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THE CYCLICAL NATURE OF SELF-OTHER STORYTELLING IN NARRATIVE INQUIRY

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17061574>

Abstract: Narrative inquiry is a well-established research method in education, used to explore educational experiences within specific social, cultural, and historical contexts. It is based on the premise that individual lives are shaped by these processes, which can be understood by examining personal life stories. This paper examines the technique of storying self-other experiences within the context of party schooling in Nepal, as part of a PhD research project. It identifies three key phases in constructing narratives from these experiences: (a) the onset of storying self-other experiences, (b) living with these stories, and (c) developing coherent narratives from them. These phases provide a framework for narrative researchers to holistically interpret self-other stories, revealing how individuals perceive, understand, and interact with their world. The study highlights the pedagogical significance of narratives in narrative inquiry and their potential to enrich educational research.

Keywords: Storying experiences, narrative inquiry, self-other narratives, educational research, Nepal

INTRODUCTION

Conceptualizing the meaning of storing self-other Experiences in Narrative Inquiry Storing self-other experiences has a long been deserved as a way of portraying socio-cultural life which is reflected in fictional writing and folk tales. For me, it can also be claimed as a pedagogic dimension of human life, where sharing of experiences appeared to be the sharing of knowledge out of the temporal and spatial history of an individual in question (Huber, Caine, Huber, &Steeves, 2013). As I reflect back to the tradition of re/constructing knowledge in the Aryans wisdom tradition, I come across the idea of storing self-other experiences as a pedagogic enterprise. For example, the *Mahabharat* cites an event of narrating the idea about dealing with *chakrabihu* (a strategy to fight with the enemy) in the battle field. The story narrated by Arjuna (to his wife), the warrior in the Mahabharat, became a part of knowledge for his son, Abhimanyu who was yet to be born. The history of re/constructing knowledge through storing self-other experiences is not a new phenomenon but an iterative journey of uncovering human experiences starting from ancient time to the date.

Story telling serves in the process of building knowledge and intellect (Hutchinson,

Original Article

2015). When I reflect back to my own life right from the childhood to adulthood, I come across a number of stories that contributed to shape the images towards self and others in the community where I lived. It contributed to re/construct my emotions and the ways to perform relationship in my social life world (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2010). For example, the stories that I heard from my grandmothers during my childhood contributed to conceptualize the relationship between me and her; it helped me understand what a child means for a grandmother and how grandmotherly love is communicated to a child especially through a story. I would like to cite my school teachers' way of narrating experiences during my primary and lower secondary school days which contributed to re/shape my understanding towards teachers and teaching profession in the context of Nepal. In this context, I feel human beings as organisms to have been developed out of re/constructing self-other experiences that inherit into the stories which they listen from the others and/or explain by themselves (Connelly & Clandini, 1990). Life is thus full of stories which consist of the way human beings experience self and others and make meaning of the world in which they are the part. A story of experiences thus serves as a building block which is placed one upon the other to give whole human life a shape, a meaning (Conle, 2000). I therefore feel that in an endeavor of exploring knowledge rooted into the socio-cultural circumstances, a research needs to focus the study of human life stories in relation to their own social, cultural, religious, political, economic and professional being and performing. When I go deeper into the term 'narrative inquiry', I see it as a compound noun being constructed by synthesizing the terms 'narrative' and 'inquiry'. On its etymological ground, sometimes it appears to me as an inquiry undertaken to make meaning of self-other narratives; but some other time narratives appear to me as a portrayal of meaning by themselves and therefore there is no need to integrate inquiry of the kind into it which carries a separate entity (Conle, 2000). The former way of interpreting 'narrative inquiry' encourages me to understand the term 'narrative' as a phenomenon to be studied under a process of an inquiry and, the later way of interpreting it provides me an opportunity to think of 'narrative' as a method in itself (Clandinin & Huber, 2002). For me, the term 'narrative' consists of chronologically reframed experiences, in the form of phenomenon to be studied through an inquiry. In this context, I would like to portray 'chronologically reframed experiences' (stories) as phenomenon to be known about and the term 'narrative' as a method to uncover the meaning of the phenomenon in question. If I take human life as a whole entity being constructed out of a series of stories, I am convinced to elicit the stories of the researched which iteratively appears in their life. I then interpret them to make meaning of the way they understand the world and act in it. For this, I, as a narrative researcher, need to explore experiences of my research subjects, organize and develop them in the form of stories, state and interpret them to portray what it means to live storied-life in a given socio-cultural context (Farmer, 2004).

Why one's storied-experiences carry the meaning so as to explain them as a unit of knowledge to be explored. It is perhaps our stories that give our life a meaning. Denying of the stories in life may be equated with the denying of the meaning it refers to. If we change our stories that construct our life, we perhaps change the circumstances and the meaning of life that we live by (Okri, 1997). Human narratives, therefore, reflects the views and images of the story-tellers (Geertz, 1995) that revealing the world into which they act and behave. In this way, narrative inquiry holds deeper, broader and multiple scopes in the field of education and social science research. Especially, in the field of education, it provides a narrative researcher an opportunity for storing the experiences of instructors and learners to unfold how the existing curriculum and pedagogy influence their living and working in their socio-

Original Article

cultural and professional life world (Connelly&Clandinin, 1990). It helps the researcher unpack how narratives of the teachers and students shape and re/form their practices (Duff & Bell, 2002). Their narratives in a sense help them explore their own ways of growing and constructing ideas in different time and space in their life.

The above mentioned way of discussing the concept of narrative inquiry reveals that hearing, storing, recording, constructing and interpreting stories of the researcher and the researched continuously takes place from the beginning to end of a narrative research. If so, I asked myself question: how do the stories of participants' experiences, as a part of narrative inquiry, became iterative phenomenon in my research, which I carried out as a part of my PhD? This question induced me to develop a paper entitled storing self-other experiences: an iterative phenomenon in narrative inquiry.

Purpose and Process of Developing this Paper

The purpose of this paper is to discuss and explore the journey of "storying self-other experiences" into three different phases of my narrative inquiry: (a) onset of storing self-other experiences, (b) living with the stories of self-other experiences and (c) developing narratives out of self-other experiences.

Onset of Storing Self-other Experiences

In the beginning of storing self-other experiences, I thought of some key questions: who am I in my study field? whom do I interact with and why? what way of interaction with my study participants (leaders and cadres of a political party) would be helpful in re/constructing selfother experiences? what sort of experiences would be helpful in developing stories in relation to my research agenda? The host of questions as such further induced me to specify my role performances, as a narrative researcher, and my relationship with my study participants in the research site. While assessing my role performance as a narrative inquirer; I came across the idea of Connelly and Clandinin (1990) who assert narrative inquirer as a negotiator. But, the question can be raised in this context like, how and why I appeared to be negotiator in my study site, especially on the onset of storing self-other experiences. By the term 'negotiation' in conducting a narrative inquiry I mean mutual understanding between me and my research participants. In qualitative research, negotiation appears as an ethical issue in which the researcher and the researched negotiate one another's purpose, presence and performances in the study field (Connelly &Clandinin, 1990).

On the way to giving 'negotiation' a meaning I communicated with my study participants about why I approached them, what I expected from them and how I and they would perform our possible roles and relationships to develop a story of self-other experiences in relation to party schooling in the context of Nepal. Negotiation between myself and my research participants thus appeared to be a gateway to re/shape, re/construct their experiences, images and impressions upon the meaning, process and challenges of party schooling (Gordon, McKibbin, Vasudevan, &Vinz, 2007). On the way to articulating 'negotiation' between myself and my study participants, I realized to be closer to them and vice-versa. In this way, I felt that building up negotiation, in the field for storing self-other experiences, is a process, in which both the researcher and the researched feel the sense of mutual connectedness, interdependent in the matter of uncovering storied-life (Coulter, Michael, &Poynor, 2007). On the way to working for negotiation between me and my study participants, we got acquainted with and accepted one another's being, valuing and performing in the social and professional life world. This kind of mutual recognition helped us to be collaborative in uncovering, organizing and constructing experiences in relation to

Original Article

party schooling and thereby developing narratives for interpreting them (Connelly&Clandinin, 1990). Although it was the beginning stage of my narrative inquiry, it appeared to be important in the sense that it paved the way for me and my research participants to portray our experiences in relation to party schooling, especially through telling our stories. As a narrative researcher, I also performed my role in empowering the study participants to engage them in the research endeavor by re/constructing their life stories in relation to party schooling (Tsui, 2007). As I felt on behalf of my study participants, their life experiences in relation to party schooling consisted the feature of temporal orientation. It constituted their socio-cultural images in the field of party schooling. It was the part of an implicit knowing waiting to be claimed as an explicit knowledge claim. In the past, it was beyond their thinking. That is, they never thought of the idea that they would have to re/construct those experiences as a part of uncovering their life in the field of party politics. They also could not think in the past that their non-shared experiences would be storied for the purpose of building knowledge for uncovering the realities in relation to party schooling in Nepal. In that context, as I felt, they needed an empowerment for exploring their unshared experiences and revitalizing them through making a story for interpreting party schooling in Nepal. For me, the meaning of empowerment, in this context, was to enable my study participants to be honest in opening up their implicit, unshared and uncared experiences that they cultivated on the way to making journey in the field of party politics in Nepal.

The other important role that I performed in the beginning of storing self-other experiences was to establish relationship between me and my research participants. My relationship with them and/or their relationship with me, especially for storing self-other experiences, constituted the sense of equality, affinity and caring (Connelly&Clandinin, 1990). On the way to maintaining equality, affinity and caring, I developed proximity (for affinity) with them and also I participated myself as a research informant (for equality) while storying self-other experiences. But the question, in this context, is: how did such relationship between the researcher and researched contribute to storing self-other experiences, especially in relation to party schooling? In the context of this research, storing self-other experiences needed collaboration and active participation of both the researcher and the researched to make a shared voice (Schaafsma, Pagnucci, Wallace, & Stock, 2007)portraying how party schooling exists and what curriculum and/or instructional techniques it performs for sensitizing, orienting and empowering the party leaders and cadres. Maintaining equality, affinity and caring between and among the researcher and researched helped me pave the ground for negotiation and empowerment for self and others in the research to articulate their experiences and voices in the process of developing shared stories of party schooling. Storing self-other experiences of party schooling can be taken as connected and shared knowing which cannot be possible by separating the researcher and the researched (Coulter, Michael, &Poynor, 2007). In the shared knowing, self-insertion is imperative and self-insertion, on the other hand, is possible when every participant feels the sense of equality, affinity and caring.

The purpose of doing so was to ensure the voice of all the participants in the process of making stories in relation to party schooling. In this context, there can be a question: why are voices of participants counted on the way to developing stories in a narrative inquiry research? Perhaps Britzman in Connelly and Clandinin (1990) provides a convincing response when they say that voice is meaning; it suggests relationship; it also constitutes struggle, perceptions and feelings. The meaning, relationship, struggle and feelings are changeable in relation to time,

Original Article

space, positioning and performance of the participants. That is, the voice of the participants get changed over time depending upon where, how and why part of their situatedness. Participants' voice thus has temporal value; it has spatial value and performativity value as well. Embedding participants' voices in storing self-other experiences would serve in multiple ways. It would add temporal, spatial, relational and contextual features of self-other experiences in the given story (Connelly&Clandinin, 1990).

Living With the Stories of Self-Other Experiences

As I revisit the above mentioned description, I come with the understanding that storing self-other experiences in a narrative inquiry research is a continuous, temporal and social phenomenon. It is continuous in the sense that the researcher and the research participants collaboratively construct stories from beginning to the end. This continuous feature of making stories in narrative research appear to be true to my research, in which I began to articulate my research agenda by narrating my own engagement and participation in political activities ranging from my childhood to the date. The stories in narrative research are temporal in the sense that they are portrayed and structured in the order of time and events as they took place (Kim, &Latta, 2009). This feature of storing self-other experiences are reflected in my own PhD research in the way that the narratives in my research constituted of plot, scene, theme in the order of time and space. Again, the stories in a narrative inquiry research constitute interactive process in which the researcher and the researched together discuss and interact to generate their unshared, implicit and/or explicit experiences cultivated in various stages of their life in the past (Kim, &Latta, 2009). As I observe the stories which I collected from my study participants, I come across the feature of social interaction in them. Generally, the stories communicated to me what sort of social interaction shaped the ideas and perception of party schooling in the part of my study participants.

My situatedness as discussed above in the realm of my PhD research provoked me understand that I was living with the stories throughout the research. While living with the stories, I sometimes appeared to live by my own stories of party schooling which I narrated to my study participants as a part of articulating my presence, participation and performance on the way to doing the research. And some other time I created a situation in which my study participants told me their stories in relation to party schooling reflecting their way of being schooled in terms of party politics. A single attempt was not sufficient to capture their images in relation to party schooling, I created a situation in which they retold, reframed and restructured their images, impressions and perceptions in the form of stories (Connelly&Clandinin, 1990). While doing so, I realized that I was not only constructing and/or reconstructing stories but also living with the stories in the study field. In this way, my research on party schooling proceeded with stories of their political schooling.

While living with the stories in the study field I assessed the temporal, social and cultural horizon of the stories. To maintain these horizons of the stories, I was conscious in terms of questions of the kind: To what extent should I probe into the life of my study participants? Which area of party schooling should be focused more and why? What should be the depth of inquiry to maintain social interaction in developing consensus upon the ideas related to party schooling? These questions often brought me on research track while living with self-other stories of experiences. It may be obvious for my reader to ask question: Why I focus the idea of living with stories in the study field? In the narrative research, right after the commencement of the research, the researcher becomes the

Original Article

part of the research process. It becomes customary for a narrative researcher like me to give an account of how I performed as a researcher throughout the study.

On the way to living with the stories in the study field I performed a series of activities that convinced me how a narrative researcher lives with the stories of self-other experiences in the research site. While working with my study participants collaboratively for storing self-other experiences came across a number of methods such as developing and maintaining field notes, interview transcripts, hearing and telling the stories, autobiographical writing, reviewing personal philosophies, documentation of party schooling mechanism, party-schooling related newsletter, bulletins, proceedings, hearing to the leaders who addressed their cadres in relation to party plan and policy (Connelly&Clandinin, 1990), so on and so forth. These events and performances encouraged to develop multilayer stories and thereby convincing me to realize my living with self-other stories, as a narrative researcher. In the following part of this paper I portray what performance made me feel to live with self-other stories and how.

Developing Narratives out of self-other Experiences

After exploring self-other experiences to meet the purpose of my PhD narrative research, I arrived at the stage of developing narratives. Development of narratives out of the participants experiences required narrative skill in the part of both the researcher and the researched. In this context, it is important for me to reveal what narrative skills constitute and how the skills as such help a narrative researcher to develop a narrative. Developing an outline of the plot, the skeleton of narrative is said to be one of the narrative skills, in which the researcher make space for setting the scene, organizing the ideas in chronological order, presenting the character, creating a space for articulating the message, representing the culture and human emotions embedded to the message, etc. (Conle, 2000). But in the context of my research, development of narratives followed selection, organization, gradation and categorization of self-other experiences. Before developing narratives out of self-other experiences, I considered questions of the kind: Which experiences would best serve my research purpose? Whose experiences should I take into account and why? How are the particular kinds of experiences fit to my research context? These what, how and why aspects of self-other experiences in the context of my research brought me on track that was primarily required by my research purpose. These questions also helped me to maintain equal power relationship between me (the researcher) and my study participants (the researched). They also instructed me at what point of time in the field I should play the role of researcher and at what stage I should appear to be a participant. In this way, I created a space for making collaborative effort not only for exploring self-other experiences but also for developing narratives.

I developed narratives out of self-other experiences to get help from them in two different ways. First, I thought my research narratives need to be devices through which I can cultivate the meaning and, second, I supposed my narratives would appear as a methodology in itself to demonstrate the unshared meaning of my research participants as a part of knowledge claim (Clandinin& Huber, 2002). I would like to call my narratives as a device in the sense that it consisted of the phenomenon related to my research agenda in the form of story. In this sense, on the way to developing narratives I was under the impression that a narrative as a device can be equated with a story through which I can get to the interpreted meaning. The idea as such appears to be similar to Connelly and Clandini (1990) who say, "People by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative

Original Article

researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experiences" (p. 2). At the same time, I thought the development of narratives would serve me as a methodology in itself because it exists in the form of both a technique and a meaning. It is a technique because it includes the systematic arrangement of time, space, themes, contents and contexts. Since a narrative integrates temporal, spatial, thematic, contextual and content-based research phenomenon, it expresses an integrated meaning (Ospina& Dodge, 2005). I thus thought that I as a narrative researcher would not have to interpret the narrative separately to reach the meaning. This perspective of developing narrative induced me to think that meaning inherits into the words. These words are arranged into the narratives depending upon the time, space, social relationship and purpose of the story-tellers. In this way, an integration of the setting, the message, the context, etc. supports a meaning to emerge voluntarily, which can be the goal of developing a narrative in a narrative research.

I developed narratives under the impression of "one versus many attempts for improving them" (Duff & Bell, 2002). Under the impression I made a collaborative effort in storing self-other experiences. Out of those experiences, I developed a skeleton of a narrative. I demonstrated the narrative framework with my study participants. They responded to it with comments and suggestions for further improvement in the narrative framework. Based on their feedback, I redesigned and/or rearranged the ideas in the narratives. In this way, I visited and revisited the narratives to bring precision into it. While doing so, sometimes I positioned myself as a narrative researcher and sometimes a study participant. The collaboration of the researcher and the researched in developing a narrative thus creates a circular mode of re/constructing, re/imaging and re/establishing the meaning into the narratives. The idea as such appears to be similar to Connelly and Clandini (1990) who say, "Because collaboration occurs from beginning to end in narrative inquiry, plot outlines are continually revised as consultation takes place over written materials and as further data are collected to develop points of importance in the revised story." (p. 2)

I also focused some key terms to cover within the narrative framework. First, I considered whether the narrative encompasses characters, values, and a way of life and whether the narrative reflects the social and/or intellectual circumstances of the time. As a narrative researcher, I also focused on some key qualities (moral, emotional and aesthetic) of the story tellers. While doing so, I enquired in what way their story in relation to the particular phenomenon of party schooling was associated with these human qualities.

Closing Remarks

Narrative inquiry as a research method for exploring perceptions and practices of party schooling in Nepal has been a blended approach of inquiry. It happens so because it blends temporal, spatial, social, cultural, emotional, and moral and aesthetic dimensions of the research phenomenon. On the one hand, narratives in a narrative inquiry research are supposed to be a device to cultivate the meaning for which the research is conducted and, on the other, they are also supposed to be the meaning in themselves. Story telling is a key idea in narrative research in which the story of the story tellers does not only reflect particular events but their life and the meaning inherent to it. A narrative researcher supposes human life in holistic form which is made up of a series of stories. These stories are the construct of experiences which they cultivate on the way to living and working in their socio-cultural and professional life world. If the experiences are accumulated in the form of stories, the images and

Original Article

impressions towards their life can be developed. In this sense, storing self-other experiences are taken as a key phenomenon in narrative research.

The idea of 'storying self-other experiences' constitutes of three different phases namely (a) onset of storying self-other experiences, (b) living with the stories of self-other experiences and (c) developing narratives out of self-other experiences. In the first phase, I learned how to be a negotiator, an empowered, and as a subject of establishing self-other relationship. In the phase of living with the story, I assessed how I and my study participants live by and live with the stories that give a meaningful account of my research agenda. Living with the stories meant to me as living with the plot, scene, time, events, place, characters, theme and the message of the story. On the phase of 'living with the stories' I obtained ample opportunities to hear and tell one another's experiences and thereby constructing stories out of them. This telling and retelling, listening and relisting of one another stories appeared to me that storying self-other experiences is an iterative phenomenon in a narrative inquiry research.

As a narrative inquirer, I maintained field notes that consisted of the stories of my participants along with my own reflection upon them. After that, I developed narratives out of self-other experiences. In this phase, I scrutinized the first and second phases and then blended them to the work of developing narratives. I considered organization of ideas and experiences, occurring of the experiences in terms of time and space, emotional, moral, aesthetic and cultural dimensions of the research phenomenon.

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Original Article

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