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Reflections on Using Video as a Data Collection Tool in Narrative Inquiry

Introduction

This abstract offers some reflections on the use of video in collecting data. Discussion draws from a research project that considered the experiences of immigrants in hosting friends and relatives. The purpose was to explore the experiences of immigrants who have hosted friends and relatives, and how hosting plays a role in participants lives. I met with nine participants, all from a major urban centre in North America, and discussed their experiences in unstructured but directed conversations. The study was guided by constructionism, and followed a narrative inquiry methodology (Burr, 1995; Heiner, 2002; Pernecky, 2012). The focus of this abstract, however, is on how video was consistent with epistemological and methodological interests, and as well as the practical considerations and advantages that this method rings. It is hoped that this abstract will provide some insight and ideas for the other researchers considering studies of relevant experiences. A brief discussion on constructionism and narrative inquiry is initially offered, and then followed by a discussion of video as a data collections tool.

Constructionism and narrative inquiry

Constructionism is a paradigm that follows an *inter-subjectivist* epistemology, in that knowledge is created through interaction. Because knowledge is created through interaction, a single, objective reality is not plausible, and the existence of multiple realities is therefore certain (Guba, 1990; Hemingway, 1999). As soon as an object or idea is considered by an individual, they enter a process of interpretation that is inherently distinct as previous personal experiences and understandings are drawn upon to make sense of the current experience. All individuals will have their own, contextual interpretation and understanding of the same item. Multiple realities of any one event or object are therefore inevitable (Bourdieu, 1987). Constructionists therefore acknowledge the researcher's involvement and influence in the research process, reasoning that the endeavour to understand and learn about social reality also constructs it (Guba, 1990; Pernecky, 2012). The knower and known are, and should be, inextricably linked (Lincoln, 1990; Schwandt, 1994).

The notion of *truth* is not, therefore, a singular and measurable place or reality. Truth is negotiated between members of a community (Lincoln and Guba, 2000), and understood as “the best-informed and most sophisticated construction on which there is consensus” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 128). In considering the credibility of a research project, the constructions it offers are “evaluated for their ‘fit’ with the data and information they encompass... [and] the extent to which they ‘work’” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 129).

Narrative inquiry is a methodology that seeks to explore and use the power of stories in creating and sharing values and knowledge. The context that the beginning of a story provides helps in interpreting the significance of what follows. Polkinghorne (1995) uses the following example to illustrate this point; “‘the king died; the prince cried.’ In isolation the two events are simply propositions describing two independent happenings. When composed into a story, a new level of relational significance appears” (p. 7). The basic point is that the combined knowledge

and meaning made available through the presentation and interaction with a complete story is greater than the review of its individual parts (Wortham, 2001). As a form of research narrative inquiry therefore seeks to understand the story, in context, and re-present that in a way that will engage an audience to better understand the phenomenon at hand (Feldman, 2007; Glover, 2003; Squire, 2013; Taylor, 2006). A narrative innately requires both a teller and an audience, and is therefore always co-constructed through feedback and reactions. Constructionism therefore offers an epistemological foundation upon which narrative inquiry can be used to guide the collection, interpretation and analysis of data.

Reflections on Using Video as a Data Collection Tool

In this study nine participants were self-recruited through social media requests for participation. I met with them in a place of their choosing. Prior to our meetings I advised that I would be asking about their decision to emigrate, settlement, and their hosting experiences. All meetings were video recorded, with prior permission. The primary purpose of using video was to be able to co-create and share the participants' stories between ourselves, and use it as a point of reflection for further interpretations and analysis; the point was not, therefore, to create videos of a professional standard with any aim of sharing them publicly. The rest of the paper provides more discussion on this aspect.

The imposition of a camera

The impact of a camera's presence is obviously a consideration to take into account regarding the influence on participants. However, many data collection techniques also put participants in unusual scenarios. It is acknowledged that a camera no doubt affects the data collected, and although participants certainly were cameras during data collection, they typically become immersed in the conversation (Heath, Hindmarsh and Luff, 2010). Initial conversation was sometimes a bit staid, with some nerves apparent, but after a short time it appeared that participants were, for the most part, comfortable to share their stories.

Some techniques include never interviewing from behind the camera where it can be an obstruction, but to position it to the side, or behind the interviewer (Rahn, 2007). Comfort with the technology is also important and I spent some time becoming familiar with the basic functions and techniques of the camera. Rahn (2007) suggests that in video research "it is more important to maintain an authentic relationship with the participant than it is to upstage that moment with stylized camera or editing work" (p. 303); a lack of substantial technical experience is therefore not a significant concern, especially if the video's aim is not primarily to be made for public consumption.

I did aim to strike a balance between the quality of the video, and imposition on the participants. I did not make time consuming and intrusive arrangements to enhance the setting that was often in the home or place of work of the participant, and used the environment as best as I could regarding lighting and backdrop. This means that the quality of the video is not professional, but allowed the focus of the meeting to be on the conversation rather than the quality of production. I

felt this was an important tone to strike with the participants to gain their comfort and demonstrate priorities for this research.

Video and practical benefits of creating a narrative

After the first meetings I edited each individual video into a 10-12 minute clip, re-positioning different smaller stories into an overall chronological narrative of episodes that reflected the interests of the study. I sent the participants a private link to their own video, asking them to review it. I then arranged to meet with most participants a second time between six and nine months later.

The importance of providing participants the opportunity to review their own narratives is clearly evident in Larson's (1997) account of reading the transcripts from her own interview as a research participant:

[reviewing t]he stories of my life magically transported me to places where I relived life experiences and revisited the people who had shared them with me. These stories drew me in. This reading was pleasurable, yet in places, disconcerting (p. 460)... [T]he enduring assumption that storytellers tell the stories they want to tell the first time is not true... [R]esearchers would be wise to simply ensure that story-givers have the opportunity to develop their texts until they are as they wish them to be (p. 463).

The use of video facilitated an engaging dialogic process in this pursuit.

At the second meeting the participant and myself reviewed the 10-12 minute video from our first meeting and we agreed that either of us could pause the video at any time, to either offer or ask for further information, clarification, or to retract or change any part of their story. I also asked participants to offer additions or new instalments to stories that had been in progress and had yet to be completed at the time of our first meeting. This process provided an opportunity for the participants to really feel comfortable with the way that their stories were being presented. Some of them asked for elements to be emphasised, downplayed, or removed. Some did not like the way they presented elements of their experience, and offered an alternative viewpoint that in reflection they felt more comfortable with. Video is a comparatively easier media to consume for many people than written text, making the elicitation of responses a simpler task. Participants could discuss sections of the original dialogue after reflection, and had a greater opportunity for an appreciation of the entirety of what had been said. The second meetings were also video recorded, and I integrated the new clips into the first videos. The first videos form the basis of the narratives, however edited clips from the second meetings add reflection, and occasional completion, of those initial shared stories. I then emailed private links of the second round of videos back to the participants and offered a chance to discuss the video over email, phone, or in person in case there was anything that concerned them.

Analysis and impact

Using video as a data source for analysis provides similar benefits as other media, but with additional advantages (Rahn, 2007; Squire, 2013). Primarily, it records more information than audio, including facial expressions and body language, which can all be reviewed after the fact (Marra and Holmes, 2008), allowing the researcher to focus on the conversation at hand rather than taking mental and physical notes.

The use of video in analysis also helps in attempting to remain close to the voices of the participants in the research outcomes. The nuances of participants' statements are more clearly captured on video for later analysis; sarcasm, ambiguity, uncertainty, and body language, are all more fully presented with the additional sensory information that video can provide. There are risks in narrative inquiry for the researcher to reduce the extensive field notes collected within a framework of their own memories rather than focussing on the texts (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). In video it is easier to keep participants' voices central.

Once the final video narratives were approved by all participants they were transcribed, with additional comments helping to provide context of sarcasm or laughter etc., and these transcripts formed the basis of analysis using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) framework of the three dimensions of narrativity (interaction with others and self, with place, and with time).

Video can also be a more powerful and accessible medium for knowledge transfer and influencing change (for example see Jonas-Simpson, 2010; Rahn, 2007), and although the videos are not shared publicly I have permission to share them in presentations to practitioners, academics, and in the classroom, and have been using them to demonstrate the importance of the findings, as well as the value in this type of qualitative methods in co-creating and sharing participants' stories.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the use of video as a data collection tool holds many advantages for tourism researchers. This abstract demonstrated some of the key issues to consider, in both practical and epistemological areas. Using video also offers greater transparency of the research process and interpretations made by the researcher (Heath et al., 2010). The meanings of my own analysis can be easily considered, challenged, evolved, and engaged with by others both within and outside the original research process, and helps to create knowledge that is defensible and explainable. For studies that are particularly interested in creation of narratives, and exploring participants' experiences in an engaging and open way. Hopefully this abstract will offer some guidance and spark ideas for others intrigued by similar topics.

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