it’s that sense of, it’s more than telling a story, becomes really important that we preserve that notion and we preserve that understanding that it’s about telling the story but then it’s about unpacking that story, asking ourselves, “Why did I tell that story? Out of all of the stories I could have told, why do I want to tell this one? What work do I want that story to do from a research perspective? And as I unpack that story, what am I going to do to make those connections, to pull the threads forward to link it to concepts, to link it to other literature, to begin to take that thread and weave it into something more.”

As we reflect on this, it would appear that there is some value in clarifying the different perspectives on narrative inquiry, which draw on vastly different theoretical underpinnings. However, we also recognise that this clarification should not reify, or place limits on innovation and creativity.

Maria suggests that perhaps the manner in which we are introduced to narrative methods then influences how we view the use of narrative within our work or discipline.

MT: I don’t think there is just one history in narrative studies. I think that there are many histories and these many histories depend on the disciplinary field you are working with. If you are a literary scholar, for example, you will have a different history in mind.

What appears to be the case in each of the three interviews is that our interviewees’ relationship to the idea of narrative methods is not only about differences in approach and utility, but is also driven by the expression of quite different ontological viewpoints. As described earlier, Michael talks about narrative as a, “free floating innovative interdisciplinary orientation”, raising the notion that this needs to be anchored in some way to maintain rigor in the approach. However, this is a complex question, one to which we will return in later sections of this chapter.

It would appear anyway, despite the different disciplinary backgrounds, narrative work, in the broadest sense, is underpinned by *the ways stories are structured, designed, communicated and/or utilised to make sense of the world and the individual's place within it*. While there appear to be significant differences in the ways in which those ends are pursued, there is perhaps more common ground than seems initially apparent. What is emerging, however, is how each of our interviewees have very different and individual pathways in how they began using narrative methods; pathways that have influenced their ontological position in relation to narrative methods. In each case the use of a narrative method appears to be secondary, with the primary focus being the participant or anticipated outcomes of the individual study. In this sense, narrative appears to be often employed as a methodological means to an end.

Strengths & Challenges of Narrative Methods

Among other issues deliberated by our interviewees, we also discussed what they saw as the key strengths and challenges facing research that employs narrative methods today. Three areas of consideration emerged. *Interdisciplinarity* was identified as an issue that could both contribute as well as divide those working in the field, including some of the tensions already referred to earlier in this chapter. Maria mentions the language focus identifying the *hegemony of the English language* in narrative methods, and finally Maria also refers to the ways in which we may seek *to hear the silences* that become part of our work.

Interdisciplinarity

Addressing the notion of challenges within the field, Maria discusses key areas of facing our use of narrative methods regarding the concept of *interdisciplinarity*. One of the major difficulties she cites is communication. How do we communicate across the multifarious differences that are present in approach, in design and, often in intention?

MT: One great challenge that I have identified is that when we are in narrative studies very easily we talk about interdisciplinarity and how important interdisciplinary narratives and narrative studies and how narratives are in a way lending themselves to interdisciplinarity but actually we are not very good at doing interdisciplinarity and if you go into narrative scholars you will see that people are trends within their disciplines. So people who do narrative studies in the humanities or literary studies most probably will know very little about what is going on in the social sciences, for example, or people who do mostly digital narratives or other kinds of new media narrative. We know very little sometimes about some of the histories of narratology.

To counter this, Maria suggests we should intentionally increase our connections and communications across and also with the various disciplines that use narrative methods. She reminds us that:

MB: We should try to be more serious when doing interdisciplinary narrative. We need to have more connections across disciplines, faculties, universities, colleagues. That's one of the challenges that we have to face.

As alluded to in the previous section, Michael expresses an anxiety with reference to the issue of *interdisciplinarity*. He describes a tension that asks if we should be striving for the development of a core or central understanding regarding narrative methods that cuts across disciplinary boundaries and provide a greater degree of coherence. Or, he suggests, would developing such a central system of language and or process undo the richness and diversification that can be found in how narrative methods are theorised and applied?

MB: Does narrative and do narrative inquiry and narrative studies need a core or a centre around which the narrative work can oscillate or fly ... it should remain where it's at and that is that there is no centre, they are not even different centres, but narrative is this free floating innovative interdisciplinary orientation, let me put it this way. The problem with that, that I have is, if we remain there, then narrative as a study, as an inquiry, we ultimately potentially at least, disintegrate.

Michael is unable to resolve this tension for himself or us. Instead he presents us with that problem and cites the potential threat that might result from a lack of action in this area.

Debbie, however, points to what narrative can offer in terms of providing connections across disciplinary lines, providing a means of accessing and learning from work in related and unrelated disciplines.

DP: I think it enables us to work with colleagues in ways that we wouldn't otherwise, that the medical work would stay in this place and our educational work would stay in this place, and we wouldn't speak to each other. But when we start to share those narratives, we see opportunities to learn from one another... narratives about children with traumatic brain injury become something that can speak to my work as an educator or my work with parents or my work with children.

Although all interviewees approach the difficulty of *interdisciplinarity* from different perspectives, all present a clear message, a 'call to arms' for some clear action in this area. The imperative referred to by all parties here is to be more intentional, more strategic and remain cautious as to what might be lost in any process of hemogenisation.

Language Hegemony

Maria draws our attention to the hegemony of the English language in relation to narrative methods.

MT: Another important challenge for narrative studies right now and it's starting to come up more and more is the hegemony of the English language and how do we deal with questions around translation. What does it mean to have transnational narratives? What

are the boundaries of the language? They are so important things that have been in French, for example, or in Italian or in Spanish speaking areas and we cannot communicate with them because of this hegemony of the English language.

Within a globalised environment where barriers around communication are being collapsed further and further, how can we as researchers begin to encompass work that is being done in nations and cultures that are not English speaking? This raises interesting questions regarding the cultural specificity not only of language structures, but also narrative structure and how these are read, in which contexts and cultures, and for which audiences. Maria suggests that:

MT: we need to do more about what we call now transnational narrative, so narratives in translation, and we need to face the fact that if we are talking about narratives and it's a question of language we need to engage the subtleties and the intricacies of different languages. So I think this is very important.

Hearing Silences

Finally, Maria points to the challenges involved in hearing and interpreting the *silences*. She discusses how we not only are required to hear the story that is spoken or covertly demonstrated but she suggests we need to develop analytical frameworks which would enable us to notice the absences and silences that are created within stories.

MT: [Another] challenge I think is how we can create the sort of framework to consider silences. Sometimes we talk about silences but what is the narrative method to discern silences, to understand how silences are part and parcel of stories and to be more analytical, more hermeneutic about this.

This might demonstrate a point of potentially productive hybridisation of narrative methods, fusing the narratological view where recently silences within the literary text have been viewed in a poststructuralist, deconstructionist framework proposed by Derrida (1998) and his unravelling of the concept of presence as both trace and absence. Alongside either exists psychodynamic views of silence characterised by discussions of the tension between “self-reflection and unformulated experience” (Stern 2002, p. 228), or more socio-political notions of silence and silencing.

Absences, silences are now commonly considered in postmodern socio-political terms, asking whose voices are heard and whose are not. In this perspective absences are viewed as specific conscious or unconscious gaps in a text or story where people, groups, ideas or issues have been omitted or silenced—sometimes to maintain the structure of a story or the structure of a societal norm.

Whatever combination of perspectives are utilised, literary or narratological, psychodynamic or socio-political, Maria's call for a more hermeneutic approach to understanding silences can potentially bring disparate approaches together, producing new ways to view narrative forms.

Debbie speaks of her own experience of feeling silenced as the impetus for the beginning of her personal journey with narrative research.

DP: ... what I found in those early experiences of being a parent on the school landscape was it was a really different experience ... I didn't feel welcomed; I didn't feel I had a place or a voice, and all of a sudden my whole understanding of schools was shaken, and I realised that there was a really marginalised group in our schools. And those experiences, after having been an educator probably 15 years by that point, those experiences for me were significant and in some way life-changing and I wanted to tell my stories to everyone who would listen.

Could it be that using narrative methods assists in giving a voice to marginalised populations? The sheer commonality of stories and storying can unite groups who are silenced—or in some cases erased from texts and stories—and help them articulate their experience so it can be heard and further understood.

New and Emerging Developments

Turns and the Post Humanist Turn

The concept of *turns* has been used a way of describing junctions and trends within disciplines, or of developments in critical theory. The idea of *turns* is often used as a way of periodising or classifying trends within research and academia. Maria challenges the idea of the big *turn*, which she alludes to as oversimplifications and which potentially inaccurately represent how ideas become developed and entrenched within our work. She suggests that instead what we retrospectively view as *turns* are often the result of a number of smaller innovations developed over time.

MT: I don't believe in "big things". I don't think that something big is coming up or we can foresee or discern it. Usually we have small things happening and then when they ... when we look back at these things small things that have already happened, then we give it the form of the big.

Maria refers to our current theoretical climate, which attempts to move beyond post structuralism and the anthropocentric, humanistic philosophical tradition, and instead supports what is being heralded as the *post humanist turn*.

MT: Maybe in 10 or 20 years' time when we look back the big thing would have been how narratives started in general. We have a date with what we now call the post humanist turn. For me, there is a lot of discussion around post humanism

What interests Maria is a consideration of what a theory such as posthumanism—that specifically aims to decentralise the conception of the human—does with a method such as narrative that is so essentially and centrally human.

MT: Narrative studies have always been centred around language and the human. What is going to happen with the post humanism turn? I think that would be a big thing maybe in 20 years' time and I'm very curious to see how narratives will feature in there.

Maria points out that like postmodernism, which challenged the nature of truth, and poststructuralism the hegemony of language, posthumanism is yet another

“grand ideology”: a further binary position created to challenge, in this case, the Humanistic, Enlightenment project of the late Renaissance.

MT: I have not been persuaded by the post humanist discourse in the same way that I have been also very sceptical about the post modernism or the post structuralism. I am against these grand ideologies, these isms, whatever they are or whatever they represent.

However much we may agree or disagree with the influence of such “grand ideologies”, we must concede that they do have an effect on how we operate within the field of narrative methods. As Maria says:

MT: The fact is whether I agree with the grand post humanism or not, the fact is that we are all in a phase where we are thinking that humans should not or need not be at the centre of our epistemologies or knowledges or, you know, in general of our concerns.

For a collection of methods that considers storying and the story as central to its analysis and almost glories in the humanness of its approach, we must seek to understand how this big *turn* will impact on our work.

Attending to the Visual and Sensory

The development of narrative emerged from a turn towards using words as data (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007), and it is thus natural that language—written and oral—has narrative researchers’ focus. However, the late twentieth century expansion of the definition of what counts as a “text” has opened up a new range of possibilities for exploring the ways in which texts that are not language-based have the potential to convey narratives. As lisahunter (Chap. 5, this volume) describes, visual images provide means of communicating something richer than text alone, and may provide opportunities for narrative research at the field text/data, interim text/analysis and/or research text/(re)presentation stages.

Visual narrative is something that Maria identified as a new direction for narrative inquiry, but one that needs further exploration.

MT: the visual turn in narrative studies where people thought a lot about the image and how can we think about narrative through images and I think this is still going on because particularly who we are, sociologists or historians, we don’t have what we call a visual vocabulary or a visual grammar to think about the image in relation to narratives. Although we are working hard on it and I think that’s a very exciting area because up until now when we think about narratives and images two things can happen: we use narratives as captions of images, or on the other hand we use images as illustrations of our narratives. But I think that a more serious engagement with storylines and images can show us that the relation is much more dynamic and organic and it’s not just additive or complementary. So I think there is a lot of work to be done in this area and, as I said, we need to educate ourselves in the grammars and vocabularies of the image.

Michael also considered the importance of visual narratives, suggesting a rigid focus on a linguistic or narratological method may result in some of the meaning being lost.

MB: when stories are told with visual means and not just like movies where we have actors who speak and actresses and they interact and carry out the action so to speak, but if we

have now these commercials, in particular, where you have [actors] interacting but without words, it's all with gestures, with gaze, so the body language rituals that hold for humans are transferred. But this is where traditional narratologists expand the notion of texts to capture film and to capture also these visual narratives without words.

However, as well as recognising the importance of using the richness apparent in visual narratives, Michael also warns against developing a “catch all”, which may distort what we consider to be a text that expresses a narrative.

MB: This is exactly where the notion of texts that we have been working with ... is breaking down. Narrative is, the notion of texts and the interpretation of texts as the core of narrative, has held us back from realising that within the narrative performance there's a lot more going on ...

This attention to other aspects of story-telling, such as gesture, is not always overlooked in narrative research. Narrative researchers in the phenomenological tradition, in their attention to temporality, and particularly, sociality and place, illustrate their stories with rich detail. The following example gives us a sense of the characters'/participants' histories, relationships, physical environment and facial expressions, demonstrating how these contextual details are as much a part of the social interaction as the words they exchange:

“Ms. K, Ms. K, looked what I got here.” Two bright shining eyes look up to me from the floor. There sits George, a little boy who usually does not talk much. In fact, he has been seeing the Speech and Language Pathologist to help with both language acquisition and articulation. George is so excited he can hardly contain himself. Standing beside him is his step-mother, Patty, who also has a huge smile on her face. George produces a big Ziploc bag with a very large snake skin inside it. I ask him what it is, and he proceeds to tell me about the four and a half foot long corn snake they have at home and how the snake had shed its skin that morning. He wants to share with everyone in the classroom. (Kowaluk 2013, p. 131)

Narrative research presented in this style tends to merge with arts-based research, particularly in the use of evocative language, literary genres and devices.

DP: narrative isn't just the words on the page or the story told, but it becomes the whole way the story is told as well. We're seeing ... plays and poetry and we're seeing work with hypertext, and we're seeing works like Vera Caine's where there's just a few words on a page or where her spacing is completely different.

Emotional Resonance

Michael discusses the influence of gestures and visual cues on the story, or as he puts it: the “micro stuff that is doing the bonding”. Here he refers to two new, largely literary, innovations within the field: specifically *narrative transportation*, and *narrative empathy*. These are new areas of development within narrative methods. Both concepts acknowledge and explore our other senses, our tacit identification with the emotional world of stories and narratives, by examining how we empathise with texts and stories, and also how we move into and away from the world on the text or story.

MB: There's the issue of narrative transportation or narrative empathy that is now being circulated ... I think the core of this question is, what do we really do when we hear a story, how do we understand and make sense and then also feel for what is going on, not just rationally but in terms of our emotional moving into the story, and then at the end moving out again. That's where the discussion has circled a little bit around, is it, and I'm over simplifying here, is it the plot, or is it the characters that we identify and identify with?

Michael explains how marketing and branding has seized upon the idea of *narrative transportation* (Brechman and Purvis 2015) and has sought to use all of our senses. Our empathic responses, along with our inherited understanding of narrative structures and how stories work are used to deliver evermore effective and persuasive messages; suggesting that advertising is using storytelling in an affective as well as an intellectual way.

MB: Our bodies resonate with other bodies—that's where the resonating activity, so to speak, happens micro genetically over the micro cues that are visual most of the times, rather than in words or textual in that sense. And these lead to an identification that we then can argue our identifications with characters or identifications with plot expectations. But there's a micro stuff [cues] that are doing the bonding, that is doing the alignment, that has been left out very much out unless people have pushed the performative aspects of storytelling.

Also, in the field of medicine (Carmel-Gilfilen and Portillo 2016), Michael alludes to how understandings of *narrative transportation* and *narrative empathy* have been used to enhance how employees within these professions work with the stories of the people they encounter.

MB: it's fascinating to see how narratives now are becoming a big part in medical humanities ... a sub field of medical training ... where narrative ... become the means, the prerequisites for doctors to become people who also have empathy, who share empathy with their patients, in order to bring empathy, being a part, a big chunk of the diagnostic procedure.

Debbie also discusses our empathic responses to a narrative both in our own storytelling and in listening to the stories of others.

DP: I think one of the things about narrative work always is that notion of resonance that, "I read your story but it resonates – it could be my story too", or, "It evokes my own story [that is] like yours." And so I think it's one of those things that truly crosses boundaries, crosses borders, attends to some of the things that sometimes keep people separate, and I think, you know, that's so exciting.

It seems surprising that the idea of acknowledging the empathic emotional content of the narratives we encounter when using narrative methods should be such a new area and one that is approached with such care and a little trepidation. Exploration of the emotional element of our work that, with some notable exceptions (Goldie 2012), is otherwise overlooked in much of the literature that surrounds the field of narrative methods. Perhaps in our quest for rigour and alignment with more mainstream qualitative methods we may have overlooked how to bring the feeling back in to our work as researchers, or as Michael puts it: "what we really do when we hear a story".

Conclusion

The exercise of bringing three key narrative practitioners together in this chapter to discuss the history, practice and future of the narrative methods appears to have been a successful one or intriguing at the very least. As is evident, there are clear divisions within the field relating to general differences in ontological viewpoints, as well as specific pathways into using narrative as a research method. There is also a tension shared by all interviewees that exists not only in the multiple uses of narrative as a method, but also in disciplinary origins of the those methods, how they were classified and how they will be further developed.

Throughout the interviews there was expressed an often-mentioned hope, at times even a need, to develop a greater commonality in our understanding about what narrative methods are and what they do. It occurs to us, however, that we could alternatively conceptualise this lack of clarity and the tensions alluded to in this chapter, as a productive working space. This space would act as an arena where there is no resolution; or even the desire for clarity or commonality. Instead this space would contain the existing push and pull between the processes employed by these competing narrative methods and the ideas exemplified by their use. By viewing the tensions that exist in our work not as a deficit but instead as a methodological *atelier*, we could actively employ the notion of narrative or story as the common focus enabling an active and effective dialogue. Such a dialogue can assist a discussion regarding our differing views of the world and our often-polemic approaches to understanding our diverse methodological and theoretical environments. We propose that embracing this space promises a productive outcome to our work, and is perhaps more desirable than a homogenous common ground without diverse edges and unexpected pitfalls and the richness that navigating these obstacles can often bring.

Acknowledgements We would like to take this opportunity to thank our interviewees Michael Bamberg, Maria Tamboukou, and Debbie Pushor for their time and participation in this project. Due to the time differences between us in Australia and the northern hemisphere, interviews often took place at inconvenient times in the working day for our interviewees. We would also like to thank the IT communications team at Griffith for their support and GIER staff for assistance in the administration of this project. Finally, a big thank you to Greer Johnson who interviewed each of our participants and who has supported this project from its inception.

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