

Act One, Scene One: using narrative as theatre to illuminate the possible selves of healthcare students with dyslexia in Higher Education. (0247)

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Abstract

This paper critically discusses the methodological processes involved within a narrative inquiry study which seeks to identify the influential temporal factors impacting upon nine healthcare students with dyslexia on level seven higher education courses. There has been an international increase of people with dyslexia accessing higher education over recent years. Policy and teaching approaches may often be sympathetic; however the reality of how it is tackled in learning environments within schools, colleges and universities differs significantly and depends on individuals and families in the absence of robust educational systems which consistently cater for individual needs. The paper focusses on the creative application of narrative inquiry and how the data from this process is being used to create acts and scenes of a play as a method of directing attention specifically to the words of the participants in order to keep their narratives intact.

Paper

Despite disparities within the education system where screening for dyslexia does not routinely take place (Rose, 2009; Lamb, 2009), more people with dyslexia are reaching higher education. Often, however many students receive diagnosis of dyslexia during their higher education while undertaking under graduate and/or post graduate study. The fractured, inconsistent nature of support for people with dyslexia continues to lead to inequalities within our society and has implications for fair access to higher education.

This study explores temporally the experiences of nine healthcare students with dyslexia who have successfully negotiated the education system to access undergraduate and post graduate programmes in the United Kingdom (UK) and discusses the barriers they have come across gaining fair access to education as well as the facilitating factors which have been influential in their success.

This paper critically discusses the methodological processes involved in the creative application of narrative inquiry in the formation of acts and scenes of a play as part of a research thesis. In order to explore how the student research participants have and are attempting to reach their desired possible selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986; Oyserman, 2010; Stevenson, 2012), narrative inquiry is applied as both the method of exploration and tool for analysis alongside the theoretical lenses of occupational potential (Wicks, 2005) and possible selves. The nonlinear, multi layered and complex process involved in this narrative inquiry study has involved multiple levels of interpretation and analysis and issues surrounding ways of directing attention to the experiences and stories of the research participants (Clandinin, 2013) are considered within this paper alongside argument for a creative approach.

While discussing the complex process of gathering narratives, the complex process of interim analysis where events, plots and three dimensional structures: temporality (moving backward and forward between the past, present and future); personal and social dimensions (feelings, hopes, reactions and existential conditions or context) and place the specific physical inquiry space where inquiry and events take place (Clandinin, 2006) are deliberated. In addition this paper discusses the interface of using sociological and psychological constructs such as The Social Model of Disability (MacDonald, 2012) and Possible Selves, (Markus and Nurius, 1986) and highlights and proposes a method of attempting to adequately represent the voices of the participants (Douglas and Carless, 2013); a process of exploring the knowledge gained from this research which allows the elucidation of that which is “more than we can tell” in written words (Eisner, 2008, p5). Therefore the exploration of these issues and concepts is assisted and enlivened by the construction and presentation format within the doctoral thesis of a play, consisting of acts and scenes, in an attempt to “generate different knowledge in different forms” (Douglas and Carless, 2013, p55).

Consideration will be given in this paper to how narrative truths can be represented within acts and scenes which remain rooted in the storied experiences of the research participants, and how this adds to the creative milieu of exploration via the narrative inquiry field. It is argued here that this contributes knowledge by shining a light specifically on the words of the participants thereby adding greater truth and meaning to the research process and enhancing both the hearability of the participants words and the listening ability of the audience/reader (Gilligan, 2007) which has been demonstrated with poetry within the Listening Guide described by Gilligan et al, (2007) and within the performative research of Douglas and Carless (2013). Consideration will be given to this process and whether it allows a further level of interpretation and emotional connection of the audience which counteracts the ‘othering’ or alienating nature which often occurs within research (Douglas and Carless, 2013).

In doing so I will deliberate on the innovative use of creativity within research, as well as consider the ‘doing’ of research participation in order for insights and understandings to emerge further (Douglas and Carless, 2013) as well as acknowledging the transformative nature of research for both the participants and the researcher which is arguably synonymous with doing, being, belonging and becoming (Wilcock, 1999); an occupational perspective. Each act (Diagnosis - Act One, The Importance of Family, Act Two and the Challenge of Fitting the Mould, Act Three) within the thesis consists of the participants playing their own character in order to preserve a sense of individuality, complexity and richness inherent in participants’ lives (Douglas and Carless, 2013) and each participant is accompanied by a narrator and researcher (two characters) which offer and facilitate the opportunity for the interactional ‘space’ (Clandinin, 2013) between the researcher and participant to be represented. Furthermore this is used as a method of positioning oneself as researcher, alongside the nine research participants in order to explore the complex relationships among knowledge, contexts and identities and as a way of considering these identities relationally with reference to temporality, intergenerationality, person, place, events, feelings, cultural, institutional, linguistic and familial which includes that of the relational of the inquirer as well as the inquired (Clandidin, 2013).

Consideration will be given to the personal, political and social dimensions of the narrative inquiry process or ‘space’ (Clandinin, 2013) which inspires inward questions of the internal conditions of feelings, hopes, reactions as well as moral dispositions and outward questions relating to the environment or existential conditions (Clandinin, 2013). These

processes assist in the consideration of the interfaces of the implications of identity as a person with dyslexia and how this interacts with the concept of self when explored and viewed through the conceptual lens of possible selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986). In addition deliberation is given to the temporal role of occupations and occupational potential (Wicks, 2005) in assisting the student/participants reach their desired possible selves and avoid undesirable possible selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986; Oyserman, 2010).

In summary, this study discusses the complex process of using narrative inquiry to explore the occupational potential and possible selves of healthcare students with dyslexia and how data collected using this methodology lends itself to further dedication to the words of the participants in the creative use of acts and scenes of a play within a doctoral thesis.

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