The Importance of Narrative Inquiry in Education

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Abstract

This article presents an analysis of the importance of narrative inquiry for investigating the everyday actions of teachers. From a narrative bibliographic review, based on relevant texts on the subject, we describe the relevance of this type of inquiry and its contribution to the articulation of theory and practice and the social and the individual for the education. We also highlight the main characteristics of this approach, distinguishing between two forms of cognition (narrative and paradigmatic). Through the description of these forms we point out the positive and negative points of each one of them, showing that the two types of research are not dichotomous, they can be complementary and have much to contribute to educational research. Finally, to answer the doubts that mark any research effort, it is essential to consider all questions, including theoretical and practical one, as well as take greater care in the search for the narrative bases of research in education. We propose that the task of narrative analysis is to shed light on dilemmas of practice, which generate thoughts. Thus there is no better place for it to "spread" than in education, because, by taking a closer look at their past, teachers have the opportunity to retrace their path, reanalyzing your current practices. This approach shows great potential for bringing new meanings to past experiences and reformulating future practices. Narrative inquiry in education faces a number of challenges, including

the need to broaden units of analysis so that researchers can stay close to the experience, those who live it, practical language, and teachers' lives.

Key words: *narratives, inquiry, theory, methods; education*.

La Importancia de la Investigación Narrativa en Educación

Resumen

Este artículo presenta un análisis de la importancia de la investigación narrativa para investigar la vida diaria educativa. De la revisión bibliográfica de tipo narrativo, basada en los textos relevantes sobre el tema, describimos la relevancia de este tipo de investigación como un aporte a la articulación de la teoría con la práctica, de lo social con lo individual para la educación. También destacamos las características de este tipo de investigación, diferenciando dos formas de cognición (narrativa y paradigmática) que proporcionaron la distinción entre dos formas de análisis dentro de las investigaciones narrativas. A través de la descripción de estas formas señalamos los puntos positivos y negativos de cada una de ellas mostrando que los dos tipos de investigación no son dicotómicos, pueden ser complementarios y tienen mucho que aportar a las investigaciones educativas. Finalmente, para sortear las dudas que marcan cualquier investigación, es fundamental considerar todos los temas, incluidas las prácticas, e intensificar el cuidado en la búsqueda de bases narrativas para las investigaciones en educación. Propomos que a tarefa da análise narrativa é lançar luz sobre dilemas da prática, que geram pensamentos. Assim, não há melhor lugar para ela "se espalhar" do que na educação, porque, olhando mais de perto o seu passado, o professor tem a oportunidade de refazer o seu caminho. Essa abordagem mostra grande potencial para trazer novos significados para

experiências passadas e reformular práticas futuras.La investigación narrativa en educación enfrenta una serie de desafíos, incluida la necesidad de ampliar las unidades de análisis para que los investigadores puedan estar cerca de la experiencia, de quienes la viven, del lenguaje práctico y de la vida de los profesores.

Palabras clave: *narrativas, investigação, teoria, métodos, educación.*

Introduction

For a long time, matters of practice were overlooked by "science". Today, however, the relevance of practices and their articulation with theory, conceptualized as praxis (by Karl Marx and defended by Freire, 1987), motivates the work and draws the attention of many authors undertaking research into practice in the field of education. Our focus of discussion in this article is precisely a mode of research that values the depiction of how individuals express their worldview: **narrative inquiry**.

A teacher is not just a worker in society. He/she may also be an opinion maker and instigator of discussions. Thus, the position he/she takes influences not just his/her own life, but also the formation of society itself. It is thus important that they have an awareness of their professional activities/choice of profession. Another important aspect is that we seek to incorporate both individual and social perspectives into the analysis of stories. For, although difficult, it is by no means impossible to overcome social determinations. People are neither determined by nor responsible for *a priori* their failure or success: the social influences life's opportunities, but there is something individual that permits us to have reasons of our own that go beyond social imperatives.

Thus, from the bibliographic review of the narrative type that selects the

relevant texts on the theme, we carry out an analysis of how narrative research can be important for education, according with Rother (2007, p. 1) that explains that:

> narrative review articles are broad publications, appropriate to describe and discuss the development of a given subject, from a theoretical or contextual point of view. The narrative reviews do not inform the sources of information used, the methodology to search for references, nor the criteria used in the evaluation and selection of works. They basically consist of an analysis of the literature published in books, printed and / or electronic magazine articles in the interpretation and personal critical analysis of the author. This category of articles has a fundamental role for continuing education because they allow the reader to acquire and update knowledge on a specific subject in a short period of time; however, they do not have a methodology that allows data to be reproduced, nor do they provide quantitative answers to specific questions. They are considered narrative review articles and are qualitative.

Thus, we performed searches in libraries and articles, selecting the most important texts for this review. Although we have carried out narrative interviews in our doctoral research that address professional choice and teacher education, the aim of this article was not to present them, as our objective was to carry out a theoretical review on the narrative theme.

Narrative: the concept that probes the complexity of practice

Narrative permits us to understand the complexity of stories told by individuals about the conflicts and dilemmas in their lives. Bolívar (2002) understands narrative as the structured quality of experience understood and seen as a story, capturing the richness and detail of the meanings in human affairs based on evidence from the world of life. Experience is reconstructed, reflecting on what was lived and giving meaning to what happened.

For Brockmeier & Harré (2003), in a general sense, narrative is a set of linguistic and psychological structures transmitted culturally and historically,

delimited by each individual's level of mastery and his/her mixture of socially acquired socio-communicative techniques and language skills.
These authors assert that words are never uttered just by the individual, rather they are articulations of various particular narratives from particular points of view determined in a given context and by particular voices. Narratives are a specific way of constructing and construing reality, making up a set of rules for what is acceptable or not in a given culture.

Jerome Bruner has made a significant contribution to our understanding of narratives and, consequently, the emergence of narrative inquiry. The author (1990) draws on some of the assumptions underpinning cultural psychology, primarily the need to embrace a more historical and interpretative approach. However, he goes beyond these assumptions, describing how "reality" is constructed: by narrative, which mediates experience itself and shapes the social construction of reality, which also includes subjectivity, which in turn is always related to communicative discourse.

For Bruner (1990), the influences that dominate the transactions of everyday life and make meaning public and shared in participation in culture ("folk psychology") have an organizing principle that is more narrative than conceptual, for the narrative organizes the experience. When things are "how they should be", narrative explications of folk psychology are unnecessary, that is, the usual in the human condition is endowed with legitimacy and deviations from the norm are verified; when there is an exception, the account needs a reason, an explication. To tell a story is to take a moral stance. Thus, according to the author, narrating something according to popular culture does not require so much explanation, on the contrary, it is necessary to explain the narrative more and take a moral position.

Lyotard (1989) also describes narrative as a form of knowledge par excellence of the popular classes, of a people's culture. It obeys rules set by pragmatics, determining what must be said in order to be heard and heard in order to speak, and what role must be played to be the object of a narrative. Narratives transmit a set of pragmatic rules that constitute the social bond. The raw material for its social bond is found not only in the meaning of the accounts, but also in the act of citing them, following a rhythm that measures time and a temporalization that aims not to forget.

However Bruner (1990) adds that our propensity to organize experience in narrative form serves not only to conserve and elaborate a tradition, but also to interpret and "improve" what happened, promoting a new form of telling. Narrative is a vehicle for "folk psychology" that reiterates social norms, can teach, and conserves the memory or alters the past. It is not realized to maintain the social or safeguard individual "memory". Stories are told through a set of personal prisms, meaning that there can be a number of different versions, for there is an unavoidably human side to making sense.

In this regard, Gudmundsdóttir (2001) points out that action and meaning leave traces in the social space and transform human activity through the collective memory in institutions. Mediated action goes beyond the initial situation and becomes relevant in other contexts. Meanings therefore go beyond those initially intended by the person involved in the original action. When constructing a narrative of practice, inquirers become interpreters, seeking to make sense of and describe their field experiences.

In the face of these observations, we advocate that while both social and individual aspects motivate memorization and narrative, institutions play an important role in schematizing the memory/narration. As Bruner (1990, p. 62)

explains, our experience and memory of the social world are structured by deeply internalized and narrativized conceptions of folk psychology and by historically rooted institutions.

Along the same lines, Lyotard (1989) and Foucault (1979) stress that institutions are a way of imposing limits on what can be said and how. Although discipline is one of the primary functions of institutions, the disciplines also submit to these games, with struggles over language strategies being conducted both inside and outside the institutional environment.

Narrative and power and discipline

Another aspect that relates the narrative, institutions and social relations is the issue of power and discipline. Gudmundsdóttir (2001) argues that the fact that speech is intimately interconnected with culture means that it is not entirely individual, because each voice is embedded in a context of multiple culturally and singularly situated voices. The multiple voices that exist in society bring influence and an invisible baggage of ideologies and ethical issues from our culture.Thus, narratives can be emancipatory from social influences or reproduce the hierarchical structures of our culture.

We agree with Foucault (1979) that neither power nor the resistance to power have a definite place. Even emancipatory actions are part of a struggle waged within the relations of power, since individuals are a product of power and knowledge. There is no prior individuality that becomes dominated by power. Knowledge is inextricably linked to power, which, as a social practice, is historically constituted. But power does not exist, it is exercised. What exists are the practices or power relations that produce individualities, not through coercion, but by framing the individual from birth in a world where power acts. In contrast, the individual is born confused and is integrated in disciplinary

rules, emerging as a target of power. Thus the individual is not crushed but rather produced by power.Still addressing issues of power, but related to the individual. Gudmundsdóttir (2001) defines the subjectivity of the subject as non-unitary, for language, ethical matters, relationships, social interactions, and experiences are central. The unitary subject is a myth that depicts social domination. In other words, the fact that we are in contact with the social and with people in society leads us to acquire not only non-unitary subjectivity, but also memories that, according to Bruner (1990), are recalled through the dialogical relations we had with a person we had contact with. Thus, what makes us recall and organize memories is the the dialectical interaction between individuals, groups, and institutions and the social relations within a given environment.

Berger and Luckman (1985) suggest that, in addition to the importance of affection and identification, above all other contents, it is language that must be internalized in primary socialization[i]. Language differentiates (and legitimizes) an individual's identity, giving meaning to roles and interpretations and constructing the individual's first world, which should be considered real.

Narrative is not just plot structure or historicity. For Bruner (1990), it is also a way of using language. Symbolic meaning depends on the internalization and utilization of its system of signs by the interpretant and therefore requires interaction with people. The initial mastery of language can come only from participation in communication.

As a consequence of the need for dialogical relationship, the narration of experience comes naturally through learning a language. Gudmundsdóttir (2001) explains that peoples of all cultures gradually develop, intersubjectively, distinct ways of knowing, understanding and perceiving their shared physical

and social reality. Narrative acts as a “script” to help us make sense of things. We use it constantly because the social presents itself to us as a narrative, which we can apply selectively to almost all aspects of our lives.

Bruner’s (1990) interpretive perspective explains that although consensus is important to provide the basis for the worldviews of those belonging to a given culture, relationship and the struggles between the different construals of reality are just as important. Narrative is one of the devices used in these struggles to maintain their perception of the world; even "power" makes use of it. To live in a culture is to live in a conflict of interests. One of the best ways of preserving peace is the human gift for explaining extenuating circumstances. To live in a culture is to be interlocked in various stories, which for the most part do not represent consensus.

Bruner signals that the collapse of a culture happens when there is no longer consensus between the ordinary and canonical in life, when there is the rhetorical overspecialization of narrative or the impoverishment of narrative resources. This does not mean that experience is no longer put into narrative, but rather that the “worst scenario” story comes to dominate daily life to the point where another story seems no longer possible.

Narrative and the self

With regard to the discussions of connection between narrative and the personal and social, Bruner (1990) revisits the concept of “self”, much used in psychology, suggesting that is not only located in the private consciousness, but also in a cultural-historical situation. Culture is reformulated by the individual, through the “reflexivity”[ii] that our narrative capacity offers, as well as our intellectual capacity to “envision alternatives”, conceiving other ways of being, acting and speaking.

These changes in the perception of our past are perceived more clearly in narrative inquiries, because reflexivity is activated in the act of recounting since upon interacting with another person the subject is able to attempt to clarify his/her motives and ways of being. Narrative studies therefore comprehend that understanding "one's self" can only be realized through an interpretive effort. The "self" is a narration, because we are always telling stories about ourselves to ourselves, recalling a memory and creating a new narrative. The narratives obtained by these studies contain much of this effort to elucidate, create and recreate explications for ways of acting and thinking, as you also highlight Freeman (2015) in your article.

Polkinghorne (1988) highlights that our self concept is formed by narrative configuration. Our stories are constantly reviewed as new events are added to our lives. The "self" is not a static thing or substance, but rather a configuring of personal events into a narrative unit that includes not only what we were, but also anticipations of what we will be. These considerations remind us that narratives provided by interviewees are totally dependent on the context in which they find themselves (as well as the purpose for which they were interviewed) and are likely to be totally different to those given years before or years later and, who knows, a week later[iii]. In short, the construction of their singularity depends on the social and historic context. Contributions are added and reformulated. To understand the rules upon which human beings are founded on creating meanings in cultural-practical contexts, we should inquire as to and interpret what the person does or tries to do in a given situation and place.

Narrative is not a "free" construction; it tells the meanings that the person constructs for the "self". For Bruner (1990), autobiographies are not merely a record, but rather a narration of what the story teller thinks he/she did, under

which circumstances, how, and why. It is an account given by a narrator in the present about the construction process of a protagonist who has his/her name and existed in the past, telling the story in the present, where the protagonist unites with the narrator.

So the narrator cannot speak about him/herself in the past? He/she can, but the past he/she refers to no longer represents what he/she is in the present. The narrator learns and reconstructs his/her way of thinking; that is why many people say that they would not no longer do what they did. Regret is an interpretation of the past. However, accounts are not made up solely of regrets. An individual often lacks a reason for his/her actions, but finds one later and justifies the actions with these new discoveries.

The interviewee is this narrator who, through the "act of telling", seeks the explications he often wished to have or discovered later. Thus narrative is not the truth as it happened, but rather a person's interpretation, which in turn is interpreted by us. Only through interpretation can we do justice to the cultural world.

Folk psychology is the exercise of narrative and storytelling supported by a powerful structure of narrative culture. The "self" is not isolated in each person's consciousness, but distributed interpersonally, seeking meaning in the historical circumstances that shape culture (Bruner, 1990).

Some personal versions of the "self" may be preferred to others, possibly because "official", or "forced", conceptions are used to establish the political or hegemonic control of one group over another. Many narrative inquiries highlight this control, for example the dominance of macho conceptions in Western culture in the face of women's biographies and ways of telling their

story.

However, control may be the target of resistance. Gudmundsdóttir (2001) posits that self-narrative can be emancipatory when it goes beyond the myth of "unified subjectivity" and permits the validation of conflict as a source through which minority groups become stronger and talk of their own experiences.

We may conclude that our individuality does not contain immutable identity, but is rather something that we socially construct over the course of our lives and is therefore constantly changing. Narrations of ourselves help us to construct our meaning, both for oneself and others in society.
Research that uses narratives permits researchers to recount the experiences not only of the legitimated, but also minorities, allowing other voices to be heard beyond those responsible for decision-making. The potential of these new voices can show that while discrimination and roles may be induced by social forces, there can be resistance to these determinations.

Narrative as inquiry

It is through perspectives enfranchised by critical positioning averse to antinomies that we can situate narratives as a link between practice and theory. In academic thinking, the separation of types of knowledge into cognitive versus emotional has received new meaning. One of those responsible for this change was Jerome Bruner, who argued that narrative knowledge is more than a mere expression of emotion, suggesting that it is also a legitimate form of reasoned knowing.

He proposed that there were two types of cognition or rationality (Bruner, 1986: 11), two complementary modes of thought. To capture the rich diversity of cognition, neither of these two types of knowledge can be ignored; both must be

analyzed in order to understand the different manners of dealing with experience. Each manner has its own specific criteria and principles and differ in its verification procedures and form of argument.
The two types of cognition described by Bruner (1986) are:

- Paradigmatic: knowledge taken over by rules and prescriptions that can only exist as long as it is purposeful, formal and scientific. This mode is influenced by positivist methods.
- Narrative: practical knowledge encompassing popular knowledge constructed biographically-narratively. The methods used by this knowledge are hermeneutic, interpretive and narrative. The discourses are presented as feelings, actions, stories and images.

"Paradigmatic knowledge" classifies individuals, nullifying individual differences, and is based on scientific logic in a mathematic system of explication and description. It employs conceptualization or categorization as operations to establish categories, which are idealized and related in order to form a system by which general propositions are extracted from particular contexts. The application of this knowledge leads to the construction of theories based on analyses, logical evidence and empirical discoveries guided by hypotheses and seeking to transcend particularities.

Polkinghorne (1995) underlines that the crucial element of "paradigmatic cognition" is classifying a particular instance as belonging to a category or concept defined by a common set of attributes. The general concepts can include sub-concepts or sub-categories, each having a peculiar attribute called specific difference. Paradigmatic knowledge focuses on is what is common to the actions and is maintained in individual words that name a concept.

In contrast, "narrative cognition" is based on the assumption that actions are unique and therefore cannot be expressed in definitions, categories or abstract propositions. Narrative knowledge is directed towards understanding human action and is maintained in emplotted stories that retain the complexity of the situation, emphasizing the particular and special characteristics of each action, permitting an understanding of how individuals give meaning to what they do, shouldn't be reduced to a set of abstract or general categories that nullify their singularity[iv].

The cumulative effect of "narrative reasoning" is a collection of individual cases where thought moves from case to case instead of from cases to generalization. This collection of cases provides a base for understanding new actions through analogy. Analogical understanding recognizes the improvisation and change that make up the flexible variability of human behavior.

Bolívar, Domingo & Fernández (2001) suggest that the biographical and narrative research approach has acquired its own identity and become a research perspective in its own right (it is not merely a method, being much more than a methodological strategy[v]). It is a branch of interpretive research that shares some of the methodological principles of qualitative research[vi], but reveals some of the cracks in usual qualitative research approach (such as the fact that lived experience is not something to be captured, but rather created during the investigation process).

Based on constructivist and interpretivist epistemology, the underlying premise of narrative inquiry is the understanding that: language mediates action; narrative is the central structure of the way humans construct meaning, or in other words, the course of life and personal identity are lived as a narration; the argument plot configures the narrative account; temporality and narration form

a whole (time is meaning); and cultural and individual narratives are intertwined (Bolívar, Domingo *et al.*, 2001: 22).

Methodological prescriptions ("recipes") do not get us very far and do not guarantee anything, because from a more interpretive perspective the meaning given by agents is converted into the central focus of research, embracing the emotional dimension of experience, complexity, and relationships, and the singularity of each action (which cannot be strictly controlled). Narrative inquiry is therefore an interdisciplinary approach involving various questions, a new field of research that has been reorganized based on its own philosophical and epistemological foundations encompassing all forms of oral and written reflection that employ personal experience. However, since accounts do not speak for themselves, they must be organized and conceptualized and depend on the social interaction established between the informant and investigator (Bolívar, Domingo *et al.*, 2001).

Narrative accounts can be presented in various ways (films, ballet, oral histories, among others) and may receive the contribution of various techniques (Such as notes, journals, letters, diaries, lesson plans, transcribed interviews) besides transcribed recorded interviews, not excluding other written means of communication. Especially since the quantity of recorded/transcribed data that the researcher may work with is limited and therefore other techniques can help provide a better understanding of a problem. However, these means are a complement to interviews in narrative inquiry. Orality is the most important source and narrative interviews[vii] transformed into written form via transcription are therefore essential. The result is a story presented in various different manners[viii] (Polkinghorne, 1995; Bolívar, Domingo *et al.*, 2001).

Two Forms of analysis in narrative inquiries

Bruner's distinction between narrative and paradigmatic cognition prompted academic reflection, with some authors distinguishing between two forms of analysis in narrative inquiries. One, Polkinghorne (1995), finds that both are underpinned by the general principals of narrative inquiry, but do it differently:

- Paradigmatic narrative analysis, or simply narrative analysis, is based on data gathered from narratives or stories to produce paradigmatic typologies and categories out of the common elements. Paradigmatic-type narrative inquiry produces knowledge of concepts.
- Narrative-type narrative inquiry operates with elements combined into an "emplotted" story, collecting descriptions of events, happenings and actions whose analysis produces stories (for example, biographies, stories, case studies). Narrative analysis produces knowledge of particular situations.

Bolívar (2002) explains that paradigmatic reasoning is present in both quantitative and qualitative research. The difference lies in the definition of the categories, which occurs before data collection in quantitative investigations using paradigmatic narrative analysis and afterwards in qualitative research (influenced by or arising from the data). In this regard, Bolívar, Domingo & Fernández (Bolívar, Domingo *et al.*, 2001: 108) claim that paradigmatic narrative analysis and narrative-type narrative analysis ultimately follow the same logic as the questionnaire: qualitative analysis of qualitative material employing selected parts of interviews for illustrative purposes.
Paradigmatic narrative analysis can be used to examine data, identifying the particular as an instance of general concepts and situating common themes or conceptual manifestations in stories/collected data. However, emphasis should also be given to the construction or discovery of concepts that give categorical identity to items in collected data and annotation of relationships between

categories (Bolívar, 2002).

It is important to make the most of the main strength of paradigmatic procedure: its capacity to develop general knowledge on a collection of stories and their common points. Because the narrative network is supported and transported by local language and local individual experiences. According to Bolívar (2002), this is why it is common to use quotes from an interview for illustrative purposes to support what has been previously determined by quantitative analysis. However, this type of knowledge is abstract and formal, failing to contemplate the unique and particular aspects of each narrative, meaning it is necessary to complement the procedure with narrative inquiry.

Both Bolívar (2002) and Polkinghorne (1995) demonstrate that narrative analysis (in the strict sense) is concerned with collecting individual cases, not to generalize each one into a category, but rather make analogies, where individuals can have similar or singular aspects. It is based on a particular narrative, but for the purpose of expressing individual life in an authentic manner without manipulating the participants' voices.

Although paradigmatic investigation fragments discourse into codifiable elements, we agree with Bolívar (2002) that the researcher should not only take notes and classify discourses, but also significantly decipher the components and dimensions relevant to subjects' lives, situating the narrative accounts in a context that takes on a broader meaning.

We advocate that we should go beyond interview discourse, without categorizing it *a priori*, overcoming the pasting of text fragments, delving into the complex set of symbols that people use to give meaning to their world and describing accounts in a meaningful way. There is frequent criticism that it is

not enough to take either an "illustrative" stance, limited to making selective use of participants' words to show what investigators want to show, or a "hyper-realistic"[ix] stance, which seeks to give full value to the participants' words as if they themselves were transparent.

The approach that permits the researcher to take these aspects into consideration is narrative inquiry (Bolívar, 2002). This methodology employs a kind of "binocular vision" (double vision), both contextualizing the informant's internal reality and framing his/her account in an external context that conveys meaning and sense to the lived reality. Experiences should be situated within a set of socio-historical regularities, always remembering that life stories are unique and singular.

The narrative analysis process should synthesize aggregate data into a coherent dataset instead of separating it into categories. The accounts obtained should result in an argument plot that determines which elements should be included, showing the respective order and purpose.

We understand that, in the present conjuncture, the writing of narrative inquiry should neither sacralize accounts, nor assimilate them to traditional paradigmatic ways of knowing. Bolívar suggests that narrative text itself cannot but be narrative, that is, the writing style should reorient conventional investigation practices. We therefore advocate that the writing is done by the investigator of the accounts, attempting to bring them as close as possible to the storyteller's words (adapting them to writing norms to make reading more fluent) and revealing not only the common points in stories, but also their differences and singularities.

Drawing on the works of Polkinghorne and Bolívar, we must not forget that the

two forms of inquiry (narrative and paradigmatic) have much to contribute to our research and are complementary. As Bolívar, Domingo & Fernández (2001) state, these types of inquiry are not dichotomous, rather they both contribute to generate knowledge and can complement each other. These authors admit that some research interests may not be covered by narrative analysis and an analysis of categorical data may be necessary. Moreover, ignoring the fact that narrative is determined by political forces and part of the broader social context can play a conservative role.

Our aim is therefore to propose an emplotted analysis that may contain a priori categories, but seeks to identify them in the research before classifying, which may neglect the particularities of each account.

Polkinghorne (1995) proposes an "emplotted" or "storied"[x] narrative inquiry that uses narrative analysis without the goal of classifying and ordering. The events and actions are shaped into a whole by the meanings of a plot, which is a conceptual scheme by which the contextual meaning of events can be depicted. The study of plot permits the researcher to understand the narrative structure through which people comprehend and describe relationships between life events and choices, the time interval, and the creation of criteria for selecting the events to be included in the story (or even the external happenings that may contextualize it), ordering events until they culminate in a conclusion. In gathered stories, people tend to follow a linear temporal logic, since the teller presumes that that is how time presents itself (the way we learn about history generally leads us to think this way) and gives his/her story meaning (Polkinghorne, 1995). Thus, the task of the researcher is to interview and configure the elements into a story that brings together and gives meaning to the data. Subsequently, analysis is required to develop or discover a plot that demonstrates the connection between the elements, culminating in a solution for the story.

Narrative research as interaction between the researcher and practitioner

Clandinin & Connnelly (1991) maintain that narrative analysis produces a story that does not belong to the individual. Its depicts the confluence of two narratives – that of the participant and that of the investigator – that become, in part, a shared narrative construction reconstructed through the inquiry. During the "telling and retelling", the entanglement of the accounts become acute and the temporal, social and cultural horizons are set and reset.

In this regard, it is important to emphasize that the researcher cannot escape from adding his/her own voice to the research process, inquiring as to why the narrative has been delivered in a particular way. By addressing these questions, participants can delve more deeply into other experiences to trace the "emotionality" appended to their particular way of storying events.

The human experience has a storied quality that can only be interpreted qualitatively, for each individual describes his/her past experience narratively (as a child, teacher, researcher or member of a particular group), reanalyzing within his/her current professional, historical or social context.

The interaction between the researcher and practitioner guides a mutual and collaborative telling and retelling, permitting participants to understand change in their practices. The "practitioner/participant" and "researcher/participant" have different goals played out within their broader social narrative. The practitioner expresses his/her restorying in the relations reshared in his/her work context. The researcher aims to restory his/her practice and narrative and retell the story so that it can be read by others, and in doing so needs to develop theoretical constructs (Clandinin & Connnelly, 1991).

Thus, our goal as researchers is to share our narrative inquiries, ensuring

accounts reach a larger audience. Narrative accounts may be seen by others as a narration of their own story, which we hope will prompt readers to retell/revisit their own stories and the question practices of readers.

But we do not just need to share our writings. As researchers, we also need theoretical constructs and storied narrative; that is why we choose the data to be gathered depending on the focus of our study. This means defining delimitations, which should weave together individual accounts (that provide an understanding of idiosyncrasies and particular complexities), but in a way that ensures that not all data need to be included in the final account of the story (because they are not always needed for the plot).

Polkinghorne's considerations (1995) guide us in this process. He considers the analysis of narrative data to be a procedure in which the researcher organizes the elements of the story into a consistently developed report, synthesizing the data rather than separating it into its constituent parts. The author warns that not all data processing is encompassed by the term analysis, which comprises the configuration of elements into a coherent whole.

Finally, to attempt to answer the doubts that mark any substantial social research effort, it is essential to consider practical questions, for example, the study of how people "narrativize", which requires more in-depth research techniques in order not to repress or interrupt interviewees when they "burst into storytelling". Thus, not only do researchers need to be more careful, they must also seek the narrative bases for their research, which this text tries to contribute theoretically in some way.

Practice is present in the narrative construction in its conception as temporal personal experience. We should therefore consider that when narrating, the

individual finds him/herself in a process of recreation of the "self", a process which visualizes the past in the face of present perspectives, organizing him/herself for the future.

Narrative inquiry in education: emphasizing the everyday actions of teachers

Narrative analysis is firmly embedded in the field of educational research because it enables an understanding of the practices, motivations firmly embedded in the human experience. The school as an institution is full of complexity, having a base built on social institutions, but at the same time composed of individuals who contribute to the continuity of this base. We need to understand personal choices to be able to understand more about the school and educational activity.

Narratives permit us to obtain a broader understanding of teachers and the school. Especially since, as Bolívar, Domingo et al. (2001: 53; 62) remind us, the account is the very subject of teaching, within which the work of the teacher acquires meaning. The teacher's knowledge is organized narratively. They are story tellers and the territory of professional knowledge is constructed narratively. Thus, by employing a device that is so common to teachers' everyday experience, we can get closer to the everyday, releasing knowledge of emotive aspects, which are inseparable from their way of working.

Bolívar, Domingo and Fernández (2001: 62; 86) hold that narrative inquiry permits an understanding of how teachers give meaning to their work, act in their professional settings, and construct their professional knowledge, and of how the reflection raised by the narrative can itself be formative. The narration of experience is how teachers bring together teaching theory and practice, always expecting it to be a true praxis in the Freirean sense (1987, p. 52) as a

transformative reflection and action and consequently a source of reflective knowledge and innovation. Telling and retelling experience is therefore a good strategy for teachers to reflect upon their own identity and "disidentify" from past practices or anticipate what they want to do/be.

Retrieving the personal dimension of the craft of teaching is a way of opposing the impersonal anonymous teacher without name. Narrative inquiry is a way of giving voice to teachers' concerns and lives, promoting a break with the usual ways of understanding and inquiring, for any generalization about teaching is a distortion of teachers' real stories as their accounts are not videos that reflect reality, but rather constructions (Bolívar, Domingo et al., 2001: 53; 55-56). Bolívar (2002) suggests that teachers' accounts are social constructions that offer particular meanings and actions and therefore should be analyzed both paradigmaticly and narratively. Teachers' biographies can offer possible explications of why they say what they say.

Clandinin and Connnelly (1991) maintain that "storying and restorying" a life is a fundamental method of personal growth, which is a fundamental quality in education. Thus, narrative inquiry should be built on this development process, describing and restorying the narrative structure of educational experience. The researcher's account should focus on restorying events, which have a continuous dimension in the reflective processes that are played out in each of our school lives.

Studies of the life and narratives of teachers enable researchers to access first order information, providing a deeper understanding of the education process and a means by which teachers can reflect on their professional life and comprehend in their own terms or voices how they live their work, taking this understanding to change that which they do not like about it (Bolívar, Domingo

et al., 2001: 56; 64-65).

However, we must not forget that we need to analyze teachers' individual narratives within a wider historical context, for each teacher is unique and can only understand him/herself from his/her own individual biographic trajectory. At the same time, each teacher has aspects common to a particular group with which they share the same story. Equally, each teacher has general aspects that he/she shares with his/her colleagues (from his/her generation, same stage of the life cycle, etc.). Thus, we should not limit ourselves to gathering just what teachers say, since the narrative is determined by education policy and curricula, which are part of the broader social context. To silence these determinants may implicitly perform a conservative function, because sanctifying teachers' narrative may mean replacing one dominant paradigm with another, without changing domination (Bolívar, Domingo et al., 2001: 45; 61; 75; 118).

Education is not an objective truth (in the form of empirical laws that show the connection between teachers' conduct and student learning outcomes). Thus, researchers do not aim to establish the objectively true character of events, but rather reflect upon what has been lived subjectively by the subject. The task is to help teachers improve what they do, not prescribe what they have to do (Bolívar, Domingo et al., 2001: 62; 141). Narrative inquiry is therefore characterized by careful attention to the researcher's interpretive authority and the relevance of the informant's voice. Undertaking this type of research in education has an impact on educational practice, involving teachers as "partners" in the study.

Education researchers are gradually abandoning the quest for the "great truth", becoming increasingly satisfied with describing local processes and theorizing

about specific problems. We propose that the task of narrative analysis is to shed light on dilemmas of practice, which generate thoughts. Thus there is no better place for it to "spread" than in education, because, by taking a closer look at their past, teachers have the opportunity to retrace their path, reanalyzing the motivations and attitudes they had and reanalyzing their current practices. Bolívar, Domingo & Fernández (2001: 48) point out that the majority of accounts are built around successes (valued positively or negatively). Teachers' narratives are full of self-evaluation elements, adopting valuative scales. The comparison between each life biography permits the researcher to identify competing standards, common themes and divergences in teachers' trajectories. This approach shows great potential for bringing new meanings to past experiences and reformulating future practices.

School narratives present the school context and can attempt to liberate research from narrative coercion, which marks a sole legitimate explanatory discourse as correct, failing to hear other discourses.

Narrative inquiry in education faces a number of challenges, including the need to broaden units of analysis so that researchers can stay close to the experience, those who live it, practical language, and teachers' lives.

Notes

[i] The authors describe primary socialization as the first socialization an individual undergoes in childhood, introducing the individual not only to society, but also to a given location in the social structure with choices inherent in his/her individual idiosyncrasies. The individual's first world is constructed in this period of socialization.

[ii] Our capacity to change the present by "going back" to the past or to change the past in the light of the present.

[iii] A single event can change the way a person describes their narrative

[iv] The collective extends beyond the sum of individual actions and singularities are also more than a part of the collective.

[v] Such as biographical interviews.

[vi] All qualitative research is also narrative in a broad sense, because its reports are full of narratives (Bolívar, Domingo *et al.*, 2001).
[vii] With a guide containing thematic questions that encourage the interviewee to retell his/her story.
[viii] Such as historical narrative, case studies, life stories, narrated episodes from someone's life...
[ix] Or a biographical utopia that provides a mere description, renouncing theoretical explanation.
[x] We use the word "story" instead of "history" here not because the former is loaded with a connotation of falsity, but to show that narrative not only depicts a view of the cultural/ideological world, encompassing the complexity of human actions, but also legitimizes and relativizes values/objectives that combine in a succession of incidents within a unified episode (Polkinghorne, 1995: 7).

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