

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Narrative Research



Miramax/Everett Collection

House of Frankenstein, 1944

“If you are a person who does not interact well with others, narrative research is probably not for you!” (p. 354)

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading Chapter 13, you should be able to do the following:

- 13.1** Briefly state the definition and purpose of narrative research.
- 13.2** Describe the narrative research process.
- 13.3** Describe the key characteristics of narrative research.
- 13.4** Describe narrative research techniques, including restorying, oral history, examining artifacts, storytelling, letter writing, and autobiographical and biographical writing.
- 13.5** Outline the steps involved in writing a narrative.

The chapter learning outcomes form the basis for the following task, which requires you to develop

the research procedures section of a research report for a narrative research study.

TASK 8A

For a qualitative study, you have already created research plan components (Tasks 3 and 4B) and described a sample (Task 5B). If your study involves narrative research, now develop the research procedures section of the research report. Include in the plan the overall approach and rationale for the study, site and sample selection, the researcher's role, data collection methods, data management strategies, data analysis strategies, trustworthiness features, and ethical considerations (see Performance Criteria at the end of Chapter 16, p. 438).

SUMMARY: NARRATIVE RESEARCH

Definition	<i>Narrative research</i> is the study of how different humans experience the world around them, and it involves a methodology that allows people to tell the stories of their “storied lives.”
Design(s)	Narrative studies usually focus on the experiences of individuals and their chronology and context using the technique of restorying to collaboratively construct a narrative account. The goal of a narrative research design is to collaboratively explore a phenomenon of interest with an individual in an effort to understand how individuals' past experiences impact the present and, potentially, the future.
Types of appropriate research questions	Narrative research can contribute to our understanding of educational issues such as adolescent drug use, cultural differences in diverse urban school settings, and the achievement gap that separates children raised in poverty from children who are less economically disadvantaged.
Key characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A focus on the experiences of individuals • A concern with the chronology of individuals' experiences • A focus on the construction of life stories based on data collected through interviews • Restorying as a technique for constructing the narrative account • Inclusion of context and place in the story • A collaborative approach that involves the researcher and the participants in the negotiation of the final text • A narrative constructed around the question “And then what happened?”

(continued)

Steps in the process	<p>The narrative research process is a highly personal, intimate approach to educational research that demands a high degree of caring and sensitivity on the part of the researcher.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify the purpose of the research study, and identify a phenomenon to explore. 2. Identify an individual who can help you learn about the phenomenon. 3. Develop initial narrative research questions. 4. Consider the researcher's role (e.g., entry to the research site, reciprocity, and ethics) and obtain necessary permissions. 5. Negotiate entry to the research setting in terms of a shared narrative with the research participant. 6. Establish a relationship between researcher and participant that is mutually constructed and characterized by an equality of voice. 7. Collaborate with the research participant to construct the narrative and to validate the accuracy of the story.
Potential challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust • Developing and maintaining a mutually constructed relationship that is characterized by caring, respectfulness, and equality of voice
Example	How do teachers confront, and deal with, high school students who have drug problems?

NARRATIVE RESEARCH: DEFINITION AND PURPOSE

Narrative research is the study of how different humans experience the world around them, and it involves a methodology that allows people to tell the stories of their “storied lives.”¹ Narrative researchers collect data about people’s lives and, with the participants, collaboratively construct a narrative (i.e., written account) about the experiences and the meanings they attribute to the experiences.

Narrative research has a long history in diverse disciplines such as literature, history, art, film, theology, philosophy, psychology, anthropology, sociology, sociolinguistics, and education, and as such it does not fit neatly into a single scholarly field. Within the field of education, a number of recent trends have influenced the development of narrative research:

- The increased emphasis in the past 15 years on teacher reflection, teacher research, action research, and self-study
- The increased emphasis on teacher knowledge—for example, what teachers know, how they think, how they develop professionally, and how they make decisions in the classroom
- The increased emphasis on empowering teachers by giving them voices in the educational research process through collaborative educational research efforts

These trends in education have resulted in a changing landscape of educational research and the promotion of scientifically based research practices to address social, cultural, and economic issues.

We live (and perhaps teach or work in schools in some other capacity) in a time when we are being challenged by educational issues such as adolescent drug use, cultural differences in diverse urban school settings, and the achievement gap that separates children raised in poverty from children who are less economically disadvantaged.

¹ “Stories and Experience and Narrative Inquiry,” by F. M. Connelly and D. J. Clandinin, 1990, *Educational Research*, 19(5), p. 2.

There are no silver bullets to solve these (and many other) issues that have come to the forefront of political and educational policy in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, but we can try to understand them better. By using narrative research in education, we attempt to increase understanding of central issues related to teaching and learning through the telling and retelling of teachers' stories. Narrative research provides educational researchers with an opportunity to validate the practitioner's voice in these important political and educational debates.

To visualize what *narrative* and *research* in the same sentence really mean, consider an example:

Hilda, a teacher at High High School, has students in her class who appear “distracted” (which is perhaps teacher code for under the influence of drugs). As an educational researcher, you decide that it would be helpful to know more about how Hilda deals with this significant educational issue and what she does to work with the distracted, possibly drug-using adolescents in her classroom. You think of a research question: “What have been Hilda’s experiences in confronting and dealing with a student who has a drug problem?” To study this question, you plan to interview Hilda and listen to stories about her experiences working with one particular distracted student. You will talk to the student, the student’s parents, other teachers, administrators, and counselors, all of whom are stakeholders in the student’s educational experience. You also want to know about Hilda’s life and any significant events that have affected her ability to work effectively with adolescent drug users. Perhaps Hilda

holds economic, social, cultural, or religious beliefs and values that affect her ability to deal with the drug culture in her school.

From the information you collect in interviews, you will slowly construct a story of Hilda’s work with the troubled student. You will then share (i.e., retell) the story and, with Hilda’s help, shape the final report of the narrative research. This final report will be Hilda’s story of working with a student who is troubled by drug use, and it will contribute to our understanding of what it takes, on the part of a teacher, to work with adolescent drug users in our schools.

This example shows how narrative research allows the researcher to share the storied lives of teachers to provide insights and understandings about challenging educational issues as well as to enrich the lives of those teachers. Narrative research can contribute to our understanding of the complex world of the classroom and the nuances of the educational enterprise that exist between teachers and students. It simply is not always possible, nor desirable, to reduce our understanding of teaching and learning to numbers.

Types of Narrative Research

Like other types of qualitative research, narrative research may take a variety of forms. Some of these forms are listed in Figure 13.1.

How a particular narrative research approach is categorized depends on five characteristics: who authored the account (e.g., the researcher or the participant; note that the researcher is the participant in an autobiography), the scope of the

FIGURE 13.1 • Examples of types of narrative research forms

- | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| • Autobiographies | • Personal documents | • Autoethnographies |
| • Biographies | • Documents of life | • Ethnopsychologies |
| • Life writing | • Life stories and life histories | • Person-centered ethnographies |
| • Personal accounts | • Oral histories | • Popular memories |
| • Personal narratives | • Ethnohistories | • Latin American <i>testimonios</i> |
| • Narrative interviews | • Ethnobiographies | • Polish memoirs |

Source: Creswell, John W., *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*, 5th Edition, © 2015, p. 506. Reprinted by permission of Pearson Education, Inc., Upper Saddle River, NJ.

narrative (e.g., an entire life or an episode in a life), who provides the story (e.g., teachers or students), the kind of theoretical/conceptual framework that has influenced the study (e.g., critical or feminist theory), and whether all these elements are included in one narrative.² The nuances that distinguish the different forms of narrative research listed in Figure 13.1 are embedded in the disciplines in which they originated. If one specific style of narrative research piques your interest, you would do well to focus on the discipline-based literature to guide your research efforts.³

Narrative Analysis and the Analysis of Narrative

It is important to distinguish between narrative analysis and the analysis of narrative, which, despite their similar terminology, reflect unique processes.⁴ In narrative analysis, the researcher collects descriptions of events through interviews and observations and synthesizes them into narratives or stories, similar to the process of restorying. In this type of narrative research, the story is the outcome of the research, an attempt by the researcher to answer how and why a particular outcome came about. Analysis of narrative is a process in which the researcher collects stories as data and analyzes common themes to produce a description that applies to all the stories captured in the narratives. Using this approach, the researcher develops a statement of themes as general knowledge about a collection of stories, but in so doing, underemphasizes the unique aspects of each story.

In this chapter, the focus of discussion is narrative analysis. That is, we are describing the development of a narrative or story that focuses on particular knowledge about how or why an outcome occurred rather than the development of a collection of stories and the search for themes to develop general knowledge about the collection of stories.

² *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research* (5th ed.) by J. W. Creswell, 2015, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.

³ For examples of how narrative research has been applied to a wide range of contexts (e.g., school-based violence, Holocaust survivors, undocumented immigrant families, and other challenging social problems), consider reading *Narrative Analysis: Studying the Development of Individuals in Society*, by C. Dauite and C. Lightfoot (Eds.), 2004, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

⁴ "Narrative Analysis in Qualitative Research," by D. E. Polkinghorne, 1995, in *Life History and Narrative* (pp. 5–23), by J. A. Hatch and R. Wisniewski (Eds.), London: Falmer Press.

MyLab Education Self-Check 13.1

MyLab Education Application Exercise 13.1:
Understanding the Purpose of Narrative Research

THE NARRATIVE RESEARCH PROCESS

The narrative research process is a highly personal, intimate approach to educational research that demands a high degree of caring and sensitivity on the part of the researcher. Although negotiating entry to the research setting is usually considered an ethical matter with assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, in narrative research it is necessary to think about this negotiation in terms of a shared narrative. That is, narrative research necessitates a relationship between the researcher and the participant more akin to a close friendship, where trust is a critical attribute. However, this friendship quality is not easily attained in an educational research setting (let alone in our lives in general). It is not uncommon for teachers, for example, to be cynical about any educational research, especially a style of research whose success relies on a friendship between the researcher and participant. Imagine how you would feel if approached by one of your educational research classmates (or colleagues at school) with a proposition such as this one: "I heard you talking about the difficulty you were having teaching kids who come to school stoned and wondered how you would feel about spending a lot of time talking to me about it. Maybe by working on the problem together, we can gain a greater understanding of the issues involved." Think about the kind of person you would trust to undertake this kind of research in your workplace; for your narrative study to succeed, you need to become that person. If you are a person who does not interact well with others, narrative research is probably not for you!

As Connelly and Clandinin⁵ have suggested, it is important that the relationship between

⁵ "Stories," by Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, pp. 2–14; *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*, by D. J. Clandinin and F. M. Connelly, 2000, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

researcher and participant be a mutually constructed one that is caring, respectful, and characterized by an equality of voice. If the researcher is unable to let go of the control that is typical in many styles of educational research, the narrative research process is not likely to succeed. The educational researcher using a narrative research methodology must be prepared to follow the lead of the research participant and, in the immortal words of *Star Trek*, go where “no man [or woman] has gone before!” In a very real sense, narrative research is a pioneering effort that takes a skilled researcher committed to living an individual’s story and working in tandem with that individual.

Equality of voice is especially critical in the researcher–participant relationship because the participant (in all likelihood a teacher) must feel empowered to tell the story. Throughout the research process, the researcher must leave any judgmental baggage at home. The first hint of criticism or “ivory tower” superiority will be a nail in the research coffin. The researcher’s intent must be clear: to empower the participant to tell the story and to be collaborative and respectful in the process. The researcher should listen to the participant’s story before contributing his or her own perspective—even if asked. That is, the narrative researcher must not become an informant. After all, it is the participant’s story we are trying to tell. As a patient listener, the researcher has an opportunity to validate the participant’s voice and allows the participant to gain authority during the telling of the story.

A researcher interested in a narrative study must thus decide if he or she has the time, access, experience, personal style, and commitment to undertake this particular style of on-site research. Once the decision is made, the researcher can begin planning the study. Each study will have unique requirements, and the steps that follow are meant simply as guideposts, but you should notice a parallel between the steps and the outline for writing a qualitative research proposal.

To illustrate the steps in planning and conducting narrative research, we build on the example of our teacher, Hilda.

1. Identify the purpose of the research study, and identify a phenomenon to explore. The purpose of the study at High High School is to describe Hilda’s experiences in

confronting and dealing with a student who has a drug problem. The specific phenomenon that will be explored is that of adolescent drug use in high school.

2. Identify an individual who can help you learn about the phenomenon. Hilda, a teacher at High High School, has volunteered to work collaboratively with the researcher.
3. Develop initial narrative research questions. What have been Hilda’s experiences in confronting and dealing with a student who has a drug problem? What life experiences influence the way Hilda approaches the problem?
4. Consider the researcher’s role (e.g., entry to the research site, reciprocity, and ethics) and obtain necessary permissions. The researcher should seek permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), as well as any other permission required by the school or school district. In addition, the researcher must ask Hilda to sign an informed consent form.
5. Develop data collection methods, paying particular attention to interviewing, and collect the data. A narrative researcher utilizes a variety of narrative research data collection techniques, including interviewing and examining written and nonwritten sources of data.
6. Collaborate with the research participant to construct the narrative and to validate the accuracy of the story. The researcher and Hilda participate collaboratively in *restorying* the narrative and then validating the final written account (restorying—a writing process that involves synthesizing story elements—is described later in this chapter).
7. Write the narrative account.

MyLab Education Self-Check 13.2

MyLab Education Application Exercise 13.2:
Evaluating Research Articles: Identifying Steps
in the Research Process for a Narrative Study

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF NARRATIVE RESEARCH

Narrative research can be characterized by the following elements:⁶

- A focus on the experiences of individuals
- A concern with the chronology of individuals' experiences
- A focus on the construction of life stories based on data collected through interviews
- Restorying as a technique for constructing the narrative account
- Inclusion of context and place in the story
- A collaborative approach that involves the researcher and the participants in the negotiation of the final text
- A narrative constructed around the question “And then what happened?”

The narrative research process is similar to the construction of a biography in that the educational researcher does not have direct access to observational data but must rely on primary data sources (e.g., the participant's recollections) and secondary sources (e.g., written documents by the participant); data are collected primarily through interviews and written exchanges. As mentioned previously, narrative research places considerable emphasis on the collaborative construction of the written account—the narrative text. Although researchers using other styles of on-site research may share accounts with research participants as a way to test the trustworthiness of those accounts, they place little emphasis on the restorying process that is quite unique to narrative research.

MyLab Education Self-Check 13.3

MyLab Education Application Exercise 13.3:
The Key Characteristics of Narrative Research

⁶ Elements of narrative research were adapted from those in *Educational Research*, Creswell, 2015, and “Narrative Analysis,” by C. K. Riessman, 2002, in *The Qualitative Researcher's Companion*, by A. M. Huberman and M. B. Miles, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

NARRATIVE RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

Empirical data are central to narrative research in spite of the inevitable interpretation that occurs during the data collection process (e.g., during the telling and restorying activities). However, interpretation does not mean that the outcome of the process is fiction. The narrative researcher, like researchers using other on-site research approaches, must be prepared to use multiple data sources to counteract challenges that narratives could be written without ever leaving home. Accordingly, Clandinin and Connelly⁷ recommend that data be in the form of field notes on shared research experiences. These experiences occur as the researcher collects data through journal and letter writing and documents such as lesson plans and class newsletters.

The immensity of the writing task for the narrative researcher becomes clear if you consider what is involved—for both the researcher and the participant—in “living the story.” The main challenge involves the participants' abilities to live their lives while telling their stories. Picture yourself as Hilda, the teacher focused on coping with adolescent drug users in her classroom. Can you imagine yourself fully engaged in living the daily life of a classroom teacher while relaying the story of your daily events and the meaning of your actions to a researcher? You might feel as if you were having a kind of out-of-body experience in which you had to look down on yourself from above. As Connelly and Clandinin noted, “A person is, at once, engaged in living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories.”⁸ Now imagine yourself as the researcher who is faced with the task of recording and communicating Hilda's story. It is no wonder that the researcher and the research participant must establish a high degree of trust and respect akin to the kind of relationship we all expect in a close friendship.

As with other methods used in qualitative research, narrative research relies on the triangulation of data to address issues of trustworthiness. As noted earlier, the data collection techniques used in narrative research are sometimes criticized as

⁷ *Narrative Inquiry*, Clandinin and Connelly, 2000.

⁸ “Stories,” Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p. 4.

leading to fictitious, romanticized versions of life in schools. Researchers can best counter this criticism by ensuring the use of multiple data sources as well as the collaborative negotiation of the written narrative account.

In the following sections, we focus on data collection techniques somewhat unique to narrative research (e.g., storytelling, letter writing, autobiographical and biographical writing, and other narrative sources). In writing about personal experience methods, Clandinin and Connelly described these data collection techniques as “field texts”⁹ that are focused on capturing the essence of collaboratively created artifacts of the field experience of the researcher and the participant.

Restorying

A characteristic of narrative research that distinguishes it from other on-site research approaches is the technique of restorying the stories that individuals tell about their life experiences. According to Creswell, **restorying** is “the process in which the researcher gathers stories, analyzes them for key elements of the story (e.g., time, place, plot, and scene), and then rewrites the story to place it in a chronological sequence.”¹⁰ Often, individuals share stories about their experiences with researchers but without attention to the real-time order of events. For example, participants may share specific details of a vacation in a somewhat random sequence, backtracking to fill in earlier omissions (e.g., “Oh, I forgot to tell you that before we got to the campsite. . .”) or jumping forward as certain details of the event call to mind other, related events (e.g., “Telling you about this trip makes me think of the one we took last year, when the bear showed up. . .”). With each interview, the researcher records these recollections, amassing many pages of notes, which serve as the raw data for the narrative account. Although the notes contain many interesting stories and details, they do not constitute a narrative account of the participant’s experiences because they lack chronology and coherence. The researcher must go

through the process of restorying to provide that coherence.

The restorying process has three steps:¹¹

1. The researcher conducts the interview and transcribes the audio recording to provide a written record of the raw data from the interview. This process involves noting not just the spoken words but also the nuances of the interview—for example, humor, laughter, anger, and so on.
2. The researcher retranscribes the data (i.e., condenses and annotates the transcripts) based on the key elements that are identified in the story. For example, suppose that Hilda (our teacher at High High School) described how she copes with students who come to class under the influence of drugs. From her comments, we may identify and highlight certain themes, such as seeking assistance from a school nurse or counselor and establishing individual educational plans and contracts.
3. The researcher organizes the story into a chronological sequence with attention to the setting, characters, actions, problems, and resolutions. For example, Hilda’s story may be set in the context of her classroom with the adolescents who use drugs (i.e., characters) and may be focused on the actions of the students (e.g., their off-task behavior and other relevant classroom behavior), the problems caused by the actions (e.g., other students distracted, teacher time focused on a few students), and any resolutions to the problems that Hilda employed (e.g., seeking assistance from outside the classroom, establishing learning contracts with students).

After restorying is completed, the researcher invites the participant to collaborate on the final narrative of the individual’s experiences. For example, the educational researcher and Hilda would collaboratively construct a narrative that describes Hilda’s experiences working with adolescent drug users, as well as the meanings these experiences had for Hilda. This collaboration between researcher and participant is critical to ensure that there is no gap between the “narrative told and

⁹ “Personal Experience Methods,” by D. J. Clandinin and F. M. Connelly, 1994, in *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (p. 419), by N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

¹⁰ *Educational Research* (p. 511), Creswell, 2015.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

narrative reported.”¹² One test of the trustworthiness of the narrative account is the participant’s validation that the account is representative of the individual’s lived experiences, as relayed in the interviews. A valid and clear narrative should increase our collective understanding of the phenomenon under study—in Hilda’s case, how a teacher confronts and deals with adolescent drug users in the classroom.

Oral History

One method for creating field texts is to have participants share their oral histories. An oral history may be obtained by the researcher during a structured interview schedule with predetermined questions (and hence with the researcher’s agenda clearly stated) or through an open-ended approach in which the researcher asks participants to tell their own stories in their own ways. In constructing an oral history, a researcher may ask a participant to create a time line (also known as a chronicle) that is divided into segments of significant events or memories. An oral history of a teacher working with adolescents who use drugs, for example, may include a time line from the beginning of the year (or previous years) that indicates significant events related to student drug use, such as when students were suspended from school because they violated a zero tolerance policy or when students were arrested for drug possession. The time line is a helpful tool for the narrative researcher attempting to make sense of the importance of these events in the teacher’s overall story. The teacher may also be asked to expand on these significant events and to write a description in a journal. Together, the chronicle and journal of the teacher’s experiences provide the narrative researcher with a powerful descriptive tool.

Examining Photographs, Memory Boxes, and Other Artifacts

Teachers have a proclivity for acting like pack rats. The materials they collect, apart from the obvious curriculum materials, often include cards from former students, newspaper clippings, yearbooks, photographs, and audio and video recordings of student performances. Often, these artifacts adorn

a teacher’s desk and bulletin board as badges of honor. The narrative researcher can use these artifacts as prompts to elicit details about the teacher’s life in school and in particular the phenomenon under investigation. For example, a teacher may share thank-you cards from students who, due to the teacher’s intervention, were able to kick a drug habit.

Storytelling

Narrative research affords many opportunities to engage participants in storytelling. Teachers, by nature, are master storytellers, and many will happily share stories about their experiences in school as “competent narrators of their lives.”¹³ The manner in which narrative researchers engage participants in storytelling sessions has a great impact on the nature of the story. That is, when storytelling is a routine part of the narrative research process, researchers can regularly add to their understanding of a “day in the life” of a teacher who is focused on finding a resolution to a challenging educational problem. Often, stories are shared when a recorder is not handy, and the researcher will have to record field notes and verbatim accounts as necessary. These stories are critical in providing insights into teachers’ work and explanations of their actions.

Letter Writing

Letter writing (or e-mail exchange) is another way to engage participants in writing about their lived experiences and to engage the narrative researcher and participant in a dialogue. The commitment of thought to text helps both the researcher and the participant. Because e-mail is widely available, this kind of dialogue can be easily initiated and maintained. The dialogue serves as a working chronicle of the participant’s thoughts on issues related to the research phenomenon and thus provides the narrative researcher with valuable insights into the evolving, tentative interpretations that the participant may be considering. Further, if each e-mail includes previous messages, the narrative researcher and the participant can reflect on the evolution of the themes by reading the increasing record of the narrative dialogue.

¹² Ibid. p. 514.

¹³ *The Active Interview* (p. 29), by J. A. Holstein and J. F. Gubrium, 1995, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Autobiographical and Biographical Writing

Engaging a participant in constructing or collaboratively constructing a life history through autobiographical or biographical writing has the potential to broaden the narrative researcher's understandings about past events and experiences that have affected the participant's experiences with the phenomenon under investigation. Perhaps Hilda, for example, has had other professional or personal experiences with adolescent drug users that would contribute to an understanding of how she operates in her current educational environment. Autobiographical or biographical writing about Hilda's life could bring these experiences to light. Again, the use of e-mail could provide a wonderful electronic record of the emerging narrative.

Other Narrative Data Sources

A researcher can access many other narrative data sources that can contribute to the construction of the written narrative. For example, documents such as lesson plans, parent newsletters, and personal philosophy statements are readily available. These sources provide windows into a world of classrooms that is not easily accessible to outsiders.

Narrative research relies heavily on interviewing and observing, which comes with the challenges of transcribing recorded interviews and recording field notes. Thus, the use of readily

accessible digital dictation tools is described in the Digital Research Tools feature.

MyLab Education Self-Check 13.4

MyLab Education Application Exercise 13.4:
Evaluating Research Articles: Evaluating a Narrative Study

MyLab Education Application Exercise 13.5:
Collecting Narrative Data

WRITING THE NARRATIVE

The final step in the narrative research process is writing the narrative, which is again a collaboration between participant and researcher. Many data collection techniques used in narrative research result in products—such as e-mail, letters, and a participant's biography—that often end up as part of the final written account. Given the collaborative nature of narrative research from the beginning until the end, the negotiation of the final narrative account should be relatively easy to achieve. However, it is worth remembering that the goal in conducting narrative research is to “learn about the general from the particular.”¹⁴ As such, we should be modest in the claims we make for the collaboratively constructed written narrative that is the final product of our research efforts.

¹⁴ “Narrative Analysis,” Riessman, 2002, p. 262.

Digital Research Tools

DRAGON MOBILE ASSISTANT, DRAGON DICTATION, AND DRAGON PROFESSIONAL INDIVIDUAL FOR MAC AND PC

Speech recognition programs have been available for many years but were often cumbersome to use and expensive to purchase. However, there are now many smartphone and computer applications available that will save the narrative researcher some of the time spent writing field notes and transcribing interviews.

Dragon Mobile Assistant

An app for your smartphone, Dragon Mobile Assistant combines the easy-to-use voice recognition software application with a host of other tools for the on-the-go researcher. Need help scheduling an interview? Check your calendar and send an e-mail to your research participants while driving to

(continued)

another research site. This free app can help record your field notes, send e-mails and texts, and make your dinner reservations while automatically detecting the need for hands-free operation. For more information visit www.dragonmobileapps.com.

Dragon Dictation

Dragon Dictation is an easy-to-use voice recognition application that allows you to speak and instantly see your content in a text form that can be edited, e-mailed, or even posted to blogs. With a little practice, Dragon Dictation gives the researcher the potential to record observations, field notes, and interviews at five times the speed of typing on a keyboard. This is also a great tool to use to record your thoughts in the car while you are driving to your home or office, and best of all, it's a free application for smartphone users. As Dragon Dictation claims, "Turn talk into type while you are on the go." Dragon Dictation is available for Apple

iOS platforms and can also be used on the Android operation system.

Dragon Professional Individual for Mac and PC

If you're not comfortable with talking and driving and you are looking for a more advanced software package, Dragon Professional Individual for Mac and PC allows you to convert talk to type at a computer. This program could be used to record interviews with research participants and would therefore save the researcher time spent transcribing. Dragon claims to leverage a next generation speech engine called "deep learning technology" that allows users to also transcribe voice recordings from smartphones or portable voice recorders to text with 99% accuracy. Unlike Dragon Dictation, it is not free, but it may become your favorite computer application and narrative research time-saving tool. For further information visit www.nuance.com.

SUMMARY

NARRATIVE RESEARCH: DEFINITION AND PURPOSE

1. Narrative research is the study of the lives of individuals as told through the stories of their experience, including a discussion of the meaning of those experiences for the individual.
2. Narrative research is conducted to increase understanding of central issues related to teaching and learning through the telling and retelling of teachers' stories.

Types of Narrative Research

3. How a narrative research approach is characterized depends on who authored the account, the scope of the narrative, the kind of theoretical/conceptual framework that has influenced the study, and whether all these elements are included in the one narrative.

Narrative Analysis and the Analysis of Narrative

4. In narrative analysis, the researcher collects descriptions of events through interviews and observations and synthesizes them into narratives or stories. Analysis of narrative is a process in which the researcher collects stories as data and analyzes common themes to produce a description that applies to all the stories captured in the narratives.

THE NARRATIVE RESEARCH PROCESS

5. The relationship between researcher and participant must be a mutually constructed one that is caring, respectful, and characterized by an equality of voice. Participants in narrative

research must feel empowered to tell their stories.

6. A narrative researcher first identifies a phenomenon to explore, selects an individual, seeks permissions, and poses initial research questions. After determining the role of the researcher and the data collection methods, the researcher and participant collaborate to construct the narrative, validate the accuracy of the story, and write the narrative account.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF NARRATIVE RESEARCH

7. Narrative research focuses on the experiences of individuals and their chronology.
8. Narrative research uses the technique of restorying to construct a narrative account based on data collected through interviews.
9. Narrative research incorporates context and place in the story.
10. The construction of a narrative always involves responding to the question "And then what happened?"

NARRATIVE RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

11. Narrative researchers employ a number of unique data collection techniques, including restorying, oral history, examination of artifacts, storytelling, letter writing, and autobiographical and biographical writing.

WRITING THE NARRATIVE

12. Writing the narrative is a collaboration between participant and researcher.

EXAMPLE: Narrative Research

For Whom the School Bell Tolls: Conflicting Voices Inside an Alternative High School

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ABSTRACT This article is a study of conflicting voices inside an alternative high school in Arizona. Voices of alternative schools are, quite often, not included in the discourse of curriculum reform even though the number of alternative schools is growing every year. Bakhtinian novelness of polyphony, chronotope, and carnival are incorporated into an arts-based, storied form of representation to provoke empathic understanding among readers. Multiple voices (polyphony) of the school are juxtaposed within a certain time and space (chronotope) while all the different voices are valued equally (carnival) to represent conflicting views on public alternative school experiences. The purpose of the article is to provide readers with vicarious access to tensions that exist in an alternative school, so that they may engage in questioning the nature and purpose of these spaces. In so doing, the study aims to promote dialogic conversations about “best practice” for disenfranchised students who are subject to experiencing educational inequalities in the current era of accountability and standardization.

Introduction

- (01) One of the school experiences that are available for teenagers who dropped out or were expelled from traditional high schools is the alternative school. One of its goals is to provide students with a second chance at school success. Although definitions or characteristics of alternative schools vary by state or even school district, one of the commonalities they share is that students who attend an alternative school did not do well in traditional schools. These students tend to be labeled as “at risk” of school failure no matter how much potential they may have, and are likely to be excluded in the discourse of curriculum reform. As Oakes points out in the forward for Kelly (1993), alternative schooling tends to perpetuate social, political, economic, and educational inequalities and continues to be an undercurrent of education without scrutiny. While many alternative education programs serving the growing population of at-risk students are run by school districts, little
- (02) research has been done to evaluate the success or the failure of the public alternative schools or programs (Conley, 2002).

The purpose of this research is to promote dialogic conversations among educators about ways in which educators can better serve a growing number of students who are at risk of school failure. Specifically, the research uses an arts-based narrative research approach to capture the voices of five participants (“inhabitants”) of the alternative high school.

Is this purpose statement clear enough to allow the reader to understand the research questions that will be investigated?

This article is a case study of Borderlands Alternative High School (pseudonym) in Arizona, which is a public school that serves about 250 students. Five different voices of its inhabitants: the principal, the security guard, a teacher, and two students, are presented in arts-based, narrative inquiry. These voices reveal tensions and conflicts that exist inside Borderlands, which may reflect issues and problems that exist in other alternative schools. Rather than to provide a final solution, the purpose of the article is to promote dialogic conversations among educators about ways in which educators can better serve a growing number of students who are at risk of school failure. The article begins with a brief review of the literature on alternative education, then specific research methods are considered, next the theoretical framework of Bakhtinian novelness is briefly explicated, this is followed by the voices of the five protagonists, finally in the epilogue, the voice of the researcher is presented.

Review of the Literature on Alternative Education

Alternative education proliferated in the United States in the late 1960s and the early 1970s as educational priorities shifted back to the progressive education movement. People who were unhappy with traditional curriculum hailed alternative public schools that subscribed to the ideas of progressive education, which called for a free, open policy that emphasized the development of self-concept, problem solving, and humanistic approaches (Conley, 2002; Goodman, 1999; Raywid, 1995; Young, 1990). These alternative schools attempted to offer places where students would have greater freedom and opportunities for success than in traditional schools, affirming that one unified curriculum could not be sufficient for all (Conley, 2002). Many disgruntled parents transferred their children to alternative schools that incorporated the concepts of “Free School” and “Open School” into the school curricula in order to meet students’ different learning styles, needs, and interests. However, most alternative schools of this era were short-lived for various reasons, e.g., internal financial mismanagement, public pressure for school accountability and the “Back to Basics” movement that followed in the 1980s (Marsh & Willis, 2003). (03)

In the mid 1990s, alternative learning programs and schools including public and private voucher programs, charter schools, and magnet programs, started emerging in an effort to solve issues of poor student achievement, ineffective pedagogical methods, and the increasing inability to meet the needs of diverse families (Conley, 2002). Alternative schools in this era “satisfy the need to provide choice and diversity within a monopolistic bureaucratic giant of public education” (Conley, 2002, p. 177). For instance, alternative schools in Washington State have been successful as an alternative to traditional public education, with schools effectively meeting students’ different needs (see Billings, 1995). Billings states: (04)

Experiential learning, off-campus course work, learning contracts, democratic decision making, new learning environments, restructuring of time, outcome-based credit, parental involvement, project based learning, sensitivity to diverse learning styles, process focused curriculum, and small size are just a few of the features that have long characterized alternative schools in Washington. (p. 1)

Other recent research on alternative education, however, shows that the public views alternative schools as places for students whose behaviors are disruptive, deviant, and dysfunctional (see Dryfoos, 1997; Howell, 1995; Leone, Rutherford, & Nelson, 1991; Mcgee, 2001). Rather than being recognized as alternative solutions for students whose needs are not being met by traditional schools, alternative schools are believed to exist to keep all the “trouble makers” in one place in order to protect the students who remain in traditional schools (Mcgee, 2001; National Association of State Boards of Education, 1994). They also tend to work to keep the expelled students off the streets in order to prevent them from committing a crime (Sprague & Tobin, 2000). Furthermore, Nolan and Anyon (2004) raise a concern that some alternative schools serve as “an interface between the school and the prison,” calling it the “school/prison continuum” (p. 134). (05)

According to the first national study about public alternative schools and programs conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), there were 10,900 public alternative schools and programs serving approximately 612,900 at-risk students in the nation during the 2000–2001 school year (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2002). NCES also reported that alternative schools were disproportionately located in urban districts, districts with high minority students, and districts with high poverty concentrations. This situation, in some cases, has rendered alternative schools as “enclaves for black, Latino, native American, and poor white students” (06)

(Arnove & Strout, 1980, p. 463), and “warehouses for academically underprepared sons and daughters of working-class families or single parents receiving welfare” (Kelly, 1993, p. 3).

(07) More specifically, in the State of Arizona, the State Department of Education announced formal definitions of alternative schools in 1999. According to the Arizona Department of Education (ADE), the school must intend to serve students exclusively in one or more of the following categories: students with behavioral issues (documented history of disruptive behavior); students identified as dropouts; students in poor academic standing who are more than one year behind on academic credits, or who have a demonstrated pattern of failing grades; pregnant and/or parenting students; and adjudicated youth (Arizona Department of Education, 2002). Every alternative school must meet the “achievement profile” provided by the ADE in the information packet on Standards and Accountability. This profile includes: ninety-five percent (95%) of students taking Arizona’s Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS), which is a state exit exam that all high school students have to pass to be able to graduate with a high school diploma; decreasing dropout rate; and increasing percentage of graduates who demonstrate proficiency on the Standards via AIMS. Every alternative school is expected to have 100% of graduates demonstrate proficiency on the Standards via AIMS by 2006 (Arizona Department of Education, 2002).

(08) The research site, Borderlands Alternative High School, is one of the twelve public alternative schools in the East Valley school district in Arizona. Borderlands houses students from ninth through twelfth grade and accepts students only by referrals from principals of conventional public schools. Enrollment at Borderlands has increased every year since the school opened in 1999. One hundred and fifty-two students enrolled at Borderlands during the 1999–2000 school year, 291 students during the 2000–2001 school year, and 350 students during the 2001–2002 school year.

Research Methods and Methodology

(09) Fieldwork was conducted from August through December 2003. Data were collected Monday through Thursday, about five hours each day, by means of observation and participant observation. I took part in classroom activities, interacted with students and faculty, helped students with schoolwork, and invited them to talk about their school and life experiences while having lunch. A main approach to the fieldwork was “conversation as research” (Kvale, 1996), in which conversations about school experiences and daily life with students, teachers, and the school staff were made during break time, lunch hours, and in class. This approach not only helped me build informal relationships with each member of the school community, but also helped me understand the ways the school was perceived by them.

More formal conversations with students and staff took the form of semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. The five protagonists in this study: Mrs. Principal, Mr. Hard (pseudonym, school security guard), Holly (pseudonym, female student), Jose (pseudonym, male student) and Ms. Bose (pseudonym, teacher), were interviewed individually during their school hours except for Ms. Bose. Ms. Bose invited me to her home for dinner where the interview was conducted. Each interview lasted about an hour and a half. The interviewees were asked to talk about their backgrounds, views on the alternative schooling, and their school experiences. Interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed.

(11) In terms of research methodology, this study employs narrative inquiry, which has become an increasingly influential technique within teacher education during the last decade (Goodson, 1995). Using narrative inquiry, educational researchers interrogate the nature of the dominant stories through which we have shaped our understandings of education, and challenge the view of schooling framed in a predictable, fragmented, and paradigmatic

Researcher’s role in the study was as an observer and participant observer. The researcher participated in “classroom activities, interacted with students and faculty, helped students with schoolwork, and invited them to talk about their school and life experiences while having lunch.”

How does the researcher’s role reflect the goals of narrative research?

Data collection methods included the use of semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions.

way (Casey, 1993; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Goodson, 1995, 1992; Munro, 1998; Sparkes, 1994). In this study, data are analyzed through *narrative analysis* or *narrative configuration*. This is the “procedure through which the researcher organizes the data elements into a coherent developmental account” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 15). That is, in the process of narrative analysis, the researcher extracts an emerging theme from the fullness of lived experiences presented in the data themselves and configures stories, making a range of disconnected research data elements coherent, so that the story can appeal to the reader’s understanding and imagination (Kerby, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1995; Spence, 1986).

Data were analyzed through narrative analysis that resulted in a narrative that captured themes from the lived experiences of the study’s participants.

This narrative analysis creates arts-based research texts as an outcome of research. According to Barone and Eisner (1997), some qualities that make educational stories arts-based texts include: the use of expressive, contextualized, and vernacular forms of language; the promotion of empathic understanding of the lives of characters; and the creation of a virtual reality. A virtual reality means that the stories seem real to the reader so that the reader is able to identify the episodes in the text from his/her own experiences, and thus believe in the possibility or the credibility of the virtual world as an analogue to the “real” one (Barone & Eisner, 1997). Virtual reality is an important element of an arts-based text as it promotes empathic understanding of the lives of the protagonists. (12)

In this article the five protagonists share their backgrounds, views, emotions, and reflections about their alternative school experiences using their expressive, contextualized, and vernacular language. Their stories are constructed in the first person. When stories are told in the first person, they can give the reader the illusion of spontaneous speech, that is, “the impression of listening to an unrehearsed, rambling monologue” (Purcell, 1996, p. 277), contributing to the creation of a virtual reality. (13)

Researcher collaborated with participants to construct first-person accounts of their experiences.

Did the researcher employ restorying as the technique for constructing the participants’ narratives?

Theoretical Framework: Bakhtinian Novelness

Through narrative inquiry, educational researchers try to understand the lived experiences of teachers or students and transform this understanding into significant social and educational implications (Phillion, He, & Connelly, 2005). Using Bakhtinian novelness as a theoretical framework is particularly important in the story-telling nature of narrative inquiry as it facilitates the understanding of human experiences in a social and educational context. It allows each protagonist to speak for him- or herself, while there is no single, unified point of view that dominates (Tanaka, 1997). (14)

According to Bakhtin (1975/1981), all stories are not the same. Depending on what kind of purpose a story has, it becomes either an epic or a novel. In an epic, stories are told from one point of view in one language, outside of considerations of time and particular places. There is only one world, one reality that is ordered and complete. On the other hand, a novel represents many languages competing for truth from different vantage points. The world of the novel is incomplete and imperfect. There is not a sense of formal closure in a novel: “One may begin the story at almost any moment, and finish at almost any moment” (Bakhtin, 1975/1981, p. 31). This “impulse to continue” and “impulse to end” are found in novels and they are possible only in a world with open-endedness. (15)

Bakhtin posits three concepts to specify the nature of the novel, or “novelness”: polyphony, chronotope, and carnival. First, polyphony, or a language of heteroglossia, refers to “a plurality of independent, unmerged voices and consciousness” (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 6). The polyphonic, dialogized heteroglossia of the novel involves a special multivoiced use of language, in which no language enjoys an absolute privilege. Different languages are used and different voices are heard without having one voice privileged over the others. Each language or voice is continually tested and retested in relation to others, any one of which may turn out to be capable of becoming as (16)

good or better a language of truth—if only tentatively, on a specific set of occasions, or with respect to particular questions (Morson & Emerson, 1990). In this way, the novel can offer rich images of languages. The creation of images of languages is, in turn, a form of sociological probing and an exploration of values and beliefs, and these images are tools for understanding the social belief systems (Morson & Emerson, 1990).

- (17) The second concept of novelness, chronotope, emphasizes time and space. For Bakhtin, polyphony is not enough to promote dialogic conversations. A chronotope is a way of understanding experiences; it is a specific form-shaping ideology for understanding the nature of events and actions (Morson & Emerson, 1990). For the voices to reflect believable individual experiences, they should be put in particular times and particular spaces. Bakhtin (1975/1981) states that “time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movement of time, plot and history” (p. 84, cited in Morson & Emerson, 1990). Chronotope, therefore, becomes important in understanding our lives as individuals and social beings.
- (18) The third concept of the dialogic nature of “novelness” is the concept of carnival or “the carnivalesque.” Carnival, according to Bakhtin (1975/1981), is a concept in which everyone is an active participant, openness is celebrated, hierarchy is invisible, and norms are reversed, like in popular festivals. The carnivalesque novel, through “laughter, irony, humor, and elements of self-parody” (Bakhtin 1975/1981, p. 7), offers an unofficial truth, where the symbols of power and violence are disturbed and counter-narratives are promoted with equal value. The novel is indebted to the spirit of carnival in creating a genuine dialogue. Bakhtin believes that the novel should play the same role in literature that carnival is alleged to play in the real life of cultures (Morson & Emerson, 1990). One formal and privileged way of life or way of thinking is discarded, but different views and styles are valued by representing the wide range of languages and experiences in the novel. In the carnival, voices of the marginalized or silenced are promoted and respected.
- (19) In brief, using Bakhtinian novelness of polyphony, chronotope, and carnival as a theoretical framework is particularly effective for the issues of power, resistance, tensions, and conflicts that occur in schools (Tanaka, 1997). As such, conflicting voices heard in a text with Bakhtinian novelness may “raise important questions about the topics under discussion, challenging the reader to rethink the values that undergird certain social practices” (Barone, 2001, p. 157).
- (20) In the following narratives, you will hear five different voices: first, Mr. Hard is the school security guard, a big, White, middle-class, former police officer, who has been working at Borderlands for two years; second, Holly is a ninth grader, White, working-class girl, who wants to be a lawyer; third, Ms. Bose is a White, Italian descent and ninth grade science and math teacher, who has been working with at-risk students for 25 years; fourth, Jose is a half-Hispanic and half-White male student, who wants to be a great musician; and finally, Mrs. Principal is a White, middle-class administrator, who is devoted to making her school an “achieving” school.

The Voice of Mr. Hard, the Security Guard

- (21) I am the security guard at this alternative high school. I got retired from a police department where I worked for 20 years before I came here. My wife is a director at a hospital here in Phoenix. Her job brought us here from Pittsburgh two years ago. I have two sons and a daughter. Two of them are happily married, and my youngest son is in college. My hobby is fixing and building stuff around the house on weekends, and Home Depot is my favorite shopping place.

This is my second year in this school, and I've been enjoying my job so far. My main responsibility is to make sure that our school is a safe place. As you know, kids these days can be dangerous. Especially kids in this school have a lot of problems that regular schools don't want to deal with. That's why they are here. A lot of kids have a criminal history. Some kids have already been to jail. My previous career working as a cop has helped me a lot dealing with these kids who have a potential to commit a crime. That's why I got hired so quickly. Our principal whom I'm closely working with gave me the authority to be in charge of the student discipline. My position here is to be a hard-liner. I'm the final set of rules that students have to abide by. That's my background. I spent a lot of money on my education at the police academy and I'm bringing that knowledge to discipline these kids. That's what I like about my job. I try to help them succeed by using my resources. If a student fails to go by rules, then he or she has to deal with me. You know, they're here because they can't control their attitudes. They can't control what they're saying. They are violent, throw temper tantrums, and talk back. There are different ways to deal with them and they are not in the textbook. (22)

Teachers can be flexible. When they don't want to deal with disruptive students, they can send them to me. My job here is to inculcate rules to kids. Some of you go to football games Sunday afternoon. When there are no referees, what kind of game is it? It's going to be a mess, right? With referees and rules, we have an organized game. Likewise, I'm the referee here. I'm the rules. Students have to face me if they don't follow the rules. I'm the one who keeps the game organized, and keeps the game from getting out of hand. My responsibility is to maintain the rules. We're trying to help these kids become successful young adults in the society. In that sense, we've been very productive. I've seen a lot of difference among students since I started working here. (23)

Kids try to avoid me at school. Out of sight, out of fight. I know they don't like me. That's fine with me. I don't want to be liked. I just want to be respected. Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that I don't have sympathy for them. I do feel sorry for these kids because they have a lot of baggage. They come from broken, poor, and abusive families. They don't fit the mainstream. They have lost the idea of where the main road is. So, our job is to put them back on the right track. It can be done only by strict discipline. They need to learn how to behave so that they can function in a society as a cashier or something. If they don't follow the rules, we kick them out of school. In fact, we suspended a lot of students this year. It's our way of showing them they are wrong. (24)

As you can imagine, we have a zero-tolerance policy for students who violate school rules. Holly has been my target these days. She is just impossible. I don't know what she's gonna turn into in the future. She's violent and gets into trouble every other day. She smokes, violates dress codes, and talks back to teachers, just to name a few. We have given her several warnings. She's quite smart, but being smart doesn't count here. What matters is whether or not one obeys the rules. On the first week of October, I caught her smoking in the restroom again. When I asked her to come with me, she wouldn't. So I tried to call the police, but Holly picked up a handful of rocks and started throwing them at me. She was ferocious! We gave her a five-day suspension. (25)

And then, our school threw a Halloween party for students three weeks later. Teachers and staff donated money to buy hamburger patties, sausages, and other stuff for students. I brought my own barbeque grill and tools from home and took charge of barbequing. I was happy to be the chef of the day. I was happy to see students relaxing, having fun, and enjoying food that I cooked. It was so nice to see students and teachers mingling together, playing basketball and other games. It was a nice change. The party was going (26)

well for the most part. But, right before the party was over, Holly got into an argument with this Black girl, Shawnee. Holly got mad at her and mooned Shawnee who was with other ninth graders. This incident was reported to the principal, who called Holly's mom to ask her to appear at the school the next day. Holly got expelled after the "happy" Halloween party. Hope this expulsion will teach her something!

The Voice of Holly, the Goofy Snoopy

- (27) My name is Holly. I just turned fifteen in July. I was born in Mesa, Arizona, and have never moved out of Arizona. I'm a White girl with a little bit of Native American descent from my mom's side. I heard my mom's great-grandma was some sort of a Native American. I don't know what tribe, though. I'm tall, about five feet seven inches, and have long blonde hair with red highlights. I like to wear tight, low-rise jeans and a black "dead-rose" shirt that has a picture of a human skull surrounded by roses. I used to wear the Gothic style of clothes in my junior high, all in black from head to toe, wearing heavy, clumpy army boots. But I got tired of it, so, now I'm into Punk. I have a tattoo on my lower back and have a silver ring on the center of my tongue. I got my tongue pierced on my 15th birthday. I like it a lot. My mom hates it, though. But I don't care. She hates whatever I do, anyway. She's a bitch. She works at a car body shop, buffing and painting old cars with her boyfriend who is living with us. I can't wait to leave home. As soon as I turn 18, I'll say bye to them and leave home. I'm tired of them ordering me to do this and that.
- (28) Anyways. . . My nickname is Snoopy. I got it in eighth grade for jumping and dancing like Snoopy at the Fiesta Shopping Mall. I just felt like doing it. People gathered around me and shouted, "Snoopy, Snoopy!" I did that for an hour. I didn't feel embarrassed at all. Since then, my friends started calling me Snoopy. They think I'm goofy. Yes, I am goofy. I don't care what others think about me. If I feel like doing something, I just do it. No second thought. But at school, I get into trouble because of that. Teachers don't like my personality. They think I'm just acting out. In fact, I was very upset when Ms. Bose told me the other day to change my personality. Do you know what she told me? She said, "I don't like your personality. You need to stop acting out. You need to change your personality. Then, your school life will be a lot easier." I said to myself, '*Bullshit!*' Change my personality? It took me fifteen years to develop it, for Christ's sake! I don't care if she likes it or not. I'm unique. I'm different. I have my own opinions unlike other kids. But teachers think I'm acting out, disruptive, unruly, and rude. Because I like to speak up, I have a history of being kicked out of classrooms and sent to ALC (Alternative Learning Center) where other "disruptive" kids are isolated, supposedly working on their individual assignments.
- (29) My friends like to talk to me about their personal issues because I give them a solution. Having said that, I think I have a leadership personality. I want to be a lawyer. I like to argue with people: my mom, her boyfriend, teachers, and my classmates. I win them all. Teachers are actually my worst enemies, but I'm not scared of them. A lot of times, they don't make sense. Last week, for example, I whistled in Ms. Bose's math class because I was happy to finish my work sheet earlier than other kids. Well, we're supposed to be ninth graders, but we were learning things that I had already learned in seventh grade. So this worksheet was super easy for me. So, I whistled to let everybody know that I finished my assignment. But here goes Ms. Bose. "Holly! Stop whistling. You're getting a zero point for today for being disruptive." "What? I'm getting a zero point even though I finished my assignment? That doesn't make sense!" "Yes, you're getting a zero point no matter what, because you are being disruptive." "Fine! If I'm getting a zero point for the day, I might as well keep whistling. What the hell!" I just kept whistling. Ms. Bose started yelling at me, "Holly, stop whistling right now! Otherwise,

I'm gonna call the office." "Whatever!" It was one heck of a yelling match. Finally, Ms. Bose called the office. Five minutes later, Mr. Hard came to our classroom to get me. He took me to the ALC. So, the day became another "do-nothing-at-school" day.

This school sucks, if you ask me. They put a bunch of "bad" kids here all together like a warehouse. There is nothing attractive here. Look at these ugly portable buildings without any windows. They are called "classrooms." We don't have a cafeteria, so we have to eat our lunch at outdoor picnic tables near the restrooms. We get to enjoy this picnic every single day even under the hot temperature of one hundred five degree heat of the desert. Go figure. We use old, "hand-me-down" textbooks that came from a neighboring high school. It's like we are the disposables of education. We don't mean much. Our classes have six or seven students. I like this small class. But we don't really cover all the stuff in the textbook. We learn easy stuff, and I get bored with that. I had to do the multiplication table again because our Mexican boy, Guillermo, didn't know how to do multiplications! When I run into difficult stuff, I just copy answers from the textbook to fill out the worksheets without understanding. And I get a good point format as long as I behave. I want to be a lawyer. But I don't know if I will ever be able to achieve my dream. I know I'm not stupid. But there is no counselor I can talk to about it. (30)

There are more rules and regulations here than regular schools. Look at Mr. Hard, the old, fat, security guard who retired from the police department. I hate that guy. He is obsessed with rules. He goes, "Follow the rules, follow the rules. That's the rule number one here, otherwise you deal with me." We try to avoid running into him because he will make sure to find something wrong with us. He randomly calls one or two kids into his office and starts searching their backpacks. We hate it. (31)

It's such an insult. Recently, Mr. Hard has been watching me like a hawk. I don't know when I became his target. Somehow, he decided to pick on me. On a gloomy day in October, I felt like smoking. The weather was weird, and I had a fight with my mom again that morning. I was having a bad day, you know. I needed to smoke to release my stress. When I was smoking in the restroom, Mr. Hard caught me on the spot. He asked me to come with him to his office. I said no. He asked me again. I said no again. Then, he started calling the police. I quickly grabbed some rocks on the ground and threw them at the son of a bitch. He ran away like a chicken with his head chopped off. I beat him finally! That night, I had a dream of him. I had a screw driver and shoved it into his neck, saying, "Leave me alone!" He was scared of me! (32)

The Voice of Ms. Bose, the Boss

"Hey, guys. There are times when I'll be asking you to leave the classroom if you get on my nerves. When I say 'Leave,' I want you to get out of here. Get out of my sight for five minutes or so, go walk around or something and come back in, instead of fighting me. I'm the boss here. I'm the dictator. It's me who makes a decision for you guys. So you have to follow my order. They pay me a lot of money to keep me here. I get paid more than any other teachers here. Yes. I make a lot of money for educating you to become a good person. So when you and I have an argument and when I say to you to get out of here, you need to leave the classroom for five minutes." (33)

This is what I usually say to my students in the first day of class. It is important to let them know who is the boss here. Otherwise, they will be out of control. I've been teaching for almost 25 years including five years of teaching at a prison in St. Louis before I moved to Arizona. After taking a break from teaching for a couple of years to raise my boys, I volunteered to teach at the poorest and worst school where there was nothing but gangsters. I never wanted to teach at a "nice" school where all the good kids (34)

attended. It is my strength that I can easily be sympathetic with kids who have issues and problems, like gang members, because I have been there. I myself came from a poor immigrant family background from Italy. I grew up in a poor area where crimes took place every day. I know what it is like to live in poverty. My father was a cop, but his paycheck was not thick enough to feed seven family members in the 50s and 60s. I still remember those days when our family had to skip meals as often as we ate. From that kind of environment, I learned to be tough. I needed to be as tough as iron to be able to survive. I also learned to control rather than being controlled.

(35) I enjoy teaching at-risk kids. I have never been afraid of those kids even though some of them are gangsters. I believe that we, human beings, are basically the same, no matter how stupid or how smart we are. We are all vulnerable and fragile. We all make mistakes and regret. We tend to repeat the cycle. But I need to teach these kids to break the cycle. I have to be a therapist first rather than a teacher in order to be able to do that. Teaching how to read and write can't be a main focus. What they need is a mental therapy, not an education, because they are "emotionally handicapped." It is their poor emotional well-being and low self-esteem that causes them to get into trouble.

(36) But under the No Child Left Behind of 2001, terms like achievement, accountability, standardization, and testing, have become our every day language at schools. Alternative schools are not an exception. In the year 2003, we got a new principal who believed that these kids needed to be taught to standardized tests. According to Mrs. Principal, my therapeutic method was not helpful in raising students' test scores. She said teachers need to focus on teaching kids how to take the standardized test, especially AIMS, if we don't want our school to be shut down under the NCLB. But, look, these kids are former drop-outs from regular schools. They are way behind their grade level because they have been skipping classes. There is no way we can make them pass the AIMS test until we subdue these kids' acting-out behaviors first. That's why Mr. Vee, our former principal, left this school. He couldn't stand the pressure from the school district about these alternative kids meeting the standards. He was the kind of liberal educator—too liberal for me, by the way—who emphasized students' personal growth. Portfolio assessment was one of his initiatives that tried to help students to reflect on their growth. But Mrs. Principal got rid of that. I didn't care for the portfolio assessment anyway, but it just shows how our school is changing under this accountability and standards movement.

(37) My perspective on educating these kids is different from both principals. My focus here is to get them to listen, that is, to make them behave and make them be positive. A lot of kids have ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). A good example is Holly. She cannot sit still for a minute; she's loud, annoying, and disturbing. She's pretty smart, at least smarter than other kids here, but her problem is that she likes to argue with everybody. She knows it all. She tries to get tough with me, but I am tougher. I let her know who is the boss here. I have a firm belief that resistance from students like Holly needs to be controlled by strong authority. I can be as warm as freshly baked bread when students listen to me, but I can also be as tough as iron when they don't listen. I believe that a good education for these kids is to teach them to behave and have a good positive attitude, so that they can function well in this society. I mean, what kind of boss would want to have an employee like Holly who talks back and is disobedient? It's my responsibility to teach my students to have good attitudes, which will eventually lead them to get a job after graduation. Here's my phrase for my students: "Attitude, attitude, attitude. You gotta have a good attitude."

The Voice of Jose, the Silent Rebel

(38) I am 17 years old, about five feet ten inches tall. I was born in California on April 23rd. I'm half-Hispanic, half-White. My biological dad is Hispanic

from Mexico. I haven't seen him since my parents got divorced when I was three. My mom got remarried when I was five, and that's when we moved to Arizona. Since then, my mom went through two more divorces, and now she's with her fourth husband. Right now, I'm living with my mom, my older brother, my fourth step-dad, and two of his children. My mom changed jobs several times, and she currently works as a gate-keeper for a housing company. Her current husband is a construction worker. I'm supposed to be a senior but am taking junior classes due to the lack of credits. I have attended Borderlands for two years to catch up with credits. I was in and out of school during my freshman and sophomore years because I was struggling with a lot of personal issues. My mom's frequent divorces and remarriages have badly affected me. I went to jail a couple of times for doing drugs, which I started when I was fifteen, and I'm on probation because of that. In addition, I was in a rehabilitation center for eight weeks for being depressed and suicidal. I used to be in serious depression, and used to cut myself with a razor. But the rehabilitation program didn't do much good for me because I'm still depressed most of the day and not talking to anybody.

There is one thing that keeps me going, though. It is music. Whenever I feel frustrated and depressed, I play the guitar. Bass guitar. That's what keeps me sane. I express myself through music. I write a song, sing, and play. I also organized a band with my friends like six months ago. The garage of my house is our practice room. We get together once a week, sometimes twice a week for practice. We're planning to play at a bar on Saturdays when we play better. Actually, some kids at school asked us to play at the Halloween party. We asked Mrs. Principal for her permission, but she said 'no' after she examined our lyrics. Her reason was that our music was not appropriate for a school environment. She said there were too many cuss words in our songs, so students would be badly influenced by our music. We were pissed off when we heard it. Kids would have loved it! What does she know about pop music, hard rock, or punk rock? Nothing!

I bet she doesn't know who Jim Morrison is. I'm sure she has never heard of the legendary band, the Doors. Morrison is my idol, although he died even before I was born. Morrison and his music influenced me so much. It was Jim Morrison who taught me how to see the world, not the teachers, not my parents. I see the world through Morrison's eyes and his music. I wanna be a great musician like him. He wrote songs and poems. I love his poetry. Through his poetry, some of which became the lyrics of his songs, he criticized the society for destroying people's souls with money, authority, and momentary pleasure. His songs are about the feeling of isolation, disconnectedness, despair, and loneliness that are caused by the problems of society. He was a free soul who was against authority. He taught me to stand up for myself to be able to survive in this world. He taught me to stand against authority. Maybe that's why I cannot stand Mr. Schiedler, our social studies teacher. I call him a "lost soul." Whenever I say something that challenges what he says, he goes, "Be quiet!", "Shut up!" He is a BIG controlling dude. He has to make an issue about everything I do. He doesn't understand students at all. He just thinks we are a bunch of losers.

In fact, many teachers are lost souls. I've been attending this school for two years, but I find teachers to be so annoying. They are only interested in keeping their job, so they just regurgitate the stuff they are supposed to teach and show no compassion. A lot of things they teach are biased and pointless. Just straight facts that have nothing to do with life. There is so much going on in the world, and there are so many other things we need to learn about. But all we do, like in Mr. Schiedler's social studies class, is to copy a bunch of god damn definitions of terms from the textbook and take a test that has 150 questions on it. One hundred fifty questions! I don't even read the questions. I just choose answers in alphabetical order: A, B, C, D, A, B, C, D. . . .

- (42) Teachers expect us to believe whatever they say. It's like going against them is a sin. I think it's propaganda that brainwashes and pollutes students' minds. But not mine. Jim Morrison taught me not to believe everything that adults say. That's why I get into so many arguments with teachers. I give them a piece of my mind. I have gotten suspended and kicked out of school many times, but I don't care. Schools don't mean much to me. I have a tattoo on my right arm. It is one red word, "Revolution."

The Voice of Mrs. Principal

- (43) How did I get here? Umm, it was last year, November 2002, when my district office contacted me and asked if I wanted to transfer to Borderlands as principal. I was told that Mr. Vee had to resign because he was having some issues with the district office. At that time, I was an assistant principal at a junior high, which was also an alternative school for 6th thru 8th grade. Of course, I happily accepted the offer because it was a promotion for me. For 20 years of my involvement with education, I always liked working with those at-risk kids who were struggling in every way. It's a challenge, but it's a good challenge that I enjoy because I feel much more successful and much more needed.
- (44) I started my job here in January this year. My district superintendent told me that our school would be a "referral basis only" starting spring semester. It means that our school is not a choice school any longer. If there are students who are deviant, unruly, disruptive, skipping classes, and violating school rules, a school principal refers them to me. It has made my job more difficult especially under the NCLB because we have to spend a lot of time dealing with students' behavioral problems when we can use that time for preparing them for the tests.
- (45) I brought several teachers with me from my previous school because it's easy for me to work with teachers whom I know and trust. They are like my buddies. And they know me well. They know I have a ranch home far away from the school with three horses. They know my 15-year-old daughter is into horseback riding and enters a horse race every spring. Actually my husband and I took her to a horse show held in the West World close to Scottsdale two weeks ago. Yea, we like horses. That's an important part of my personal life.
- (46) Sorry about the digression. Anyway, the teachers who came with me are very cooperative in making the school run smooth. They are not only teaching subject matter but also teaching kids social and life skills. They work on disciplining the students. We have a zero tolerance policy for anybody who violates the school rules and regulations. Mr. Hard has been playing a key role in implementing the policy. He's really good at taking care of kids who have issues of drugs, violence, smoking, fighting, etc., all kinds of problems our students have. Since he started working with us, discipline issues got a lot better. Kids are scared of him. They try to follow the rules as much as they can, so that they don't need to face him. Holly and Jose have been exceptions, though. They tend to act out too much, making a bad influence on others. The other day, Jose was trying to bring his band to school for the Halloween party, but I flatly said no. Their songs were full of "F" words, talking about getting high, going against authority, and revolt, all kinds of bad stuff. And I know his band members do drugs. No way we would allow them to play at school.
- (47) On September 23, 2002, two months before I got a phone call from the school district office, Arizona Department of Education announced the achievement profile formula that will determine which school is underperforming, maintaining, improving, and excelling in terms of standards and accountability. We have to have ninety-five percent of our students take AIMS, and make 100% of our graduates demonstrate proficiency of the Standards via AIMS by 2006! With the NCLB, our state standards and accountability, and

AIMS, we, as an alternative school, have to cope with two main issues. It's like a double-edged sword. While trying to correct students' bad behaviors, we also have to strive to improve their academic skills. We recently got rid of the portfolio assessment that Mr. Vee started. In our monthly faculty meeting two weeks ago, we had a vote on whether we would keep the portfolio assessment or not. Our teachers said it was putting a lot of burden on the faculty's shoulders because they had to read students' essays, give them written feedback, read their revisions again and again until they improved. In addition, we had to invite three community leaders to interview our graduating students to see their personal growth. It's a good thing to do, but this Achievement Profile doesn't give us time to do such an "ideal" thing. You know what I mean. So after a short debate, teachers decided to abolish the portfolio. They came to an agreement that what our students need is to focus on basic skills that will help them pass the AIMS test such as basic vocabulary, reading, and basic math skills. And that's what our district wants us to do anyway.

Right now, our school is rated as "Improving," according to our state report. It's amazing, isn't it? Well, in order for us to get there, we had to "bribe" our students to come to take a state test which took place early this spring. The formula for deciding a school as performing or underperforming is quite complicated. It is not just about how well students did on the test. But students' attendance plays a huge role in that formula. We did a campaign for a week before the test, telling students that they have to come to school to take the test. We told them we would provide lunch and snack and play time the next day if they came to school to take the test. You know what? We had almost 98% of students who showed up for the test! It was crazy but it worked. You know what I mean. (48)

Epilogue: The Voice of the Researcher

Listening to all these "unmerged voices" (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 30) among different power relations and subject positions about pedagogical practice, readers may find themselves trying to understand each protagonist's standpoint. Further, readers who view "their existence as multiple selves" (Noddings, 1990, p. x) may find themselves left with more questions than answers. (49)

While respecting and valuing the voices equally, I am reminded of an Aesop's fable, *The Fox and the Stork*: (50)

At one time the Fox and the Stork were on visiting terms and seemed very good friends. So the Fox invited the Stork to dinner and put nothing before her but some soup in a very shallow dish. This the Fox could easily lap up, but the Stork could only wet the end of her long bill in it, and left the meal as hungry as when she began. "I am sorry," said the Fox, "the soup is not to your liking." "Pray do not apologize," said the Stork. "I hope you will return this visit, and come and dine with me soon." So a day was appointed when the Fox should visit the Stork; but when they were seated at table all that was for their dinner was contained in a very long-necked jar with a narrow mouth, in which the Fox could not insert his snout, so all he could manage to do was to lick the outside of the jar (Aesop's Fables, 1975, p. 66).

It is obvious that Mr. Hard, Ms. Bose, and Mrs. Principal care about their students in their own terms. As an act of "caring," they invite students like Holly and Jose "to dinner" as a favor. The "dinner table" is filled with their favorite dishes of control, rules, authority, discipline, irrelevant teaching and learning, and test scores, without considering the guests' appetites. They believe their guests are well-fed. Unfortunately, constant conflicts, tensions, resentment, and resistance at Borderlands reveal that students are not happy with what is served and how it is served, just as the Stork could not eat the "soup in a very shallow dish." Students seem to penetrate what is going (51)

on in schools (Willis, 1977), as we heard from Holly, "This school sucks, if you ask me," and from Jose, "Schools don't mean much." Students return the favor with dishes that teachers cannot enjoy: acts of resistance such as talking back to the teacher, violating the rules and regulations, or being disruptive in class. In the different power relationship between the teacher/administrator and the student, however, it is the latter who has to leave "the meal as hungry as when she began." Students' hunger for caring, hunger for meaningful, relevant education, hunger for respect and being valued, and hunger for success, still remain unsatisfied. As a result, our students' at-riskness of school failure remains unresolved, if not exacerbated, causing them to be farther left behind.

(52) Under the No Child Left Behind legislation, all schools in the nation feel the pressure of increased accountability, and Borderlands is not an exception. It seems that teachers and administrators at Borderlands are working hard to make the school accountable. But for whom are they trying to make the school accountable? Why does it seem that students' "appetites" and "needs" are not taken into consideration in that effort? Why do I see a clear line of distance, disconnection, and dissonance between the administration and the students? What happened to the ideas of progressive education to which alternative public schools in the late 1960s and 70s subscribed? Why are these "unmerged voices" heard as a cacophony, rather than, as Bakhtin would call it, "an eternal harmony of unmerged voices" (1963/1984, p. 30)? Ultimately; for whom does/should the school bell toll? I wonder.

(53) In this article, I have presented different voices of an alternative school employing Bakhtinian novelness of polyphony, chronotope, and carnival. Although they are synopses of what is going on in the alternative school, the five voices of Mr. Hard, Holly, Ms. Bose, Jose, and Mrs. Principal, may be considered a metaphor of the possible life inside other public alternative schools experiencing similar tensions and struggles. The carnival of these multiple voices, including the epilogue, remains open-ended as it serves as a starting point of genuine dialogue among educators. A dialogue in which our taken-for-granted thoughts are disturbed, and counter-narratives that challenge one dominant view are promoted with compassion. I hope that this, in turn, will encourage questions as to the nature and purpose of alternative schooling that serves disenfranchised students, and to work together to provide true, meaningful, and equitable education that students like Holly and Jose deserve.

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