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The Appeal of Narrative in Research

I saw the bird flattened on the ground outside my door. One of the kindergarten children walked toward me slowly, crying. That's when I knew it was time to act.

WHAT IS NARRATIVE?

The very brief narrative above occurs amid myriad spheres of social relations. These relations are not all apparent, but understanding narrative meaning requires understanding narrating as an interactive process. As researchers we enhance our methods *if* we know how to read narratives as complex social processes. This opening **narrative** expresses a sequence of two past events.¹ The narrative involves action (“walked,” “act”) and consciousness (“saw,” “crying,” “knew”). From the little bit that is there, one can imagine possible settings: “Kindergarten” suggests a school context; characters include the implicit narrator “I,” apparently in a position of responsibility and power (“it was time to act”). This bit of narrative also sits amid possible plots—some kind of conflict on a school playground—with characters, the “child,” the “I” character, and the “bird” (depending on how the story develops). This brief narrative seems to convey life quite naturally with a story of an encounter involving a person, nature, and an institution—a child, a bird, and a teacher, school principal, or other adult—within a broader series of imaginable events. The ending “it was time to act” implies that the bird’s demise involved something more than disease or old age, compelling the “I” character to intervene. Details like the dead bird, the crying child, and the urgency to act hint at some sort of trouble, piquing the reader’s desire to know what happened. That 30 words invoke so much meaning demands a dynamic narrative approach.

Narratives are accounts of daily life, stories that spring from the imagination, vignettes of daily life, news reports of events of public interest, histories, gossip, and other oral and written accounts in past, present, and future time. Narratives tend to include characters—human or otherwise—presented in spatial and temporal contexts to share some meaningful experience or idea. More than a set of features, **narrating** is the interaction of expressions and contexts in ways that render relationships among characters and events prominent. Even when details of the context are unknown to a reader or listener, a narrative like the one above points beyond its brevity and pulls in the careful reader/listener's curiosity and ideas about the surrounding situation. As a “product of social life and human social activity” (Wertsch & Tulviste, 1992, p. 551), narrating is **culture** in action.

The power of narrative is not so much that it is *about* life but that it interacts *in* life. Narrative is an ancient product of human culture and an activity that keeps producing cultural innovations. With current technologies, human mobility, and the resulting intercultural connections, narrating has become a tool people use to engage with diverse others, to develop personally, and to contribute to the development of society. Narrating is a uniquely human form of expression and intelligence, and it occurs in both verbal and nonverbal forms. Thousands of years ago, people shared experience in pictorial scenes still preserved in caves, later in the form of oral epics by travelers who shared events across distant places. Since the invention of writing, generations across cultures have narrated religious, historical, legal, literary, popular, social, and other traditions. Studies of narrative across civilizations show that **meaning** resides in expressive form—in its style, linguistic flourishes, organizational format, and visual features—as well as literally in the words referring to persons, places, things, and actions. Over time, cultures establish ways for speakers and writers to recount events and to show why the events are important.

Facebook, for example, is a massive contemporary epic narrative. People use Facebook and other social media to do much of their connecting in conformity with social-relational practices established over time while also crafting self-presentations to assert some individuality. Much of the meaning in social networking occurs in *how* the narrator puts words and images together and thereby connects personal experience to a vast network of actual and imagined audiences. Most remarkable is that human babies learn the nuances of language and narrative long before they get Facebook accounts, and in doing so they acquire skills created by humankind slowly over thousands of years. Every interaction, including the ways that friends, family, and others share pictures and anecdotes, becomes part of the material people draw on for their personal

narratives, not only to share experiences but also to become persons recognized as good or bad, heroes or villains. While the words “My child is so clever and cute!” do not appear, this recent Facebook posting about Sophie demonstrates how clever and cute she is: “Sophie began to read yesterday!!!! Not yet 3, she held up the book confidently, began with ‘onceuponatime,’ turned each page deliberately, and soon, maybe, she’ll hold the book right side up!” The narrative of Sophie’s early encounter with a book uses the details of the story, the posting itself, and the parent’s attempt to appear just short of bragging by admitting that the child was, after all, holding the book upside down. **Narrative inquiry** should be sensitive to such interweaving of implied and stated meanings. Dynamic narrating is a theory and practice researchers can use to learn from meaning-making processes people use every day.

INTRODUCTION TO DYNAMIC NARRATING

This introduction to the social and cultural nature of narrating sets the scene for dynamic narrative inquiry. **Dynamic narrating** is a social process occurring in life and, thus, should be the basis of **research**. This book explains and guides such an approach to narrative research in the social sciences, building on practices of daily life, where people use storytelling to do things—to connect with other people, to deal with social structures defining their lives, to make sense of what is going on around them, to craft a way of fitting in with various contexts, and sometimes to change them. In this process, narrating integrates perspectives of diverse individuals and groups with varied influence, experience, knowledge, and goals related to an issue of research interest. If you are, for example, studying the effects of recent immigration policies in the United States, you could interview people entering the country for different reasons, such as people seeking work, refugees from war zones, young people joining family members, immigrants already in the country, or public officials, including social service professionals, employers, and educators working with immigrants. In addition to interviewing some of these actors in the immigration process, you could examine official documents or media stories to gain insights about immigration policies, perceptions, and impacts. That research design would provide material for analysis of shared and divergent meanings about immigration. In this book, I define **narrative meaning** in terms of such interplay among actors—people whose perspectives merge and diverge in social and political processes—and I apply this definition for systematic research sensitive to language use.

The guiding idea of **dynamic narrative inquiry** is that narrating **mediates** experience, knowledge, learning, and social change. When acknowledging this active, functional nature of narrative, a researcher focuses on what narratives do as much as on what they say. Consistent with this view, narrative researchers focus on narrative expression as it interacts with situation and purpose. This book explains and illustrates that process by presenting various dynamic features of narrative working together much like colors in a kaleidoscope when a researcher applies them in research. In the remainder of this chapter, I further define the dynamic nature of narrative, explain why researchers are interested in narrative, and present four principles to guide narrative inquiry.

Narrating Is a Natural and Artful Human Activity

Scholars of narrative understand that, beyond being a discursive form, narrating is a basic, necessary, and fascinating human activity. Because dynamic narrative inquiry draws on narrating in daily life, a discussion about its qualities is foundational. Narrative seems to copy life events. Something about the sleeping-waking cycles of life translates well into the “Once upon a time” and “and so that’s how it came to be”—beginning, middle, and end—structure of narrated experience. What is particularly powerful about narrating is the fertility of this apparently mundane cultural practice for recounting events, “**landscapes of action**” (Bruner, 1986), in ways that animate why those events matter, “**landscapes of consciousness**” (Bruner, 1986).

Words in context. People use the ordering of events in narrative form to guide perception, expression, and interpretation of those events. For example, from a young age, children learn to recognize the cues of rising suspense in a story, perhaps even sitting alert until they notice story elements suggesting that everything will turn out okay. The repeated “Someone’s been sitting in my chair . . . eating my porridge . . . sleeping in my bed . . .” in the British fairy tale “Goldilocks and the Three Bears,” for example, creates an anticipation about the interloper to the bears’ home and possible consequences for that protagonist when discovered (Cundall, 1851). After hearing the story of a family of bears returning to their woodland home that is not quite how they left it, even very young children familiar with the story want to shout out to the unsuspecting bears that someone has been sitting in their chairs, eating their breakfast, and ultimately falling asleep in one of their beds. From early on, the young child listening to a reading of the story becomes emotionally involved

with the rising action of the plot. The interwoven phases of meaning in the bears-and-girl story plot—a little girl intruding on the family home, the attendant turn of events, the listener’s feeling of suspense, and more—can be mined for deep understanding in research. Young children’s interactions with characters, places, and events that they never experienced or that never occurred attest to the basic nature of narrative. Understanding a story is as much about context as about words, because, for example, someone relating to a story would have heard it (or stories like it) before, would observe the reactions of others in the context, would have some sense of how to behave during a reading, and would use any illustrations to augment details. All this involves paying attention to how the story is told.

Meaning in how the story is told. Stories communicate with a variety of features that narrators use not only to share specific messages but also to hint at why they are telling *this* story in *this* way at *this* time. The various features of narrative create recognizable expressions indicating that “this is a story” with interactive devices individuals use to achieve their goals. Beyond any literal meanings learned over time among members of a community (and written in a dictionary) are the implicit meanings, the words between the words that members of the culture understand as expectations, possibilities, and taboos (Labov & Waletzky, 1967/1997, discussed in detail in Chapter 5). For example, the brief narrative “There was a war here and everyone feels bad about it” conveys literal and implicit meanings in Bosnia, where a young person wrote it as part of a postwar youth history project in a community center (Daiute, 2010). The passive construction, “There was a war here,” for example, implies that the war was imposed on the Bosnians when their capital city was under siege for several years, and “everyone feels bad about it” applies to the local people, the commonly accepted major victims of the 1990s wars in the Balkans. In contrast is the superficially similar narrative written by a youth in Serbia (for the same project): “. . . the news is that we are again under an embargo. They all got scared and mad and started . . . fights about our responsibility in all this mess. . . .” Although these narratives are both about war and express painful emotions, one enacts the passivity of a declared victim, whereas the other takes an active stance and addresses the issue of responsibility. In addition to the passive and active forms of the sentences, collecting narratives of local living histories to read alongside these two brief but rich stories reveals responsibility in the one case (“fights about our responsibility in all this mess . . .”) and lack of control in the other (“There was a war here”). Such nuances of narrative expression are ripe for application in narrative inquiry, across cultures and languages in terms of local practices.

Cultural variation of a basic tool. The specific forms for interweaving narrative action and consciousness differ across cultures. Children in all cultures grow up learning about the accepted practices in their environments, at first in oral story form and then in literature, religious rites, social media, and other genres (Heath, 1983). Along the way, given the opportunity to tell and to write stories for responsive audiences, people become good at narrating *within* cultural norms, not only to entertain others but also as a means of connecting, **sense making**, and thriving. In local settings, children are initiated into the mores and practices of their cultures via narrative. Those cultural differences have to do with the structure of the language—such as how a fairy tale or folktale in Spanish or Swahili builds suspense or manages to convey a moral without spoiling the pleasure of the story. The qualities applied for narrative inquiry in this book are based in English and languages of other western cultures, but readers may consider and alter the qualities applied herein as appropriate to their preferred languages. The point is that most cultures use available linguistic devices for interactive narrating (Bruner, 1986).

The Development of Narrative in Life

Narrative is one of the major cultural processes guiding children's **development** from early in life. From birth and across contexts, people use narrative to interact in the world. Using narrative as a means for participating in the world integrates human biology, such as the ability to speak, and cultural inventions, such as the capacity to create literature (Donald, 1993). Researchers have explained that children develop the ability to narrate as others tell stories around them (Miller, Hoogstra, Mintz, Fung, & Williams, 1993; Nelson, 1998). One explanation relevant to the current inquiry is that children become familiar with cultural routines in the context of daily activities like having meals, bathing, and celebrating family milestones (Nelson, 1998). As they mature, young people focus increasingly on broader social contexts, like school, where different expectations, like those for proper classroom behavior, organize activity and meaning (Cazden, 2001). Children narrating experience in mainstream American schools, for example, are expected to share facts, while the home cultures of many American children value stories that entertain, share role models, or serve other developmental functions than reporting facts (Cazden, 2001; Heath, 1983).

Storytelling socializes young people via cultural values shared during routine events that parents, teachers, employers, and others repeat and reinforce. In

turn, children and adolescents exert effort to socialize those around them, by infusing personal details and desires into scripts (routine ways of explaining routine events) and transforming them into nuanced stories (Daiute & Nelson, 1997). It is, for example, through storytelling that families let their children know the kinds of persons they are and will become (Miller et al., 1993). Once they have mastered the basics of the narrative genre by around age 11 (Berman & Slobin, 1994), young people take increasing control over social-relational processes linking persons and contexts—that is, they gain control over the impact of their stories on others. Because storytelling is, moreover, a means of presenting oneself to others and to one's own reflection, children, like adults, use it to perform identities and reflect on them (Bamberg, 2004a; Daiute, 2004; Reyes, 2011). Physical events—a salient word, glance, movement, or physical arrangement—are embodied in these interactions among author/speaker, audiences, and self-subject (Bakhtin, 1986). In this way, storytelling embeds institutional values, power relations, circumstances of the physical environment, and individual motivations (Fairclough, 2010; Harré & van Langenhove, 1999) in ritual narrations or scripts (Nelson, 1998).

Different social **scripts** may co-occur; they may be integrated, like plots and subplots, and they may clash, resulting in a story that seems incoherent. Social scripts have also been referred to as dominant ideologies (Foucault, 2001), ways of knowing (Gilligan, 1993), cultural scripts (Nelson, 2007), master narratives (Solis, 2004), and collective memories (Wertsch, 2002). These social scripts organize perception and action (discussed further in Chapter 4). Storytelling shapes public life, and individuals transform public life in their own personal stories. It is through storytelling that societies indicate who belongs and who does not. It is, moreover, through storytelling that leaders justify war and peace, as their political arguments are based on certain sequences of causes and effects, motivations, and involvements of individuals and groups. National stories are often adopted by individuals, a process that sometimes suppresses the voices of those left out of any official story (Amsterdam & Bruner, 2000; Scott, 1992). Prior research shows that children and youth adjust their personal stories to the preferred narratives in their societies, toward organizing personal accounts in terms of victimization in one situation and responsibility in another (Daiute, 2010; Daiute, Buteau, & Rawlins, 2001). Young people also use narrating to challenge stereotypes (Daiute, 2010). Narrating then becomes a means for advancing society.

Drawing on this knowledge about the social and cultural nature of narrating, researchers can broaden beyond assumptions that narrative is primarily relevant to research interested in individual experiences, perspectives,

and life histories. Instead, it is the range of narratives that participants in research, like people in everyday life, use to interact with those in their surround, including researchers. The multiplicity of narratives that each individual uses to connect with and change a social milieu is what researchers should explore.

A brief review of reasons for the increasing interest in narrative inquiry will set the foundation for the approach in this book.

WHAT IS THE APPEAL OF NARRATING IN RESEARCH?

Building toward the dynamic narrating approach requires a brief review of the major arguments for narrative in contemporary research. Researchers embarking on narrative inquiry should become familiar with different ways of appreciating narrative for research purposes as well as in life. “Narrative research has many forms, uses a variety of analytic practices, and is rooted in different social and humanities disciplines” (Cresswell, 2013, p. 70). Arguments for narrative research draw on scholarship as varied as literary theory, human development theory, psychodynamic theory, cultural anthropology, sociolinguistics, and sociology, among other disciplines. Different disciplinary perspectives lead to some different emphases, such as a focus on process and change by developmental, psychodynamic, and health psychologists, a focus on identity and identity conflicts by social psychologists, a focus on meaning by philosophers, a focus on culture by anthropologists, a focus on aesthetics by literary scholars, and a focus on language in context, including social and power relations, by sociolinguists and discourse theorists.

The major differences that play out in narrative inquiry design and analysis pertain to whether and how experience and meaning are defined as authentic reports, constructions, or patterns of use. Although these three ways of thinking about narrative in research can work together, narrative researchers should understand the implications of resulting differences for the design, analysis, and interpretation of their projects. The purposes of this review are to orient readers to the appeal of narrative inquiry and to build on prior approaches with an increased focus on narrating as a relational activity.

The appeal of narrative, most agree, is that it expresses personal experience. Narrative inquiry typically focuses on experience and the meaning of experience from the perspective of people living it in reality or in imagination rather than to identify objective truths. Differences in how scholars define narrative determine their beliefs about the location and operation of personal

experience—such as whether it is primarily *in* the individual or distributed *across* symbolic and physical spaces where individuals interact to create and transform meaning. Illustrating the range of reasons for doing a narrative approach, the following narrative by a college student serves as an anchor. After presenting the narrative and its origin, I interpret it briefly in terms of the report, construction, and use rationales for narrative inquiry.

The conflict happened in the middle of the day when I went with my friend for a drink. I am [a] non smoker but one guy was very rude and he was keeping his cigarette in front of my nose. I kindly asked him to move his cigarette to the side, he did not pay attention to me but instead purposely was blowing the smoke towards me. I was upset . . . and I told him he was a primitive Neanderthals . . . I felt very upset.

This narrative by a youth in a study of the effects of political violence and transition anchors this discussion of three major rationales for narrative inquiry. Twenty-one-year-old Z was born in 1987, a few years before the beginning of the wars that broke apart the country of Yugoslavia. When Z's city of Sarajevo was under siege for three years, she was a child. Her prime school years were disrupted by cancellations due to bombing, street sniping, lack of electrical power, food, and other resources. A community-based project involving Z's generation in the writing of a social history elicited narratives of daily life a decade after the war (Daiute, 2010). During the time of the workshops, many youth like Z participated in activities at community centers, often devoted to helping with neighborhood rebuilding efforts, youth skills, and social life. The need for out-of-school activities highlighted young people's welcome of opportunities to narrate from diverse perspectives, not only the perspectives dictated to them. Z and her peers in Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia, and the United States responded to an invitation to write about conflicts of daily life. Z wrote the narrative above about a conflict with a peer.

It may be surprising that, given her childhood growing up in war, Z's story seems mundane. Nevertheless, the fact that people do not always narrate the experiences researchers may seek is relevant to appreciating narrative as tool for interacting in complex ways with the extant circumstances. In fact, few of the 137 participants in the same study as Z directly addressed "the war." Instead, they used their narratives to consider the present time, including but not only consequences of war, in very different ways. To illustrate the appeal of narrating for researchers considering narrative inquiry, I discuss Z's narrative and a few other examples in terms of each rationale for narrative inquiry below.

Narrative Report

A common rationale for using narrative in research projects is to gather information about personal experiences, memories, feelings, and knowledge. This rationale, which I refer to as the narrative **report**, is based, albeit often implicitly, on several assumptions. These assumptions include that people have access to past events in memory, that they recount those events as the events occurred or were experienced, and that narrative accounts provide insights about the person, his or her group, and the individual's deeply held understandings of the subject of interest.

In spite of the range of disciplines and theories informing narrative inquiry, many researchers emphasize certain features, including the individual's experience, authentic expression of that experience, identity, and identity processes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Cresswell, 2013). Narrative research designed to elicit personal reports mentions "authenticity" and "spontaneity," available in individual perspectives often referred to as "voices" (Cresswell, 2013; Gilligan, 1993). Emphasizing the individual narrative report also tends to emphasize coherence, to smooth over tensions that render the individual voice confused and confusing. When trying to understand how people make sense of life and the problems scholars study, researchers often identify narrative as important for the particular, idiosyncratic, deeply held experiences of being in this world, as compared to the more general indications noted on surveys or responses in controlled experiments.

Another common goal of narrative reporting is to empower the voices and perspectives of those who have been silenced or excluded from some public hearings of personal experience (Harding, 1988). On this view, narrative research serves to enter previously excluded voices into a broader public forum. Such research introduces novel and sometimes critical interpretations of life by people in diverse situations whose experiences are not considered mainstream or ideal (Harding, 1988). With those voices increasingly in the foreground rather than the background of public life, researchers can take them increasingly seriously by focusing on the nuances, diversities, and powerful uses of narrating within as well as across social groups. Narrative expression can be or can feel personally life affirming. Power comes from the social nature of narrating, the interactive nature of personal stories and collective voices narrating a situation, place, or insight.

Research emphasizing narrative reports tends to include interviews, repeated interviews, or life stories to glean a person's or a group's authentic basic truths (McAdams, 2005). Narrative inquiry focuses on stories and/or on

the storied nature of discourse (such as chronological order) by analyzing themes, structures (such as turning points), or interactions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Riessman, 2007). As noted by a leading scholar of narrative inquiry, “A good narrative analysis prompts the researcher to look beyond the surface of the text” (Riessman, 2007, p. 13). There are numerous ways to look beyond the surface of the text. There are also numerous hints to profound meaning in narrative expression.

One way narrative researchers go beyond the surface is by identifying “themes”—defined in this way after a comparative analysis of qualitative research scholarship: “Themes are abstract (and often fuzzy) constructs that link not only expressions found in texts but also expressions found in images, sounds, and objects . . . as the conceptual linking of expressions. . . . Themes come both from the data (an inductive approach) and from the investigator’s prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study (an a priori approach)” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, pp. 87–88). What counts as “theme,” “content,” and “expression” differs in interesting ways across approaches to narrative inquiry. Nevertheless, what is common in valuing narrative as a report of personal subjectivities (memories and feelings about experiences) is that the content or theme is authentic and embodied in a specific person. For that reason, perhaps, themes require reading beyond the surface of the text. In the absence of the connection of themes to narrative expression and a way of connecting surface expression to deep structure, themes remain in the mind of the researcher and difficult to identify.

Researchers, of course, work from theoretical perspectives, which means that those relying on theories like personality development (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Spence, 1984) might identify meaning in narrative in terms of psychological conflicts with others and one’s own history (Erikson, 1994; Lieblich et al., 1998), or feminist theories focusing on oppressions and consequences of oppression (Chase & Rogers, 2001; Harding, 1988). Grounded theory is another approach used to create themes that emerge as self-conscious interactions of the researcher’s perspective with narratives and other discursive data (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2007).

Emphasizing Z’s narrative for its individual authenticity would involve noticing topics—peer conflict, changing social mores, such as the fact that smoking in public places is no longer always accepted, and, most important, Z’s feeling upset about the smoker’s rude behavior. A researcher seeking a meaningful theme might wonder if some intergroup tensions were playing out between Z and the smoker, if Z had a history of conflicts with men, or if her harsh judgment was a relational habit. Such questions could be addressed with

additional narratives or interviews, a life history, observations of Z with her peers, perhaps directly addressing Z's orientations to peers, male peers, that person, or something about him.

Research that values narrative inquiry for individuality and coherence indicates a preference for case studies to remain personal, abstracting away from within-person diversities and common uses of narrative across individuals. Reading Z's character and relation to this narrative would be a priority in a case study. With the emphasis on creating a narrative profile, a case study would seek meaning in terms of principles of character, motivations buried in the narrative, a need to avoid certain painful events, and strategies for doing so, such as what restorying might produce (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 2001). In terms of ongoing methods for analyzing this and other narratives by Z, research emphasizing individual authenticity—the report approach to narrative inquiry—may caution the researcher to avoid influencing the interaction as much as possible. The reason for this is that the report is intended to be the authentic voice of the individual.

From the perspective of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2007), a beginning analysis would focus on topics (like smoking), characters, conflicts, and reactions, to create categories of social relations. Such an inward look is valuable and an aspect of narrating. Nevertheless, because human development is a dynamic sociocultural process, reducing discourse to the individual or to an identity group could minimize the interaction of an individual in constant interaction with diverse others and the individual in diverse situations, thereby provoking within-person diversity and complexity. Research designs can also allow for such diversities as well as any essential truths.

While grounded theory excavates individual meaning, a constructive perspective assumes a broader gaze on narrating in context, as a process of increased awareness about self or relevant issues. The state of the art of narrative inquiry provides insights for increasingly precise analyses of narrators' interactions with others. Another major reason researchers cite for doing narrative inquiry is that narrative is a creative process.

Narrative Construction

Some scholars focus on narrating as a developmental process—whereby persons become themselves through the stories they tell (Polkinghorne, 1991). This constructive nature of narrating is appealing because it involves people in creating meaning and a sense of who they are.

Researchers do systematic studies to examine how narrating interacts with the development of identity, thereby acknowledging the process nature of narrating in research. Narrative psychologists have, for example, explored literary features such as “chapters” (McAdams, 2005), “turning points” (McLean & Pratt, 2006), coherence (Linde, 1993; Smorti, Pananti, & Rizzo, 2010), and continuity (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), in particular to learn about narrators’ identity development and health.

This rationale for narrative research emphasizing **construction** builds in part on psychodynamic theory that personality is the story one tells (McAdams, 2005; Ochs & Capps, 2002; Polkinghorne, 1991). This constructive view is also appealing for studying and promoting well-being or socialization to social norms (Chase & Rogers, 2001; Ochs & Capps, 2002). Storytelling treatments are based on the idea that creating a new story to explain traumatic events or to make sense of those events can provide healthier guidelines for perception and action. Researchers have, for example, found that narrating a disruptive event like an earthquake and its aftermath led to increased calm among the college student participants (Smorti, Del Buffa, & Matteini, 2007). Interacting with narrative can impose sense on chaos and familiarity on strangeness. Researchers focusing on identity and well-being construction also tend to emphasize coherence and conformity in their designs and analyses with narrative (Baerger & McAdams, 1999). While coherence may be important at times to mental health and social conformity, it can actually undermine the study of identity development when it glosses over the inevitable conflicts and within-person diversities. For this reason, researchers need to expand beyond an emphasis on narrative report to include broader social dimensions and their vicissitudes.

The appeal of narrating for its constructive function extends beyond the narrative text and individual to various kinds of interactions. Some researchers emphasizing the constructive function of narrative for identity development highlight the interactive nature of narrating. This strand of research on identity development mines tensions in the process, in part because it defines narrating in conversations or **small stories** (Bamberg, 2004a; Korobov, 2009; Ochs & Capps, 2002). Small story research, for example, examines the formation of male ideals exchanged during conversations among preadolescent boys talking about girls (Bamberg, 2004b) and studies college students discussing their romantic relationships (Korobov, 2009). The research design simulates settings for peer group conversation as closely as possible, such as asking friends to “chat among themselves” during a delay in starting the presumptive research activity (Korobov, 2009). In this approach, researchers examine turn-taking patterns and other strategies, like irony, as means of conveying acceptable

conversation about such matters and, thus, about related ideals. These designs emphasize narrating for identity development in conversations, which the researchers analyze for enacted qualities like agency/passivity and constancy/change (Bamberg, 2008).

The construction rationale acknowledges, even invites, tension and contradiction, often enlivened by defining narratives as always interacting in the environment, as occurs in actual conversation. The construction rationale thus argues that “. . . the domain for analyzing counter positions is the social realm of interaction in which narratives are implemented rather than the stories per se” (Bamberg, 2004a). When examining narratives in the context of everyday activities, it becomes clear that people use narrating not only to report or to construct personal experiences but also to interact with diverse environments—people, objects, and situations—including research settings.

Approaches emphasizing narrative construction would appreciate Z’s narrative in ways that are explicitly social—that is, as among persons rather than primarily for what the social situation invokes within her and the history that has created her personality. Reading Z’s narrative in terms of its value as a constructive process would turn outward more than inward, as with a report reading. As a construction process, Z’s narrative would yield some additional insights about how she felt about the people, place, and history related to her narrative of the rude smoker. An emphasis on zooming out to the interaction of the smoking incident, asking about it, observing other events in the same place, or reproducing peer conflicts might address questions about how Z was performing not only the stable identity she had crafted up to the age of 21 but also how she was continuing to develop that identity. What occurred before, after, and during the narration would be relevant to the researcher emphasizing narrative construction. The researcher’s consideration about seeking or eliciting additional narratives to inform the analysis and interpretation might include presenting Z with the narrative and asking her about those surrounding events and her current interpretation.

Alternatively, the researcher might observe or construct conversational events with individuals or groups of similar profiles relevant to the research questions framed, perhaps as “What bugs you in public places or society these days?” Use of the colloquial “bugs you” would indicate interpersonal issues rather than big issues, as those microaggressions of everyday life tend to be material for ongoing self-construction. Brief anecdotes or longer sagas can be helpful in figuring out the meaning of an event and its relation to a researcher’s questions, for the narrator as well as for the audience. In other words, the point and relevance of a memorable event often become clear in

the telling, in the social interaction among researchers and their subjects, as among friends or other interlocutors. Analyses would identify self-presentation and self-reflection moves, like self-aggrandizing (Oliveira, 1999) or playing with irony (Korobov, 2009), within the text and in a recorded interactional context. Analyses presented in Chapters 5 and 6 of this book are especially relevant to such a reading.

Narrative research has indicated that in addition to being an activity for reporting personal experience and constructing identity, narrating is an activity for engaging with the world. An emphasis on activity, relationships, and diversity is important in this global era, characterized by increasing plurality of experiences, intercultural contact, conflict, and resource inequality. Research must, thus, be sensitive to these complexities as they interact in expression. Toward that end, the use theory of narrative provides an explanation and analytic approach for understanding narrating as an activity of critical and creative sense making about the environment as well as about the self.

Narrative Use

Valuing narrative for its use quality extends prior emphases by highlighting the fact that narrating is a sense-making process—a process for figuring out what’s going on in the world and how one fits. According to this theory, narrating is an activity for creating identity as well as for sharing experience, but more than that, it is an activity for figuring out what is going on in the environment and how one fits—in brief, for problem solving about experience (Nelson, 1998, 2007). Another source for this view is the philosopher Wittgenstein (1953), who defined meaning as use: “Now, what do the words of this language *signify*?—What is supposed to show what they signify, if not the kind of use they have?” (p. 6).

When zooming out from the individual in this way, identity fades as a focal issue of research while the interaction of social and personal activities and perspectives comes into focus. Within this broader process of narrating to interact in the world, one crafts and tests out self-presentations both for how others respond and how one feels in the wake of interaction (Spence, 1984; Turkle, 1997). Inevitably, given the diverse contexts where people participate across the life span, these experiments at being—aided in part by storytelling—continue. A 70-year-old participating in her first meeting of the local senior citizen group might, for example, feel as attentive as a high school freshman to all the implicit rules of what people talk about and what they don’t, which personal experiences

they share, which they don't share, and how they make friends. Narrating creates a symbolic reality as a person remembers it or would like it to be, so researchers must extend the idea that narrative is a construction process to allow for how people use narrating to interpret their experiences.

A dynamic narrating approach assumes that in research, as in life, people address one another guided by the situation, expectations, and rapport, rather than only in terms of an individual's knowledge about an issue. A dynamic narrating perspective assumes there are myriad influences on what people say or write and that these influences are expressed in the research narratives, whether the researcher accounts for them or not. Very often interviewees do not explicitly mention the issues of interest to the researcher. For example, participants in a study on gender roles in workplace practices may avoid mentioning gender or discrimination because they know that differences of opinion about such issues cause conflicts at work, or they may mention an issue because the researcher has asked about it several times. A researcher interested in gender discrimination and also sensitive to the dynamics of narrating could ask a participant to narrate from the perspectives of females *and* males or for audiences of males and females. The participant would then be performing ideas about gender in relation to diverse situations rather than only talking about gender. The researcher could analyze for dynamic cues to meaning rather than only explicit mentions of "gender," "discrimination," or synonyms. Another language-sensitive option consistent with dynamic narrating would be to present several narratives expressing gender discrimination and interpretations for the participant to judge in terms of whether she or he relates to the story in a positive way, a negative way, not at all, or would like to adjust the telling.

Eliciting personal stories in research is an advance in social science, but this must occur with awareness of the fact that narratives are language, language is social, language use constructs meaning, and that meaning is fraught with relational realities and dilemmas. Also destabilizing the idea that narrating would be in any singular way authentic is a fact that many beginning researchers notice: Participants often check with the researcher for "Is that what you want?" Acknowledging and adjusting to the creative nature of narrating is the way to address this. This is not a problem but an indication that researchers must design studies with the awareness that research discourses are social and directed. In these ways, narratives are interactions rather than reports or personal constructions.

Emphasizing the use quality of narrating involves defining meaning in interaction with explicit or implied others, in relation to social structures, power relations, and one's own needs and goals. Participants in research, as in life,

use multiple narrating experiences, engaging diverse narrator stances with diverse audiences and purposes (connecting, inquiring, advising) to express their complex range of knowledge, experiences, and intentions. Narrating is, thus, oriented externally, first acquired by interacting with experts—like parents and older children—in the culture, then becoming a tool available for use. This approach adds to prior inquiry by employing basic knowledge of how language works.

A poignant example of how meaning includes social context comes from a news report about speeches at the Republican and Democratic conventions to nominate the 2012 U.S. presidential candidates. This quote from the news report explains that what each political party emphasized in its speeches was precisely the opposite of the party platform and its historical position: “The two back-to-back conventions are highlighting an interesting role reversal between the political parties. The Republicans, who in the past eagerly waged a culture war, tried to emphasize economic issues, while the Democrats, stuck with a bad economy, were no longer running away from social issues that once petrified their strategists” (Baker, 2012). This reporter alerts readers to the fact that the meaning of each speech must be understood in the context of history (that one party typically emphasized the economy and the other emphasized social issues), current facts (the party of the incumbent president was being blamed for a bad economy, and the other party for being hostile to the economic needs of poor and middle-class Americans), and public opinion at the time about each party’s weaknesses. What all this means for researchers wanting to understand how their subjects think and feel about topics of interest is that a large part of narrative meaning is not stated at all or may contradict what is stated.

Reading Z’s narrative with an emphasis on use involves establishing the context with which she was interacting, actually and virtually, to account for the presentation she wanted to make with the story for others. Because Z wrote the narrative in the context of a community center with progressive values, the issue of past behavior was much in the air. Even the use of the term “Neanderthal” had come to refer to those who were unable to move beyond the war and many suspected to be holding on to the past mentalities, like hatred of people of ethnic groups different from their own. A researcher who observes narrative situations, makes notes, and gathers narratives or other documents by the focal participants and their interlocutors can consider such interactions, as is explained in Chapter 2 of this book. Qualities of narratives are also relevant for precisely identifying performed meanings, as explained in all subsequent chapters of this book. Rather than doing extended interviews or a life history, as would be consistent with the report rationale for narrative inquiry, a

researcher focused on learning about narrative use would involve participants in personally meaningful activities involving narrative and other discourses (letter writing, mission statements, and so on) directed to different audiences with whom the participant would want to interact in different ways. For example, in this narrative where she is merged with the “I” character, Z is critical of a person exhibiting behaviors the narrative expresses as bad. In that way, Z uses the narrative to perform her distance from past behavior, indicated not only by the portrayal of the smoker’s rude behavior but also by summarizing him as a “Neanderthal”—a prehuman species living thousands of years ago. As explained in Chapters 2 and 3, emphasizing the use value of narrating involved Z in sharing accounts that were not only autobiographical but also focused on others and imaginary scenes. The purpose of such diverse narrating is to shift judgment away from the individual as an explicit focus, which tends to restrict expression toward a perceived ideal. In narratives about adults in the community and in fictional stories, for example, Z comes across in a different way, still distancing from the past but expanding her range of narrative vision, at least to express another’s possible perspective:

. . . there is one old man that is really primitive. Whenever he enters the trolley he rudely tells someone to get up so that he can sit, as if that is someone’s duty and not just a show of good manners. This is why the old man got into conflicts many times with others, and he always gets a “shorter end of the stick.” The conflict is never resolved.

In yet a third narrative, Z crafts a completely different approach. Rather than distancing, she enacts connections with others, cooperation rather than harsh judgment, and a comparatively positive demeanor:

The news that the building could not be built came because the property was illegally purchased, and government does not approve building on that place. People were crushed, angry, and upset. At the end, by strike, they won and the building will be built.

In a letter to a public official, Z extends further with the plea “give the opportunity to youth and they will show you what they can do.”

Having four opportunities to express experience, knowledge, and imagination in relation to issues of interest, Z comes across as complex. Acknowledging that narrating is a clever human invention for performing meaning, researchers pay close attention to narrative expression, thereby eliciting complexity rather than making individual authenticity or coherence the priority. The story at the

beginning of this chapter, for example, sounds like it could be about how a bird died, but focusing on the telling suggests it could instead be about the narrator. Details like the repeated “I” and the action leading up to the high point of the narrator’s recognition “it was time to act,” among other elements of this emerging story, implicate the narrator as protagonist. Because narrating is embedded in life—with all its social pressures, such as public opinion, in just the way that researchers would like to discover—the main message often unfolds with how the story unfolds in context.

Narrative use focuses closely on expression, and, for this reason, after mastering some analytic strategies, researchers can work in precise ways. Understanding narrative uses requires providing multiple opportunities for people to narrate from different perspectives (self, other) and for different audiences (audiences of peers or adult authorities like teachers or politicians). Emphasizing narrative use is not incompatible with appreciating the individual report or self-construction, but the appeal of narrating for how people use it to mediate interactions in the world adds a strand of meaning that is often missed with other approaches.

Building on this brief review of the appeal of narrative inquiry, the next section presents four principles to guide dynamic narrative inquiry, as explained and illustrated in subsequent chapters. This narrative approach offers insights to complement prior and other approaches, but it can also offer new kinds of information.

PRINCIPLES OF DYNAMIC NARRATING IN RESEARCH

Dynamic narrative theory provides a foundation for principles to guide research design and analysis. Rather than being a window into people’s minds and hearts, storytelling is a cultural tool (like other discourse genres and symbol systems) for managing (mediating) self-society relationships (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 55). As a **cultural tool**, narrating is, thus, a psychosocial mediator or “conductor of human influence on the object of activity . . . externally oriented . . . aimed at mastering and triumphing over nature . . . and . . . as a means of internal activity aimed at mastering one’s self” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 55).

This theoretical insight is brought to life with the dynamic narrating principles defined in this chapter, explaining that narrating is a process of use—to do things in the world in relation to diverse other people and the physical and symbolic environments. The principles of use, relation, materiality, and diversity guide the work of narrative inquiry design, analysis, and integration in the chapters to come. A brief statement of each principle provides a foundation for

researchers using this book, researchers paying attention to sociocultural meaning in the style and context of narrative discourse. Subsequent chapters work with these principles for research design and analysis.

The Use Principle

The **use principle** highlights the fact that discourse is activity. Narrating functions as a tool to mediate individual and societal interactions, so researchers can design activities where participants have the opportunity to use narrating flexibly to interact with and reflect on the issues of interest. Research consistent with this principle would sample multiple narratives from diverse positions to learn about meaning by comparing diverse uses. Because people use narrating to contest historical and cultural narratives and not only to conform to them, research designs should allow for and even encourage narrating from critical stances as well as to conform to accepted expressions. Put most simply, a research design can elicit narrative use by studying it in activities that are meaningful to people, where people can reflect from different perspectives around the phenomenon of interest and for different purposes. Eliciting narratives in meaningful situations will elicit meaning in use, and varying important purposes and interactions in those meaningful situations will bring diverse dimensions of meaning to life. If, for example, a researcher is interested in how people deal with conflict in relationships, he or she can invite participants to narrate from their relationship partners' perspectives as well as from their own. Respecting the use principle also means examining how people employ narrative elements to express themselves socially, as well as studying what they say literally. A researcher studying public opinion about political candidates could, for example, consider how candidates' speeches over time relate to different news reports about the candidates and voters' narratives on similar issues.

The Relation Principle

The **relation principle** is that narrators interact with present and implied others, objects, and ideas in environments, so we should design research with narrating in terms of different narrator-audience-issue relations. Narrating is a relationally complex process, because for each telling and listening arrangement, the narrator must consider which details to select, how to arrange them to highlight the most interesting points to maintain the listeners' attention, how to present him- or herself in the telling, how to avoid certain taboos, and how

to suggest a better life with the story. Recounting the same event at another time, in another place, or in another social arrangement would provoke some change in the meaning, because narratives embed audience, time, and place, implicitly as well as explicitly. For this reason, research designs should observe, elicit, and analyze the narratives participants share in relation to diverse circumstances. Whether participants mention issues like race, gender, or political persuasion is likely to be determined by the present and presumed listeners and readers of the narrative. What may loom large as an expectation or a taboo in an interview about voting preferences and ethnicity with a person of the same ethnic group is likely to differ from what looms large in an interview on the same issue with someone from another ethnic group. Likewise, what emerges in a narrative framed as one's own experiences with a certain difficult situation is likely to differ from what emerges in a narrative about another person's plight. Ignoring such relational complexity—variation of narrator stance and meaning—and any contradictions in favor of coherence could seriously limit the results of a study.

Narrating is dynamic because it is a social-relational activity. According to discourse theory, knowledge and identity are created in the context of culturally meaningful activities in verbal and nonverbal practices, as each linguistic utterance is a response in “the chain of communication” where “no utterance is the first to break the silence of the universe” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 69). Interaction occurs “when the listener perceives and understands the meaning (language meaning) of speech, [and] he simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude toward it. He either agrees or disagrees with it (completely or partially)” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 68). The interactive process of person-in-world has been identified in the narrative quality of “**addressivity**” (Bakhtin, 1986).

Addressivity is a quality of each meaningful utterance, a word, brief narrative, or novel, responding to others in the present, prior, or future moments of history. Whether in the room or in the imagination, those others have contributed in some way to the motivation for an utterance—a definition, explanation, or justification—and a basis for response or resistance. The insight for narrative inquiry is that writers and thinkers, like speakers, direct language to audiences distant or imagined, such as others who may judge them, as well as to actual audiences in the immediate context. Because people select what to say, what not to say, and how to say it in relation to their views about expectations of these audiences, they become part of each text. This concept of addressivity brings context—those to whom a narrative is directed—into the meaning of a narrative text.

Consistent with that view, narrators work with features, like plot, to read, re-create, and respond to expectations and sanctions where they live. The

narrator of the story at the beginning of this chapter was, for example, using a basic plot to interact with assumptions about playgrounds and adults' responsibilities to protect children. The first sentence sets up a problem or trouble that launches the story ("I saw the bird flattened on the ground . . ."), a consequence and complicating action ("One of the . . . children walked toward me . . . crying"), and what appears in this unfinished story to be a high point or turning point ("That's when I knew it was time to act"). The reader or listener who understands this bit of story draws on clues about the context (school context indicated by "kindergarten"), characters ("children," "bird," "I"), and cultural mores ("it was time to act"), thereby interacting with that context and the narrator who created that story world. Aided by plot structure in this way, narrative is not only a memory of reality but also a means to an end, such as to present oneself as a good person, a serious person, or some other kind of person. The process of narrating interweaves such goals in accounts of specific events to show researchers the diverse realities subjects perceive.

Ironically, much research tries to limit the relational dimension, in part because it creates dissonance and in part because the emphasis is typically on conformity and truth. Survey research, for example, minimizes participants' language production. And, as discussed above, research with narrative often emphasizes coherence. Those may be important goals over the life course, but to achieve a coherent sense of self, individuals go through the process of dealing with conflict, tension, and contradiction. Those dynamics are embedded in the narrative process, albeit often unexpressed in favor of a good story or the right story—so research designs must allow the expression of multiple stories relevant to the inquiry. The relation principle contributes to dynamic narrative inquiry by providing guidelines for designing and analyzing for complex narrating. The concrete elements of narrative also contribute to meaning.

The Materiality Principle

The **materiality principle** accounts for the fact that narrating is firmly rooted in actual life, so narrative inquiry is also embedded in life. The physical features, like exclamations (!) or repetitions, and the structural features, like prosaic openings (e.g., "Once upon a time"), contribute to meaning, so we pay attention to those features in narrative analysis. As illustrated in Chapter 5, for example, exclamations (among other detailed narrative features) indicate what is especially important to the narrator. Also, as presented in

Chapter 4, elements of plots, like openings, indicate the narrator's stance on narrated events. "Once upon a time," for example, indicates that the narrator wants us to judge her story as a comment on life from a distance rather than exactly as *her* life. When designing research, we should, therefore, consider the concreteness of meaning in discursive acts and elements, such as whether the genre is autobiography or fiction and the specific features that go along with each, such as whether the referent of the "I" character is the author or an imagined other. Important messages may or may not be stated (often the most contentious ones are *not* explicit). Like the Democrats and Republicans mentioned earlier in this chapter, narrators use the features of their discourse cleverly to express or to hide meanings in appeals to their audiences at specific times and in specific places.

Meaning doesn't float vaguely in the act of narrating to then disappear from the airwaves or into participants' memories, writings, or transcripts of their speech. Meaning is, instead, material because narratives are symbolic systems inextricably linked to persons, contexts, cultures, and circumstances of their histories and expressive moments. When I share an experience of my day, those in earshot, viewers of an e-mail subject line, blog, or online conversation, understand (or can venture a good guess about) why I am sharing the story, how to respond, and what not to say. The meanings come from the patterns of symbols rather than only the literal words. The words "This was the day I had been waiting for!" have meaning, but the arrangement of "This was the day" followed by "I had been waiting for" points demonstrably to the day as an anticipated event rather than just another day. Those arrangements, like the sounds and referents of the words, embody meaning.

Narratives appear to mirror events in everyday life, but even more than that, meaning is material because it integrates biological qualities, like vocalization and hearing, with culture, like agreements about when we share stories and which stories are worth telling. This blend of material and cultural life is expressed with the concept of the cultural tool—a symbolic process developed in human relations for interacting purposefully in the world. The quintessential cultural tool is language, which people use to interact with one other, their environments, and the myriad symbolic realities created in cultural histories (Vygotsky, 1978).

Narrating is also material because it provides specific elements pointing to meaning outside the narrative as well as within it. A simple illustration is a parent's pointing to a dangerous object, alerting the other parent and the baby to steer clear of the object. The parent's use of a finger and any wounds from past perils with this object are physical, while the means for creating shared

attention among the family group are cultural. Pointing an index finger progresses symbolically to the use of pronouns that point in written language to persons, places, objects, or ideas in the physical or conceptual world outside the text. Pointing to an approaching snake, for example, refers to the snake object, expresses an urgent call to attention, and, over time, expresses an understanding that a similar object could present danger. With the aid of devices like pointing and the routines where these devices take on meaning, narrating creates a scenario that leads to future action. This is important when analyzing narratives in research to acknowledge that what people say is often intentional rather than only factual. Verbal pointing techniques—referred to as **indexicals**—connect expressions to contexts because they point somewhere in the world (Reyes, 2011). That research participants use narrative to indicate what they intend to say should be included as research data.

Another example of the materiality of meaning that has implications for research comes from a study with multimodal forms of narrating. In a project to compose a library book about fourth and fifth graders' lives, children digitized photographs they had taken of interesting places in their neighborhoods, used digital drawing tools, and used a standard word-processing program. Analyses of the completed book and the composing process showed that children who had difficulty writing used the physical features of a multimodal computer system to extend their abilities to complete social studies assignments (Daiute & Morse, 1993). For example, one boy whose major difficulty was maintaining attention on writing tasks used computer commands to shift—hyperactively—among visual, oral, and written elements of the class database of material about the students' home neighborhoods. In contrast, a very verbally skilled girl who was also very slow to realize she had ideas to share played with multiple visual tools, including a scanned image of a Hershey bar wrapper and a drawing tool to alter that image. This play with visual and digital tools, in turn, sparked the girl's memory of her departed grandfather, whom she described in a touching narrative about their relationship symbolized by sharing favorite candies. How these young people employed diverse computer tools was integrated into the meaning of their final compositions. The boy who hyperactively selected among different composing modes created a complete text with interwoven aural and visual imagery. The girl used an image as a motivating springboard for a parallel verbal narrative. In summary, highlighted in this example of multimodal composing are the young people's abilities to use various media to enhance personal skills and preferred ways of working to create meaning. These examples suggest meanings that the researchers might have missed had they ignored the

physical composing process. Likewise, the features of narrative (like plot and exclamations) are highly relevant, albeit underused, as clues to understanding meaning in narrative research.

The Diversity Principle

The **diversity principle** refers to differences within and across individuals and groups in narrators' stances—purposes, feelings, and thoughts—in relation to their audiences at the time of telling. This kind of diversity is like a network of connections rather than primarily inside the narrator or about narrator identity. Researchers often design their studies based on diversities between groups distinguished by categories like gender, ethnicity, and citizenship. Such factors play a role in narrator experiences, but they do not completely define individual or group experiences or their tellings, as is explained with the diversity principle. Categories like gender and ethnicity, which are presumed to be within individuals, are complicated when narrators have the opportunity to imagine various situations from the perspectives of diverse others, including adversaries in a conflict, unfamiliar groups or those of another age group as well as from their own perspectives. A common narrative—or script (see Chapter 4)—might emerge from an analysis of narratives by participants who had an opportunity to tell several versions of a story. Given the complexity of contemporary life and human relations, assuming unitary experience based on predetermined factors may not, however, offer the kinds of personal nuance researchers often want from narrative inquiry. Narrating diversity does not mean giving up one's point of view or giving in to another point of view; rather, it involves acknowledging one's complexity and sensitivity to others and environments.

In summary, narrating is an activity of oral, written, and visual communication. Discursive activities, like speaking, writing, choreographed movement, and signage, not only express symbolic thinking but also form it and develop it (Parker, 2005). Narrators use myriad elements, including characters, settings, plots with events that set stories in motion (also referred to as “trouble”; Bruner, 2002; Daiute, 2011), high points or climaxes (Labov & Waletzky, 1967/1997), resolutions, and morals as building blocks for sharing experience, feelings, and intentions. This communicative nature of narrating—*how* people express themselves—is central to *what* people are saying in research projects. That there is so much in a narrative text means that researchers can read context in the text, in large part, with a theory of use. Dynamic narrating also

extends beyond prior approaches that emphasize the individuality of each person's voice, focusing instead on the networking quality that humans use to connect with their social and physical environments. Defining narrating and applying the dynamic process to research design and analysis continue across the chapters of this book. For now, a narrating experience is a step toward understanding the process.

RESEARCHER NARRATING

As someone who has used narrative to interact in your own life, you can do the following activities as steps toward doing narrative inquiry. These activities might remind you that you tell, write, or imagine narratives on a daily basis. They might bring the definitions of narrative above to life for you, or they might add weight to the preceding explanations of the appeal of narrative inquiry. Your own narratives, written or dictated as I suggest below, might also serve as examples to use for practice with various narrative analysis strategies presented in later chapters of this book. (If you dictate your narratives, you can transcribe them for closer study with activities in later chapters of this book.)

- Write about a good childhood experience. What happened? Who was involved? (You can use pseudonyms—that is, invented names.) How did everyone think and feel about the event? How did it all turn out?
- Write about an event you observed and consider humorous (or write about a difficult childhood experience). What happened? Who was involved? (You can use pseudonyms.) How did everyone think and feel about the event? How did it all turn out?
- After writing these narratives, consider the following: What makes them narratives? What are the features? How do these narratives rely on knowledge of the context, audience, narrator, and other factors? What questions do these writings raise for you about narrative and the narrating process?
- Imagine yourself as someone who might listen to or read one of your narratives. Then, redo it imagining that potential audience.

Doing the narrating you are interested in for your research is also a way to consider whether and how your research plan is likely to yield the kind of material you will need and would like to analyze. Many researchers also use narrating in their work by making notes about the research process and experiences, sometimes even when they are not eliciting narrative discourse.

PLAN FOR PRESENTING DYNAMIC NARRATIVE THEORY AND PROCESS

The theory and process of dynamic narrative inquiry unfold in relation to research activities in this book. Chapter 2 presents an approach to dynamic narrative inquiry design, and Chapters 3 through 6 focus on different narrative analysis strategies consistent with this theory. Chapter 2 is an ideal next step for gaining a sense of factors to consider when designing a narrative research project. After that, you can read and do the activities in Chapters 3 through 6 in any order. I present **strategies** including values analysis (Chapter 3), plot analysis (Chapter 4), significance analysis (Chapter 5), character mapping (Chapter 6), and time analysis (Chapter 6) in an order that explores narrative meaning first in a broader social interactive sense (with values), then in terms of narrative structure (with plot), followed by narrative features anchored in, but not limited to, specific kinds of expressions (significance, character, time). Chapter 7 focuses on ways to transform analyses into findings.

For a more detailed overview of the book, see Table 1.1 (on pages 28–29), which presents the process strategies of subsequent chapters in terms of the principles of dynamic narrating discussed in this chapter. The table offers a summary of the major principles of dynamic narrating, defines them briefly, and points to subsequent chapters presenting practical inquiry strategies that apply each principle, with examples and materials.

Each chapter includes a brief overview, an introduction to the foundational concept(s) for the methodological strategy with an example, an explanation of the method and its potential contribution, an interactive example, examples of the strategies in previous published research, a detailed description of the process for applying the strategy in new research, a chapter summary, and a brief transition to the next chapter. Following this progression of concepts and activities will provide you with a good understanding of dynamic narrative inquiry by the end of the book.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT

Researchers have expressed several different rationales for narrative inquiry, including wanting to gain insights about personal experiences and understandings of issues related to their research, wanting to learn about the construction of knowledge and identity, and wanting to assess similarities and differences in ways of knowing across individuals and groups. That narratives are tools

Table 1.1 Plan for Focus on Dynamic Narrating Design and Analysis Strategies

<i>Dynamic narrating principle</i>	<i>Defined</i>	<i>Focal chapters applying each principle in detail (see chapters for methods, examples, implications)</i>
Use principle	People <i>use</i> narrative to make sense of what's going on in their environments and how they fit, so researchers should build on this natural use of narrating for design and analysis in narrative inquiry.	All design and analysis strategies across Chapters 2 through 6 apply this principle. Chapter 7 discusses strategies for determining how analyses across the chapters combine to address research questions in terms of how participants used narratives to make sense of the issues of researcher interest.
Relation principle	Narrators select and organize their expressions interactively in relation to others likely to communicate with and/or to judge them. These may be interpersonal relations, intergroup relations, and/or relations with society more broadly.	<p>Chapter 2: The <i>activity-meaning system design</i> is useful for guiding the sampling and collection of narratives by stakeholders with different perspectives on the research questions and issues of interest.</p> <p>Chapter 3: <i>Values analysis</i> examines how narratives by the different stakeholders interact with the research issues of interest and one another.</p> <p>Chapter 6: <i>Character mapping analysis</i> identifies interactions of characters (and objects) in narratives as they relate to issues in the context and the research issues.</p>
Diversity principle	Because narrating is an interaction with others, it is not a neutral process. Narrating is, instead, defined by the perspectives of people (groups, institutions, and so on) in positions of different influence (power), cultural familiarity (e.g., ethnicity, gender), practices, resources, and so on. Such diverse perspectives with which narrators interact must be considered in narrative research design/analysis.	<p>Chapter 2: The <i>activity-meaning system design</i> suggests purposefully including stakeholders positioned in different ways around the issues of interest (e.g., influence, knowledge, goals) around the research questions and issue of interest.</p> <p>Chapter 3: <i>Values analysis</i> involves examining how the stakeholder narratives relate with their uptake (<i>performing</i>), rejection (<i>contesting</i>), and transformation (<i>centering</i>) of values identified in the first part of the analysis.</p> <p>Chapter 5: <i>Significance analysis</i> identifies narrator individuality by the use of unique patterns of nuance in narratives (<i>evaluative devices</i>) as those relate to others' narratives and the context.</p> <p>Chapter 6: Patterns of narrative <i>time analysis</i> offer additional unique information about narrators' individual and collective subjective orientations to the issues of interest.</p>

<i>Dynamic narrating principle</i>	<i>Defined</i>	<i>Focal chapters applying each principle in detail (see chapters for methods, examples, implications)</i>
Materiality principle	Narrating is a physical process, rooted in the settings, scenarios, expressive features, and social relations of daily life, enacted verbally (also visually and in movement) and with inflections for effect beyond literal meaning (e.g., dialogue, intensifiers, metaphors, repetitions). The symbolic qualities of narrating link so closely to perception, action, and language use common in daily life that they create meaning that integrates symbolic and material expression.	<p>Chapter 4: <i>Plot analysis</i> (e.g., setting, conflict, resolution strategies) indicates the narrator’s perceptual and interpretive framing of specific narrated events, thereby shaping the meaning.</p> <p>Chapter 5: <i>Significance analysis</i> identifies the physically expressive features of narratives (e.g., repetitions, emphases, and verbal and nonverbal markers) for their shaping of meaning.</p> <p>Chapter 6: <i>Time analysis</i> follows the chronological organization in a narrative to address the fact that narratives have a finite period of expression defined by narrative structure (plot with beginning, middle, end). Time markings engage sense and symbolic responses rather than only mirroring real time.</p>

people use is a relatively novel idea for conducting narrative research design and analysis. This idea builds on prior explanations for narrative inquiry and expands the inquiry process for new insights and precision.

Dynamic narrating is, in summary, a concept emphasizing the interactive, communicative, purposeful nature of narrating, leading to strands of meaning researchers can identify to enhance findings about human problems, understandings, and behaviors. Dynamic narrating highlights the interactive quality of narrative for making sense of life events, people, and objects and for developing life in the symbolic realm. As a shared cultural tool (developed and used in culturally relevant ways), narrating is a relational process, occurring within a system of diverse situations and diverse perspectives from an individual’s point of view while always implicating others. This process of sense making occurs with the use of language forms, like narrative, and serves to organize (mediate) people’s interactions in the world. Narrating is purposeful; for example, we use it to present ourselves in ways that connect or disconnect with the social and political milieu or to suggest different views of how things could be. Narrating is also a means for imagining possible worlds (Bruner, 1986). These creative and imitative dimensions together enact narrative meaning.

Drawing on such knowledge about narrating in daily life for research design and analysis is long overdue. This dynamic narrating approach extends knowledge about mundane narrating to the design of research acknowledging that people *use* narratives (they don't pour meanings into them) to relate to social, physical, and symbolic environments (people don't narrate only for interviewers or themselves), to employ features of the genre to create meaning (people don't just speak through narratives to meaning in some other place; meaning evolves with the narrative such that narrator and audience are changed in the process), and to engage a tension between culturally accepted stories and alternatives leading to social change. Because this approach to narrative inquiry draws on the history of human communication, researchers employing it can move beyond the qualitative versus quantitative methods divide. We blur that distinction by acknowledging the combination of the naturalistic and systematic qualities of storytelling. This is not only a mixed-methods approach including qualitative and quantitative analyses but also an integrated approach drawing on the naturalness and diversity of the cultural practice of narrating.

Chapter 2 presents an approach to designing narrative inquiry consistent with the principles of dynamic narrating discussed in this chapter.

Notes

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1. Terms appearing in boldface type are defined in the glossary.