COACTION PUBLISHING

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Adapting to the digital age: a narrative approach[†]

Sarah Cousins[a]* and Dounia Bissar[b]

[a]*Faculty of Education and Sport, University of Bedfordshire, Bedfordshire, UK;* [b]*Department of Language and Linguistics, University of Essex, Colchester, UK*

The article adopts a narrative inquiry approach to foreground informal learning and exposes a collection of stories from tutors about how they adapted comfortably to the digital age. We were concerned that despite substantial evidence that bringing about changes in pedagogic practices can be difficult, there is a gap in convincing approaches to help in this respect. In this context, this project takes a ''bottom-up'' approach and synthesises several life-stories into a single persuasive narrative to support the process of adapting to digital change. The project foregrounds the small, every-day motivating moments, cultural features and environmental factors in people's diverse lives which may have contributed to their positive dispositions towards change in relation to technology enhanced learning. We expect that such narrative approaches could serve to support colleagues in other institutions to warm up to ever-changing technological advances.

Keywords: narrative inquiry; resonance; story; engagement

Introduction

The project

> We know the world through the stories that are told about it. (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p. 641)

What stories can be told about the fast-changing world of higher education, and what can we learn from them? Adapting to new situations, conquering fears and overcoming obstacles are familiar storylines, with particular relevance for university lecturers having to introduce new technologies in their working practices. This is not the only story, there are many others, all unique, all with the potential to move us and make us reflect on our own situation. This paper reports on a research project undertaken at London Metropolitan University, UK, with the aim of gathering and sharing personal accounts of successful adaptation to the digital age.

Rationale

University lecturers are under increasing pressures to adopt new systems and ways of working. In order to address this, some institutions have adopted a bottom-up approach, whereby colleagues lead practice and influence peers from the ground.

1

This is in order to counteract their potential "lack of control over the larger systems for which they are ... held responsible" (Schön 1987, p. 7).

There are reports that this approach is becoming increasingly widespread. Benson, Anderson, and Ooms (2011), for example, consider factors that facilitate or stand in the way of adopting and developing learning and teaching with technology. They explore tutors' willingness to accept new technologies and analyse signs of scepticism and misunderstandings within staff teams. Their research is concerned with tutor perceptions and points out that whilst some tutors are more willing to embrace blended learning than others, many are "overwhelmed by the variety of resources" (p. 150), or state their need for more resources, including time and technological support. Benson, Anderson, and Ooms (2011) conclude that tutors are generally willing to "extend the range of pedagogical and technological approaches if barriers could be overcome" (p. 153) and point to the need to build on positive staff attitudes.

Rolfe (2012) stresses the importance of identifying individual pioneers within institutions to complement wider institutional support. With reference to tutor adaptation to open educational resources, Rolfe emphasises the need for "understanding the motivations and characteristics of potential users" in order to establish "strong and sustainable practices" (p. 16). Kearney *et al.* (2012) also emphasise the importance of attending to tutor perspectives. They suggest that, in order for blended learning approaches to become securely embedded in practice, account should be taken of "the preferences and characteristics of teachers, including their epistemological beliefs." (p. 50). This research rests comfortably with these empathetic positions, creating a space for tutors' own stories, and giving a voice to their individual perspectives and beliefs. It concurs with Skelton's (2012) analysis that "the contemporary university accommodates an increasing variety of people and subjectivities" (p. 37) and that any notion of a single "teacher identity" is highly complex. Accordingly, it takes up the challenge set by Cook, Pachler, and Bradley (2008) that "issues of identity, affect and technology require further investigation" (p. 15).

The context

In line with other higher education institutions in the country, e-learning is high on the agenda at London Metropolitan University. Guidelines regarding the use of a learning management system were issued some years ago and programmes of staff development organised by technical staff. However, it soon became clear that there are no simple solutions to match the "full complexity of professional learning for e-learning practitioners" (Sharpe and Oliver 2007, p. 126). It was felt that, in order for lecturers to fully engage with the new tools, another kind of support was needed.

Teams of "Blended Learning Advisers" were created in each faculty to meet this need. Their remit was to encourage and support colleagues in making use of new technologies to enhance their teaching. This approach was in tune with Sappey and Relf's (2010) emphasis on "capacity building at the teaching faculty level through training embodied in the academic identity" (paragraph 6). In other words, the idea behind the champion movement was to effect change within horizontal rather than vertical structures, with a focus on individual tutors' diverse needs rather than through a blanket, one-size-fits-all strategy.

The Blended Learning Advisers at London Metropolitan University led a series of workshops and mentoring sessions, which on the whole received positive feedback from colleagues. But perhaps more than their informative content, it was their value as a platform for exchanging views and perceptions that was appreciated, a space where tutors' voices could be heard. Following on from this, the idea was born to find a larger outlet for some of these voices and share some inspiring stories.

The approach

The aim of the project is to stimulate reflection on the practical and emotional conditions that can be conducive to the process of adapting to new technologies. The research adopts a narrative methodology, listening to and presenting life stories, in the belief that dispositions and attitudes to change in the workplace are moulded by life experiences. The choice of methodological approach was therefore guided by the following imperative: no hypothesis would be made, no answer given, but stories would be told that could both inspire actions and raise questions. Such an approach follows on principles for writing advocated, for example, by Richardson and St Pierre (2008). Similarly, Jewitt and Kress (2003) suggest that "opening up questions is ... more useful ... than suggesting unsustainable certainties" (p. 4).

Given the resistance of some tutors to new technologies, it is indeed important for the project not to be seen to offer models to follow. Rather, the project should stimulate a process of self-reflection to help individuals gain a better understanding about their own attitudes towards the use of new technologies, so as to develop a personal strategy and determine what kind of training and support they need.

The project therefore adheres to a collaborative and constructive approach, whereby all people engaged, whether narrators, researchers or readers (listeners), construct narratives of past experiences to help shape future experiences. A narrative methodology imposes itself as most appropriate for the purpose but also most likely to acknowledge the complexity of people's lives and honour what Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) call "lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding." (p. 42). The tutors' narratives would not serve to develop theories but rather reconstruct individual cases. We wanted to avoid the temptation to develop categories of elements that may be seen to contribute to successful adaptation to new technologies. The focus of this research is on the participants' own theories and interpretations and the narratives in which they are presented. Our approach therefore follows Chase's (2005) description of the interpretive process as "listening to the voices *within* the narratives rather than locating distinct themes *across* them" (p. 663 – author's italics). These voices can be multiple and constitute stories within the story.

The project is grounded in the domain of biographical research. The analysis focuses solely on the narrative structure and not on the discourse. It concentrates on the stories' *power of resonance* rather than on recurring themes or forms of expression. In so doing, it adheres to Sandelowski's (1994) claim that stories may provide us with "visions of human nature more resonant with our own experiences that any psychological, sociological, or any conventionally scientific rendering of it" (p. 52). Indeed, it is this resonance that this research seeks to evoke.

Narrative inquiry has its defenders, but also some detractors who question the validity of a research based on stories that may or may not be plausible (Phillips 1994).

Stories, we suggest, are the product of multiple interpretations: by the narrators themselves, by the researchers and by the readers/listeners. In that process, the "factual" dimension may be lost in part and the narratives may not face up to criteria of acceptability such as reliability and truthfulness. However, and this is accepted by such sceptics of narrative research as Phillips (1994), in some cases the criterion of "truthfulness" of a narrative is not relevant to the research. We argue that this research is one of such cases as its aim is not, in the words of Conle (2001), "strategizing in order to win others to our own position", but promoting "mutual understanding" (p. 23) with a view to facilitate a process of professional development.

However, one of the dangers of narrative inquiry, as exposed by Savin-Baden and Van Niekerk (2007), is that stories can be used as a means to promote "truths" (e.g. institutional diktats) or to control behaviours (in our case, the use of new technologies). It is to avoid any such danger that the emphasis of this study is firmly on the personal, individual nature of the stories, that cannot be used to make generalisations.

A second issue concerns the interpretation of the data collected, i.e. the relation between the stories as they are told and the way they are presented. The decision to present the data as it had been collected, in the words of the participants, was taken to avoid interference from our own interpretation. However, the problem of quantity of data needed to be addressed, with the selection of the most "relevant" parts of the stories. This selection was undertaken using the subjective criterion of "resonance".

Method

The participants

In some respects, the participants formed a homogenous group. They were all of white European ethnic origin, for example, and all were employed as university lecturers. There was some limited diversity. Thirty-six per cent of the participants had come to academia later in life, having first pursued a career as teachers. Eighteen per cent of the participants were from non-UK backgrounds, and only one participant spoke English as an additional language. Most of the participants were female, with only 27% males. Thirty-six per cent of the participants were over 50 years old. These features of diversity, however, were of little importance to the research as a whole, since the stories themselves were rich in diversity. In line with research about the learner experience of e-learning by Creanor *et al*. (2008), the diversity of learners' profiles was not a useful indicator for designing or supporting e-learning activities. There was, rather a stronger correlation between the use of technology in learners' lives and their engagement in the process of e-learning.

Ethical considerations were incorporated from the start of the research process. This is a study of people and the narratives they construct. As a result, such research "has the potential to cause (usually unintentional) damage" (Wellington *et al*. 2005, p. 106) Our view was that such an empathetic approach was necessary, so that we would consider at each stage, "whether or not [we] would be happy for [us or our own families] to be involved in any particular research, or to be re-presented in any particular way" (Sikes 2009, p. 172).

Ethical considerations were at the forefront when methodological choices were made. It was not necessary to collect data from large numbers of people since this would carry the danger of "diminishing people to characteristics which failed to take account of personal biographies and circumstances" (Sikes 2009, p. 174). Sikes points out that so much research about teachers is concerned with improving standards and outcomes, rather than seeking to explore how particular teachers view their role. Accordingly, tutors' life stories were at the foreground of the research. With Sappey and Relf (2010) we believed that teaching is not something that most tutors simply do for a living, but that they bring who they are to their work.

One of the potential difficulties to be considered carefully from the outset was our relationship to the participants as the participants were our colleagues. Morse (1994) warns that if researchers are already familiar with the setting and participants in a non-research capacity, then special precautions need to be taken (p. 27). Morse suggests that such situations invariably involve "competing agendas" (*Ibid.*) which may distract the researcher, interfere with the research and prevent the researcher from entering the scene as a "stranger". With these potential barriers in mind, participants were allocated to particular researchers according to criteria of familiarity and connections.

We also decided not to follow Denscombe's (2003) recommendation that researchers should "go back to the field … to check their validity against 'reality'" (p. 272). This would be a diminishing act, fitting people's complex realities into artificially conceived categories. In this way, we adopted a Foucaultian (1969) position and avoided creating any over-simplistic "divisions" (p. 25), since these are, by definition, forms of classification and frequently refer to "institutional types" (*Ibid.*). People and their diverse, unique identities remain at the core of this research.

We considered it important to tread carefully around any sensitive and personal features of people's lives. As Janks (2009) proposes, "we bring who we are and where we come from to the process of production and reception of spoken … texts." (p. 58). Accordingly, we did not want to skim over these essential story backdrops. We chose a narrative methodology as the most suitable approach for eliciting these rich, personal and interwoven details about people's lives. One participant concluded at the end of her account: "… nobody ever told me: You can't do it." Her narrative thus evoked the encouragement and support she received from her family and community. This reflexive utterance is mirrored in the learning and teaching context in Higher Education in which, as Beetham (2007) suggests, "most learning involves interaction with a more expert other person" (p. 36).

We were also aware that our own life experiences gave us a particular gaze and interpretation on the biographical narratives we were privileged to hear. Our own stories would inevitably filter our participants' stories and in the analysis create new stories, different to those originally conceived. This was not, however, a disadvantage, since, like Bagley and Castro-Salazar (2012), we were able to construct shared meanings with our participant-colleagues. We shared an understanding about our institutional context and at the same time built up relationships with our participants. We accommodated their stories into our understanding about how tutors adapt to the digital age.

The process

Eleven participants contributed to the project, all lecturers in the faculty of Humanities, Arts, Languages and Education. They volunteered to take part, in response to an invitation sent collectively by email. The purpose of the project was to gather stories with the potential to encourage and inspire. The invitation targeted those who considered themselves as "having adapted successfully to digital change".

For the stories to be "credible" (see Tracy 2010), their content would have to be selected by the participants themselves. However, a purely "biographical" narrative (Flick 2009) could have posed problems of length and relevance, as well as selective memory. An "episodic" narrative (*Ibid.*), on the contrary, could have led to a loss of spontaneity. A combined type was therefore chosen, i.e. a "situation-orientated" (*Ibid.*) narrative, as the most appropriate to elicit a response to our inquiry. A "generative narrative question" (Riemann and Schütze, quoted in Flick 2009, p. 177) was formulated as a prompt for the narratives. Participants were asked to "give an account of the events, features and people in their lives that [they] thought may have facilitated the process of adapting to new technologies in the context of higher education".

Before collecting the narratives, pre-interview meetings were offered to explain the procedure. Drawing on Burnett (2010), participants were asked to prepare themselves, choosing from a range of methods, including lists, mind-maps or even a selection of objects to symbolise or stand for their relationship to different technologies that they perceived as significant in their lives. In addition, a focus-group meeting was organised to stimulate reflection on the topic. The interviews were conducted at a time and location to suit the participants. This was usually in our own or our participants' university offices. A maximum length of one hour was specified, but most interviews did not exceed half an hour.

For the transcriptions, an external provider was employed, less as a matter of preference, and more one of expedience, due to our heavy workloads. This, however, had the benefit of having more consistency than might have otherwise been achieved by two separate persons. The recordings were professionally transcribed from a more detached perspective and were not mediated by the researcher who experienced their telling. The narratives were transcribed verbatim and returned to participants, who were invited to make any changes necessary.

The next stage involved becoming familiarised with the content of the narratives so as to be able to extract the most significant parts. We read the stories several times, separately and to each other. We then compiled story frames for each narrative, which captured the main events, people and features (including objects), as well as the narrator's comments about them. The result offered a perspective – both of the individuals and the group – revealing common trends and impressions mixed with personal experiences. It occurred to us that these different stories could be merged into one single story which would speak for all of them and for all of our stories. However, much would be lost in the process, most crucially the individual voices and their potential to move and inspire. Stories were gathered, re-fashioned and re-presented as distinct and whole units of meaning.

The story frame exercise, although not taken forward as part of any data analysis, nevertheless supported the research process. As we disentangled the narratives and extracted the themes to match our headings: Story, Features (including objects),

Events and People, so we gained familiarity with the stories and deepened our involvement in them. The process also helped us to reach our decision not to carry out a discourse analysis and to maintain the stories as unique and whole entities.

Findings and discussion

The stories

"Language is the house with lamplight in its windows" from *What the Light Teaches* by Anne Michaels, 2000, in Astley, 2002.

The participants were self-selecting. There is no suggestion, therefore, that their stories are in any way typical. They are simply accounts gathered, considered and re-presented from tutors who declared themselves to have warmed to new technologies, embraced change and been willing to develop their pedagogical approaches through a range of new media and modes.

Each researcher heard the narratives of different participants before reading the corresponding transcripts several times over. Each of us then foregrounded particular transcripts according to the extent to which they resonated with them (Conle and de Beyer 2009; Sandelowski 1994; Snyder-Young 2011). At the next stage, we read the narratives to each other and made further reductions in accordance with feedback from their co-researcher. In these ways, the selection process became more of an echoing-resonating approach, whereby the first researcher responded to the oral telling, then the first reading and then the re-written version. The second researcher offered a further layer of responses. At the next echoing stage, delegates at a conference in the UK offered their responses to the distilled "vignettes" (Benson, Anderson, and Ooms 2011). The conference was an opportunity to obtain "collegial feedback" and "guidance" (Knafl 1994, p. 369). The echoing-resonating process continued as the transcripts are scripted and read back to a re-gathering of the participants.

We considered that, if a single, stereotypical, story had to emerge from the various personal narratives, it would be one of overcoming the difficulties that technologies present and feeling empowered as a result. Some participants acknowledged that technology had brought about improvement and new possibilities both in their personal lives, and in their broader social and working contexts. Other participants emphasised the support they received from other people in conquering their use. In this respect, tutors' stories mirrored students' stories in Burnett's (2010) study, in which students' accounts suggested that "their online practices were embedded mainly in local activities and relationships located primarily in the physical world" (*Ibid*. 2.1). In this study, as in Burnett's, "induction to new practices was often mediated by friends or family" (*Ibid*.) Our participants told stories in which they were supported to acquire digital skills from people close to them, such as family, friends or loved ones. "My husband was hugely important" and "My mum was hugely important too", offered one participant.

Beyond this, all that emerges from the research are individual stories, stories with details about significant life events, key people and changing technological objects. Woven throughout these important story landmarks are people's individual voices. The voices echo and resonate with the researchers who re-read them to themselves, then to each other and then to colleagues. We suggest that these warm, echoing

sounds may generate their own warmth onwards and outwards, within the faculty and beyond.

Five extracts

Rebecca's story

When I was about four or five, I was always interested in taking toys apart and finding out how they worked. The adults would say:

"Oh, look at that! Isn't that interesting!"

"She takes things apart and she is really good at putting them back together!"

"Look at how she can do it!"

I felt empowered. I'm sure I must have broken things, but I have no vivid recollection of ever being told off. Even if I did break the toaster or whatever, it wasn't the end of the world.

And so I think from a very early stage I lacked any fear in new experiences. That would have been early Sixties, as everything came in, so I can't remember getting a television, but my older sister can.

I can remember being allowed to change channels and pressing the buttons, and nobody actually stopping me. I probably grew up thinking I was someone who could do things.

What shines through all this is that nobody ever told me: "You can't do it." All the time I'd been learning all these things just by watching others, having a go, being prepared to experiment and by just growing with the updates.

Liz's story

I can still to this day remember when I first typed an essay and I saw it being printed out and nearly crying. I was as proud of that as the fact that, you know, I've got a first class degree, I was as proud of the fact that I could use a computer, even though that in a sense was a secondary, you know, you didn't get a degree in computing with what I did. But I just remember that huge satisfaction in getting that, and a huge satisfaction when I first realised that I could send an Email, these kind of things, that I never ever thought I'd be able to do, that had scared the life out of me.

I don't want anyone ever to feel as frightened as I felt. At university, I thought that everybody would be terribly confident and of course actually they weren't. And I think I tried so hard when I first went there that I ended up being the person that everybody used to come and ask. After a while people were asking me "How did you do that?" and "How did you develop this, that or the other?" And I thought it's just because I really tried. And that made me feel fairly good about myself. I thought "I can do this!"

Annabel's story

It was quite interesting to look back on my life and go back to being the first house on the street to have a TV, for example, [laughs], back in the Fifties. So I probably always lived with technology. And my dad was an aeronautical engineer in the RAF and stuff. He built the first TV we had. He built his own Hi Fi. We had one before anybody else. He loved technology. So I suppose it was something that I was always surrounded by from about the age of four or five. And as new kind of media technology came on stream, so my dad upgraded his stuff. And so I was just brought up with this kind of constant development of different kinds of media.

To some extent it's possibly to do with my upbringing ... with a father who was an early adopter. He died in 2002, but the saddest thing is that just before that he got a computer

at home but he couldn't really use it. I think it's part of why he died, in a way. It was the first time that he couldn't get his head round something technological. He'd been using computers in this great big huge mainframe in his work. They were cutting edge of course. I'm sure that must have been a massive influence to be brought up in a family with a father who was like that.

Siobhan's story

I think my interest in ICT in particular started when I started teacher training, when I first trained to be a teacher myself, maybe about twelve years ago. And at the time I had a friend who was very much into computers and technology, and I would find it very frustrating to use the computer and not know how to access the programs, and what I tended to do was ignore everything I didn't need to know and only focus on the very small bits I needed to know. And he helped me a lot but he did what lots of people do and he sort of took the mouse and showed me what to do by doing it himself. And as a teacher I recognise the frustration of children when they don't know how to do something and somebody takes over. So that's again developed my interest and I knew that once I started using computers and got better that I would always make sure that I would never, you know, take over when children don't understand. And that's something I try to work with the students to understand not to do the tasks for the children [when they are on placement], or even for each other when they're demonstrating in the lectures.

Chris' story

I suppose one of the things that does make me sceptical is just how badly interactive white boards are used in a lot of classrooms. And I do, you know, remain slightly frustrated by the mantra that using ICT is always good. Because I think it's done a lot of damage. I see students talking, teachers talking to kids for much longer than is healthy from the front and I blame technology almost entirely. Because in my day when there was only one OHP to share in the department, it took a bit of a faff to get things printed onto OHP, you wouldn't bother. So you would, you know, the most I would do from the front to start a lesson would be to put some notes on the whiteboard to guide the introduction. And then the whole point was to get the kids cracking on something. And I think now that point at which the kids get cracking is delayed and sometimes never happens. And it's purely this kind of, that ICT can, can kid you into thinking you're better prepared than you are. And also kid you into thinking that your teaching is more interactive than it is because actually it remains driven by you. So I can see the dangers in the classroom as well.

So some bits of technology I will not pick up and others because I can't really see the point. So I did have a half-hearted attempt at listening to music on an MP3 player but then I found I kept forgetting it, leaving it at home, the battery had run out, and I thought actually I quite like the sounds of a train and the rustle of the pages of a book so I don't even carry one now, you know, and it is just that kind of, it's kind of nice but I don't need to.

In the opinion of the researchers as well as academic colleagues who heard some story extracts at a conference, the stories generate warmth about adapting to change and adopting new approaches to technology enhanced learning. Rebecca refers to undercurrent themes that run through her narrative. She comments: "What shines through all this is that nobody ever told me: 'You can't do it.'" And, we suggest, it is this glistening "I can do it!" belief and approach that emanates throughout the stories. "I remember my moment of great joy!" and "It was great fun!" exclaims Annabel, as she describes her accommodation of new technologies in different decades

in her career. The participants reveal a determination to succeed and overcome any obstacles in their way.

The narrative sessions not only provided opportunities for participants to share their glowing stories, they also encouraged them to reflect on them. "I probably grew up thinking I was someone who could do things," Rebecca reflected. To the researchers, this "probably" signifies a reflective moment. Similarly, Liz laughs as she reflects on her elderly mother's technological pursuits. This laughter, too, seems to indicate a new understanding. Annabel laughs before she recalls that her father paid for her to do a typing course. "I think this is relevant," she reflects. "Not only do I think it's relevant, it is totally relevant, but I hadn't thought of it before!" The narrative sessions, then, appeared to serve as dwelling posts, or opportunities for tutors to reflect on how their life stories contributed to their work as university tutors. These story-telling sessions do not provide answers but, as we experienced, create warm, enlightening moments that echoed throughout the research process and, we suggest, may continue to resonate beyond.

The dénouement

The work that now remains is "to build on positive staff attitudes" (Benson, Anderson, and Ooms 2011). The research process provided colleagues with an outlet for telling their stories and this is something that could usefully be extended in the future. This forum for telling and sharing, it is proposed, might be more effective than broad-sweep, institutional policies and strategies. As Cappelli and Smithies (2009) articulate, "a 'top-down' vision rarely works and instead it is the community who realise the vision and begin to set the agenda" (p. 73). The suggestion here is that colleagues should attend to the teaching community before and during the imposition of inevitable strategies, if the global visions are to become a lived reality on the ground. As Skelton (2012) proposes, quality assurance and enhancement drives, reward schemes or national and institutional incentives, are not necessarily sufficient in themselves. Big-sweep strategies do not remove "the fragility and riskiness of any human project" (Rorty 1991, p. 34). The view in this research is that any Foucauldian "mechanisms for surveillance" (Skelton 2012, p. 27) are repressive, and quieten or suffocate the human spirit. This research makes time for individual colleagues to tell their delicate, unique, time-bound, human stories.

The stories gathered for this research, we suggest, merit reflection, deserve dwelling time (Walsh 2012). We were surprised to acknowledge that the content of the stories carried less significance for us than their resonating power as a whole. As with Walsh (2012) there was a shift "from thinking about experience as shaped in discourse to experiencing the world more directly, increasing awareness, attending to energy, intensities" (p. 276). No discourse analysis is appropriate here.

In order to facilitate an immediate, live experience and attain maximum resonance, an oral reading session was held in the university at a later stage. At this session, the stories were re-told out loud to an assembled group of research participants. The aim of this reading session was to offer participants the opportunity to encounter the stories through their senses, bodily, in time and space (Conle and de Beyer 2009) and "dwell momentarily within those worlds" (Barone 2001), those story-worlds.

All the research participants were invited to read extracts of their stories at a session held on the university premises. As many of half of them took part and another two colleagues allowed us to select and read out sections of their stories.

Taking place one year after the stories were initially gathered, the session might have presented little interest to busy academics (some of them in senior management positions). We were pleasantly surprised, however, by the enthusiasm of participants to share their stories, and their apparent eagerness to read all the extracts that they felt were meaningful and make full use of the allocated time. We understood their attendance as an indication that, not only did they want to make their voice heard, they also wanted to hear it themselves and reflect upon their experiences. This was a collegial event and an opportunity not only to dwell awhile, but also to share insights with colleagues. The conversations that followed could have lasted a long time, had time not been restricted. It seemed to us that there was a feeling of shared purpose within the group.

This remains a highly subjective and optimistic research project, with fluid, literary, creative leanings. The project is wholly limited by time and space. The university in which it originated underwent large-scale changes following the onset of the project, and the make-up of faculty clusters, groups and cohorts remain ever-shifting. This research does not arrive at closure, or reduce uncertainty in any way. It does not lead to theories either, since "theories are about ideas, not personal stories." (Ceglowski 2000, p. 16) A narrative methodology was adopted as the most appropriate one for understanding the human experience, especially because, as Richardson (1990) suggests, narrative is "the way humans understand their own lives" (p. 65).

There can be no final word to this paper, only words of encouragement. We encourage colleagues in other higher education institutions to create dwelling posts. These dwelling posts are times and spaces where tutors may rest awhile and tell or listen to warming, re-echoing stories about adapting to change and uncertainty, about adopting new technologies, whatever they are, and especially if they carry the potential to enhance tutors' pedagogical repertoires. The final words will be those of the readers/listeners. Responses so far from participants at conferences suggest that the project's aim has already been partially achieved. Further dissemination is necessary for the research to achieve its full impact.

References

Astley, N., (ed) (2002) *Staying Alive: RealPpoems for Unreal Times*, Bloodaxe Books, Tarset.

Bagley, C. & Castro-Salazar, R. (2012) 'Critical arts-based research in education: performing undocumented historias', *British Educational Research Journal*, vol. 38, no. 2, pp. 239–260.

Barone, T. (2001) 'Science, art, and the predispositions of educational researchers', *American Educational Research Association*, vol. 30, no. 7, pp. 24–28.

Beetham, H. (2007) 'An approach to learning activity design', in *Rethinking Pedagogy for a Digital Age: Designing and delivering e-learning*, eds H. Beetham & R. Sharpe, Routledge, Abingdon, England, pp. 26–40.

Benson, V., Anderson, D. & Ooms, A. (2011) 'Educators' perceptions, attitudes and practices: blended learning in business and management education', *Research in Learning Technology*, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 143–154.

Burnett, C. (2010) 'Medium for empowerment or a 'centre for everything': students' experience of control in virtual learning environments within a university context', *Education Information Technology*, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 245–248.

Cappelli, T. & Smithies, A. (2009) 'Online communities of practice as agents of change in curriculum development', *Proceedings of the International Conference on E-Learning*, Toronto, Ontario, pp. 68–74.

Ceglowski, D. (2000) 'Research as relationship', *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 88–103.

Chase, S. E. (2005) 'Narrative inquiry: multiple lenses, approaches, voices', in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, eds N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln, 3rd edn, Sage, London, pp. 651–680.

Clandinin, D. J. & Rosiek, J. (2007) 'Mapping a landscape of narrative inquiry: borderland spaces and tensions', in *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry*, ed. D. J. Clandinin, Sage, London, pp. 35–75.

Conle, C. (2001) 'The rationality of narrative inquiry in research and professional development', *European Journal of Teacher Education*, vol. 24, no. 1, pp. 21–33.

Conle, C. & de Beyer, M. (2009) 'Appraising the ethos of experiential narratives: key aspects of a methodological challenge', *Educational Theory*, vol. 59, no. 1, pp. 41–65.

Cook, J., Pachler, N. & Bradley, C. (2008) 'Bridging the gap? Mobile phones at the interface between informal and formal learning', *Journal of the Center of Educational Technology*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 3–18.

Creanor, L., *et al.*, (2008) *LEX The Learner Experience of e-Learning: Final Project Report. LEX Final Report*, Glasgow Caledonian University, Glasgow [online] Available at: http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/LEX%20Final%20Report_August06.pdf

Denscombe, M. (2003) *The Good Research Guide for Small-Scale Social Research Projects*, 2nd edn, Open University Press, Maidenhead.

Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S., (eds) (2005) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3rd edn, Sage, London.

Flick, U. (2009) *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, Sage, London.

Foucaultian, M. (1969) *The Archaeology of Knowledge.* Trans A. M. Sheridan Smith (1972), Routledge, London.

Janks, H. (2009) *Literacy and Power*, Routledge, Abingdon.

Jewitt, G. & Kress, G., (eds) (2003) *Multimodal Literacy*, Peter Lang, New York, USA.

Kearney, M., *et al.*, (2012) 'Viewing mobile learning from a pedagogical perspective', *Research in Learning Technology*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 37–53.

Knafl, K. (1994) 'Academic integrity in qualitative research', in *Critical Issues in Qualitative Research Methods*, ed. J. Morse, Sage, London, pp. 357–374.

Morse, J. (1994) '"Emerging from the data": the cognitive processes of analysis in qualitative inquiry', in *Critical Issues in Qualitative Research Methods*, ed. J. Morse, Sage, London, pp. 23–43.

Phillips, D. C. (1994) 'Telling it straight: issues in assessing narrative research', *Educational Psychologist*, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 13–21.

Richardson, L. (1990) *Writing Strategies: Reaching Diverse Audiences*, Sage, London.

Richardson, L. & St Pierre, E. A. (2008) 'Writing – A method of inquiry', in *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, eds N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln, Sage Publications, London, England, pp. 475–485.

Rolfe, V. (2012) 'Open educational resources: staff attitudes and awareness', *Research in Learning Technology*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 7–19.

Rorty, R. (1991), *Essays on Heidegger and Other Philosophical Papers*, vol. 2, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Sandelowski, M. (1994) 'The proof is in the pottery: towards a poetic for qualitative enquiry', in *Critical Issues in Qualitative Research Methods*, ed. J. Morse, Sage, London, pp. 46–63.

Sappey, J. & Relf, S. (2010) 'Digital technology education and its impact on the traditional academic roles and practice', *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, vol. 7, no. 1, [online] Available at: http://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol7/iss1/

Savin-Baden, M. & Van Niekerk, L. (2007) 'Narrative inquiry: theory and practice', *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, vol. 31, no. 3, pp. 459–472.

Schön, D. A. (1987) *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

Sharpe, R. & Oliver, M. (2007) 'Supporting practitioners design for learning: principles of effective resources and interventions', in *Rethinking Pedagogy for a Digital Age: Designing and Delivering E-Learning*, eds H. Beetham & R. Sharpe, Routledge, London and New York, pp. 117–128.

Sikes, P. (2009) 'The Study of Teachers' Lives and Careers: an auto/biographical life history of the genre' in: *Power in the Academy*, eds J. Satterthwaite, H. Piper & P. Sikes, Trentham Books, Stoke-on-Trent.

Skelton, A. (2012) 'Teacher identities in a research-led institution: in the ascendancy or the retreat?', *British Educational Research Journal*, vol. 38, no. 1, pp. 23–39.

Snyder-Young, D. (2011) '"Here to tell Her Story": analysing the autoethnographic performances of others', *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 17, no. 10, pp. 943–951.

Tracy, S. J. (2010) 'Qualitative quality: eight "Big-Tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research', *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 16, no. 10, pp. 837–851.

Walsh, S. (2012) 'Contemplation, artful writing: research with internationally educated females', *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 273–285.

Wellington, J., *et al.*, (2005) *Succeeding with your Doctorate*, Sage, London.