Beyond the Story Itself: Narrative Inquiry and Autoethnography in Intercultural Research in Higher Education

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Abstract: STENHOUSE's (1981) differentiation between research *on* education and research *in* education contributed much to the development of practitioner research in educational settings, yet exemplars of university teachers researching their own practice are rare. Even rarer, in spite of pleas from "international students" for reciprocal dialogue with local academics and students to recognise the value of many different realities and knowledges (KOEHNE, 2006), are practitioners who reflect critically on the personal and professional impact of cultural diversity in higher education (BRUNNER, 2006).

In this article, I critique how a narrative inquiry paradigm supported and challenged me to explore different realities and knowledges about learning and teaching in a UK higher education context in my doctoral research with postgraduate students from many different cultures. Practitioner research is, inevitably, an iterative process—research and practice are inextricably linked and continuously evolving. Thus, through the autoethnographic exploration of my own practice, my "subject positions, social locations, interpretations, and personal experiences" continue to be examined "through the refracted medium of narrators' voices" (CHASE, 2005, p.666), glimpses of which will be seen as the article unfolds.

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1. What Is Narrative Inquiry?

Narrative inquiry is based firmly in the premise that, as human beings, we come to understand and give meaning to our lives through story (ANDREWS, SQUIRE & TAMBOKOU, 2008). Grounded in interpretive hermeneutics and phenomenology, it is a form of qualitative research that involves the gathering of narratives—written, oral, visual—focusing on the meanings that people ascribe to their experiences, seeking to provide "insight that (befits) the complexity of human lives" (JOSSELSON, 2006, p.4). But, narrative inquiry is more than the uncritical gathering of stories. Narrative inquirers strive to attend to the ways in which a story is constructed, for whom and why, as well as the cultural discourses that it draws upon:

> "The term *narrative* carries many meanings and is used in a variety of ways by different disciplines, often synonymously with *story* (...) the narrative scholar (pays) analytic attention to how the facts got assembled that way. For whom was this story constructed, how was it made and for what purpose? What cultural discourses does it draw on—take for granted? What does it accomplish?" (RIESSMAN & SPEEDY, 2007, pp.428-429) [1]

In the gathering and telling of "stories", we are gathering "knowledge *from* the past and not necessarily knowledge *about* the past" (BOCHNER, 2007, p.203, original emphases), thus:

> "Making stories from one's lived history is a process by which ordinarily we revise the past retroactively, and when we do we are engaged in processes of languaging and describing that modify the past. What we see as true today may not have been true at the time the actions we are describing were performed. Thus we need to resist the temptation to attribute intentions and meanings to events that they did not have at the time they were experienced" (ibid, p.203). [2]

Yet, it is often only retrospectively that we come to understand and give meaning to events (POLKINGHORNE, 1995); memory is always selective and plays tricks on us. It lurks in the shadows waiting to catch us out—"(It) is far from uniquely (auto)biographical (...) (it) is grounded in what is tellable" (ATKINSON & COFFEY, 2003, p.118). [3]

As a very young child I was always writing stories. I cannot recall the content of those stories but I remember that Mrs. Jackson, my teacher, used to take them home to show to her husband. The meaning that became part of my family narrative was that I was always writing stories, very creative stories. But is that the meaning that I am applying retrospectively? How can I know? Thus, in *The Story of the Rotten Shrimp*, told later in this article, Cheng-tsung may not have experienced the events that he describes as racist but it is in the retelling of them to an audience—me—and my subsequent analysis that this meaning was attributed. [4]

2. Narrative Inquiry and Intercultural Research

Narrative inquiry then has evolved from the growing participatory research movement that foregrounds a greater sensitivity to social and cultural differences. "Narrative inquiry embraces narrative as both the *method* and the *phenomena* of study" (PINNEGAR & DANES, 2007, p.4, my emphases) and "characteristically begins with the researcher's autobiographically oriented narrative associated with the *research puzzle*" (CLANDININ & CONNELLY, 2000, p.40, original emphasis). In my research I acknowledged the importance of accessing and understanding participants' different social constructions of reality (BERGER & LUCKMANN, 1967), examining issues in depth through exploratory, open-ended conversations, prioritising holistic understanding situated in lived experience. The study also drew upon related methodological and theoretical perspectives derived from the field of international and comparative research, combined with recent advances in critical theory. Most notably, these included this specialist field's central engagement with context sensitivity and its long-standing challenge to research or policy initiatives that, knowingly or unknowingly, promote the uncritical transfer of policy or practice across cultures (CROSSLEY & WATSON, 2003). I thus began by problematising discourses and policy interventions that prioritised Western models of learning and teaching in multicultural settings. [5]

The research design came to draw increasingly upon research perspectives and strategies developed and applied by writers such as CLANDININ and CONNELLY (2000). Methodological strategies developed by such scholars prioritise autobiographical experiences and conversations "between theory and the stories of life contained in the inquiry" (ibid, p.41). True to many of the principles of a broader qualitative paradigm, however, this eventual methodological positioning was not fully conceptualised before the study began. Rather, it emerged and evolved during the research process itself. Sustaining this methodological agnosticism enabled me to remain open to, and to explore, a myriad of possibilities for conducting intercultural research. Holding on to this "not knowing" was uncomfortable but maintaining the position of the agnostic enabled me to recognise eventually the suitability of narrative inquiry and autoethnography for this evolving study. [6]

3. A Practitioner Researcher

As a practitioner researcher with a steadfast belief in reciprocal dialogue between academics and students (KOEHNE, 2006), I did not enter the field to gather research data. I am in the field, "a member of the landscape" (CLANDININ & CONNELLY, 2000, p.63), in relationships with students, my main research participants. I turned to narrative as a mode of inquiry because I was "persuaded that social science texts needed to construct a different relationship between researchers and subjects and between authors and readers" (ELLIS & BOCHNER, 2000, p.744-745). Reading of how "the narrative text refuses the impulse to abstract and explain, stressing the journey over the destination, and thus eclipses the scientific illusion of control and mastery" (ibid), I was hooked. Narrative inquiry and its allegiance to social constructionism that holds that "our

constructions are the product of social forces, either structural or interactional" (BURR, 2003, p.20) fitted with my critical questioning of the epistemological foundations of many of the methodological paradigms prevalent even in qualitative research and reflected ways in which "constructions" emerged through "social forces" of relationships between the participants, between the participants and me and between you, the reader, and me. [7]

From the very beginning of the study I wanted to provide "insightful accounts of processes which go beyond the particular story" (PRING, 1999, p.6). It would, therefore, have been disingenuous and inconsistent with the methodological paradigms that I espoused eventually to "plan my tactics in advance", rather than "let them unravel as life does" (GABRIEL, 2003, p.181) by separating out the research process into the discrete elements of more conventional studies. I believed that I needed to work within a methodological approach that was sensitive to the different worldviews that I was encountering in my interactions with students. At the same time, I acknowledged the paradox of seeking to develop a conceptual framework that was grounded in those different worldviews. Working within a postmodern paradigm where regimes of truth are questioned, may of course be disrespectful to the very people to whom I was seeking to be respectful and whose conceptualisations of truth may remain firmly modernist (ROBINSON-PANT, 2005). But I did not write as a "disembodied omniscient narrator claiming universal and atemporal general knowledge" (RICHARDSON & ST. PIERRE, 2005, p.961). I presented the narratives as I perceived them, recognising the situational limitations, articulating the ethical complexities. "Postmodernism ... distrusts all methods equally. No method has a privileged status" (ibid). More paradoxes: By positioning myself as a narrative inquirer and writing autoethnographically, I have privileged those perspectives and they, too, have their limitations. For example, the recognition that "I, too, lead a storied life and the research relationship is part of my experiential text" (WINKLER, 2003, p.399) may be seen as a limitation as the telling and retelling of this experiential text may detract, at times, from the storied lives of others. [8]

Narrative inquiry became the most appropriate methodological approach, because I was investigating meanings of experiences but, at the same time, the research process itself was a series of experiences, a journey. "When you are preparing for a journey, you own the journey. Once you've started the journey, the journey owns you" (SHOPE, 2006, p.165). The journey did begin to own me, entirely consistent with the concept of "the narrative text ... stressing the journey over the destination" (ELLIS & BOCHNER, 2000, pp.744-745). [9]

Finally, constructing a "dialogical experience" (McINTYRE, 1997, p.41), allowed those critical comments to be made about dimensions of working with cultural diversity in higher education that are often uncomfortable and contentious and can, therefore, remain unsaid. Such silence makes it difficult to initiate reasoned debate (BACK, 2004) losing opportunities for increased understanding. I grasped those opportunities—the interrogation of my own "whiteness" and my own "culture" as a British woman, became intrinsic to the study, contributing much to the subsequent changes that I made to my pedagogical practice. [10]

4. Gathering Narratives

Narrative inquiry does not privilege one method of gathering data. Because the research is life as it is lived on the landscape (PHILLION, 2002) then inevitably other events, actions, happenings are also a part of the research and are woven into the stories that are retold. I invited students to have conversations with me that were tape-recorded, transcribed and "analysed", but "interviews" can be considered of less importance than the noting of events, feelings, hunches, conversations in the corridor (CLANDININ & CONNELLY, 2000; CLOUGH, 2002). Thus in the brief, storied extract of a narrative interview with Cheng-tsung you can "read" how everyday events and experiences were recalled and stories told about them by each one of us. In narrative inquiry, the relationships between researcher and participants remain open and "agnostic". I could not "know" the stories that would be meaningful for research participants and so rather than ask a series of questions, I invited participants to tell stories that were meaningful for them and I shared the resonances that those stories had for me. Although the overall aim of the doctoral research was to explore experiences of learning and teaching in the culture of our department, had I only focused on those dimensions, I maintain that I would not have been able to hear the unanticipated narratives (CORTAZZI & JIN, 2006) that led to profound and different understandings and meanings. Thus I came to "know "something" without claiming to know everything" (RICHARDSON & ST. PIERRE, 2005, p.961), a crucial dimension of researching across cultures, particularly as I was seeking to be sensitive to cultural diversity and to the ethical issues inherent in conducting research with students. Sustaining this position of the respectful and curious inquirer brought forth rich stories that changed through our interactions (ELLIS & BOCHNER, 2000). Exploring our diverse experiences of learning and teaching through individual and collective narratives allowed me to begin to understand the cultural embeddedness of learning and teaching knowledges and how these knowledges are "narratively composed, embodied in people and expressed in practice" (CLANDININ & CONNELLY, 2000, p.124). [11]

5. Analysing Narratives

Not only are narratives gathered by using a variety of methods, they may also be re-presented in various ways, such as analysis of narratives, narrative analysis (POLKINGHORNE, 1995), structural narrative analysis (LABOV, 1982), dialogic/performance analysis (RIESSMAN, 2008) and fictionalised representation (CLOUGH, 2002). Consequently, there is even more onus on the researcher to articulate transparently how s/he gathered and analysed the data. The narrative interview, a major way of gathering verbal narratives, may bear resemblance to broader definitions of semi-structured and unstructured interviews or it may be viewed as a collaborative activity, one in which the researcher shares the impact on her/him of the stories that are being told. Through such an interactive process, different stories may emerge, stories that are co-constructed (CHASE, 2005). There can though then be an inference that because a story is co-constructed, it somehow produces the "truth"; this we need to be wary of: "Techniques like *prolonged interaction or joint construction* (...) will not lead to a

more correct interpretation because ... an indeterminate ambiguity (...) lies at the heart of the interview interaction" (SCHEURICH, 1997, p.73, my emphases). [12]

What is important is that the interview or conversation is conceptualised as problematic and complex—it is never a simple process of sitting down with a research participant and asking them a series of questions or issuing the invitation to "Tell me about ...". Those who use interviews as a research method are often cautioned to articulate and render transparent the supposed power imbalance between interviewer and interviewee, but the power in any interview shifts constantly. Research participants will often find ways to tell the stories they want to tell rather than or perhaps as well as those that they think the listener wants to hear. In addition, the researcher herself may well be bringing her own agenda to the interview. She may want to be seen in particular ways, want or need the participant to hear something of her experiences and opinions. This probably happens in any research interview—the difference in the type of narrative interviews that I strive to engage in is that these elements are surfaced, articulated in so far as they can be, so that readers can gauge how the complexities of "difference" have been grappled with. [13]

6. Researching Intercultural Communication—Messy Research?

Narrative inquirers, as indicated earlier, are cognisant of audience. They will be the audience for their narrator (s), and then in turn they re-tell the stories to other audiences—their readers. Narrative inquirers recognise that a story will differ depending on the listener and the teller, when the story is told and in what context (MISHLER, 2004). The role (s) of the researcher (s) is/are thus extremely complex and "research involving this level of human interaction and human relationship is going to feel messy!" (CONNOLLY, 2007, p.453) [14]

In my conversations with research participants and with the re-presentation of them, I strove to be transparent so that it is obvious where we share similar knowledge and experience. When that knowledge and experience is not shared, we make it explicit. Throughout my conversations with Cheng-tsung, for example, there are numerous points when we do not understand or think we do not understand each other, resulting, sometimes, in "messy" dialogue:

> "Seeking to recognise how 'race' ethnicity and other social differences are produced and have effects in qualitative interviews is undoubtedly difficult and messy work. Rather than trying to fix this mess with methodological strategies such as matching, or analyses that erase the complexities of difference and power relations in the interview, there is much to be achieved by distrusting any neatness, and actively searching out and valuing the complexity and richness that comes with the mess" (GUNARATNAM, 2003, p.104). [15]

Experiences that resonate with each other lead us to connection, but these connections are not "contrived versions of commonality" (ibid, p.102). Cheng-tsung and I (and other research participants), by interrogating those "points of commonality for the dislocations and differences that they carry" are finding

"points of alignment and orientation between us" (ibid; p.104). These are significant elements of any research encounter, but perhaps rendered more significant when those encounters are manifestations of the intercultural research "tentacles". The conceptual framework of narrative inquiry enabled me to grasp some of those slippery tentacles and to hold on to them for sufficient time to enable the insights, some of which are summarised in this article, to occur. [16]

I actively searched out and relished the complexity of difference, but took some time to distrust the implied neatness of the conversations with those with similar ethnic and cultural backgrounds to me. Those conversations were as complex, if not more complex, once I began to engage in questioning that supposed neatness. For example, in my re-presentation of my conversations with another white British woman, I queried whether our apparent sharing of knowledge and experience produces a kind of collusion, a positioning of the "international students" as the "other" that we fail to confront in our research conversation. It was only later, when I was analysing this conversation that I became aware of this. In sharing my interpretation with her—she agreed. [17]

7. Autoethnography

The definition of autoethnography is an:

> "Autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of the personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations" (ELLIS & BOCHNER, 2000, p.739). [18]

This definition is congruent with the narrative inquiry principle of the researcher's story being intrinsic to the study. Narrative inquirers engage in intense and transparent reflection and questioning of their own position, values, beliefs and cultural background. There is, therefore, much potential for such articulation of self-awareness and reflexivity to be used in and to enrich research in intercultural communication (FOX, 2006; TRAHAR, 2006 a, b, 2008). Making oneself apparent via such reflexivity, however, carries with it a danger. One risks making oneself more central to the discourse and pushing "other" voices out to the margins (EDWARDS & RIBBENS, 1998). Increasingly, in reporting narratives, an autoethnographic account that provides information on the researcher's own "voice, stance, assumptions and analytic lens so that the reader is abundantly clear on whose story is whose" (CONNOLLY, 2007, p.453) is advised and I trust that by the time you read *The Story of the Rotten Shrimp*, you will have gained enough such information to enable you to understand the meanings that were ascribed to it. [19]

Narrative inquirers may vary in the extent to which "they" are present in the writing and may employ one or more of three voices. An authoritative voice "speaking differently from but not disrespectfully of the narrator's voice"; a

supportive voice "pushing the narrator's voice into the limelight (...) creating a self-reflective and respectful distance between researchers' and narrators' voices" (CHASE, 2005, p.665) or an interactive voice, one that reflects the intersubjectivity between their voice and the narrator's voice. Through the interactive voice, researchers "examine *their* voices—their subject positions, social locations, interpretations, and personal experiences—through the refracted medium of narrators' voices" (ibid, p.666, original emphasis)—and it is this voice that I chose to employ. [20]

8. Critiquing Narrative Inquiry

As with any other paradigmatic position, narrative inquiry is not without its critics; I want to acknowledge three areas of criticism of narrative inquiry. One criticism is that "If you are a storyteller rather than a story analyst then your goal becomes therapeutic rather than analytic" (ELLIS & BOCHNER, 2000, p.745). In my case this statement resonates powerfully as it was narrative therapy that drew me originally to narrative inquiry. As a counsellor, I relished the challenges of the narrative therapists WHITE and EPSTON (1990) to the major theoretical traditions in counselling. This stance is though an example of the Cartesian dualisms prevalent in Western social science—I can be a story "analyst" with an "analytic" goal but the stories may also have a "therapeutic" value. [21]

Another allegation is that researchers often re-present narratives as if they were "authentic" when:

> "Autobiographical accounts are no more 'authentic than other modes of representation: a narrative of a personal experience is not a clear route into 'the truth', either about the reported events, or of the teller's private experience (...) 'experience' is constructed through the various forms of narrative" (ATKINSON & DELAMONT, 2006, p.166). [22]

Such criticism is entirely legitimate in my view, especially when narrative inquirers may be seduced into a belief that in order to re-present faithfully another's story, the story needs to be simply reproduced—whether textually or visually. But this reproduction will only ever be as the researcher heard it—even if the text is given to the narrator for member-checking or even if the event is filmed. *The Story of the Rotten Shrimp* is a good example of this. That story was constructed through Cheng-tsung's telling of it to me and my responses to it. Both he and I can never know whether that story told to another person, especially one who shared his cultural background, would have been the same or even whether it would have been told. So, in narrative inquiry, we work with what we gather but look for "the supporting evidence and argument given by the researcher" (POLKINGHORNE, 2007, p.476) for the claim that is made. [23]

A further criticism levelled at narrative inquirers is that, in their concern to re-present the meanings that individuals ascribe to their lived experience, they resist what FOX defines as "a globalised, homogenised, impoverished system of meaning" (2008, p.341), and oppose collective understanding being derived from

their work. While recognising that each individual is unique, those such as JOSSELSON (2006) call for the need to "build a knowledge base out of these proliferating studies" (p.5), challenging that "what we seek in narrative research is some understanding of the patterns that cohere among individuals and the aspects of lived experience that differentiate" (ibid). There is yet again a danger of falling into the trap of Cartesian dualisms. *Either* the individual voice is privileged *or* collective understandings are made, when both are possible. ANDREWS poses some provocative questions for those who consider that collective understanding is unwise:

> "How does this individual with whom I am speaking reflect wider social and historical changes that form the context of his or her life? I am convinced that if I can listen carefully enough, there is much to learn from every story that one might gather. For society really is comprised of human lives, and if we can begin to understand the framework that lends meaning to these lives, then we have taken the important first step to being able to access the wider framework of meaning that is the binding agent of a culture" (ANDREWS, 2007, p.491). [24]

Such questions demonstrate how narrative inquirers can build a knowledge base without relinquishing the respect for the individual voice. So, in *The Story of the Rotten Shrimp*, I can begin to understand how difficult it can be for students from Taiwan to be critical and to complain and to experience particular behaviours as racist. I can therefore develop greater sensitivity towards such behaviours and in addition ensure that in my teaching I develop strategies that will enable students to express any dissatisfaction without feeling that they do not have the appropriate words to do so. [25]

9. The Story of the Rotten Shrimp

The Story of the Rotten Shrimp is an example of an unanticipated narrative (CORTAZZI & JIN, 2006). It seemed to emerge from my desire to share with Cheng-tsung, a postgraduate student from Taiwan, my feelings about the "'whiteness' of the academy that seemed to go unnoticed and uncommented" (CLEGG, PAR & WAN, 2003, p.164). The concept of institutional racism (SCHEURICH, 1997) was challenging me to interrogate not only my own teaching and learning practices, but also to investigate more critically the dominant pedagogy of the institution and of my department. I was keen to move from "teaching as assimilation (...) a kind of colonial phase" (BIGGS, 2003, p.123) towards a transformational ideal of assimilation (YOUNG, 2001). I wanted to share some of these reflections with Cheng-tsung, to gain his perspective:

Cheng-tsung: **Sheila:**

And what we don't do enough of ... and I feel very strongly about this ... is this, what we're doing now, is to talk to you about your experiences and to use those experiences to inform and to look more critically at what we do. So I kind of wondered ... I'm interested in how you feel about that.

Personally I think that ... I mean the support from the university, especially Education School, I think it is enough for me personally. [26]

This is not the response I was expecting. I anticipated that he would agree with my statement, but his response is that he has felt supported. He then disrupts the conversation to tell me two different stories, stories about specific experiences from his life in the UK. He might be said to be radically transgressing from the "knowable order" of the "interview", providing another example of what I wrote earlier in this article "the indeterminate ambiguity of interviewing "(SCHEURICH, 1997, p.75).

Cheng-tsung: **Sheila:**

Yeah, personally, yeah I think some part of England or outside the university, that image is I mean ... is different from I thought before. Yeah. I thought I mean British should be a very polite country. (LAUGHTER) According to my image that this is a very clean place or something like that. But some image is contrary to my past imagination. I mean outside university. I mean some people are really rude, yeah.

In what way? Can you give me an example?

Because ... such as 2 weeks ago I went to the airport to receive my family and I went to the bus station and I tried to get on, get on the coach. And the coach is delivered from the bus station to the airport every half hour. But when I get there in time the coach driver told me, told me that he won't drive this time because he said that the traffic is so bad. But there is no previous information about cancelling this bus service.

So he just cancelled it?

He just cancelled. Nobody told me that, nobody told me this kind of a ... this cancellation. And he didn't, I mean, apologise to me. And the coach station, they didn't say anything about this kind of ... such kind ...

So that would be an example of how you don't think that we're particularly polite

Cheng-tsung:	Sheila:
Yeah. But I found it is usual in this place, yeah. It's not so I mean ... strict, strict on the regulation all the time.	
I found this interesting, it's a very interesting. (LAUGHTER) Yeah so maybe in this way. And some feeling is very subtle because I found sometimes you're, you're communicating with some businessmen or ... if you go shopping sometimes. I found the feeling ... that made me feel I am not respected. But I think maybe it is the reason maybe I don't use the very fluent English. So maybe I misunderstand this meaning or meaning yeah. So maybe this is part of the language difficulty.	
	But what it makes you feel is not respected.
Yeah [27]	

He then continues to illustrate further his feelings about not being respected by telling me the story that I have titled *The Story of the Rotten Shrimp*:

Cheng-tsung:	Sheila:
I remember that one of my colleagues in TEFL pathway, once she was going to a noodle bar, yeah, and she ordered a bowl of noodles. And she found that, that something in her bowl, I mean a shrimp or something like prawn or something like that, is rotten. Yeah. And they called the waiter to complain about this situation. But they found that the, the attitude of this waiter is very bad. Yeah? But I mean maybe we are afraid of, I mean, the language, how to communicate well or maybe we are so worried about we are so rude in some way, so ...	
	Oh so you think **you** might be being rude?
Yeah yeah. So we force ourselves not to complain more, even if we feel we are not ... uncomfortable. So the thing is ... I mean is over without any further, any further solution ... even if they still feel unsatisfied.	
	That's really difficult, isn't it? Because you don't know why that is do you? What you're saying is you don't know ... the waiter was **rude** and you don't know whether the waiter was rude because you complained ... or because of the **way** you complained, because of the **language** that you used.
Yeah.	

Cheng-tsung:	Sheila:
	And because you don't know, you don't know why he was responding to you in that way, you then kind of don't do anything, you're left not doing anything.
Yeah. (LAUGHTER) I mean in that kind of a situation we don't have enough words to complain properly So most of the time we will ... I mean ... constrain or ...	
	Constrain yourself. [28]

In an earlier conversation, Cheng-tsung had told me that Chinese people constrain themselves and avoid confrontation. In this conversation, much later in our relationship, I feel that I have permission to probe a little more about his difficulties with making a complaint. I had become aware that it can be difficult for Confucian-heritage culture (CHC) students to express any dissatisfaction with my teaching (CORTAZZI & JIN, 2001; HO, 2001), and so I wanted to find out how to encourage them to do it. I want to respect the importance of face (BOND, 1986, 1991), to be mindful of the authority invested in the "teacher" figure (PRATT, KELLY & WONG, 1999), and yet I still want to hear about their dissatisfactions. I use the "rotten shrimp" as a metaphor, which he responds to immediately with laughter. I sense that he likes it; he is sharing my attempt at humour:

Cheng-tsung:	Sheila:
	So would that happen here? Thinking in the department, you know if there was something you weren't happy with, I mean say something like the rotten shrimp ...
(LAUGHTER)	
	... in a bowl of noodles, what would you do about that?
You mean in education school?	
	Yes, yes.
I feel that I am very relaxed if this kind of situation happened, because I know you are here and I know you are very supportive. So if something happened I am not satisfied, I will tell you.	
	Right yeah. So you would have been happy to do that?
So I'm very relaxed here, because I have a very strong support behind my learning. So I don't have to worry... something ... I mean, I mean I always have enough support, so I can relax in my learning.	

Cheng-tsung:	Sheila:
	But so ... okay, so what you're saying then is that that's very important, that's been important, to feel that you've got that support. So that actually if you were not happy about something you could have come and spoken to me about it.
Yeah that's right. Yeah the point is some colleagues of mine, I mean … a Taiwanese student, they are not quite satisfied with their learning here. I think maybe the main reason is that they don't have sufficient support from their tutor. [29]	

I change the direction of the conversation at this point. I have obtained from him some expression of the dissatisfaction I was searching for, even if, it was not dissatisfaction with me, but with others. He tells two stories, both of which seem to be about rudeness and finding it difficult to complain. I take the opportunity to use the metaphor of the "rotten shrimp" to explore with him how he would complain about situations with which he were unhappy in the learning environment. He responds that he would have been able to come and talk to me, because he had sufficient support and can feel relaxed in his learning. This is in marked contrast to an earlier conversation, where he told me that he would find it very difficult to complain to me. [30]

JOSSELSON (1996) suggests that narrative inquiry should be mutual and collaborative, within a relationship that is being established over time, which allows for the telling and re-telling of stories. In *this* conversation, held at a later stage in our relationship, he re-tells stories told in an earlier conversation. He disagrees with me. He "disrupts", determined to let me know the lack of support felt by some of his colleagues. Thus the coda here is that we agree that respect and valuing are important, but that the ways in which respect and valuing are demonstrated, are different in our respective cultures. Such differences may result in or be derived from racist attitudes that masquerade as claimed misunderstanding. [31]

10. Intercultural Communication and Critical Pedagogy

A critical pedagogic approach seeks to dismantle the hierarchy that creates a power differential between academics and students (IPPOLITO, 2007) yet in seeking to dismantle such hierarchies, we may overlook the different ways that people understand each other's behaviour and "hierarchies", especially in intercultural higher education contexts. "Hierarchies" may be very familiar to many students who can feel threatened by apparent attempts to dismantle them. No matter how much we talk of shifting and fragmentary identities (SARUP, 1996; FOX, 2006) resisting essentialised notions of the latter, we *all* bring different understandings to the international classroom, including ways in which the relationship between learner and teacher is conceptualised (SALILI, 2001). To

what extent then, in seeking to dismantle this "hierarchy" are we acting in ways that are at best counter cultural for many people and at worst dismissive of their traditions? Through my practitioner research as a narrative inquirer, I have learned that, seeking to dismantle or dismiss the authority vested in me can be threatening for those students who are more familiar with positioning the academic as an authority figure. It is much more inclusive to accept the different conceptualisations of the teacher/student relationship, certainly at the beginning of that relationship, as this can lessen the anxiety of such students. [32]

In addition, I have explored the cultural embeddedness of some other culturally inviolable Western academic traditions such as critical thinking and plagiarism elsewhere (see TRAHAR, 2006a, b, 2007, 2008). Those such as WELIKALA (2008) engage in similar critiques:

> "For instance, for Japanese learners, criticality is interwoven with their norms related to interpersonal relationships. Moreover, they do not relate verbal silence to intellectual passivity. Their argument is that critical learning also involves critical thinking, and hence, for them, arguing for a point of view itself is not an assurance of critical learning (...) those who talk too much during lessons may not be critically re-flecting but 'shouting' since they have language fluency" (WELIKALA, 2008, p.166). [33]

There is of course a more fundamental and perhaps more uncomfortable question to ask (BACK, 2004) which is to what extent are we, certainly in the UK given our history as a coloniser, perpetuating imperialism by not opening up *all* of our higher education practices to scrutiny for their unacknowledged cultural entrenchment? "Even the cultural hybridity permitted within an internationalised HEI is scripted by the neoliberal presumption that Western norms should prevail" (SIDHU, 2004, cited in HAIGH, 2008, p.430). I suggest that engaging in narrative inquiry to research intercultural communication in learning and teaching in higher education is a way to challenge this neoliberal presumption. [34]

11. Ethical Complexities

Inevitably, the complex ethical issues that are a consequence of this messy research can rarely be resolved at the outset and can be difficult to anticipate (BOND & MIFSUD, 2006). Many of the participants in my research, including Cheng-tsung, wanted to be named so that their stories would be made visible. But, in narrative inquiry, as I indicated earlier, the research does not depend on the gathering of one form of "data". The research depicts lived experience and, in my life, certainly my professional life, although conversations about learning and teaching are a large and significant part of it, so, too are my dreams, daydreams and reflections, my interactions with people who are (so they say) "nothing to do with the research".

> "For example, who decides what may be disclosed about whom? What is restricted information and only disclosed outside the formal exchange, as it were 'off the record'? These are familiar problems in any qualitative research. However the nature of the narrative process means that concerns of this type may be difficult to anticipate

in advance and may only become issues as they arise ... both parties need to engage reflexively in both the subject matter and the ethical challenges to create the human circumstances that enable the research to flourish and to ensure the intellectual integrity of the project" (BOND & MIFSUD, 2006, p.250). [35]

In so far as it was possible, all those foregrounded in my research read and approved what I wrote and, in many cases, added their own comments that I included. But, in some cases, by naming the person, other people who had chosen not to be named, were rendered visible. In each of these ethically important moments, I used my intellectual integrity to make a judgement call (SPARKES, 2002) and chose to take a communal sense of responsibility. In doing so, I overrode the desires of some to be named. But ownership of stories is one of the complexities of narrative research. If the story is constructed collaboratively, then who "owns" the story? Has it become a communal story of which we all have ownership? Or, indeed, do any us have ownership because the story was not *my* story or *their* story but *became* a story through those stories? (YARDLEY, 2008) [36]

I tried to imaginatively feel my way into experiences and included dialogue so that the reader can make judgements about the meanings that I have ascribed. I sought to ensure that the spirits and values of the original storytellers as they expressed them are embedded in the writing. But I must not forget that I, too, am an original storyteller and I, too, have striven to be accountable to my spirits and values. [37]

12. Glass Palaces and Glass Cages?

I was concerned that I might be accused of being "self-indulgent rather than self-knowing, self-respectful (...) or self-luminous" (SPARKES, 2002, p.214). As a practitioner researcher, I wanted to go beyond "self-indulgent exercises to provide ... deliberation and critique that will generate guideposts for future practitioner research" (BROOKER & MACPHERSON, 1999, p.219). I wanted my research to make a difference to me, to my participants, to my practice, to those who read it. Consequently, it was important to establish criteria against which I wanted the research to be judged—to go beyond the story itself:

"How do we judge the merits of these stories? When do we know they're reliable and telling? I think it's the same judgement we make about any author or any character. Is the work honest or dishonest? Does the author take the measure of herself, her limitations, her confusion, ambivalence, mixed feelings? Do you gain a sense of emotional reliability? (...) Does the story enable you to understand and feel the experience it seeks to convey?" (ELLIS & BOCHNER, 2000, p.749) [38]

Clearly in an article such as this, the extent to which the above judgements can be made are limited. I hope, however, that I have given a flavour of the research that will enable you to at least consider the above evaluative criteria. The impact of cultural diversity on the academic is still rarely exposed in the literature. That was a motivation for this research and, I suggest, the extent to which I exposed

and critiqued the cultural influences in my own life, is a very distinctive dimension. I tangled with the complexities of critiquing the paucity of reflexive, lived experiences in the literature, while, at the same time, problematising reflexivity as culturally a constructed discourse as any other. Questioning notions of reflection and reflexivity may have made me a thorn in the flesh for those who speak unproblematically of these concepts as essential elements to developing one's own practice. I have, however, come to disagree with ERLANDSON (2005) and those other critics who position reflection in action as another method of controlling the practitioner, and of denying the value of her own practical skills. I do not agree that by "thinking" about my practice and my experiences and interactions with others, I have " been disciplined to judge and normalise (my) everyday practice with tools not from (my) own practices but from (my) discursive captors" (ERLANDSON, 2005, p.668). Perhaps that is the glass cage that GABRIEL (2003) refers to but, for me, it is questioning myself and sharing those questions with others that moves me, occasionally, into the glass palace. [39]

Finally ...

> "Globalization is the context of economic and academic trends that are part of the reality of the 21st century. Internationalization includes the policies and practices undertaken by academic systems and institutions—and even—individuals—to cope with the global academic environment...Globalization may be unalterable but internationalisation involves many choices" (ALTBACH & KNIGHT, 2007, pp.290-291). [40]

Their words "and even—individuals" imply that "individuals" somehow are not actors in the drama of the changing nature of higher education and yet it is we, the individual students and academics, who constitute the "deeply embedded values, cultures and traditions" (STENSAKER, FROLICH, GORNITZKA & MAASSEN, 2008, p.2) of higher education, the values, cultures and traditions that are rarely articulated and exposed to critical scrutiny (TRAHAR, 2007; TURNER & ROBSON, 2008). Subjecting events inside and outside of the higher education "classroom" to intense and sustained critical reflection through narrative inquiry can produce "insightful accounts of processes which go beyond the particular story itself" (PRING, 1999, p.6), can contribute much to effective intercultural communication and to the internationalisation of the academic Self (SANDERSON, 2007). Intercultural communication in higher education does not just happen (OTTEN, 2000, 2003). Through narrative inquiry, I have learned to be explicit about diversity in higher education contexts and to acknowledge that we may all experience difficulties and frustrations, encouraging people to learn, through dialogue, about their differences and similarities.

> "Voice without control may be worse than silence; voice with control has the capacity to become a less perishable form of power because in essence it allows voice to enter into a more genuinely reciprocal dialogue. Such dialogue could provide a more enduring challenge to the power relations of research, knowledge production and the public sphere. To create the conditions for dialogue therefore implies a research

agenda that both revisits research methods and ethics, but also unmasks the inequalities of the global public sphere" (GREADY, 2008, p.147). [41]

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