Per Linguam 2009 25(1):1-16
http://dx.doi.org/10.5785/25-1-25

Journal Home Page:
http://perlinguam.journals.ac.za

Per Linguam

A Journal for Language Learning
Tydskrif vir Taalaanleer

A COLLABORATIVE NARRATIVE INQUIRY: TWO TEACHER EDUCATORS LEARNING ABOUT NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Gary Barkhuizen & Penny Hacker
University of Auckland

With its capacity to unharness the power of narrative to promote meaning-making of lived experience, narrative inquiry is developing as a credible approach to research in several areas in the field of language teaching (Johnson, 2006). This article tells the story of two narrative researchers working in language teacher education who engaged in a collaborative narrative inquiry as both participants and inquirers, in order to learn more about narrative inquiry. The 'bounded' nature of their inquiry design provided a feasible way for them to explore their focus of research (i.e. their learning about narrative inquiry), and led them, through an iterative and reflexive process of analysing their narrative data, to formulate what they believe are essential ingredients of principled narrative inquiry work. Four narrative inquiry variables became the scaffolding which enabled them to answer their research questions, and are offered here as a heuristic for teaching practitioners, whether they be teachers, teacher educators or researchers, to guide them in narrative inquiries into their own work.

INTRODUCTION

Both Penny and Gary, the authors of this article,[1] are involved in second language teacher education research. Penny is trying to understand how language teacher educators learn to become, and practise as, teacher educators, what she calls language teacher educator learning (LTEL) (Hacker, 2006) and Gary is concerned with understanding how English teachers make sense of their practice in the particular social contexts in which they work (Barkhuizen, 2008). We[2] both use narrative approaches in our research. But we wanted to move on, in two ways: (1) Neither of us had actually participated in a narrative inquiry as a *participant*, i.e. the 'subject', and (2) we both wanted to learn more about narrative inquiry and the ways in which it can inform teacher preparation and contribute to our understanding of the work that teachers and teacher educators do; its epistemology, its theory and its methodological procedures.

This article reports on a collaborative narrative inquiry project we embarked upon to achieve these goals in our research work. We believe, as Ritchie and Rigano (2007) point out, that collaborating as researchers has enormous benefits not only for the outcome of the project but also for the developing working relationship between the researchers. We hope that this article presents an example of how successful such collaborations can be. In the article we locate the inquiry in the field of language teacher education research and practice. We describe in detail the methodology. In particular, we report on what we call a temporally and spatially 'bounded' approach to collaborative data collection and analysis. We then report on

the findings as they unfolded during the living of the research experience, and we conclude by suggesting implications for teachers, teacher educators and researchers who desire to use a narrative inquiry approach in their work in order to understand better what it is that they do.

WHERE WE STARTED

At the start of the inquiry we shared a number of fundamental assumptions regarding narrative inquiry, language teacher education and their relationship. We briefly state these here before moving on to a description of the inquiry itself. Centrally, we saw (and still do see) *narrative* as *stories* of *experience*. Our subsequent inquiry discussions deconstructed these three concepts in great depth, but our starting point was that stories lived and told were the core of any narrative research activity (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Pavlenko, 2002). Polkinghorne (1995:7, citing Ricoeur) says that 'stories are particularly suited as the linguistic form in which human experience as lived can be expressed. … The subject-matter of stories is human action'. For us 'human action' means the practices, desires, imaginings and theories of language teachers and teacher educators, and is the very substance and essence of our narrative research work.

We were also aware that there is no clear definition of narrative research (see Smith, 2007). Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998:2), for example, indicate that 'qualitative studies freely use the terms *narrative* and *narrative research*', and Kramp (2004:106) notes 'the absence of any single, universal' approach to conducting narrative research. A number of complex typologies of narrative research have emerged in recent years (see Mishler, 1995, for a useful overview), but most authors recognise a distinction between research which focuses on the socially-situated content of narratives and that which focuses on the form and construction of narratives. Pavlenko (2002) refers to the former as narrative inquiry and the latter as narrative study. At the start of our inquiry we were happy to proceed with the understanding that narrative research is, as defined by Lieblich *et al*. (1998:2), 'any study that uses or analyzes narrative materials', and felt satisfied that our own interests lay in narrative inquiry rather than narrative study, although we realized that these two areas of focus are not distinct; focus on narrative form, in other words, is inevitable in any analysis of narrative content.

There are substantial claims made about the value of narrative inquiry for teachers in both the theoretical and empirical literature on language teacher education (e.g. Casanave & Schecter, 1997; Golombek & Johnson, 2004). Many of these are grounded in the earlier and ongoing narrative inquiry work in general teacher education (Carter, 1993; Feuerverger, 2005; Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002). Following is a summary of these claims.

Narrative inquiry is reflective inquiry (Freeman, 2002). Through constructing, sharing, analyzing and interpreting their teaching stories, teachers get the opportunity to reflect on their own practice and to articulate their interpretations of this practice. Constructing and thinking about stories in this way, therefore, involve both introspection and interrogation. The result of this deeper understanding is change; change within self and one's practice. Johnson and Golombek (2002:4) make this point, saying, 'inquiry into experience … can be educative if it enables us to reflect on our actions and then act with foresight'. When teachers articulate and interpret the stories of their practice, their *own* practice, they develop their personal practical knowledge to the extent that they act in the future with insight and foresight. As we know, reflecting and changing is not always easy to do. Any teaching situation is a complex, dynamic arrangement of many factors. In constructing stories, however, teachers bring

together many of these factors, and in reflecting on the stories there exists the potential for them, therefore, to see the whole picture. So, as opposed to focusing on only one or two isolated variables in a particular context, stories include many of these variables linked together, and the process of making sense of the stories means unraveling this complexity. Furthermore, this process is a contextualized inquiry (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). As Phillion and Connelly (2004:460) say, 'context is crucial to meaning making'. Calls for a context approach to language teaching highlight the necessity of 'placing context at the heart of the profession' (Bax 2003:278), which involves teachers exploring the numerous aspects of their particular, local contexts such as the needs and wants of their students, the school and community culture, existing syllabuses and language-in-education policies, as well as the broader sociopolitical context in which the teaching and learning take place.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to a narrative space consisting of three dimensions which interconnect to provide context for any particular story. These three dimensions guided us in our planning and then during the early stages of our inquiry (see Ollerenshaw & Cresswell, 2002, and Phillion & Connelly, 2004, for how this space has been employed to shape the design and analysis of teacher practice inquiries). The three dimensions are as follows: (a) the participants in the story – their own experiences and their *interactions* with others; (b) the *time* during which the story takes place, including its temporal connections to history and the future; (c) the physical settings or *places* in which the story is located. Any story is positioned within the matrix or space that these three interrelated dimensions create, and it is within this context that the story is understood, by both the teller of the story and the narrative researcher.

Our research questions were developed in the process of living and telling our stories of experience within this narrative space. We were only able to articulate them some weeks after we started the project: our initial conversations and storytelling were directed at finding the questions, which then, with minimal tweaking, guided us throughout. As stated above, our aim was to learn more about narrative inquiry (NI) in language teacher education, but more specifically we asked the following:

1. What are we learning about NI by collaborating as both researchers and participants in a NI on NI?
2. What are we learning about being narrative inquirers by collaborating as both researchers and participants in a NI on NI?
3. How does our collaborative NI on NI inform our own independent work as narrative inquirers?
4. What are our perceptions of the effectiveness of the 'bounded' NI approach used in this NI on NI?

EXPERIENCING A BOUNDED NARRATIVE INQUIRY PROJECT

Positioning ourselves as both researchers and participants in our inquiry, we fundamentally perceive our participation as a research *experience*. This experience comprised four interrelated facets: (a) we lived stories; (b) we then told about our lived stories in written narratives; (c) these narratives were analysed and interpreted; and finally (d) we considered these three facets in preparation for two academic conference presentations (Barkhuizen & Hacker, 2006; Barkhuizen & Hacker, 2008). Each of the four facets was situated within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space described above. Most importantly, the inquiry space we created was 'bounded' in terms of time, place and interaction to fit in with our busy professional lives. Doing so did not compromise the qualitative, narrative methodology of the

study, as we explain below. We followed typical procedures associated with a qualitative paradigm, but within the bounded context of the study's design. In general terms, we gave ourselves three months in which to complete the whole project (*time*) (and to prepare for our conference presentation), it would be carried out locally in our own work environment (*place*), and we would be the only participants and researchers in the study (*interaction*). These dimensions are elaborated on below.

Living a story

In this phase, we were essentially participants in the project; two people meeting together and talking about their lives as narrative inquiry researchers engaged in their own individual studies outside the inquiry. The *time* we allocated for this was one hour per week (maximum!), early on Friday mornings, for ten weeks. The *place* we chose for the experience was our favourite coffee shop close to our departmental offices. And the *interaction* was of a social nature. We engaged in conversation about our narrative inquiry practices and theorising. We told many stories, articulated questions and issues we were grappling with, and sometimes brought along literature to discuss. Thus our personal experiences as narrative inquirers in the field of language teacher education provided the content for our talks. We digitally recorded each conversation, not with the intention of transcribing our dialogues, but in order to readily retrieve any significant extracts that otherwise may have been easily forgotten in the flow of interaction. As we talked, we often mind-mapped or diagrammed our thoughts and ideas on paper, whilst the last few minutes of each meeting were given to noting down the main topics of our conversation in a series of short, bullet-pointed notes. Once back in the department, we would make copies of anything we had committed to paper so that we both had identical sets of the materials.

Telling the story

Having lived a story during the hour over coffee and generated certain records of the conversation, our task was to write a one-page (maximum!) personal narrative of the experience. Our *time* frame was to complete the story within half the number of days until the following meeting. As this was an individual undertaking, we each created our narrative in a *place* of personal choice and then exchanged the stories through email. We each read the other's story and then offered a written response, in no more than half a page, which we emailed back to the narrator. Although we did not initially agree to do so, we individually decided, after exchanging our first stories, that we would not read the other's response to our own story until we had read their narrative and written our response. In this way, we avoided the influence of the other's accounts in our story-writing and responding.

Analyzing and interpreting the narratives

Our engagement in facets one and two generated ten sets of stories and responses; a story and response from each of us in each set. We used these materials as our primary inquiry texts, or data, and decided that they, together with our notes and bullet points, would be the only materials we would analyse and interpret. The purpose of this seemingly 'limited' data was to bound the inquiry project in order to make it a feasible project within our busy lives as teachers and researchers. One aim of this inquiry, as we have stated above, was to explore this dimension of narrative inquiry with the aim of providing constructive feedback to other busy language teachers and teacher educators. While we were living and telling stories our role was largely that of participants, whereas in facet three we operated mainly as narrative inquirers.

As is common in qualitative research, analysis and interpretation begins, albeit often in a very informal way, even as the data are being generated (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999), and this was no less true of us and our inquiry texts. We were conscious that once the first set of stories and responses had been created we immediately began to search for some degree of meaning in our texts, and this continued as we added to our body of data.

However, in week six we decided it was time to embark on a systematic analysis and we agreed to spend some time individually before the following meeting coding the existing inquiry texts. We approached our analyses somewhat differently. Gary adopted a highly inductive open coding method, using largely one-word conceptual labels to identify themes in each text. As he worked, he created a visual one-page thematic web, linking the concepts that were in some way connected. Penny began her analysis in a more deductive manner, by reading the stories and responses in light of the four research questions and by identifying themes that related directly to the four issues to which we were seeking answers. She represented her analysis in tabulated form. At the following meeting we compared our work and although our approaches were obviously different, we could determine very similar salient notions appearing in the texts.

We maintained our own systems of analysis for the following two weeks, and, as we created further inquiry texts Gary added to his conceptual web and Penny continued to identify themes to answer the research questions. Working on our own between meetings and then discussing that work in subsequent conversations resulted in an iterative and reflexive process. Although important, and indeed necessary, this generated a very *close* analysis. At the same time, we found ourselves stepping back from the texts and our displays, with the purpose of gaining a broader, socially-situated perspective or interpretive view of our inquiry. We continued by categorizing our collaboratively-generated conceptual themes as they related to each of the research questions. We refer to these categories as 'variables' (see table 1, to be discussed in the Findings section below). On a matrix we placed the four research questions in the top row and the four variables in the first column. Then, working independently, we considered each of the 16 intersecting cells and, mindful of all the information generated in our previous analyses, assigned to each one a notion (typically one of our themes) that represented our understanding of how the inquiry texts answered each research question in relation to each of the four main variables. For each theme we assigned an explanatory statement (see table 1), and we also selected, independently, two different sets of appropriate quotations from our stories to illustrate each theme (some of these are presented below).

Preparing the experience for a conference presentation

Following the ten weeks, we had two weeks remaining of the original allotted *time* frame in which to complete the interpretation and prepare for our first conference presentation. In doing so, we continued to work in our chosen *place*s; at times together in the coffee shop and at others in our individual locations. Our findings were settled on in a reflexive manner as we consulted and reorganized our matrix. Once this stage was complete we worked together on the conference presentation by preparing a series of PowerPoint slides and agreeing on the sections we would each present. Our very final meeting took place over lunch just prior to the actual presentation where we simply affirmed for ourselves and each other, the material that we were to present.

FINDINGS

Table 1 represents a summary of our findings. The research questions are placed in the top row of the matrix. In the first column are the NI variables: Narrative Knowing, Narrative Doing, Narrative Applying, and Narrative Feeling. These are the four major categories into which the conceptual themes are grouped. We have deliberately used the word 'variable' to reference these categories because the answers to our research questions were indeed variable[3]. A 'more or less' thread runs through all we experienced and learned. There were no definite answers to our research questions, and each theme representing the 'answers' were themselves more or less evident. We constantly found ourselves using 'more or less' in our discussions and stories about, for example, what narrative is (e.g. Were our post-meeting written reflections more or less story?) and what narrative inquiry is (e.g. Should a written report on a narrative inquiry, like this one, be more or less narrative-like? And answering this question, of course, depends on a working definition of 'narrative').

Table 1 Matrix representing narrative inquiry variables and research questions

	Research Questions			
Narrative Inquiry Variables	1. What are we learning about NI by collaborating as both researchers and participants in a NI on NI?	2. What are we learning about being narrative inquirers by collaborating as both researchers and participants in a NI on NI?	3. How does our collaborative NI on NI inform our own independent work as narrative inquirers?	4. What are our perceptions of the effectiveness of the 'bounded' NI approach used in this NI on NI?
Narrative knowing	***making meaning*** 'we understand by storying'	***co-constructive*** 'we story with someone'	***interrogating*** 'I ask questions about my thinking'	***focusing*** 'it guides and scaffolds our thinking'
Narrative doing	***purpose*** 'we ask why we are doing this'	***equitable*** 'we are doing this as partners'	***informed*** 'this is how to do it'	***feasible*** 'it can be done'
Narrative applying	***reflexive*** 'our thinking and practice constitute each other'	***reflective*** 'we ask questions about our practice'	***rigorous*** 'I am careful and thorough'	***disciplined*** 'it keeps us on track'
Narrative feeling	***legitimate*** 'we feel good that we are doing something credible'	***confident*** 'we know what we are doing'	***energizing*** 'I am motivated and invested'	***affirming*** 'we can do it'

Our four narrative inquiry variables reflect our main findings, but we believe they are also four essential ingredients of any narrative inquiry. We now describe and exemplify these variables.

Narrative knowing

Polkinghorne (1988:109-110) distinguishes among different types of knowledge, one of these being schematic knowledge, which is 'organized according to a part-whole configuration'. For us, as it is for Polkinghorne, Narrative Knowing is, spatially and temporally, schematic knowledge. As participants in the inquiry we began over time to link, and to understand, the theoretical bits and pieces that make up narrative inquiry, and what makes it different from others sorts of inquiry. In other words, we began to *make meaning*, to understand through our storying, the parts that make up NI and how they fit together. In sum, we refer to Narrative Knowing as knowing, through narrative inquiry, about narrative and narrative inquiry at a theoretical, philosophical level, and we recognise the 'tentative and variable nature' of this knowledge (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007:25). Penny's comment (from her Story #9), for example, illustrates her meaning making through storying:

> I guess my experience illustrates how integral/unique/influential/the role of interlocutor is in the act of narration. That I don't feel as clear in my thinking now has to be good. You helped me to co-construct another story – one that is far less certain and much more reasonable. Can we say then that 'making meaning through telling the story' does not automatically mean gaining complete clarity/understanding? Can understanding look like confusion sometimes? Maybe it's more or less meaning about more or less of the experience. … Anyway, in telling this story, I seem to be making meaning of yesterday's experience … more or less!

She also emphasizes in this extract the role of the interlocutor in the process of collecting and analysing narrative data; another of the themes related to this variable, and directly relevant to Research Question 2. Obviously, storytellers have a listener or a reader that they tell their stories *to*, but as McEwan's (1997) essay on the multifunctionality of narrative (e.g. to inform, instruct or transform) points out, the interlocutor plays a crucial role in the construction of stories. This co-authorship or *co-construction* was evident in all aspects of our inquiry experience and reflected in our data – both our coffee-shop conversations and our reflective story writing. In Gary's last story (#10), he sums up his thoughts on this theme:

> *All is co-construction*, in the sense of both (narrowly?) the narrator/listener relationship and the reflexive relationship with the context in which the co-constructed narration takes place (e.g. temporal, political, pedagogical, physical). Narrative doing means doing it with someone in a particular time and place. Telling and living stories *with someone*.

The next theme, *interrogating* ('I ask questions about my thinking'), is also illustrated in Penny's story above (#9): she asks questions about the process of her meaning making through narrative inquiry, and because this theme is indexed to Research Question 3, these questions relate to her own, independent narrative research work. These sorts of questions about Narrative Knowing were evident throughout our stories. The 'bounded' design of our inquiry meant that this interrogating, although wide-reaching in terms of Narrative Knowing topics, was nevertheless *focussed*. It was focussed because 'it guided and scaffolded our

thinking' (see table 1). In response to a diagram that Penny produced at one of our meetings, Gary wrote (Story #3):

> Nice summary of where we are at – and where we're heading. I think we should continue 'fiddling' with it each week, and perhaps diagram our progress regularly. Without doing so, we might begin to lose focus. The bullet-points help, of course, but the diagram makes links across sets of bullet-points.

So, although we asked many questions, about a wide range of topics, our storied interrogation was nevertheless bounded both spatially and temporally (but not cognitively, as we will discuss in the Implications section below), the result of which was 'bringing to consciousness knowledge' (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002:21) about narrative and narrative inquiry.

Narrative doing

Narrative Doing means narrative inquiry methodology, or approaches to narrative inquiry. It means *knowing about* doing narrative inquiry. Knowing *how to do* narrative inquiry, in practice, is Narrative Applying, and the variable to be discussed in the next section. The analysis of our experience produced four salient themes. Perhaps the most salient of these was *purpose*: Why do a narrative inquiry? What outcome is expected from the inquiry? Is narrative inquiry the most appropriate approach to use to achieve a particular research outcome? As Doyle (1997:93) cautions, 'what one hopes to accomplish or claim has a great deal to do with whether one's decisions about method are appropriate or not'. Our concern in our inquiry, however, seemed to be more with the second of these questions. We, as participants in the inquiry, felt that our desired outcomes (the answers to our research questions), were vitally important in shaping the co-construction of our storytelling. In other words, the way narrative inquiry is done is determined by its purpose. And we became more and more aware that the same probably applied to anyone doing a narrative inquiry (see, for example, Sakui & Cowie, 2008).

Penny comments on purpose in her Story #2: 'This aspect of 'purpose' in a NI really struck me today – certainly, hearing that in your study with teachers you're not sure if the research purpose was an important factor. Why?' In Gary's response to Penny's story he too addresses the importance of, and his uncertainty regarding, purpose:

> I'm glad you also mention *purpose* in your story. I'm beginning to think this is the key to NI (not necessarily *good* NI, just NI): All other questions (truth, usefulness, credibility, generalizability, etc.) seem somehow linked to the purpose of the narrative work that participants do. So, this is one connection you and I certainly have made so far in our inquiry. Related to purpose, of course, is purpose for whom? The teller (re-teller), the researcher?

Outside of our project we each had our own narrative work. Penny's project was her PhD research (now completed), and Gary was her supervisor. Although we are colleagues in the same university department, and also good friends, there was, at least an 'official', power difference in the supervisory relationship. Of course we were aware of this when we started the project, but we declared ourselves right upfront to be equal as collaborating inquirers. This was easier said than done.

In Penny's very first story she writes,

> Today, as we sat down with our coffee I felt entirely at ease, knowing you'd listen attentively as you always do to my often disjointed articulations – and also knowing that you'd be the guide. … I sense that, although there is an inevitable senior-junior partnership, we trust each other.

The nature of the inquiry relationship had also been on Gary's mind, since he responded by writing, 'I had been thinking about that too – while we were talking this morning, actually.' Pavlenko (2002: 214) argues that narrative research involving teachers and learners allows for their 'voices to be heard on a par with those of the researchers'. Although, as we have argued above, stories are co-constructed in particular sociocultural and sociohistorical contexts, they are after all particular people's stories; their own discursive articulations of their experiences. Gary could not say to Penny on hearing her story that she had perceived or experienced something differently, for instance, and vice-versa. Personal narratives of experience are not factual statements that can be contradicted. Knowing this means that Narrative Doing can be a far more *equitable* activity, and thus result in transparent, insightful collaboration.

For us, this had consequences for how methodologically *informed* we became during the duration of the inquiry. In reference to her own, independent narrative work with teacher educators (this theme is indexed to Research Question 3), Penny observes (Story #2): 'I think seeing you asking questions of your own practice inspires me to explore my own with more … open-mindedness.' Informed practice, of course, is desirable not only in narrative inquiry, but is a condition of any systematic research endeavour. The equitably collaborative nature of our inquiry, however, meant that we were able to do work on the project as well as our own independent NI work with much more rigour (see Narrative Applying below). At the same time, we realized that being methodologically informed is (or should be) an essential feature of all narrative inquiry (Riessman, 1993). And because the inquiry was bounded (Research Question 4) it was also *feasible*. Penny explains (Story #1):

> I liked the way the meeting progressed; how we settled on a research focus, generated ideas and clarified our thoughts. At one point I said 'let's think about it' and you said 'let's decide now'. This is a good move – to do as much as we can in the meeting, to push for ideas and answers 'in the moment' if at all possible. (And yet I didn't feel as though we were being unrealistic or that we were panicking.)

Narrative inquiry has the potential to be enormously 'laborious and time consuming' (Kramp, 2004:113) and knowing that Narrative Doing, if it is bounded, can be feasible and 'doable' was reassuring for us, and could be for other narrative inquirers.

Narrative applying

Narrative Applying is narrative inquiry on a practical, procedural level, with a focus on methods, in other words, how to do narrative inquiry. During our storytelling, we constantly had narrative practice on our minds, not only with regard to our own work with teachers and teacher educators (stories of which usually launched each coffee-shop meeting), but also with regard to the progress we were making on the inquiry itself. Two of the themes related to the Narrative Applying variable stress the relationship between doing narrative inquiry in practice

and Narrative Knowing; these are *reflexive* and *rigorous*. In his Story #4 Gary explains his understanding of this reflexive relationship:

> Our inquiry is a mutual constitution of our narrative knowledge and the inquiry. They inform each other – but not in a simple, bidirectional way. That is not reflexive. Reflexive means mutually constitutive. Concertedly constitutive. I'm beginning to think that this is the essence of our inquiry, and why it is so hard to articulate in the form of Research Questions what it is we are asking and doing.

His concern about 'doing' in the last line is further explored in one of his later stories (#10), where he relates his recent experiences of his own narrative research with teachers to his developing Narrative Knowing and Narrative Applying (rigorous practice), as a result of the inquiry:

> My experiences of these certainly tell me that because of our Narrative Knowing plus Narrative Doing on the project, there's much better Narrative Applying (more effective, more informed, more systematic, more reflective). Which in turn (reflexively) means learning more about narrative inquiry and being narrative inquirers.

Through his experience of applying narrative methods of data collection and analysis in the project (Narrative Applying), and his independent narrative work (see Research Question 3), therefore, Gary learned more about narrative inquiry and what it means to be a narrative inquirer (Narrative Knowing), which in turn, reflexively informed his methodological practice. This relationship between theory and practice is sometimes referred to as *praxis*, which Pennycook (1999:342) defines as 'the mutually constitutive roles of theory grounded in practice and practice grounded in theory'. Such a relationship does not develop easily or by itself. As a participant in the inquiry (and also a researcher), a substantial amount of *reflection* is required. Gary's Story #3 illustrates this reflective work in process:

> Writing this story took longer than the last two did – because I found myself stopping along the way to think about the things I was writing about: integrating aspects of our meeting yesterday, with aspects of former meetings, and thinking about NI possibilities for the future. I'm off to the village now, for my Saturday morning coffee, with your story #3 tucked under my arm. Will respond later.

Lyons and LaBoskey (2002) also make this connection between doing and knowing through narrative reflection. With reference to teachers interrogating their practice narratively to construct meaning, they claim that narrative inquiry is 'a fundamental activity of mind, constituting an intentional, reflective activity' (2002:21). Our understanding of reflection is simply stated in table 1 as, 'we ask questions about our practice.' We do this intentionally, and through introspection.

Because our inquiry was bounded, and we were determined to keep it so, it was clear to us from the start that our practice had to be *disciplined*. In Penny's Story #4, for example, she reflects on our decision to finally formulate the research questions in our previous (one-hour) meeting: 'Drafting the research questions stretched my brain cells today – I had to move very carefully through the concept of 'learning about NI by doing a NI on NI.' And it's good to have something on paper.' We gave ourselves only one hour to complete the task, and we did it, with collaborative effort. This lesson transferred to our independent narrative work as well,

as Penny's closing comment in her Story #4 illustrates: 'The weekend lies ahead. I'll spend it with one of my participants; re-listening to their story, that is. Thanks for spurring me on in this direction.'

Narrative feeling

Narrative Feeling has to do with our affective responses to the work we were doing on the inquiry project. It is about emotional involvement. Every story, every response to a story, and every meeting (i.e. all the data) were held together, like a ubiquitous sub-plot, by our feelings – our feelings about narrative inquiry, about what we were learning, and about our collaboration. In the analysis of our storied data, themes relating to this variable were universally salient. For a start, we began to feel that what we were doing, in our project and in our own narrative work, was *legitimate*; in other words, 'we feel good that we are doing something credible' (see table 1). In an exchange about the 'purity' of our inquiry (i.e. is it more or less narrative inquiry?) we show our concern about this topic:

> *Gary (Story #2)*: I think we revealed two threats today in our conversation – threats to our own sense of being narrative inquirers: (1) perspectives of some, perhaps like [name of a colleague who had questioned the usefulness of NI], of what NI is and does, and (2) a potential sense of guilt because of moving too far away from 'pure' NI.
>
> *Penny (response to Gary's Story #2)*: It's really good that you named the two 'threats'. My response is to welcome the challenge of seeking answers. I want to believe that NI can be established as a credible disciplined research approach in our field – and that we'll feel confident about the way it develops.

Throughout the course of the inquiry, as we learned more about narrative inquiry (see Research Question 1), we felt more satisfied that what we were doing was indeed a legitimate form of inquiry. As a consequence (see Research Question 2), we grew in *confidence* about what we were doing as narrative inquirers (and, more generally, what narrative inquirers do). Golombek and Johnson (2004) suggest an interwoven connection between emotion and cognition in their analysis of the narratives of three English teachers. The teachers' engagement in narrative inquiry created a mediational space which allowed them to 'reconceptualize and reinternalize new understandings of themselves as teachers and their teaching activities' (2004:307). Golombek and Johnson conclude that their development was both cognitive and emotional, saying 'engaging in narrative inquiry will indeed bring emotions to the surface as teachers recognize contradictions in their teaching' (2004:325). This situation was clearly very similar to our own experiences during the inquiry. Narrative Knowing and Narrative Feeling were intimately interwoven, mutually constituting each other. The following extract from Penny's Story #2 sums up her emotional commitment to the project: 'No trouble getting out of bed this morning! I've been looking forward to our meeting all week. This project – and the meetings are central to it of course – energizes me no end.' Both Penny and Gary found that this *energizing* outcome of the inquiry transferred to their own narrative inquiry projects; e.g. 'the motivation generated in our work today feeds into my PhD work,' wrote Penny (Story #8).

A fourth theme related to the Narrative Feeling variable (and indexed to Research Question 4) is one we call *affirming* ('we can do it'). By this we mean that, despite our many questions, our uncertainties and our complex research questions, we felt we could accomplish what we

had set out to do in the project. This was certainly due to the bounded nature of the design of the project, and because we felt more and more in control of the direction of the inquiry as it proceeded, but we also, and perhaps most importantly, were learning more about narrative inquiry and about ourselves as narrative inquirers. In other words, our feelings of affirmation spread beyond this particular inquiry.

IMPLICATIONS

There are, we believe, several practical implications of our project for language teachers, teacher educators and for researchers working in the field of teacher education. These implications relate to integral features of its design, its theoretical base, and the four narrative inquiry variables as we have discussed and exemplified them. We designed our project as a collaborative inquiry and have demonstrated the value of our collaboration in terms of our learning; about the focus of our inquiry (Research Question 1), ourselves as narrative inquirers (Research Question 2) and our own independent narrative inquiry work (Research Question 3). Freeman (2004:122) states that collaboration 'suggests a lack of formal hierarchy among the players, a sense of mutual openness to the ideas and proposals of others, and an element of shared purpose'. However, at the start of our inquiry we acknowledged the 'official' power difference between us, but, as we have shown, engaging collaboratively neutralized this disparity and our participation became more or less co-constructive, equitable, and confidence-generating. We therefore promote *collaborative* narrative inquiry among those who want to learn more about what it is that they do, whatever their professional roles in the language teaching field.

The project was also a purposely 'bounded' activity. Although we identify with Clandinin and Connelly's (2000:89) notion that 'living, in its most general sense, is unbounded' and therefore narrative inquiry as a form of living is also unbounded, we nonetheless argue that at times placing certain limits on an inquiry is advantageous. If, as we believe, inquiring narratively is a highly effective means to make meaning of experience, we see no reason why our understanding should be stymied for want of unlimited resources, particularly time. In fact, we are in no doubt that, notwithstanding the temporal and spatial boundedness of our project, it certainly was not cognitively bounded. Paradoxically, it is probably the case that limiting the scope of the project resulted in even more learning because of the focused, disciplined nature of all our activities. We suggest, therefore, that bounded narrative inquiry offers a feasible methodology to language teaching professionals who may otherwise not entertain the idea of research amid their hectic schedules.

Essential ingredients, we have learned, of principled narrative inquiry work are the four variables we identified in this project: Narrative Knowing, Narrative Doing, Narrative Applying and Narrative Feeling. These are not particularly surprising, contributing as they do, to the theoretical basis and methodological design of much narrative inquiry work. We propose, however, that together they have the potential to offer an introductory guide, or heuristic, for those who wish to inquire narratively into their work, whether that be teaching or teacher education. A heuristic process enables self-discovery or independent learning, either alone or in collaboration with an inquiry partner. We suggest that the guide, simply in the form of Table 1, provides a starting place for those (beginning) narrative inquirers who wish to engage in their own inquiry[4]. It would work like this:

1. As we have said, the four variables are both important and helpful notions pertaining to any narrative inquiry. When using the guide, therefore, inquirers will necessarily start in the first, left-most column. They will need to know something about what narrative inquiry is, at philosophical, methodological and procedural levels. And they should be aware of the emotional investments and realisations that will occur during, and as a result of, their inquiry.
2. In order to guide (or scaffold) them through this learning process, they will look to the right in the matrix. Not all these themes will be applicable to all inquiries, but they and their accompanying explanatory statements provide signals or reminders of salient features of the theory and practice of narrative inquiry. Participants will no doubt discover new themes, and thus add their own cells, as their inquiry unfolds.
3. Participants will modify our research questions (in the first row) according to their inquiry focus, or our questions could prompt entirely new questions, which more accurately reflect the inquiry aims. For example, collaborating teachers wishing to understand more about using tasks in their classroom teaching could change Question 1 to become: *What are we learning about task-based teaching by doing a narrative inquiry on using tasks in our classrooms*? And Question 2 might be: *What are we learning about our own task-based teaching practice by doing a narrative inquiry on using tasks in our classroom*? And Question 3: *How does our narrative inquiry on using tasks in our classrooms inform our other work as teachers in our classrooms*? In this case, the teachers would be working on a collaborative project, as we did on ours, with the same topic of inquiry (i.e. task-based teaching). These questions would need to be personalized if collaborating inquirers were exploring different topics.
4. The right-most column pertaining to Research Question 4 will remind inquirers of the temporally and spatially bounded nature of our inquiry, which will also then act as a guide.

We emphasise that we do not wish to be prescriptive about the focus of any inquiry (particular topics, questions or problems to be investigated), or indeed inquiry design. Each narrative inquiry will be unique, its nature very much dependent on the researcher-participants' purpose, resources and setting. Furthermore, our suggestions above, as well as the procedures used in our study and described in this article, are not intended to be a 'how to' guide for prospective narrative inquirers. We hope, however, to have provided a case of narrative inquiry in practice – one which will inspire interested readers to explore both narrative and narrative research more fully themselves.

Johnson (2006:242) states that in the field of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) 'the use of narrative has emerged as a predominant means of understanding and documenting teachers' ways of knowing'. For us, the power of narrative to promote meaning-making cannot be underestimated, as we have attempted to demonstrate here through telling our inquiry story. In fact, our collaboration and reflection on the inquiry experience in order to write this article was in itself a retelling of that experience and has provided us with a further opportunity to learn. This is another aspect of the nature of narrative inquiry that we have come to understand, and one that can be explained in Dewey's (1952:16) notion of the continuity of experience, whereby 'every experience lives on in further experience'. It highlights the significance for us of our inquiry in that we now have the advantage of an on-going learning experience. We cannot imagine that our explorations of 'things narrative' will cease in the foreseeable future. We suggest that, through engaging in narrative inquiry, other language teaching professionals may realize a similar advantage regarding their own work.

END NOTES

[1] An earlier version of this article was published in *New Zealand Studies in Applied Linguistics* (2008, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 36-52).
[2] When we refer to one of the authors we use our names in the third person, otherwise we use first person 'we.'
[3] Conversely, we do not use 'variables' in the sense associated with a quantitative, experimental paradigm; i.e. dependent and independent variables.
[4] This is not to say that aspects of the project itself may not also serve as an inquiry exemplar.

REFERENCES

BARKHUIZEN, G. 2008. A narrative approach to exploring context in language teaching. *English Language Teaching Journal*, 62(3): 231-239.

BARKHUIZEN, G. & HACKER, P. 2006. Narrative inquirers learning about narrative inquiry: More or less. Paper presented at the *Applied Linguistics Association of New Zealand (ALANZ) Annual Symposium*. 14 October. Dunedin, New Zealand.

BARKHUIZEN G. & HACKER, P. 2008. Coffee-shop narrative inquiry: Implications for language teacher education. Paper presented at the Joint Conference of the *Linguistics Society of Southern Africa*, the *Southern African Applied Linguistics Association*, and the *South African Association for Language Teaching*. 17-19 January, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

BAX, S. 2003. The end of CLT: A context approach to language teaching. *English Language Teaching Journal*, 57(3): 278-287.

CARTER, K. 1993. The place of story in the study of teaching and teacher education. *Educational Researcher*, 22(1): 5-12.

CASANAVE, C.P. & SCHECTER, S. (eds.). 1997. *On becoming a language educator*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

CLANDININ, D.J. & CONNELLY, F.M. 2000. *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

CONNELLY, M. & CLANDININ, D. 1990. Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5): 2-14.

DEWEY, J. 1952. *Experience and education*. New York: The MacMillan Company.

DOYLE, W. 1997. Heard any really good stories lately? A critique of the critics of narrative in educational research. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 13(1): 93-99.

FARRELL, T. 1998. Reflective teaching: The principles and practices. *English Teaching Forum*, 36(4): 10-17.

FEUERVERGER, G. 2005. Multicultural perspectives in teacher development. In Phillion, J., He, M.F. & Connelly, F.M. (eds.). *Narrative and experience in multicultural education*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

FREEMAN, D. 2002. The hidden side of the work: Teacher knowledge and learning to teach. A perspective from north American educational research on teacher education in English language teaching. *Language Teaching*, 35(1): 1-13.

FREEMAN, D. 2004. Closely examined work: An epilogue to the LTEC conversations. In Hawkins, M. & Irujo, S. (eds.). *Collaborative conversations among language teacher educators*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

GOLOMBEK, P.R. & JOHNSON, K.E. 2004. Narrative inquiry as a mediational space: Examining emotional and cognitive dissonance in second-language teachers' development. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 10(3): 307-327.

HACKER, P. 2006.The five-minute picture story: Towards understanding language teacher educator learning. *New Zealand Studies in Applied Linguistics*, 12(2): 78-85.

JOHNSON, K.E. 2006. The sociocultural turn and its challenges for second language teacher education. *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(1): 235-257.

JOHNSON, K.E. & GOLOMBEK, P.R. (eds.). 2002. *Teachers' narrative inquiry as professional development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

KRAMP, M.K. 2004. Exploring life and experience through narrative inquiry. In deMarrais, K. & Lapan, S.D. (eds.). *Foundations for research: Methods of inquiry in education and the social sciences*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum. 103-121.

LECOMPTE, M. & SCHENSUL, J. 1999. *Analyzing and interpreting ethnographic data*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

LIEBLICH, A., TUVAL-MASHIACH, R. & ZILBER, T. 1998. *Narrative research: Reading, analysis and interpretation*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

LYONS, N. & LABOSKEY, V.K. (eds.). 2002. *Narrative inquiry in practice: Advancing the knowledge of teaching*. New York: Teachers College Press.

MCEWAN, H. 1997. The functions of narrative and research on teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 13(1): 85-92.

MISHLER, E. 1995. Models of narrative analysis: A typology. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 5: 87-123.

OLLERENSHAW J. & CRESWELL, J. 2002. Narrative research: A comparison of two restorying data analysis approaches. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(3): 329-347.

PAVLENKO, A. 2002. Narrative study: Whose story is it anyway? *TESOL Quarterly*, 36(2): 213-218.

PENNYCOOK, A. 1999. Introduction: Critical approaches to TESOL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33(3): 329-348.

PHILLION, J. & CONNELLY, F.M. 2004. Narrative, diversity and teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20(5): 457-471.

PINNEGAR, S. & DAYNES, J.G. 2007. Locating narrative inquiry historically: Thematics in the turn to narrative. In Clandinin, D.J. (ed.). *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. 3-34

POLKINGHORNE, D.E. 1988. *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

POLKINGHORNE, D.E. 1995. Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 8(1): 5-23.

RIESSMAN, C. 1993. *Narrative analysis*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

RITCHIE, S.M. & RIGANO, D.L. 2007. Solidarity through collaborative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 20(2): 129-150.

SAKUI, K. & COWIE,N. 2008. 'To speak English is tedious': Student resistance in Japanese university classrooms. In Kalaja, P., Menezes, V. & Barcelos, A. (eds.). *Narratives of learning and teaching EFL*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 98-110.

SMITH, B. 2007. The state of the art in narrative inquiry: Some reflections. *Narrative Inquiry*, 17(2): 391-398.

BIOGRAPHIC NOTE

Gary Barkhuizen works in the Department of Applied Language Studies and Linguistics at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. His teaching and research interests are in the areas of sociolinguistics, language teacher education and learner language. He has published in a wide range of international journals, is author of *Analysing Learner Language* (OUP, 2005, with Rod Ellis) and is Assistant Editor of *Language Teaching Research*. (Email: g.barkhuizen@auckland.ac.nz)

Penny Hacker is Head of the English Language Self-Access Centre at the University of Auckland. Her postgraduate and doctoral research focused on language teacher learning and language teacher educator learning respectively. Now she is turning her attention to language learning issues facing EAL students studying in a predominantly English-medium institution.
(Email: p.hacker@auckland.ac.nz)