

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

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Academic identities revealed? Reflections on participant-selected artefacts presented within a narrative inquiry research methodology

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Abstract: Conducted with academics within a post-92 university, this empirical research exploring factors impacting academic identity development is work-in-progress as part of a Professional Doctorate in Education. Interviews were conducted online using a narrative inquiry methodology, including use of participant-selected artefacts chosen to represent academic identity. Narrative inquiry was selected as a methodology as a powerful research method to elicit depth of feeling

The use of participant-selected artefacts was intended to prompt a narrative through lived experiences, with participants explaining reasons for their selection and links to academic identity. There was an expectation that the artefacts would trigger ongoing reflection and discussion from participants throughout interviews, but this was not evident to the extent anticipated.

Data was collected during unprecedented times of Higher Education (HE), with coronavirus restrictions in place, determining that interviews were conducted online. This paper seeks to evaluate the merits and limitations afforded by the approach taken.

Paper: Introduction

The research represents a half-way point in data collection and a point at which reflections on artefacts chosen and their effectiveness in triggering narrative can be explored. Observations are made on how interview format, changed to online due to coronavirus restrictions, may have impacted effectiveness of the research methodology chosen.

Narrative Inquiry is a powerful research method to elicit depth of feeling (Muylaert et al., 2014). Guiding principles behind this approach are for participants to control the flow of the interview by articulating a narrative without interruption from the researcher (Rosenthal, 2018). This type of narrative or story-telling was anticipated to fit well with academic identity formation, as academic identity is reputed to be a continuous journey of construction over time (Bennett, 2017). Quigly

(2011) describes academic identity as a constantly shifting target suggesting the importance of time in its' development. As interviews were conducted during a period when HE has been forced into methods of delivery (predominantly online) that may be new or challenging to some academics, questions arose during the research into how this may have triggered any unanticipated changes linked to academic identity formation.

Decisions on research methodology were made prior to the coronavirus pandemic, with the expectation that interviews would be face-to-face, in rooms booked on campus, away from distractions of day-to-day responsibilities. Arguably interviewing academics within their own offices or academic space could have been problematic due to many offices being shared.

Eight participants were interviewed with a mix of profiles, as illustrated in Figure 1. Each agreed to partake in two interviews, 8-10 weeks apart. Length of interview ranged from 28 minutes to 1 hour 50 minutes and all interviews were recorded. The interview structure was adapted from Wengraf (2001), Rosenthal (2004) and Bauer and Gaskell (2020) to include an introduction stage, recorded narrative and clarification questioning stages, and further questions following cessation of recording.

Artefact selection

The use of artefacts within narrative inquiry methodology supported a desire to tease out deeper understanding of how academic identity is constructed. Visual artefacts have been used in psychological research for many years, as a form of accessing meaning and expressing experience (Reavey and Johnson, 2011), and Clandinin and Connelly (2000) espouse that the creation of stories enables sense-making of observed and experienced phenomenon. Thus, it was anticipated that participants would use artefacts as triggers or prompts throughout narrative development.

Information sheets were sent to participants explaining the rationale behind use of artefacts. They were further reminded in the body of Outlook meeting invitations, to bring an artefact to be used as a prompt during interview. Finally, before interview recording began, participants were read the same introduction, including:

“You have been asked to bring along a picture or artefact that you feel represents your academic identity and you are invited to use this as a prompt throughout your narrative”

During interviews it was observed that most participants introduced their artefact at the beginning of their narrative, then built their story without additional reference to it. In later questioning stages of interviews, participants were promoted to further discuss their artefact selection, but often by this time it had been placed back on tables or desks amongst other personal objects.

Evaluation of methodology

Bringing artefacts to interview suggests that participants will think ahead, planning their choice of artefact and its' relevance to their academic identity. Rich data was collected and references to artefacts were insightful, contributing to the narrative developed. It was however noted that despite encouragement participants did not use artefacts as prompts beyond their introduction.

Reflecting on reasons for this, interview surroundings may have diluted the impact of the artefact. Instead of taking place in a booked meeting room on campus, with limited distractions and a focus

on their artefact, interviews were conducted over Microsoft Teams due to coronavirus restrictions. Participants were either at home (7 participants) or in their office. Thus, they were surrounded by multiple personal stimuli throughout the interview, amongst which artefacts were placed, possibly reducing the likelihood of further use as a trigger during interview.

Discussion

The research is ongoing with thematic analysis to be undertaken. Whilst use of artefacts as a trigger appeared limited, the link between artefacts as introduced by the participant and narratives then developed was evident and brought depth to data collected. Any link between the unprecedented conditions within which data was collected and perceived limited reference to artefacts during interviews, is to be further explored within the ongoing research.

References:

Participant	Gender	Title	Subject specialism	Artefact brought
1	Female	Senior Lecturer	Counselling	Participant-authored research report
2	Male	Lecturer	Law	Text referenced by the participant in their academic development
3	Female	Senior Lecturer	Law	Participant-authored text
4	Female	Senior Lecturer	Computing	Picture of a patchwork quilt
5	Female	Senior Lecturer	Web and Multimedia	Picture of a spiders web with a smiling spider
6	Female	Senior Lecturer	Nursing	Participant-authored practice assessment document
7	Male	Lecturer	Bioscience	Note received from friends
8	Male	Senior Lecturer	History	Text referenced by the participant in their academic development

Figure 1: Participant profiles and artefacts

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