
10. In Search of Narrative Analysis

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Abstract:

Qualitative research can explain how people experience a research question by providing a human side of an issue which includes the beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals (Mack, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). When used along with quantitative methods it helps us to interpret and better understand the complex reality of a situation. Compare to quantitative research qualitative research have different approaches to scholarly inquiry which include Narrative research, Phenomenological research, Grounded theory research, ethnographic research, and case study research (Creswell, 2007, 2014). The following paragraphs elaborate upon Narrative analysis as a Qualitative approach

Keywords:

narrative analysis; qualitative research; story; phenomenology; generalization.

Introduction:

According to Frost (2011), "Narratives are stories with a clear sequential order, that connect events in a meaningful way for a definite audience." Thus, it takes stories as the unit of analysis. The stories are gathered from the accounts of participants and focus on different features of the story. Features of the story can include structure, function, or performative function (Denzin,2001; Labov,1972 & Riessman,1993). The assumption about the social reality of this method lies in understanding and use of narrative within the approach.

It is considered a powerful form for giving meaning to experience. Mattingly and Garro (2000) state that "Narratives mediate between an inner world of thought-feeling and an outer world of observable actions and states of affairs." Events/situations itself is not represented as narratives, only through experiences the event becomes a story, and by retelling the experience the narrator creates meaning. The event is always retrospective and the narrator already knows its ending (Frost, 2011). The narrative method is widely used as a tool under psychological discipline since the early 1980s.

Looking back to history two main events can be considered as the cornerstone of the narrative method. The first one is the humanistic/person-centered approach which tries to see the storytellers and listeners in a unified and singular manner. The second principle is connected to the postmodern ontology that reveals the role of multiple subjectivities in the construction of narratives. Based on the research questions /objectives narratives are conducted in different ways (Frost, 2011 & given,2008). Through Narratives participant is not expressing individual or independent reality but rather helps in constructing the reality within relationships between the narrator and their external world. It talks about the world, lives, and selves and are considered a creative means of exploring and describing realities.

The Narrative analyst during the process of interpretation considers individual and cultural resources.

Frost (2011) states that the topics suited to narrative analysis include various aspects of identity, individual experiences of psychological processes, interpersonal and intimate relationships, and experiences of body, beauty, and health. Based on this criterion as an example, a study conducted by Trachtenberg (2012) is elucidated in the following paragraph.

Trachtenberg (2012) examined the unique challenges faced among young breast cancer survivors' self-concepts and explored the identity reformulation process as they adjust to a new lifestyle after completing medical treatment. Semi-structured interviews were conducted among 10 young breast cancer survivors (aged 32-45).

The results indicated that three core categories emerged in the identity reformulation process: 1) relocating self in gender; 2) re-locating self in youth, and 3) re-locating self in health status.

Some of the chief features of Narrative analysis as highlighted by Creswell (2013), Frost (2011) and Given (2008) are as follows:

- Narrative researchers mainly focus on a single individual/ two or three individuals as it was found to be more time-consuming and need good effort to gather detailed form of life experience from each individual.
- The issue explored through narratives/stories should have a significant impact on the participant's life.
- Based on the stories the researcher creates or tries to develop a chronology that connects different phases or aspects of a narrative/story that re-stories the event in a literary way (Creswell, 2007)
- Narratives are a creative means of exploring and describing realities, which are arranged and bound by stipulated time (Frost, 2011).
- Depending on the research questions and the collected data, multiple models can be combined to capture multiple layers in the construction of narratives to understand the experiences of the participants (Given,2008).

Steps Involved in Narrative Research:

The following paragraphs elaborate on the steps used in Narrative research as explained by Clandinin and Connelly (2000):

- Determine the research question
- Selection of participants who have stories or life experiences to tell based on the research question.
- Collect information about the context of stories by spending a considerable amount of time with them. Gather their stories through multiple types of information in the form of field texts, journals/diaries, field notes, memos, photographs, personal-family – social artifacts

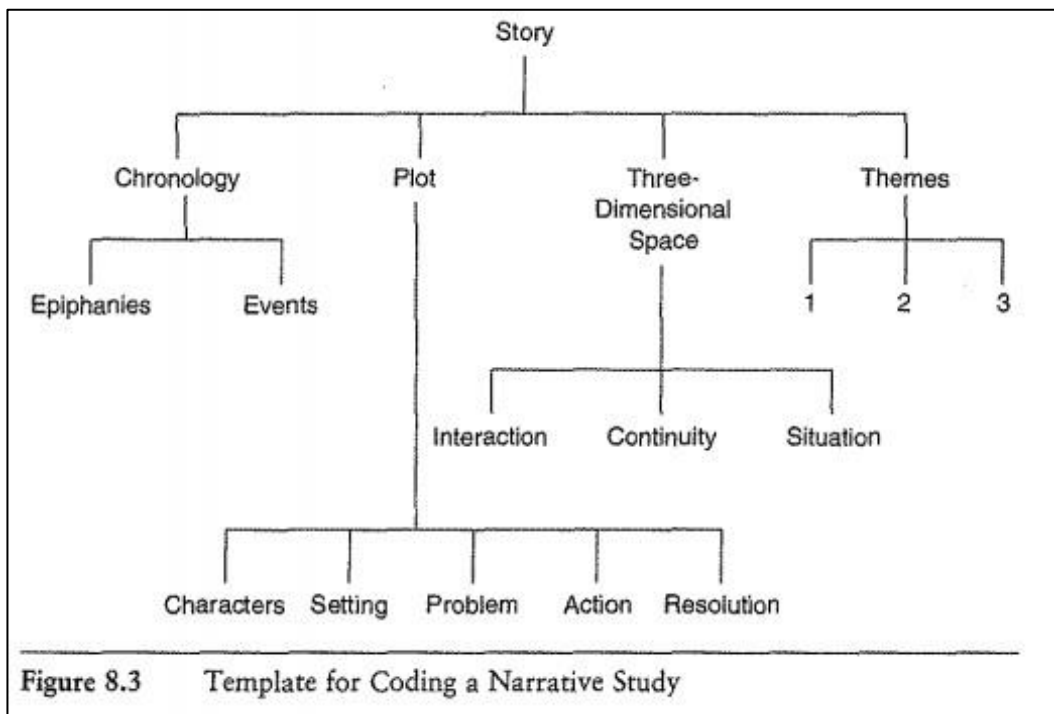
- Analyze the participants' stories, and then "restore them into a framework that makes sense. Restorying is the process of reorganizing the stories into some general type of framework. This framework may consist of gathering stories, analyzing them for key elements of the story (e.g., time, place, plot, and scene), and then rewriting the stories to place them within a chronological sequence (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

Analyzing Narratives and Reporting:

The narrative analysis includes a family of methods and models of narrative analysis that offers different focus to the analyst. Each of these models is formed by different theoretical discussions (Riessman, 2005). Majorly three models have been used by the narrative analyst the structural model (Labov,1972), the Thematic model (Riessman, 2005), and the Interactional/performative model (Riessman,1993; Mishler,1995 & Denzin,2001).

The structural model focuses on the structure of stories or how participants narrate the story. The thematic model focuses on the content of the stories and generates themes out of it. The interactional/performative model emphasizes the contextual features or the meanings created by the storytellers and listeners through their interaction. Creswell (2007) has given a strategy for reporting the codes of the collected individual details and recorded experiences.

These are based on four principles which are, chronology, plot, three-dimensional phase, and themes. Figure 1 below depicts the pictorial representation of the template for coding.



Creswell (2007)

Advantages:

Narrative research is considered to be the first and foremost method to get in-depth life experiences of people involved in it. It's useful to interpret texts which are oral, written, and visual. Given (2008) states that narrative methodology reshaped the field of qualitative research because it helps in providing close attention to the experiences of individuals. It not only functions as a method through which researchers explore how people remember, structure, and story their experiences but also helps in understanding the complexities of human selves, lives, and relations.

It is useful to shape both individual and social experiences and helps the researcher to identify effective tools to easily gather the individual's details. (Andrews et al., 2004). Furthermore, it helps the investigator to find out the multiple layers of meaning and reconstruct the meaning through these layers and understand more about the individual and social processes (Frost,2011)

Disadvantages:

One of the major disadvantages of narrative analysis is that it cannot be used in all research topics (Frost,2011) It is considered a challenging approach to use because the researcher needs to collect extensive information about the participants. Also, the researcher should have a clear understanding of the context of the individual's life. It is essential to maintain an active collaboration with the participants throughout the study by keeping an account of the participant's personal and political backgrounds. Further, Multiple issues can arise while collecting and analyzing stories which can be time-consuming.

Conclusion:

Narrative research is found to be the best applicable way to collect the individual's life experiences through written, spoken, or visual representations. It encourages an individual to remember and present the life stories of the participants in an organized manner.

Through experience, the event becomes a story, and by retelling the experience the narrator creates meaning and knows its ending. Even though it has many positives it is criticized for its nature of time consumption and applicability. However, it is important as a method of understanding the complexities of human selves, lives, and relations.

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