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Narrative Inquiry in Physical Education Research: The Story So Far and Its Future

Promise

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Abstract

At a recent international education conference current life history and narrative research within Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) was criticised for its seeming inability to ‘produce anything new’ and for lacking ‘rigour’. This paper aims to respond to the criticism and to reassert the strengths of narrative inquiry in the current moment. It maps out narrative and life history research (published in English) carried out in PETE, illuminating a spectrum of narrative approaches and a richness of theoretical perspectives. It underscores the need for PETE scholars to acknowledge the broad range of philosophical assumptions about knowledge and how we come to know as this underpins all research, whether carried out within a qualitative or quantitative research tradition, and to develop a climate of mutual respect for these various positions if we are to avoid stagnation, hegemony or blind spots in our research agendas.

Key words

Narrative, life history, Physical Education, teacher education, quality

Introduction

At a recent international education conference current life history and narrative research within Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE)¹ was criticised for its seeming inability to “produce anything new” and for lacking rigour. As researchers and teacher educators who have long since valued narrative inquiry, we experienced a sense of hesitation, an unsettling of our self-assurance in what we know and do. However, as Stengers (2005), and more recently Sellars (2012) claim these moments of hesitation can also be pedagogical in that they allow potential for reinvigoration and new understandings. Something in our claims was not being heard or it was reframed by members of the audience according to what appeared to us to be narrow principles of what constitutes ‘good’ research. Rather than allow the incident to destabilise us, we have engaged in an on-going collaborative conversation where the challenge to produce ‘something new’ has been cultivated into a deeper understanding and recognition of what narrative research can offer PE. This article is based on our reflections, and is offered as a means for ‘enlivening the PE research conversation’ (Eisner 1997). It is not our intention, and indeed it is impossible for us, to recreate the detail and the theoretical complexities of the symposium, or the ensuing short exchange of views about the value of narrative inquiry in bringing ‘bodies’ in PE pedagogy to the foreground. Rather we have used the incident as a starting point for reflection about the insights and knowledge we believe the PE community have gained, and can potentially reap in the future, from narrative inquiry, as well as to dwell upon what is meant when terms such as ‘new’ and ‘rigour’ are used in relation to ‘evaluate’ PE research. The latter is clearly of interest in on-going debates about valued knowledge and practices within research more generally (Denzin 2010), as well as more specifically within research in PETE, and go beyond a discussion of narrative.

¹ We use the term Physical Education (PE), but wish to acknowledge that in some countries this includes the subject Health and Physical Education (HPE).

The Multidisciplinary Nature of Narrative Inquiry

Of course, defining narrative inquiry is no easy task, in part due to its multidisciplinary nature but also on account of the many epistemological foundations on which it rests (Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou 2008; Riessman 2008). Whilst we position our current narrative and life history research within the traditions of critical pedagogy (Lather 1991; Tinning 2002) and critical qualitative research for social justice (Denzin 2010), we respect and acknowledge the range of ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning narrative research in PE, reflecting the broader field of study. The discussion ensuing the symposium reminded us of the ever present need to be both aware of the assumptions of any given research paradigm including its judgement criteria and to articulate them explicitly and publically (Denzin 2010; Lincoln and Guba 2000; Sparkes 2002). Rather than rehearsing the so-called ‘paradigms war’ we strongly adhere to the notion of dialogue and a plurality of approaches to qualitative inquiry, and across the qualitative-quantitative divide. Following Denzin (2010:17), we envisage a future where paradigm proliferation is commonplace and the need “...for a large tent where all of us – traditionalists, experimentalists, postmodernist and postpositivists – can learn from and work with one another”.

We urge the PE research community to be reflexive about the influences of current, pervasive neo-liberal discourses around ‘quality’, closely linked to the notions of ‘evidence’ and ‘impact’ and a narrow view of Science, in our conversations and everyday practice. By deconstructing their taken-for-grantedness we may improve the articulation of our embodied notions of ‘good’ research and be better positioned to acknowledge a range of judgement criteria across different research paradigms in PE. For example, in order to judge whether

creative analytic practices (Richardson 2000) within narrative research can enhance our understandings within PETE we must first engage with the appropriate criteria for writing and reading research of this kind before making a judgement call. From a starting point which recognises that life history and narrative research in PETE has been carried out in what we might term as the broad field of qualitative research, we attempt below to illustrate how different ontological and epistemological approaches to research with their range of purposes can generate multiple perspectives by enabling a range of research questions to be asked about 'known' and unknown phenomena in PE.

Despite Riessman's (2008:14) observation that the field of narrative inquiry in the human sciences can be likened to "a veritable garden of cross-disciplinary hybrids", common for most discussions about narrative understanding is the way in which it enables us to analyse the complexity, messiness, and often contradictory aspects of and sophistication of human meaning-making, and an acknowledgement that without narrative we cannot share our uniqueness and/or interconnectedness with others in the world (Andrews *et al* 2011; Denzin 2010). Students, parents, pre-service PE teachers, PE teachers and teacher educators narrate their lived experiences in PE and their lives beyond, both in order to make sense of themselves as subjects and in relation to the social worlds they inhabit. As experience is central to learning we can argue that one of the ways we learn is through the narration of our experiences (Bruner 1990) and the stories we live by (Clandinin and Connelly 1998, 2000). The development of these understandings is framed by the narratives we have available to us in our cultures and communities (Ricoeur 1988). Whilst individuals have access to multiple, interrelated, social, public and cultural narratives there is nevertheless a limited repertoire. Narratives are inherently bound to temporality and to contingency. It follows that every day, individual 'small stories' in PE are inevitably linked to macro canonical and/or 'big stories' in

PE, PETE and society beyond. These are, of course, contextualised within a longer-term historical narrative. Some narratives are more durable and enticing than others in convincing subjects of their verisimilitude, however, subjects have agency and can therefore draw creatively on available narratives to adapt or even defy them in making sense of their experience (Richardson 2003). Narratives can thus serve a range of functions and their communication can have many different consequences (Gubrium and Holstein 2009; Riessman 2008). Narrative inquiry in PETE is accordingly concerned with understanding subjective, lived experience in the larger context of events and circumstances. From this recognition alone it seems difficult to accept that it cannot produce anything 'new' in an ever-evolving world.

Early Narrative Research in PETE: Understanding PE Teachers' Subjective Lived Experience

Reflecting developments in education research at the end of the 1980s, early narrative studies in PE were primarily concerned with capturing the 'teacher's voice', both in epistemological and political terms (Sparkes 1993). There was a growing dissatisfaction with an overreliance on the empirical-analytical paradigm, which had rendered teachers to statistics in large scale surveys, and interactionist and anthropological studies which focused mainly upon classrooms and cast teachers as seemingly interchangeable. Many believed that the intensely personal nature of teaching required greater understanding (Ball and Goodson 1985; Goodson 1983). Building upon the sociological tradition of the life history approach, these studies illuminated individual life stories/careers within genealogies of context; the agency and structure of working as a PE teacher was explored (e.g. Armour 1997; Dowling Næss 1996, 1998; Schempp, Sparkes and Templin 1993; Sikes 1988; Sparkes, Templin and Schempp 1990;

Sparkes and Templin 1992; Swan 1995; Templin, Bruce and Hart 1988; Templin, Sparkes and Schempp 1991; Tinning 1997). Whilst revealing the unique and idiosyncratic nature of a career in PE, they also provided knowledge about commonalities between teachers and important insights into the socio-historical contexts of PE in education. Emerging themes in the analyses of the life history data were PE subject-specific issues like the low status of practical knowledge and the consequential marginalisation of its teachers; the dominance of technical-rationality in conceptualising teaching and learning in PE; the centrality of a sports performing identity to PE teachers' pedagogy, and its vulnerability in the light of illness or injury; the challenges of dual careers in PE teaching and coaching; the micropolitics of teacher induction; and PE teachers' personal teaching philosophies. These studies illuminated how the labour process of teaching, neither begins nor ends in the PE classroom, and they made some modest contributions to understanding the dynamics of battles concerning the ownership and control over what is to count as valid education knowledge (Evans and Davies 1988). Contextually, the studies provided glimpses into how PE teachers were negotiating the introduction of New Public Managerialism in schooling (Apple 2006), as well as accommodating subject innovations such as health related fitness, games-for-understanding and examinable PE.

In addition to these substantive contributions of knowledge, the narrative projects contributed significantly to enriching qualitative inquiry in PE. Collectively, they challenged the dominance of positivist, bio-behavioural claims to truth in PETE and marked the emergence of competing views about ways of knowing. With hindsight, we note that the level of engagement with different philosophies of science tended to be at a paradigmatic level of 'interpretive inquiry', as opposed to specific theories of science such as hermeneutics or phenomenology. Certainly theoretical traditions, such as symbolic interactionism, could be

mentioned (e.g. Schempp, Sparkes and Templin 1993; Templin, Bruce and Hart 1988), but on the whole scholars talked about the importance of understanding subjective experience in local contexts in more general terms (e.g. emic, insider perspectives, 'thick description' of social realities), as a means for providing important insights into why individuals in PETE act in particular ways. Acknowledging that qualitative methods were 'new kids on the block', these were important inroads and it was not unusual that positivist and postpositivist traditions seemed to linger like long shadows over the qualitative/narrative projects in PE during this phase (Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Sparkes 2002). Consequently research findings from this early period were largely represented in the form of 'realist tales': closely edited, extensive quotations from the 'mouths of the informants' were offered as representative, authentic 'truths', alongside theoretical frameworks required for a 'correct' interpretation (Sparkes 2002). On the other hand, several of Sparkes' studies (e.g. 1992, 1993, 1995) were located within a broader discussion of the philosophy of science, and signposted the way for future narrative inquiry in PE to gain inspiration from postmodern sensibilities. His ethnographic fiction about a gay, male, physical education teacher is a case in point (Sparkes 1997).

Studying sexuality and gender

In fact, in the wake of the life history projects about PE teachers, there evolved a number of studies which have focused upon marginalised groups within PE, such as gay and lesbian PE teachers (Sparkes 1994; Squires and Sparkes 1996; Sykes 1998, 2001), and this work continues to develop (e.g. Carless 2012). 'Giving' a voice to people who previously have been left out of 'official' knowledge in PE reflects one of the main impulses behind narrative research: that is to say, illuminating the lives of suppressed and subordinated citizens as part of the democratic project of recognising and respecting human dignity (Andrews *et al* 2011).

The research has aimed to transform readers' understandings about the subjective experiences of gay and lesbian teachers with the view to fighting discrimination in the workplace and beyond within PE and society at large. The studies have drawn upon a range of theoretical perspectives from interactionism to feminist-poststructuralism, and they have exhibited a range of writing strategies from the realist tales described above to more experimental writing forms, such as autoethnographic storytelling. They have contributed not only to knowledge about homophobia and heterosexism in the field of PE and educational institutions, but they have also enriched theoretical understandings about the complexities of the self. Additionally and of equal importance, they have contributed to theoretical discussions about the problem of 'voice' and representation in narrative and qualitative inquiry. We observe a growing sophistication in this wave of narrative studies in PE, which reflects the increasing impasse of blurred genres between the social sciences and the humanities, and the so-called 'narrative turn' influenced by postmodern thinking (Denzin 1997). Sykes (2001:16) discloses, for example, that her study was

... precariously positioned between political critiques of poststructuralism and its potential to incorporate contradiction, absence, and silence into life history.

... My challenge shifted from accurately re-presenting the "real" experiences of sexuality in the lives of the women, towards multiple yet still cautious discursive analyses of their stories, my questions, transcripts, quotations, interpretations.

She describes how she used a hybrid methodology for data analysis which included speech act theory, deconstruction, psychoanalysis and social postmodernism. From a starting point which states that humanist and standpoint lesbian narratives have shortcomings, she explored how a feminist-poststructural approach involving 'understanding' and 'overstanding' can enable analysis of the 'silence' in lesbian texts.

Carless' (2012) more recent autoethnographic narrative of negotiating sexuality and masculinity in school sport is yet another example of innovative narrative work in PE. In addition to providing moving, evocative insights into the problems and possibilities of same-sex attraction in school sporting arenas from a retrospective student perspective, it theoretically explores how 'unspoken body knowledge' can be 'captured' and scholarly interrogated via the use of storytelling. Building upon the work of Sparkes (2003), which identified the limitations of realist tales for exploring personal embodied experience, Carless drew upon personal memories via the process of storytelling to bring into being hitherto 'unknown' experiences from school sport and his sexual identity. He writes, "... I have tried to draw on this knowing, not by looking to theory to explain life, but by looking to life to intervene in theoretical writings" (Carless 2012: 622). The extended 'story/-ies' about becoming, presented in the form of 10 fragmentary tales, draw(s) upon creative writing skills in order to recreate visceral, intimate experience with the view to evoke an emphatic understanding with otherness. When we compare Carless' and Sykes' studies, we witness, therefore, two very different research strategies at work in striving to understand sexuality in PE contexts, and the 'silences' which feature therein: both in a substantive but also in very abstract forms. They illustrate a complexity of theoretical grappling and refinement, which once again stands to refute the criticism that current narrative research offers 'nothing new' and that it lacks rigour. Certainly if one were to utilise a traditional notion of 'scientific rigour' in judging the quality and relevance of these particular studies, or indeed most of the research projects discussed in this article, they would fail to make the grade, yet this would be a futile assessment. In fact, at the core of most studies there is an overt, on-going epistemological and ontological debate about just what it is that constitutes 'good' research and how it can be represented so that it furthers understanding in PETE, which is perhaps not

a common feature of much bio-behavioural research, where validity and reliability are often taken-for-granted as hallmarks of quality.

Related to the studies about sexuality, there have been a number of narrative projects focusing specifically upon gender relations in PE (e.g. Brown 1999; Rich 2001, 2004). Brown and Rich used a life history approach for studying the ways in which gender plays out in PETE and schooling. Their studies drew upon social constructivist theories of gender, in particular that of Connell (1995), as well as theory about teacher identity and professionalism. They complimented and enriched the growing body of research on gender in PE, which revealed that conventional gender relations are reproduced and strongly influence PE teachers' socialisation and the ways they teach in schools. They illuminated how the gendered space of the PE lesson has far reaching consequences for all young people, intersecting with identity axes such as social class, sexuality, ethnicity, religion and disability.

Narrative inquiry and the experience of the body

Over the past few decades bodies have become a central feature in academic research, and so too, in narrative inquiry. Investigations into the social construction of bodies in the context of education have worked to expand our understandings around the cultural influences on participation in PE. Specifically, the meanings we attach to bodies, shape our identities and mould our physicality. Narrative research in the area has informed the field of PE about student and teacher embodiment, understandings of the body, and engagement with PE (e.g. Dowling Næss 1996, 1998; Garrett 2006; Wrench and Garrett 2012). Sparkes (1996, 1999) engages with the potential of narrative to enhance understandings of the ways in which the body-self relationship develops for teachers and athletes, tracing the embodied experiences of

athletes and PE teachers, as well as the aging body. More recent work using Bourdieu as an analytical lens investigates the dynamics of sporting cultures and specifically, the dynamics and embodiment of the jock culture within a sport science degree program (Sparkes, Partington and Brown, 2007).

In focusing on students both Oliver and Azzarito utilised media as an avenue to generate stories about bodies. Oliver's (1999, 2001) and Oliver and Lalik's (2000, 2001, 2004) research highlights girl's stories and revealed how they uncritically took up and owned discourses around the socially constructed idealised female body. Similarly Azzarito (2009) and Azzarito and Solmon (2006, 2009) showed how body narratives were linked to embodied identities and participation in PE as well as how social discourses around the body were institutionalised in schools and PE practice. Garrett's (2004) feminist, poststructuralist study of girls' 'physical stories' revealed the complex processes whereby young female, socially classed bodies become active and physical, as well as the processes whereby they are denied this power. Fisette (2011) builds on the work of these scholars to explore how girls articulate their embodiment and navigate embodied identities in PE.

Young people's narratives of PE

Our discussion so far has mainly centred on studies of PE teachers within PE settings, and we observe that it is only more recently that narrative researchers have turned more attention to the experience of students within PE. As Groves and Laws (2000, 2003) highlighted, large numbers of studies in PE have been conducted from the perspective of the 'legitimate adult' (e.g. teacher, parent, researcher); the pupil's 'voice' has been missing. Their narrative study aimed to counteract this trend and used a phenomenological analysis of the stories students

told about their experiences in PE lessons in an English comprehensive school. Refraining from the use of explicit theoretical analysis they staged short realist tales to let the young people “tell their stories in their own words” about the types of activities they experienced and the role of significant others in PE lessons (Groves and Laws 2000:20). In 2007, Fitzgerald adopted the use of drama as a narrative tool in order to enable students with severe learning difficulties to share their experiences of school PE. With the help of two professional drama facilitators, she aimed, too, to legitimate the disabled youth as sources of important information about their personal lived experience. From a starting point which recognised the incongruence of research methods, such as the interview, to generate insights into the young people’s social worlds, participants were invited to mime and enact a range of experiences from PE, which in turn were video-recorded and later interpreted by the researcher. This research was novel for several reasons: it explored participatory creative performance as a research tool for data generation and it problematized the notion of participatory research in relation to young people with severe learning difficulties, as well as focusing upon marginalised, silenced ‘voices’ in PE.

Fitzgerald and Stride’s study (2012) also shared the agenda of legitimising young disabled people’s voices. They chose to represent data from a project exploring disabled students’ experiences of mainstream PE in the form of three narrative cases, and let the realist tales ‘speak for themselves’ with only a brief personal interpretation at the end of the article. In contrast, Berg Svendby and Dowling’s (2012) research used an explicit critical pedagogical framework to create explanatory narratives in the form of an ethnographic fiction and a poetic transcription about one disabled young woman and her experiences of mainstream PE. As ‘storytellers’ they aimed to provide a dynamic framework in which disconnected data could be linked together in an evocative, engaging and *explanatory* way (Polkinghorne 1995; Smith

and Sparkes 2008). Whilst they argue that the narratives can stand alone as explanatory tools, they nevertheless simultaneously acknowledge their role in crafting them and use critical discourse analysis to problematise power relations in PE lessons and policy, as well as to link macro and micro narratives of marginalisation, dis/ability and inclusion. Their work is thus another example of narrative research embracing the postmodern challenges of ‘voice’ and ‘representation’, as well as demonstrating the eclectic use of a range of theoretical lenses from social theory.

We contend that until recently it has, in fact, been difficult to publish narrative research in PE as storytelling (Carless 2012), not only because much of it has remained in the long shadows of postpositivism, as argued above, but also on account of the barriers scholars meet from professional journals with regard to how to structure and present research (Denzin 2010). When a recent book on difference in PE and sport was published (Dowling, Fitzgerald and Flintoff 2012), analytic stories about students’ experiences in PE were told in the form of ethnographic fictions, poetic transcriptions and drama informed by theory about social class, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability and health promotion. Collectively these narratives challenge taken-for-granted ways of presenting research findings with the aim of opening up possibilities for future studies of social difference, which seems pressing on account of the increasing diversity among student populations worldwide and the relatively weak impact that postpositivist research has had to date with regard to social change (see e.g. Penney (2002) on perpetuation of inequities due to gender). Scholars in PE have so far shown, in fact, relatively little interest in social class (Evans and Davies 2006) or ethnicity (Harrison and Belcher 2006), and we therefore need a range of theoretical approaches in order to better understand their mechanisms, as well as the intersection of class, ethnicity and young people’s other identity positions. lisahunter’s (2012) innovative drama, ‘You hurt me Fizz-Ed: the socially

classed discursive practices of the PE lesson' is an excellent example of the promise of alternative ways of doing and representing narrative inquiry. It offers 'readers' the opportunity to enact, and not least, to embody the power relations of positioning and being positioned as subjects in the everyday interactions of a 'normal', traditional PE lesson, still so common today. She provides the 'reader' simultaneously with insights into the workings of Bourdieu's theoretical toolkit of the field, capital, habitus and practice, as well as critical discourse analysis about hegemonic practices which both empower and restrict students, in ways which avoid closure; the text begs further engagement and on-going analysis. Similarly, Knez' (2012) narratives trouble readers' understandings about young people's 'race' and ethnicity in PE contexts in novel ways, as well as actively demonstrating and problematizing theories about postmodern subjectivities. The deliberate holding back of explicit theoretical analysis provides a potential for what Barone (1995:64) called 'emancipatory educational story sharing': the texts invite the reader to actively engage in meaning making from their particular social location, and potentially conspire to move beyond it.

Narrative inquiry and pedagogy

The potential of narratives to evoke empathy and resonance with their readers explains of course why throughout the past twenty years we, and many colleagues, have embraced narrative ways of knowing in our teaching in PETE, as well as in our research agendas. A life history approach can enable pre-service teachers to reflect upon the constitution of their subjectivities, including their investment in physical activity cultures and sport, as well as more general attitudes towards education, society and schooling. Activating critical reflection about the individual pre-service teacher's action and beliefs can contribute to their developing teacher identities and by interrogating young people's stories, there is also a potential for

gaining new depths of understanding about learners (e.g. Garrett 2006; Garrett and Wrench 2011; Lisahunter and Dinan Thompson 2012; Sparkes 1993). As Ricoeur (1988) argues, the temporal structure of narratives and the reflexivity inherent in the telling of the 'self' allows for the constitution of a dynamic narrative identity that incorporates change, flexibility and cohesion across a lifespan. Tinning (1997) found narratives to be a useful pedagogical tool for helping practising PE teachers' enlisted on postgraduate professional development courses to link their personal experience with theoretical texts. His course handbook, 'Pedagogies for Physical Education: Pauline's Story' engagingly narrates, and invites the reader to activate further storytelling and sharing, about the links between personal, political and intellectual commitments, as well as values and beliefs in education. Tinning (1997b) writes, "I set out to make the issues which underpinned the subject matter more personal and up close; to breathe some life into what I considered to be the often distant and abstract discourse which is so common to the field of ... PE". In a similar vein, Sykes and Goldstein (2004:53) write that they wanted their own and others' ethnographic work to "speak to my students rather than at them", in ways which not only facilitate their truths but also in ways which lead the reader/listener to act upon them. They shared an anti-homophobia ethnographic drama and invited student teachers to create their own dramatic pieces and to enact them.

Reflecting the rich tapestry of narrative research as described above, teacher educators have used storytelling and story sharing to trouble a range of taken-for-granted truths in PE and PETE such as gender relations (e.g. Christensen 2012; Garrett 2006; Hickey and Fitzclarence 1997; McMahon 2012), homophobia (e.g. Sparkes 1997; Sykes and Goldstein 2004), and the dominance of technical rationality (Sparkes 1993) and traditional sports (e.g. Legge 2011). Recognising the transformative potential of collective stories, educators located within critical pedagogy have described how powerful insights into the lives of marginalised individuals and

groups can disturb readers to reassess their own sub/conscious role in prevailing social arrangements and create a possibility for social action and a celebration of diversity.

Maivorsdotter and Lundvall (2009) have demonstrated the potential for narratives to also deepen our understanding of aesthetic experience in PE and PETE, whereas Hall's (2012) study explored the ways in which a combination of narrative and interactive technology may enhance physical engagement. Other teacher educators/researchers have embraced the potential of narrative inquiry for systematically deconstructing their own values and beliefs and pedagogies (e.g. Dowling, Fitzgerald and Flintoff 2012b; Legge 2011; lisahunter 2011), which until recently have been sorely overlooked areas of research within the pedagogical device of PE. Once again we witness a wide range of research questions, methodological approaches (e.g. autoethnography, collective biographies, action research, written stories) and theoretical lenses being used to explore teacher educators' worlds (e.g. theories of embodiment, critical race theory, critical disability studies, philosophy of aesthetics), demonstrating new insights and robust, rigorous research. Krogh Christensen (2007) has shown the vast, untapped potential of using narratives with students in school PE in her study which drew upon Ricoeur's notions of praxis, narrative and texts to explore the connections between biography, sporting experiences and health promotion, although she did conclude that this approach to learning in PE was often viewed at odds with students' notions of 'real' (read: activity based) PE.

Indeed, as Sparkes (1997:37) observes, "... the notion of stories and storytelling does not sit easily in many academic circles", and consequently such work is not without its challenges from both students and the academy. For those who reject the concept of contested knowledge in PETE, narrative ways of knowing can appear far removed from technical-rational, 'hands on' teaching knowledge or the universal truths of much bio-behavioural research. Requesting

student teachers to carry out life history work is particularly rife with ethical dilemmas, from the challenges of creating trustful learning environments, respecting confidentiality, to the power relations at play and the possibility of a conflict of interests between accredited courses and personal revelations. As Garrett (2006) and Garrett and Wrench (2011) have revealed student teachers may also lack the ability to engage in the high level of abstraction required to translate the stories, via theory, into their practice. Changing structural frameworks in higher education have brought about further challenges on account of the large numbers of students enrolled in courses and the trend to have shorter modules, which can make it difficult to develop an appropriate learning environment for narrative work. From a critical pedagogy perspective, we would nevertheless argue that it is just such developments in higher education brought about by neo-liberal ideology that need counter narratives and strengthen the case for narrative inquiry's future in PETE.

Future Narrative Research in PE

Returning to the starting point for this discussion and the critique directed at narrative research due to its inability to produce anything 'new' and its lack of 'rigour', it would seem that Sparkes' (1997) observation concerning the academy's scepticism is as relevant today as it was fifteen years ago. We hope, however, that our overview of narrative research in PETE demonstrating its richness and diversity will contribute to troubling this verdict among the sceptics. Beyond a shared interest for how actors in PETE represent their subjective lived experience to themselves and to others, we have revealed how scholars develop their knowledge claims upon a wide range of ontological and epistemological theories, and consequently their research findings must be evaluated from these different perspectives. In tracing the underlying assumptions about the philosophy of science in the works of fellow

narrative researchers, we have been reminded of the importance of articulating one's chosen position within the complex landscape of qualitative inquiry and of the continual need for reflexivity in all aspects of the research process. One of the future challenges for narrative researchers in PETE appears therefore to be that of contributing to the cultivation of a climate of mutual respect for different waves of qualitative inquiry (Denzin 2010) and the types of knowledge insights they can provide, as well as nurturing dialogue with researchers in the quantitative tradition. Following Denzin (2010) we believe in a future characterised by "multiple mainstreams" (p. 87) and the need for "... a spirit of cooperation and collaboration and mutual self-respect" (p. 20) in PETE research. Whilst our current critical pedagogical research agenda sees a potential for narrative approaches to systematically analyse so-called self-regulatory practices associated with neo-liberalism in education (Ball 2003), such as 'publish or perish' in higher education and the upsurge of 'fitness' testing in school PE, with the view to transforming them as a part of the democratic project of education, others may frame research priorities quite differently. Clearly such a call for pluralism goes beyond the narrative research community in PETE.

Another generalist issue which has emerged through our reflections and sense of hesitation (Sellar 2012) is the need for scholars in PETE not to discount persistent findings over the years as 'old news'. We have been reminded that our research agendas, methodologies and theoretical lenses are neither decontextualized nor ahistorical. Conceptualising our research as narrative, we can ask critical analytical questions about the research agendas that have been, and continue to be, pursued in PETE. Whilst some participants at the symposium on bodies and pedagogies 'heard old stories' about the centrality of teachers' bodies in PE contexts, perhaps influenced by taken-for-granted, sedimentary 'truths' about PE teachers' physicality, other participants clearly 'heard new stories' framed within postmodern theories of

embodiment. The historical moment, current and previous theorising and individual histories all affect the way research problems are perceived and pursued. PE scholars' research narratives are entangled in their cultural repertoires. Narrative research with its central focus on temporality enables us in fact to visit and revisit the duality of the individual and the collective, and to study dominant memories and public histories (McLeod and Thomson 2009). By using the ever-evolving, complex theories of 'time' and 'memory', together with emerging social and educational theories, it is possible for us to re-visit the persistence of the importance of a physical identity among PE teachers/students/educators and unveil novel insights about so-called 'old' knowledge. Such research could involve the generation of data among current practitioners, or alternatively, following scholars like Thomson *et al* (2012), it is possible to return to archived data and to re-interpret them from the perspective of today.

Following discussions in narrative inquiry and qualitative research more generally, we propose that narrative scholars in PETE ought to undertake a meta-analysis of narrative inquiry to date, in order to reveal what is common and typical for particular cases (Andrews *et al* 2011). What knowledge have we gleaned, and in what ways have these insights informed practice? Similarly, we ought perhaps to pay more attention to the 'hows' of narratives in PETE, as well as the 'whats' (Gubrium and Holstein 2000, 2009). Certainly some of the aforementioned studies have had their main focus upon the contexts in which narratives are told and the way they are crafted, but the majority of them have analysed the content of stories. Greater attention to the former may tease out the contradictions experienced by individuals, as well as illuminate the lack of coherence inevitably present in their experiences. Whilst many of us ground our research upon a recognition of the latter, due to the power of narrative structures (both lingual and in our subcultures) in our analyses, the messiness of lived experience is often omitted or played down in our findings (Riessman 2008).

Furthermore, by directing more attention to the practice of storytelling greater diversity between storytellers may be revealed (Sparkes and Partington 2003; Smith and Sparkes 2002). Following Coffey and Atkinson (1996), it is also important to keep in mind what is 'rememberable' and to keep asking, what stories are being left out? Whose voices are not being heard? With regard to the latter the voices of non-Western and indigenous peoples are, for example, sorely missing in PETE.

Clearly it is beyond the scope of this paper to produce a list of future narrative studies in PETE but we hope that we have demonstrated the huge potential of the approach which can draw upon subject disciplines such as education, sociology, history, humanities, psychology, media and cultural studies, and the wealth of social theories therein. 'New' research (narrative or otherwise) may well involve systematically looking back at previous research's aims, achievements and challenges in order that the PETE research community does not forget important issues or mistakably catalogue them as history (McLeod and Thomason 2009). For example, from our critical pedagogical perspective many of the challenges in creating more inclusive learning environments are similar today as they were for over 20 years ago, so despite the existence of knowledge about these complexities, we cannot simply move on to something 'new'; we have a moral obligation to keep unravelling the many sources of these inequities. As our review has illustrated, narrative and life history work can enable many differently positioned, embodied 'voices' to be heard and felt within PETE, so far from it being a passé research strategy, we would argue that it has never been more appropriate than today: it offers a democratic and inclusive approach to knowledge production. It signifies a rich, reflexive and generative field rather than a normalised field in content and praxis, and accordingly can meet the research challenges of tomorrow's global, postmodern world.

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