

Learning and life stories: Narrative inquiry in the classroom and fieldwork setting

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Narrative inquiry and teaching geography

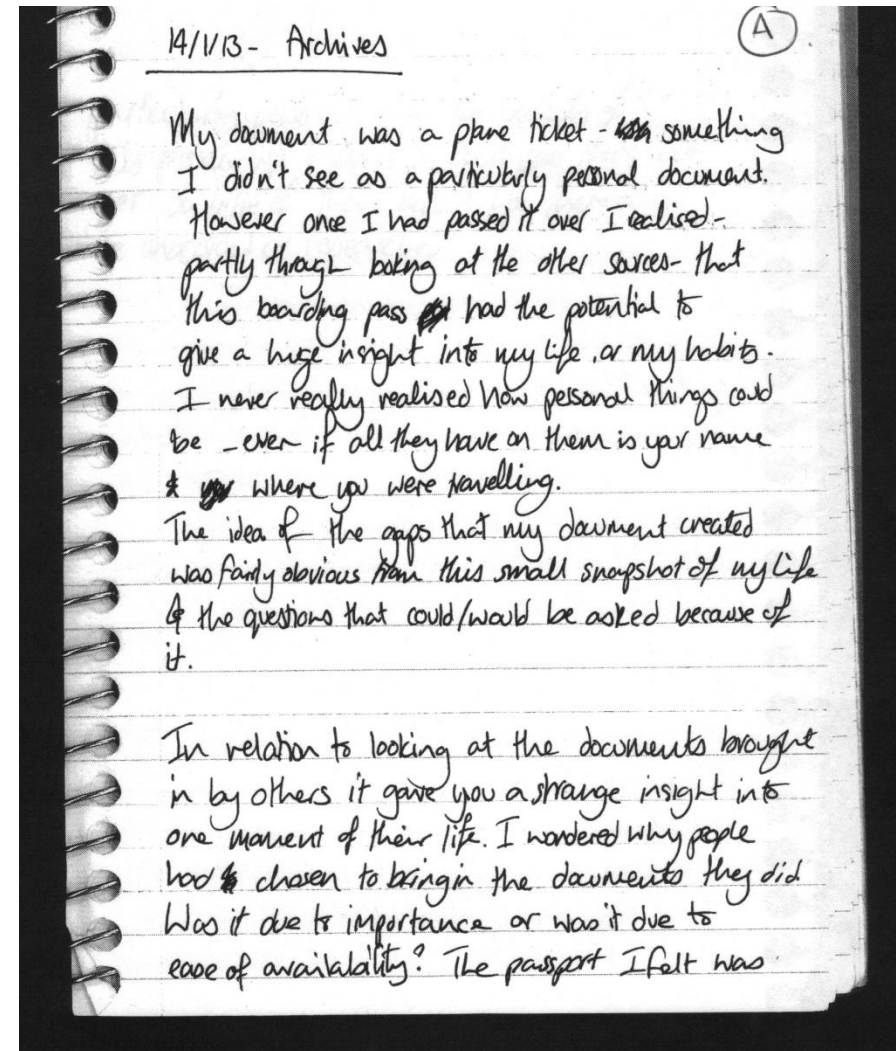
People are always tellers of tales.
They live surrounded by their stories and
The stories of others; they see everything
That happens to them through those stories
And they try to live their lives as
If they were recounting them
(Sartre, *Words*, 1964).

‘Story is the very stuff of teaching, the landscape within which we live as teachers and researchers, and within which the work of teachers can be seen as making sense’ (Elbaz, 1991, p.3).

Example 1: Tales from the Archive

Class Exercise:

To bring to class one item from your own personal archive to discuss with the group. Each group to collect their archival items and to hand them to the next group for investigation. In groups, discuss the items that you have in relationship to thinking in more depth about the politics of the archive.



Example from student H's notebook
(Historical Geographies, 2013)

‘It was fascinating looking into other people’s lives and trying to figure out the circumstances in which they were made. Felt like I was in *The Killing* ... I was annoyed as I forgot my original document that I planned to take and I was excited about sharing it ... I was torn between bringing in a letter from a close friend or a group travel diary from when I went to South America[.] I chose the latter as I felt it was less personal than the letter. I would have felt more self-conscious about the letter although I was still quite aware that at certain parts of the travel diary there were specific anecdotes about me. [A]lthough humorous I still felt quite self-aware’ (Megan, *Historical Geographies*, 2013).

‘At first when passing my document to my own group I felt fine about explaining to them the reasons behind it, etc. But then being told that it would be passed to another group I felt panic – then I realised it was no big deal. Yes I knew some of the people in the other group, so they would see my name on the document and know it was mine – other people who I didn’t know were looking at my document and I could see/hear them wondering and evaluating it. This in turn made me curious as to what they thought about the document’ (Siobhan, *Historical Geographies*, 2013).

Example 2: Narrating journeys

NARRATIVE ACCOUNT OF TRIP TO THE RIVERSIDE MUSEUM FOR HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHIES PROJECT

AS PREPARATION FOR OUR HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHIES PRESENTATION, THE SIX MEMBERS OF OUR GROUP EMBARKED ON A JOURNEY TO THE RIVERSIDE TRANSPORT MUSEUM IN GLASGOW. BEING IN OUR DESTINATION TURNED OUT TO BE HALF THE FUN...

MEETING AT TEN O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING OUTSIDE THE MEDICAL BUILDING, PROVED TO BE A DIFFICULT TASK FOR SOME, AS IT WAS COLD, WET AND MUCH TOO EARLY TO FUNCTION. HEADING DOWN DUMBARVON ROAD, WE EVENTUALLY FOLLOWED A PATH ON WHICH I HAD NEVER BEEN - EVEN THOUGH I LIVE IN THAT AREA. A WRONG TURN (IN THE WRONG DIRECTION), A TRIP ACROSS A FOOTBRIDGE, AND HALF AN HOUR LATER, WE FINALLY ARRIVED AT OUR DESTINATION. HOWEVER, ONE CHALLENGING OBSTACLE STILL LAY AHEAD - AS THE RAIN PETERED DOWN, THE SIX OF US STOOD SEPARATED FROM THE MUSEUM BY WHAT SEEMED LIKE A HUGE SWAMP, BUT WHAT WAS ACTUALLY JUST A BOBBY PATCH OF GRASS.

AFTER HAVING 'HOPPED' NOT SO GRATEFULLY OVER THIS HURDLE WE WERE GREETED BY THE UNUSUALLY STRUCTURED BUILDING AHEAD, THAT PROMISED BOTH AN ADVENTURE AND AN UNUSUAL EXPERIENCE. I HAD NEVER BEEN TO THE TRANSPORT MUSEUM BEFORE, AND SO WAS EXTREMELY INTERLUED ABOUT WHAT THE MUSEUM WOULD BE LIKE.

AS WE ENTERED THE BUILDING WE IMMEDIATELY WERE SURROUNDED BY A VARIETY OF VEHICLES AND DISPLAYS CONTAINING STORIES FROM THE PAST. WE FOLLOWED THE PATH TO THE LEFT OF THE ENTRANCE AND WERE 'TRANSPORTED' BACK IN TIME - BACK TO THE WORLD OF GLASGOW IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY. SURROUNDED BY CARRIAGES, SHOPS, CLOTHES AND TAVERNS, THE EXPERIENCE WAS TRULY AS IF WE HAD BEEN TRANSPORTED THROUGH TIME. THIS WAS BY FAR THE BEST PART OF THE MUSEUM.

Example from student L's notebook (Historical Geographies, 2013)

'We all met outside the Wolfson Medical building to begin our Riverside Adventure.

It was a bitter, bitter day and I was running 5 minutes late. Sorry about that lads. As fit young individuals we decided to walk instead of [use] public transport. It took approximately 30 minutes. Once there, it was nice to get a heat and we began by turning left into a Victorian cobble street where we past out first point of interest - The Old Subway ... We then worked our way around the ground floor displays; playing with the interactive motorbike display and listening to the tales of George Parsonage (Student A, Historical Geographies, 2013).

References

Elbaz, F. (1991) Research on teachers' knowledge: the evolution of discourse, *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 23: 1-19.

Webster, L. and Mertova, P. (2007) *Using Narrative Inquiry as a research method: an introduction to using critical event narrative analysis in research on learning and teaching*. Routledge: London.