

Stories and Teacher Narratives as a Way of Understanding Teachers' Work.

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There is a growing body of literature which suggests that narrative accounts such as biographies and life stories are a legitimate and important methodology for deepening understanding of how teachers make meaning out of their professional lives (Goodson and Walker, 1991; Clandinin and Connelly; 1991 Britzman, 1986; Elbaz, 1991). The aims of this paper are three-fold. Firstly I want to look briefly at the recent history of the methodology in an attempt to explain the current interest in life story as an educational research methodology. Secondly I want to look at how life history research can open up new ways of investigating and understanding teachers' work. Finally I will explore some of the problems raised by questions concerning the identification of those who have agreed to participate in this co-operative kind of research. Can the story be disentangled from the identity of the story teller and if anonymity is guaranteed does the story retain its authenticity?

The Narrative Discourse and The Discourse of Science

The narrative form has suffered from a close alignment with the literary tradition, the world of fiction. During the seventeenth century a division arose between literary writing and scientific writing which was in itself a reaction against the dominance of metaphysics as the source of scientific knowledge (Chalmers, 1978, 1).

'The philosopher Francis Bacon and many of his contemporaries summed up the scientific attitude of the times when they insisted that if we want to understand nature we must consult nature and not the writings of Aristotle.(Chalmers, 1978, 1).

This consultation was to be done by the empirical method of collecting facts through organised observation and experiment, arriving at conclusions and then by deriving theories from these conclusions. From this the following widely held common-sense view of science evolved:

Scientific knowledge is proven knowledge. Scientific theories are derived in some rigorous way from the facts or experience acquired by observation and experiment. Science is based on what we can see and hear and touch, etc. Personal opinion or preferences and speculative imaginings have no place in science. Science is objective. Scientific knowledge is reliable knowledge because it is objectively proven knowledge (Chalmers, 1978, 1). It was within this context that the Marquis de Condorcet introduced the term 'social science', and contended that with precision in language about moral and social issues, "knowledge of the truth" would be "easy and error almost impossible" (Quoted in Richardson, 1991, 120). He believed that the scientific methodology could be adapted so that social scientific 'truths' could be arrived at with the same degree of certainty as in the natural sciences. Literature, on the other hand, could only invent reality. Life story methodology was subjective, individual, nongeneralisable and therefore not 'true' other than in a particular instance. It is not surprising therefore that in Education, as in the social sciences, the scientific method has been dominant and the narrative

code undervalued (Richardson, 1990, 119). It is also not surprising that the kinds of research being done fitted this particular methodological approach. Much later, in the early sixties, Goodson and Walker noted that:

it proved difficult to find ways of doing research which investigated the processes of schooling because the methodologies that were generally accepted lacked the ability to look inside schools and classrooms and to investigate curricula. Sociologists were mostly restricted ... to standing outside the school gates counting as children from different social class backgrounds came and went through different doors (Goodson and Walker, 1991, xi).

How we are expected to write affects what we can write about. It follows, therefore, that by asking different questions a different methodology might emerge as being more appropriate. In anthropology, for example, where the emphasis has been on studying the culture and life style of particular groups of people the life story has been considered one of the standard

tools of field work (Bertaux, 1981, 6). The history of life story in sociology has been different. Daniel Bertaux, in writing about life stories as a sociological method of investigation, claimed that the emphasis shifted 'from enthusiasm in the twenties to utter rejection in the fifties; from ...strongly positive opinion...to the strongest form of critique: silence' (Bertaux, 1981, 1). The period of 'enthusiasm' is associated with

'a specific group of sociologists in a specific time and place, namely some of the Chicago sociologists during the twenties and thirties' (Bertaux, 1981, 5). What is more, , etc.) (Bertaux, 1981, 5).

The period of silence occurred from the forties onwards when American sociologists led the world in empiricist research and when 'most of the textbooks of methodology published during the fifties and sixties focussed upon survey research and simply ignored other forms of observation, including the collection of life stories.' (Bertaux, 1981, 1).

The two traditions of empiricist research and life story writing came to be presented as oppositional so that rhetoric was pitted against plain writing, subjectivity against objectivity, and fiction against fact. These terms themselves became value laden so that one set (plain writing, objectivity and fact) was associated with pure research ('proper' research) and the other with the world of the imagination and as a consequence the so-called 'objectivity' of the scientific method became hegemonic.

The idea of 'science' became a metanarrative that was both legitimating and constraining. 'Science' became an over-arching term that was adopted in many areas of study, presumably to give them the same claims to legitimacy as the traditional sciences, such as physics. The corollary of this was that the methods and procedures of the traditional sciences also became an accepted part of the metanarrative. In academia this led to the study of political science, social science, health science, environmental science, to meat and animal science and even to mortuary science

(Chalmers, 1976, xiv). The University of New England, for example, is currently advertising a chair in Meat Science. This same high regard for science can be seen in ordinary life through the popular media where statements such as 'scientific evidence shows...' abound and are therefore, presumably, beyond dispute. A narrative form has become associated with 'science' when it is used in this way. Narrative structures, it would seem, are pre-operative, regardless of whether one is writing primarily in a "narrative" or a "logico-scientific" code' (Richardson, 1990, 119). In other words, the scientific tradition, rather than being distinct from the literary tradition, is in fact embedded in it. Richardson also argues that seeing these two as polar opposites masks the fact that the language of science, and particularly the language of social science, is riddled with literary devices which serve to convey specific meanings and values to text.

Metaphor is probably the most commonly used literary device, so common in fact, that it passes unnoticed in everyday language and in scholarly writing alike, yet metaphor has the power to control and limit the way we think. (The use of "power" in the previous sentence is itself a metaphor which gives quite specific value and meaning). 'The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another' (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 5.) Thus in Science there is the black hole, the big bang and the big crunch. The harmony of the spheres, the expanding universe, the clockwork universe, attraction and repulsion...kingdoms of animals and plants, computers that crash or refuse demands...families of elements, daughter and grand-daughter isotopes in radioactive decay... the selfish gene (and) degenerate quantum states (Holton, 1984, 102.).

Holton also mentions a new biology course taught at Wheaton College in Boston which gives a radical feminist interpretation of fertilization as 'an encounter between an aggressive spermatozoan - an old stereotype - and an 'equally aggressive egg' that envelopes it rather than passively accepting what comes'. (1984, 102). And in Education the business metaphor has emerged in many of the writings of the eighties. Thus global budgeting, corporate goals, efficiency and effectiveness, products of the

system, and now the new language of competencies, all conspire (another metaphor) to set the parameters of how we think about schools. The very language used limits understanding because of an uncritical acceptance of how value laden it is. Richardson says of metaphors that they 'exist at the conceptual level, and they prefigure judgement about the truth value of a text' (Richardson, 1990, 121). Regardless of whether the discourse is sociological, educational or scientific it is crucial to critically examine the language used and to expose those metaphors that have contributed to the entrenchment of some views as given, as undisputable (as hegemonic) and which at the same time have prevented the possibility of other visions, other ways of looking at the world.

Jerome Bruner in his book *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* argues that these two methodologies are different but complementary. Both the narrative code, and what he terms the logico-scientific code, are

two modes of cognitive functioning, two modes of thought, each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality. The two (though complementary) are irreducible to one another. Efforts to reduce one mode to the other or to ignore one at the expense of the other inevitably fail to capture the rich diversity of thought (1986, 11).

Bruner goes on to give an example of how these two discourses, these different forms of communicative practices, combine to 'capture the rich diversity of thought'. He quotes from a book entitled *Hamlet's Castle* in which two scientists on a walking tour of Denmark came across Kronberg Castle and one mused to the other

Isn't it strange how this castle changes as soon as one imagines that Hamlet lived here. As scientists we believe that a castle consists only of stones, and admire the way the architect put them together. The stone, the green roof with its patina, the wood carvings in the church, constitute the castle. None of this should be changed by the fact that Hamlet lived here, and yet it is changed completely. Suddenly the walls and the ramparts speak a different language. The courtyard becomes an entire world, a dark corner reminds us of the darkness of the human soul, we hear Hamlet's "To be or not to be." Yet all we really know about Hamlet is that his name appears in a thirteenth-century chronicle. No one can prove that he really lived here. But everyone knows the questions that Shakespeare had him ask, the human depths he was made to reveal, and so he too had to be found a place on earth, here in Kronberg (Bruner, 1986, 45).

Thus viewing Kronberg Castle as stone and mortar is one account based on a view of the world that does not vary with the human condition. Adding Hamlet's story does not change these facts; it adds another dimension, a way of understanding the world as lived. There is a place for both views independent of each other yet it can also be argued that each is diminished without the other. So too for the work of teachers. At one level there are descriptions of the myriad kinds of work teachers typically engage in (Connell 1985, 1982. Turney et al, 1986) and at another level there are the real stories of real teachers, their tragedies and their triumphs and their very real contribution to the understanding of what it means to be a teacher (Kidder, 1989).

Teachers' Life Stories as a Celebration of Teachers' Work

There is some terminological confusion about the differences between such terms as biography, autobiography, life history, case history, personal narratives and life stories. The first two are relatively straight forward. Autobiography is written by the person herself, and biography is written by someone other than the person who is the subject of the story. Both focus on the person's whole life and both have a long literary and historical tradition. Life stories and personal narratives are oral accounts narrated by the persons themselves to an interpreter and the stories themselves may be whole life stories or they may be fragments or incidents from a life. When these stories are supplemented with other biographical data they tend to be called life histories or case histories because it is assumed that a more complete account is given than can be gathered from just the one source. However the terms life histories and case histories are often used interchangeably (Bertaux, 1981, 7-8).

So what possibilities are opened up by this life history type of research?

How can it open up new ways of looking at and understanding teachers' work?
Mary Louise Holly and Maggie MacLure in their editorial to the special

issue of *The Cambridge Journal of Education, Biography and Life History in Education* (1990, 203) claim that

- (1) it can enhance qualitative research by opening new roots into the social sciences, and perhaps into people's heads (what it means, how it feels, to be a teacher, a pupil, a mother...)
- (2) it can be a vehicle for curricular and educational reform with the power to anchor educational policy in the personal experiences and values of teachers and students
- (3) it can be an oppositional strategy of reclamation, emancipation and empowerment by rescuing experience and identity from the abstractions and reductions of bureaucrats, of researchers, of men
- (4) it can be a path towards self understanding and professional development, a search for self-knowledge through discovery, reflection or appraisal

My interest lies in the ability of the methodology both to enhance qualitative research and act as an oppositional strategy. Tracy Kidder's best selling novel, *Among Schoolchildren*, is a wonderful example of the former. It is a true story of life in the fifth grade classroom of Mrs. Chris Zajac, over one school year. It is a celebration of teachers' work in that it captures the rich diversity of what it means to be a teacher - the planning, the thinking, the caring, the heart ache and the happiness of everyday life. It shows what being a teacher is like from inside Chris Zajac's head. It captures the conflict that arises when a decision to spend time with one child may in fact be to the detriment of others in the class, or even worse, when reflecting back on the progress, or lack of progress, of a child, the teacher blames herself for not recognising the problem earlier, or not spending sufficient time with the student. It captures what it means to be a teacher because it focuses on the particular school context and the blend between the private and the professional lives of Chris Zajac. No job description could capture the reality of teaching as well.

Life story as the reconstruction of episodes and fragments of lives that teachers recall as being significant does more than just describe. It also has the potential to explain and to provide different insights into the teaching profession. For example *Among Children* is really the story of an experienced primary school teacher; someone for whom control is no longer a major issue, yet still an issue in terms of how best to cope with a particular individual; someone who is highly organised so that lesson preparation is always done yet the needs of her own family are not neglected; someone who is profoundly aware of the class and ethnic differences in her classroom and how they impinge on learning and the life chances of her students (interestingly gender did not seem to be an issue, although it was the boys who provided her major problems and took up much of her time). She manages to find time to blend her different lives but it is not always easy and her sense of frustration and failure comes through just as strongly as her feelings of satisfaction. It is because she is a

fallible human being that her story is inspirational. It provides hope for other mere mortals and guidelines for those who might tread the same pathway.

The first section of the book also deals with the presence of a practice teacher in the classroom. Because this is Chris Zajac's story the reader sees through her eyes the trials of this trainee teacher, and this perspective is a valuable one. But there is another story that could also be told, and probably should be told, if the emphasis was to shift from the experienced teacher to the novice teacher. It seems to me that there are a lot of teacher stories still waiting to be told - the beginning teacher story, the head teacher story, the leading teacher story and the kindergarten teacher story to name a few. There are a lot of myths waiting to be debunked and a lot of innovatory teaching practices waiting to be exposed. One of these myths, held by the wider community rather than the teaching profession, is that teaching is a nine to three job. Chris Zajac's experience shows that to be an outrageous assumption. Another is that all beginning teachers have disciplinary problems in the classroom. 'Be firm, fair, and not too friendly' and 'don't smile until Easter' was the advice given by the deputy principal to one of the beginning teachers who I interviewed recently. The reality is that some do and some don't,

and that there is no such thing as normal. But the different ways that teachers cope with these situations is important and can provide alternative solutions. With the new emphasis on teacher competencies in recent policy documents, and the potential to interpret these as either emancipatory or instrumental, it seems to me that life history research methodology offers the possibility of linking together a group of otherwise separate individuals in a shared consciousness. This common understanding should not only provide a sense of reassurance and encouragement but might even result in collective social action.

Tracy Kidder spent the entire year observing Chris Zajac's fifth grade classroom, and through participant observation and indepth interviews he constructed her story. However in this kind of research there are really two narratives being told, that of the speaker and that of the writer, not as two separate stories, but rather as a collaborative effort where two stories together produce one. 'A speaker and a listener ask, respond, present and edit a life'(Prell, 1989, 254). In other words there is an acknowledgment that the part played by the writer in the construction of the story is not neutral. The story narrated and recorded is not simply the "'true" representation of an objective "reality"' (Richardson, 1990, 116) but rather one version of the truth constructed by the language and form of the written story. Interpreters need to be sensitive to their own motives for writing the narrative and to be open about them as indeed they must be aware that narrators who collaborate in this process also have their own motives for doing so. Walker and Fisher, for example, in Stations write the researcher into the telling of the story. Walker writes:

I find it awkward sitting in the pub with this close-knit group (of teachers) I don't belong to. Partly it's me not wanting to dominate the

conversation, partly I'm aware that I am an outsider without access to the shared experiences that form the basis of the conversation. I concentrate on trying to listen in to catch the mood and tenor of conversations but I am aware that they perceive me as uncomfortable (Walker and Fisher, 1990, 232).

Life stories can also be construed as cultural stories. In cultural stories the narrative is embedded in the practices and processes of a particular cultural world. That is, they reflect the beliefs and practices, the sets of meanings and the kinds of relationships which bind people together into a particular group. Gender, socio-economic background, education and ethnicity are all factors in this cultural framework even though the individual stories may revolve around other units like the family, the community or the school and not appear to be concerned with wider societal issues. This can quite clearly be seen in Kidder's book which is set in a depressed area called the 'Flats' (as opposed to the more affluent Highlands) in Holyoke, Massachusetts and where out of a class of twenty students half were Puerto Ricans and two thirds were recipients of the free lunch scheme. Unemployment was high, particularly among the Puerto Ricans, run-down high rise apartments dominated the school catchment area and vandalism in the school was the norm. The story of Chris Zajac's fifth-grade classroom is the story of this culture.

According to Richardson '(t)he cultural story is told from the point of view of the ruling interests and the normative order, and bears a narrative kinship to functionalism' (1990, 128). Thus within the current culture of the school system in Australia one would expect the competitive academic curriculum to form the backdrop against which an individual teacher might talk about his or her work. Similarly one's gender may well determine the subjects one teaches and exactly where one is in the hierarchy of the school although gender itself may not be perceived to be an issue. And at a local level the geographical location of the school and the community's beliefs and expectations about what constitutes good schooling also contribute to the cultural story of both the individual who teaches within that context and to the wider story of that community. It is important to note that in these stories the silences may well be more 'telling' than the narrative itself. In other words what is not said may be just as significant as what is selected for publication.

As well as being individual narratives these are also collective stories in

the sense that no matter how individual the details in a particular case, a certain group of people can clearly identify themselves with this story and say 'that is my story too.' These collective stories may be ones of acceptance or they may be ones of resistance. There are some who thrive within a culture and actively contribute to its maintenance. Their stories help maintain the status quo and are important in understanding the process of reproduction. There are also some who appear to accept the dominant values of society but who nevertheless challenge them constantly in small ways all their lives and live happily with the contradictions of their acceptance/resistance. Their stories are particularly useful for those who

find themselves supporting apparently contradictory lines depending on how they position themselves in relation to an issue. And there are others, who by definition must be a minority, whose narratives can be read as counter narratives, because they reveal that the narrators do not think, feel or act as they are "supposed to." Such narratives can serve to unmask claims that form the basis of domination...or to provide an alternative understanding of the situation... (They) are often particularly effective sources of counterhegemonic insight because they expose the viewpoint embedded in dominant ideology as being particularist rather than universal, and because they reveal the reality of a life that defies or contradicts the rules (Personal Narratives Group, 1989, 7).

These are the oppositional stories which create alternatives to the official storyline and in doing so open up new possibilities for emancipation and empowerment. They give 'voice to those who are silenced or marginalised in the cultural narrative' (Richardson, 1990, 128) and they open up new ways of looking at the world and of teaching within it. These stories are oppositional because they actively challenge the system. For groups who are known to be marginalised in some way, like women, Aboriginals or various ethnic groups, it is possible for researchers to actively search out such stories. But if the group is defined more by its actions than the identity of those who comprise it, then locating such stories becomes problematic. It is not always easy, for instance, to find stories of teachers, students or parents who have successfully challenged established practices and by doing so have shown that it is possible. One cannot plan a research project that will target a particular group of individuals in order to come up with counter narratives of this kind. However one hears about them relatively often, usually by chance. This may happen through talking to 'ordinary' teachers in schools where one hears rumours about 'extraordinary' teaching practices, or it may happen by reading teachers' journals. It seems to me that we should seize these chances and record them when the opportunities arise because just as in the sciences some of the great discoveries have come about as side effects of other experiments, so too some of the really powerful counter narratives in education have been discovered when least expected. So, for example, a teacher's account in a journal of how, through an action research project, she had her consciousness raised about the pervasiveness of gender inequality in her classroom, and how she subsequently became empowered by realising she could do something about it, that she could make a difference, is a counter narrative which can provide important knowledge for both experienced and novice teachers. It gains its power, its authenticity and its impact from the fact that it is so real and so close to the reality of 'ordinary' teachers.

There are also other types of counter narratives that I think are worth investigating and these are the stories which belong to those people who in living their lives in the way they know best unwittingly manage to challenge hegemonic assumptions about schooling or society. The story of Kevin and his family in *Making the Difference* (Connell et al, 1982) is one such example. The school's assumption is that working class parents do not value education highly. This is based on the observation that these

parents tend not to come to the school very often. They do not, for example, take advantage of parent teacher nights. They do not appear to express their worries about their childrens' progress at school and so are assumed not to care. On the whole their children 'choose' to take less academic subjects and overall are less successful at school. They also leave school earlier and they finish up in jobs like their parents rather

than in the professions (Connell et al, 1982, 54-59). And yet the story of Kevin's parents shows an amazing faith in the school system. They see it as infinitely better and more fun than when they were there and they see it as vitally important in getting on in life.

They want the best for the boy and far from undervaluing school they have a very optimistic view of its value. This story is unintentionally counter hegemonic in that its protagonists did not set out to contest taken for granted assumption about working class attitudes to schooling, but in the telling of their story it became apparent that they held the school system in high esteem, out of all proportion, in fact, to their own fairly dismal experiences at school (part of their reasons for avoiding much contact with Kevin's school). The school had clearly misinterpreted the situation. In response to very real problems within the school, and because of very real demands on their time, the teachers had in fact imagined that working class parents do not value education. The power of this story, therefore, lies in its ability to challenge teachers to re-examine their beliefs and to evolve new practices in the light of new knowledge.

The Ethics of Identification in Life History Research

It is interesting to note that Connell et al maintained the anonymity of the participants in their study by changing locations and using pseudonyms. Kidder, on the other hand, kept the real name and identity of the main character in 'his' story because in a very real way it was 'her' story. It was quite unambiguously one year in the teaching life of Chris Zajac. He did, however, change the names of the children in the story. I think this raises interesting ethical problems for researchers. What happens if it is not actually possible to guarantee complete anonymity because of the nature of the story, as in Chris Zajac's case? What happens if participants initially agree to co-operate in a project and then withdraw their permission because they do not like the story that emerges? In a situation of complete trust between narrator/interpreter how constrained is the interpreter in writing about things which might be considered detrimental to the narrator yet potentially profoundly enlightening to the readers? Does selecting only advantageous events give a distorted picture of the truth?

The recent fiasco about the Sylvania Waters 'star' Noeline Donaher, which involved the Deputy Prime Minister Brian Howe making remarks about her excessive drinking and smoking, illustrate some of the hassles associated with making public the lives of real people. Mr. Howe told a Public Health Association of Australia conference that 'Noeline admits she has a drinking problem, wants to give up smoking, has a close relationship with the TAB, and is constantly vacillating between Gloria Marshall (weight loss clinics) and cream cakes' (Telegraph Mirror, 1st October, 1992, 4). He went on to

equate her bad dietary habits with her working class background. This was all despite the fact that he had never seen any of the episodes of the series. He was in fact treating the documentary like a soap opera and not taking into account that holding up real people to ridicule involves real hurt. However Barry Humphries coinage of the term 'soapumentary' in relation to Sylvania Waters would lead many to argue that there were good reasons for Howe to treat the program as a 'soapie.'

Regardless of the motives of the Donaher family for agreeing to take part in the program in the first instance, by the end some of them clearly wished that they had never been involved in the production. They did not like the picture that emerged of them as a family and more importantly they did not believe that it was a particularly accurate depiction. It is important to state here that they had absolutely no rights at all about what was selected for air and what was rejected, a situation that is ripe for exploitation! They had signed away such rights in a contract which made explicit their total lack of control over editing. Under these circumstances it is difficult to argue, as the BBC producer of the show did, that they really knew in advance what the impact of such a public disclosure of their private lives would mean.

The example of Sylvania Waters is somewhat absurd in the academic context but nevertheless life story methodology has the potential to fall into some of these traps. I have already talked about the necessity in life story research to make explicit how the relationship between narrator and interpreter influences the story that is recorded. Although not writing

about life story methodology Habermas (1974, 28-29), using an analogy with psychoanalytical ethics addressed the need to avoid exploitation and deception in the development of reflective practices. He identified four sanctions, two fundamental and two pragmatic, which he argued would guard against misuse and which apply equally as a guide to ethical reflective research practices. These are:

- (1) The truth must be the basis of all claims and any claims made must be able to be defended in terms of the rules of the discourse within which the claim is made
- (2) The interpretation must be appropriate and must be able to be confirmed through self-reflection. '(T)ruth must merge with authenticity- in other words the (narrator)...is the final authority' (Habermas,1974, 29).
- (3) Researchers must conform with the established code of ethics of their profession.

(4) The narrator, within certain limits, must retain the right to change the conditions or terminate the research arrangement.

It is the fundamental sanctions that ensure the validity and the rigour of the research and the pragmatic ones that ensure the integrity of those involved as well as that of the end product. These conditions actually mean that this kind of research is risky but perhaps no more so than other forms

of research where one cannot predict the quality of the data to be collected. In an extreme case the entire project could be cancelled. Mitigating against this, of course, is the fact that this kind of research usually relies on a close personal relationship between narrator and researcher which means that problems can often be solved through discussion. In some instances the discussion of the problems and the kinds of resolutions or compromises made can become a part of the narrative itself (Cohen and Somerville, 1990). In the end, however, unlike the the Sylvania Waters case, those who are collaborating must have the right to authenticate data and must have the right to withdraw at any stage. It is only when 'both (subject and narrator) suffer equally from resulting errors and the consequences of such errors' (Habermas, 1974, 29), that ethical practice can be assured.

Conclusion

By examining the relationship between narrative and scientific discourses this paper argues that at this point in time life story methodology opens up important possibilities for educational research. It allows a wider range of research questions to be addressed. Just as students often see teachers as school creatures with no life outside the confines of the school, so too much of the research has denied teachers their professional and their private lives and by doing so has presented only a limited version of what teachers work actually entails. Because life stories and personal narratives make people's personal lives in all their complexity the focus of the research, education can be understood as a phenomenon connected to and influenced by the personal experiences and histories of the participants and not simply as either a socially determined system or set of practices or a developmentally oriented system.

In this paper I have argued that life story research can both enhance the quality of education by adding a new dimension to qualitative research and provide a range of oppositional strategies for those who desire change. I have indicated also that this methodology may contribute to curricular and educational reform as well as facilitating self understanding and professional development. The way in which this might occur needs further investigation and documentation.

It has also been argued, however, that there are risks involved in this form of research. These risks exist for the subject of the research who may be harmed in unintended or unanticipated ways by participation in and identification through the research. There are also risks for the researcher given the difficulty of locating significant stories and the obligation to share power over the researching process with the subjects of the research. Yet these risks cannot be avoided or even minimized, but can be acknowledged within the ethical framework proposed. Ultimately, life story research is about giving teachers power over their own stories.

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