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Seeing red: poetry and metaphor as responses to representational challenges in critical narrative research¹

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Research with young people who ‘do not fit the mould’ requires innovative and unconventional methods, but what are the implications of such methods for scholarly representation? This paper reports on the development of such a method with students diagnosed Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and offers one view of the borderland spaces and tensions between critical theory and narrative inquiry. In particular, the paper defines the methodology that underpins the ‘critical cover narratives’ method, describes the application of this approach within a doctoral study, and identifies resultant issues of representation when combining narrative and critical approaches. The paper then details the use of a tapestry metaphor to reconcile these issues. The central premise of the paper is that differing methods produce different knowledge, which demands different forms of representation. In making this case, the paper discusses the importance of a balance between the epistemological and aesthetic within scholarly representations of narrative inquiry.

Keywords: arts-based educational research; narrative inquiry; poetry; attention deficit disorder

Introduction

My journey to critical narrative research was a pragmatic one. It did not start with a philosophical orientation, but like many other narrative researchers it came out of a ‘position of service to those among us who suffer most’ and because of a ‘respect for members of these communities’ (Clandinin and Rosiek 2007, 64). Those whom I would serve were young people with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), their families and teachers.

ADHD² is defined as a biological dysfunction that results in hyperactive, inattentive and impulsive behaviours to such an extent that it causes problems in home, school and work settings. While there is ongoing debate about the reality and construction of the disorder, it is a phenomenon that it is real in its consequences. The number of young people diagnosed and treated with psychostimulants for ADHD has grown rapidly in Northern America and Australasia over the last two decades, with the UK, Europe and South Africa beginning to mirror these trends (Berbatis, Sunderland, and Bulsara 2002). The most common understanding of ADHD is as an individual deficit, a construction that has been left unchallenged by the dominance of medical and psychological discourses in the community (Prosser 2008a, 2008b).

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However, my experience as a youth worker with young people diagnosed with ADHD did not conform to this deficit view and led me to consider research into their schooling experiences. This focus on schooling was due to the accounts of school life told to me by the young people with which I worked. Immediately such research was faced with a challenge. The inattention, anti-authoritarian behaviour and hyperactivity that typify ADHD (along with frequently low levels of written literacy), presented a problem for traditional qualitative and ethnographic research methods. Too easily the objective eye of ethnography can become the oppressive 'I' of imperialism (Conquergood 1991), which could further reinforce a deficit label such as ADHD. As a result, I looked to alternative methods. My search occurred during a period of 'post-experimental' blurring of the boundaries between social science research and the humanities (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 3), which brought with it an ethical self-questioning about the resultant crisis of representation (Conquergood 1991), and it was these ongoing debates that shaped my early thinking.

The work of Eisner (1985; Eisner and Peshkin 1990) that emphasised the arts as an 'enlightenment tool' was also influential on my early reflections. So too was the emphasis on empathy and the potential for change in the work of Barone (1992, 1995). Further, the exploration of the use of narrative in doctoral dissertations (Piantanida, Garman, and McMahon 2000), as well as consideration of the qualities of credible arts-based educational research (Garman and Piantanida 1996), was highly influential. Each of these influences honed my plans until I imagined an arts-based inquiry project with a critical emphasis, an approach that is becoming more widespread in qualitative studies in education (Finley 2005). It was in this context that I developed a 'critical cover narrative' method (Prosser 2006b).

However, developing this method brought with it unforeseen challenges. Firstly, there has been a tendency among some studies to use story-telling as another strategy within open-ended interviews, and narratives as just another text suitable for coding analysis. While the use of linguistic or discourse analysis tools can go some of the way to redressing this, there remains the risk that the rich contextual, collaborative, emotional and partial understandings provided by narrative will be lost. With a shift of method comes a shift of epistemology, and with new forms of knowledge about a participant's experience comes new responsibilities to present this knowledge in all its integrity.

Secondly, if the rich forms of knowledge that are created through narrative methods are stripped down to conform only to traditional scholarly genres, there is a risk that meaning will be misrepresented or presented as a single 'truth'. While the traditional epistemologies of academia seek greater transparency around certainty and truth, emerging aesthetic ways of knowing emphasise indeterminacy and multiple understandings (Gingrich-Philbrook 2005). For that reason, narrative accounts need to be presented within academic texts in a form and structure that allows for the integrity of the story, as well as the coherence of the whole text. There is both the responsibility to allow for interpretation by the reader and the responsibility to present rigorous analysis by the researcher, each without presenting a single 'enlightened truth' or 'systemless relativism'.

Thirdly, there is the challenge of authorship and voice. In traditional research methods, the goal is to minimise the influence of the researcher in meaning-making, while in narrative research method, the researcher is inevitably a co-creator, consciously or not. Hence, any pursuit of the 'real' or 'secret' narrative is based on an epistemological error and for a researcher to present narratives as such is ethically

questionable. Narratives emerge within a shared performative space between researcher and participant and in the fluid context of a certain time, place and audience. There is a responsibility to present every narrative as a collaborative telling, with any metanarrative presented as the story of the researcher, not the 'real story' of the participant.

It is these complex responsibilities, and how this researcher responded to them in a study, that is the focus of this paper. The aim of this paper is not to document how young people labelled with ADHD make sense of that label through various narratives, this is done elsewhere (Prosser 2006a, 2006b); it is to present one researcher's response to the associated issues of representation. In particular, I explore the use of a tapestry metaphor to maintain flexibility and coherence, integrity and analysis. Thus, the product is not a woven-together reality uncovered by a now enlightened researcher; rather it is one researcher's weaving that encourages readers to cut their own cloth.

Narrative, narrative inquiry and 'critical cover narratives'

I did not see the purpose of this narrative inquiry to present the 'truth' or 'real story' about ADHD. Rather, I sought a series of stories that offered alternate views of what ADHD was like, and that would prompt professional audiences to rethink their pre-conceptions. My way of approaching this was through a consideration of discourse communities (Habermas 1972, 1974) and in particular the notion of small groups discovering collective meaning through dialogue. I also found Habermas' work influential through his ontological categories (objective, subjective and normative-evaluative) which led to an interest in dominant, cover and private narratives. My understanding of these narratives drew heavily on my re-interpretation of work in the area of teachers' narratives.

There are probably as many nuanced definitions of narrative research as there are researchers working in the field. At its broadest, narrative research is any research that involves narrative, whether it uses quantitative or qualitative analysis (Pinnegar and Daynes 2007). Chase (2005, 651) presents narrative research as a subtype of qualitative inquiry that is an 'amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods – all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them'. Chase maintains a strong sense of narrative being orientated around eliciting and collecting stories. However, Clandinin (2007), drawing on her work with teachers, argues that although the terms narrative research and narrative inquiry are used almost interchangeably, she has found it helpful to make the distinction that 'narrative inquiry' is based in the relational. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) extend this definition by arguing that 'narrative inquiry' is a methodological approach that is about ordering and exploring experience, including the interplay between individual, institutional, cultural and social contexts.

Clandinin and Connelly (1996) saw this interplay at work in western schools and used narrative as a way to uncover new perspectives on the experiences of teachers. Their model of dominant, private and cover narratives highlighted the complexity at work within narrative accounts and challenged the contention that there are single narratives of experience. In this model, dominant narratives align with the normative/evaluative realm, and private narratives with the subjective realm. The perspectives of these different narratives often differ, which requires teachers to mediate cover

narratives for public presentation. These narratives negotiate private and dominant demands to satisfy various audiences within the school, and are built on a Deweyian view that all experience is transactional and there is no underlying 'real' account or reality (Clandinin and Rosiek 2007). While private and dominant narratives compete for primacy within cover narratives, the elements within these narratives do not inherently embody conflicting material or power interests. Consequently, this model operates largely as a pragmatic and interpretative tool, which can be used within various theoretical frameworks.

If one adopts a critical framework, then all human relationships embody negotiation of power and narrative (due to its grounding in human relationships) must also be associated with power relations. Such a perspective is all the more useful when the dominant narrative is fostered by socio-economic priorities in schooling. This is the case with ADHD:

- ADHD describes the failure of young people (mostly boys) to show the cultural capital traditionally required to be successful in Australian, American and British school institutions (Prosser 2008a);
- ADHD diagnosis peaks with entry into primary or secondary school (Prosser 2006a, 2008a);
- Many Australian and American parents seek ADHD diagnosis due to inadequate school support (Prosser 2008a); and
- ADHD emerged in the context of a greater emphasis on student behaviour management (Sapon-Shevin 2005; Adams 2006; Prosser 2008a) rather than on management practices of schools (Slee 1994; Lloyd 2006; Graham 2007).

Readers of this journal will be familiar with Graham's (2007) paper that argues the institution of Australian schooling is complicit in the recent spectacular increase in ADHD diagnosis, particularly as the competitive demands of contemporary schooling have resulted in diversity increasingly being deemed a disorder. With these influences in mind, it is not unreasonable to argue that ADHD is the visible tip of an iceberg of students who are being alienated by neo-liberal schooling policies in western nations.

In this context, the dominant narrative (or ADHD label) can be seen as an embodiment of the impact of this 'welding education to the economy' (Smyth et al. 2000, 5), a point made all the more pertinent in the case of ADHD as diagnosis and drug use has been shown to be higher in regions of lower income and employment (Prosser and Reid 2009; Reid et al. 2002). If one takes the acceptance of these discourses around ADHD as a thesis, then the antithesis must be those private narratives of student learning and experiences of schooling that defy these dominant narratives. It is from this dialectical tension that 'critical cover narratives' can emerge to not only mediate narratives that better reflect the experiences of students, but also to disrupt the disempowering discourses around them.

This approach mobilises the concept of narrative identity. Emerging from philosophical ideas inspired by Freud and Sartre, narrative identity understands humans to be in a process of constantly creating themselves, selecting from the overwhelming wave of experience only those memories which we deem appropriate and repressing those that we do not. This approach argues that if the principle of selection is a negative view of self, then over time what is created is a deficit identity through a plot line of experiences that emphasise failure within the memory and pre-ordain the selection of future failures. In response, 'narrative therapy' (White and Epston 1990) seeks

the identification of unique events outside the existing plotline to develop more emancipated and enabling identities for young people with ADHD (Nylund and Corsiglia 1997). However, this emphasis on the individual responding to master narratives through counter narratives can overlook the influence of environment and social contexts. In response, 'critical cover narratives' seeks to prompt change for the individual as well as in their context. 'Critical cover narratives' (Prosser 2006b) draw from narrative therapy the notion of interplay between the normative and subjective within narrative identity, as well as from cover narrative through the notion of complex and multiple narratives, while also acknowledging the influence of economic interests in education on the construction of dominant narrative discourses.

'Critical cover narratives' differ to more utopian counter-narratives of the same tradition, such as 'critical personal narratives' (Denzin 2005) in that they do not assume that the private or personal is inherently the embodiment of the critical. 'Private narratives' as a separate category avoids relegating the experiences of individuals to secondary (or false) consciousness, while reifying those testimonies, stories and events that foster a critical view. This is because 'private narratives' are kept beyond the reach of the researcher to fully understand or interpret. By definition, 'private narratives' are only known to the participant, and while in practice the researcher may see glimpses of these narratives, these narratives remain private. While 'public narratives' are far more accessible through the analysis of dominant discourses, it is the realm of cover narratives that is most accessible to interaction with the researcher.

However, with 'critical cover narratives' as the focus of critical intention, the individual's conception of both private and dominant narratives are free to evolve, with the private narrative not burdened by carrying the responsibility of being the overt source of emancipation. Such an approach enables the exploration of experiences that enable a new cover narrative that is outside notions of deficit, which in the process supports the re-narration of identity. With 'critical cover narratives', the final goal is not only for the individual to re-narrate their personal realm and gain an understanding of the broader social and material influences at work, it is also to develop strategies of resilience to disempowering contextual narratives.

In summary, 'critical cover narratives' seek the emancipation of those disempowered by deficit identities (such as ADHD) through three means. Firstly, this approach uncovers the deficit assumptions within dominant narrative discourses and makes them visible to participants. Secondly, the researcher and participants work together to draw on elements of private narratives to construct new and more empowering cover narrative accounts of identity that reflect their abilities and learning successes. Thirdly, the researcher and participants collaborate to create heuristic cover narratives to use with parents and teachers to encourage the empathy and conditions to sustain these new identities (the definition and specifics of heuristic development will be detailed in the following section).

Issues of method and analysis

The two-year fieldwork component of this study was conducted across two sites in southern Australia and one site in mid-west of the USA. It consisted of three stages. Firstly, a quantitative review of diagnosis and drug use for ADHD was conducted to establish the relevance of the project (see Prosser and Reid 1999). Secondly, a series of interviews that sought narrative accounts of student experiences of ADHD and

schooling were carried out (see Prosser 2006b, 2008a). Finally, I was involved in the co-production of critical cover narratives, which resulted in over 100 hours of narrative production and recorded interaction with 12 adolescent students diagnosed with ADHD and it is this last stage that is the focus of this paper.

The first procedural step was to create a series of contextual narratives. These included the various accounts of the converging story of my journey to the study, the site context and my thoughts and reflections on entering the research sites. Through poems such as *Camps*,³ I also revealed the emotional investment that I brought with me to the project.

'You run camps? Who for?'

Boys who need a break, boys whose parents need a break,
or just boys who are broken.

'What are they like?'

He's eight, likes Power Rangers, cricket and footy,
is shy, still has baby fat, and the sweetest smile you've ever seen.

But he won't shower, he smothers himself with shit,
so the adults won't be attracted to him and do what they did last time.

He's nine, shines at eight-ball, exploring and climbing,
is tiny, tough, even nuggetty, and is a bundle of happy energy.

But his mum doesn't want him, he cries and kicks a door down in anger,
so the adults won't forget he exists and do what they did last time.

He's ten, plays basketball and handball no-end,
is slow to catch on, yet so lovable.

But he's ADD, he yells, he fights, he threatens, he taunts,
so the adults won't know he's the weakest and do what they did last time.

He's eleven, loves go-karts, bikes and fishing,
is tall and lean, maybe even stringy, and has freckles and a college hair-cut.

But he loses his temper, he hits and bites and spits and screams,
so the adults won't know he's afraid and do what they did last time.

He's twelve, lives for woodwork, computers and horses,
is short for his age, yet so mature, and has the round-rimmed glasses of an artist.

But he wants to die, he scratches his wrists and watches for cars,
so the adults won't be there any more and do what they did last time.

These are just boys, who are broken, it breaks me too.

Any more questions? (Prosser 2006b, 22)

Having recorded the context, I then moved to ways of collecting narratives of student experience. Firstly, I met with individual students to listen to their experiences of ADHD and schooling. Secondly, and simultaneously, I met with the participants in small groups to discuss the insights from individual meetings and shared experiences. Rarely were these in coherent or complete narratives, which reinforces that researchers are not privy to coherent 'private narratives'. In response, I would keep narrative snippets for use in narratives that I would write later. These two different approaches to collecting narratives had the useful role of concurring or contradicting individual accounts, which highlighted the uniqueness of individual accounts, explored cover narratives and provided two lines of triangulation (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). The third way I used these accounts was through a process of collaborative writing.

Our collaborative narrative creation extended the cover narrative metaphor described earlier through a focus on 'heuristics'. Barone (1997) defined the heuristic as a work of literature that is based in social research but written with the specific purpose of disturbing the commonplace assumptions of a particular audience. Drawing on this definition, we saw our audience to be parents, teachers and other education

professionals, so in our groups we discussed ‘what if’ scenarios. ‘What if your teacher saw you or ADHD differently?’ ‘What if you could tell them something positive about learning that they do not know about you? What would it be?’ ‘What would you need to change about school to make it better?’ ‘How would you make a news report about ADHD to show the media what it is really like?’ The purpose of these heuristics was to change the perspectives of parents and education professionals and to help create the conditions where new, more liberating, narratives of the students might survive and grow.

In our groups we created heuristics, and for each of these, I took a different role in its provocation, creation and recording, but with most narratives the main concept, scenarios and events were decided by the group. I brought transcript extracts from previous interviews to these sessions to guide discussion about the appropriate dialogue and content in the heuristic. I also used these texts to assist the group to decide when differences of opinion occurred what should be included in the text. These decisions were made by consensus or the majority vote, where I had an equal vote with the participants. The only censorship that I exercised was in the area of overtly sexual content as it was part of the ethics approval process that the project did not access sensitive information not directly associated with the research topic. The students had final editorial control and some who were confident would take the drafts away to read, return with comments, while more often, their lack of confidence with literacy saw me read to them, and they would discuss and debate the draft in their groups.

I also worked with the participants to write heuristic poems. The following poem was inspired by a student telling me about an experience they had on their way to school on the day of one of our interviews in the USA. The student provided the imagery and content, and was insistent that ‘poetry must rhyme’, so I provided the meter and more complex language to provide this poetic structure. The poem was produced in three stages, the first was where the student used dialogue to organise the key ideas into an order, while I recorded the language of our discussion. In the second stage, I took the key ideas and dialogue and sought to draft a text with the student that represented both, and in the third stage, we met on several occasions to rework the poem into its final form. The result is our collaborative work, *Red the Squirrel*.⁴

Red was an adventurous squirrel who used to love a surprise,
 he would greet it with a smile and a glint in his shiny eyes.
 But last week after he left his tree so solemnly he swore,
 he’d never leave it again not after what he saw.
 He’d scampered down to follow the kids that passed each day,
 kicking up autumn leaves as they skipped along the way.
 He followed them to the road, then down a path,
 along a fence, through a gate, and across a park.
 He followed until they went inside a building much taller than his tree,
 which he scampered all around to discover what he could see.
 At last he found a dark oak tree like the one he knew
 and clinging to it half way up he got a better view.
 He saw kids and tables, pictures and chairs,
 but still he couldn’t work out what was going on in there.
 Red had heard of these places before he’d heard kids call them schools
 but he didn’t know what they did except teach facts and rules.
 Finally, the kids came out and Red hatched a cunning plan
 he’d befriend a likely looking youth and get carried in by hand.
 He spied a blonde young man who looked like he was in for fun,

so Red confidently bounced up to him in a sort of cautious run.
 Well the plan worked well and before much time could pass
 Red had been smuggled in to his first mathematics class.
 The boy sat down to take out his books and Red's problems started about then
 because schools you see are not designed for the likes of our adventurous friend.
 There was too much to do and see for Red to stay in the student's pack
 so as soon as he opened it to get his books Red scampered up his back.
 The other students gasped and giggled but the teacher didn't seem to see
 he was facing the blackboard writing something about probability.
 The student told Red to stay still on a seat because that was what you do in school
 and to do it Red tried and tried but it seemed more than he could do.
 Red was naturally full of energy and not suited to sitting still
 and doing that for half an hour was an impossible act of will.
 So Red shuffled around avoiding the teacher's glance
 trying to explore this thing school making the most of his chance.
 But Red couldn't seem to learn anything because the teacher just droned away,
 and because he struggled to read or write there seemed no point anyway.
 So eventually when the teacher came to escort him back outside
 he was kind of glad it was over and scampered home to hide.
 Maybe Red could have liked school better if he had learnt how to behave when young,
 or maybe it just was the way he was, so once born the deed was done.
 Or maybe if the teacher hadn't droned on, or had taught with squirrels in mind,
 he might have learnt more and had a far less harrowing time.
 Or maybe if schools were about something else and taught for different sorts,
 maybe then Red could've fitted in or at least lasted until sport.
 But now safe back in his tree Red knows that school was not for him,
 and when he sees the boy in the yellow school bus he gives him a knowing grin.
 – written with US participant, Michael (Prosser 2006b, 1)

The title of this paper uses this metaphor of 'Red' the squirrel and also alludes to the participants' descriptions of ADHD-associated anger as 'seeing red' and the critical orientation of the study.

In my planning, I underestimated the difficulty of the turn to a more critical student perspective, a struggle also noted by Exley (2008). As a result, I changed my initial plan to give greater prominence to the student accounts as the source of narrative analysis and I started work on a heuristic of my own. This drew on the interviews with the students, took scenes from our cover narratives and drew on the academic literature.

To develop this heuristic I used the transcripts and texts from all our previous narrative efforts by coding around key research questions, critical perspectives, topics of relevance to education professionals and themes that students identified as important. I then worked these into a narrative using direct quotes from interview and narrative production transcripts as the foundation for dialogue development. The product, which was openly by my authorship, told the story of *James McKenzie* (see Prosser 2006b, 237).

While doing this I also recorded my thinking and reflection during the process of analysis, often in the poetic form, as is demonstrated by *Blackbird*.⁵

In my garden at home there lives a blackbird,
 with shiny eyes and bright orange beak,
 it lives bouncing from bough to bough,
 pecking at grapes until they fall.

In my garden at home the vine grows over pavers,
 which catch the fallen grapes,

and keeps them at various states of decay.
Until the blackbird comes for them.

Today the blackbird came.

It swooped down to the pavers from above,
and pecked a recently fallen fruit.
It pecked and flicked,
pushed and poked,
at times tilting its head
as if another perspective might make it more manageable.

Eventually it picked up the grape,
and rolling it from tip to back of its beak,
and with lurch of the head,
tried to swallow.
It would not go.

The little bird pecked and poked,
dropped and pushed,
again and again trying to swallow.
Finally it succeeded, nearly choking as it did so.

In my garden at home I am that blackbird.
My grape is ADHD.

I peck at it,
to peel back its skin,
to see that medication works,
to see the label used as resistance,
and to see that it matters more to parents than kids.

I poke at it,
to peek inside the classroom context,
to see relationships with teachers as crucial,
to see ways teaching practices make it harder,
and to see things that make it hard for teachers.

I pick it up,
to feel the weight of my undertaking,
to see school as the place ADHD is most keenly felt,
to see that adversarial relationships with parents are the rule,
and to see the medical discourse dominant.

I roll it back,
to bite into the larger issue of society's response,
to see medical interventions overlooking social needs,
to see practitioner mislabelling and malpractice,
and to see the media hindering in its help.

I struggle to get it all down.
Eventually I do,
knowing that it is consumed
but not digested.
That will take time ... (Prosser 2006b, 190)

In this way method and analysis came together in the study; however, different knowledge demands different forms of representation, which presented additional challenges.

Issues of representation

Study into a topic as controversial and sensitive as ADHD will always present ethical challenges (see Prosser in Piantanida and Garman 1999, 154). However, the choice to take a critical narrative approach also brought issues of ethical integrity around how the various accounts were to be represented without compromising or limiting the new knowledge that they created. My way forward was found through the work of Piantanida and Garman (1999). From their experience with research students facing a similar dilemma to my own, they had developed a list of criteria for assessing arts-based inquiry. They had refined these criteria to negotiate the demands of the academy, while still allowing scope for creative research and protecting the authenticity of participant accounts. In Garman and Piantanida's model of quality, a project must ring true to people's experience and the relevant discourses, and if it did not it must explain why (verite). It must be structurally sound, hold together and present a developing logic (integrity). The project must demonstrate deep reasoning and reflection (rigour) as well as professional relevance (utility). It must be meaningful, attractive and inspirational (aesthetic and vitality). It must also present enough detail to appear reliable and conceivable (verisimilitude). In response, my dissertation addressed each of these in turn (see Prosser 2006b, 178ff.), however, the most persistently challenging of these criteria was that of 'integrity'.

Since the texts in this project included academic, literary, poetic, critical and vernacular texts; how could I demonstrate integrity in logic and structure? How could I write in the tone and style required for scholarly analysis and interpretation (with an orientation toward revealing the workings of power and ideology on individual experience), and still represent diverse narratives in a way that respected the initial telling? The remainder of this paper details how I responded to these challenges to construct a final document.

Metaphor as a response to issues of representation with 'critical cover narratives'

My inspiration to use metaphor came initially from Willis' (1998) use of the metaphor of an art gallery to structure his doctoral work. My background in pre-Renaissance literature had left me with an interest in a period where knowledge and understanding was sought through the spoken and the aesthetic, rather than just the written form. Woven throughout my study are echoes of the symbolic ordering of knowledge through allegory and the verbal ordering of knowledge through alliterative verse. However, it was Witherell and Noddings' observation that 'stories and metaphors attach us to others and to our histories by providing a tapestry' (1991, 1) that soon had me considering the Bayeux Tapestry as a possible organisational metaphor for my study.

The Bayeux Tapestry (see Figure 1) was commissioned after the conquest of England by William the Conqueror in AD 1066 and was among the first recorded pieces of political 'spin' in English history. This colourful tapestry is 20 inches high and 230 feet long and includes a central panel that tells the story of William's conquest

Figure 1. Bayeux Tapestry – *Harold reports to Edward*. ©Reading Museum Service (Reading Borough Council, all rights reserved).

through a number of connected images, which is surrounded by a border of symbolic patterns and animals, and then contained by a hem of loose floral swirls. The tapestry appealed to me as a metaphor because it enabled versatility and coherent structure for the final document. This extract from the study explains the versatility of the metaphor:

Imagine for a moment a medieval tapestry, its hem a thoughtfully woven strip of burgundy and gold, giving limit to its scope and context to its scenes. Imagine also a series of smaller scenes encircling the tapestry, each bordered by cleverly woven threads. Imagine then these scenes flowing into and out of a large central panel, which presents a single image giving meaning to hem, scenes and the tapestry as a whole.

You feel a tension as you view this tapestry. It is a tension between wanting to stand close and admire the intricacy of each scene (along with the complexity with which the many threads are woven together), or to stand back and appreciating the tapestry as a whole. You sense that by paying too much attention to one you will lose a sense of the other. This is my fear, and this is the tension I feel as I write. As I present a bigger picture of the growth of a critically orientated research project into ADHD, I am also attempting to draw attention to the uniqueness of every story. I feel the tension of the many discursive threads that weave through a complex phenomenon such as ADHD.

Around my central panel lies the scenes, the stories, each made up of an interplay of threads (all part of a larger fabric of meaning), which weave their way into the centre and together tell this tale of growing Enlightenment about ADHD. In doing so, I experiment with the power of personal and collective narratives to disrupt the hegemony of today's scientific explanations of reality, just as they disrupted with hegemonic Christian reality of the early Middle Ages.

As you read, you will see threads weaving a way through the scenes encircling this tapestry. You will hear the account of the gradual enlightenment of a researcher, and the growth of a unique research project. Inlaid and woven amongst this, you will see the accounts of children, parents and teachers. Stories, possibly seeming unrelated that, like a collection of stitched frames, will come together to form a pastiche of ADHD experiences in schools.

As you read, you will see the threads stretch to the large central panel, which depicts a medieval Cathedral towering over a bustling town and surrounded by wilderness. It is here, that you will find a piece of academic writing, a final central panel into and around which each scene is woven. As you read, you will be invited to take a large step back and ponder what all these threads woven together may mean ... (Prosser 2006b, 7–8)

It is important to note that my use of the tapestry metaphor was a response to the practical representational challenges in my final document. The demands of academia required me to present a story of enlightenment, of finding the ‘truth’ of ADHD, while the demands of narrative aesthetics required me to represent the partiality, subjectivity and beauty of my new understandings. As I sought to find a way through what I saw as an impasse between the traditional academic/text (which seeks to reduce ambiguity and advance reason), and the literature/narrative text (which seeks to access the imaginative and remain open for interpretation), there is a risk that some might view it as either one or the other. However, in a contemporary context that publicly emphasises agreement, like Gingrich-Philbrook (2005), I am looking for ways of understanding and living without unified agreement. This is where the symbolism of the Bayeux Tapestry’s structure of hem, scenes and central panel, I hope, draws on the hand-made, partial and politically spun associations of the tapestry metaphor.

Notably, woven into the hem of the Bayeux Tapestry are the names of its weavers, and in the hem section of my final document I portrayed my role as a weaver/writer. This section presented my motivation to conduct this study, my curiosity about the topic and my emotional investment in the project. Poems such as *Camps* (presented earlier in this paper) are indicative of the texts included in this section. It also presented ethnographic narratives about my process of entry and first impressions on entering the research sites. The purpose of the narratives in the Hem was to provide context and to support subsequent interpretation by others.

The scenes (or frame) section represented the various narratives that were co-produced in the study. Like the tapestry, each of these were represented by an iconic image, be it a squirrel, bird or a child. Poems such as *Red the Squirrel* (presented earlier in this paper) represent the texts included in this section of the study. As noted earlier, my role in the co-production of these narratives varied, however in all cases, the students had editorial control (although many were reluctant to exercise this once the narrative took written form). In this section, the narratives were produced without editorial change; however, these scenes were framed by stories and poems that I had collected or created (such as *Blackbird* presented earlier) that gave insight into either the narrative or my analysis, but still allowed the reader to interpret the narrative independently.

Finally, the central panel was my attempt to provide scholarly analysis on the preceding data. It was in this section that I presented both my heuristic about James McKenzie and the series of more traditional interpretative texts for the participants, parents, my peers, policy makers, teachers and the media. In doing so, I sought to use

metaphor to bring together different genres (while maintaining the integrity of each), different objectives (while maintaining new insights and the multiplicity of experience), and different approaches to representing experience (both scholarly analysis and aesthetic appreciation). My goal was to overcome potential tensions between epistemologies, methodologies and genres to present a final dissertation that embodied qualities of verite, integrity and verisimilitude.

Concluding remarks

There has been a rush over the last decade toward the burgeoning area of narrative (Barone 2007; Pinnegar and Daynes 2007) and this has resulted in a growing interest in matters of ontology, epistemology and method, as well as the mapping of narrative research in relation to social science approaches from within other philosophical traditions (Clandinin and Rosiek 2007). Such considerations have important definitional and delineation implications for the credibility of the approach. It is vital to the integrity of narrative as a research approach, and the reliability of individual narrative projects, that they be grounded in a philosophy and a research tradition. Such traditions provide a series of ontological and methodological do's and don'ts (Piantanida, Garman, and McMahon 2000) to underpin our work.

However, within efforts to ground our work philosophically there is a risk in that one can lose a sense that experience is more aesthetic and emotional than philosophical boundaries would allow. I am reminded of Conquergood's (1991) consideration of the mind over body hierarchy in academic work, where the rational is taken to be epistemologically superior in a way that denigrates the seriousness of sensual knowing, such as that embodied in rigorous ethnography. Related to this is debate within arts-based educational research around the relative role of rigour in art and research (see Barone and Eisner 1997; Richardson and Lockridge 1998; Finley 2003; Piantanida, McMahon, and Garman 2003; Slattery 2003). While some delineate between small 'a' arts to represent personal artistic renderings and large 'A' Arts to represent public renderings that conform to art traditions (Greene 2000), I would argue that it is important to pursue rigour in both art and research. Perhaps this position is more in line with Gingrich-Philbrook's (2005) exploration of the epistemic/aesthetic creative double bind, where artist/researchers seek to work in the tension between equally valued, but equally inadequate, demands from the competing discourses around their practice.

Too often the demands of the academy are the very things that 'kill off' aesthetic (Finley 2003) and creative knowing (Gingrich-Philbrook 2005). Hence, we must heed Hendry's (2007, 495) warning that narratives cannot be reduced to an object of study in a way that is a 'violation of the sacredness of humanity'. We must respond to her call for an 'epistemology of listening' (Hendry 2007, 494). While modern Western thinking is preoccupied with seeing, measuring and mapping, those of us dedicated to narrative inquiry must not forget a heritage of speaking, hearing, performing and feeling as paths to understanding.

In this paper, I have explored how I came to use critical narrative method with ADHD, as well as the representative challenges that resulted. In doing so, I argued that narrative research must retain the qualities of both art and research. Caution is needed so that any efforts to strengthen the position of narrative research (within an academy that reifies epistemological boundaries) or to use it for socially just purposes (within a critical ideological tradition), do not inadvertently relegate the aesthetic nature of

narrative. For me, one answer is to attempt to use poetry and metaphor to coherently represent the vitality, emotion and complexity of human experience.

Notes

1. Extracts from this paper were presented at the UK Arts-Based Educational Research Conference in July 2007 and the Australian Association for Research in Education Annual Conference in November 2007.
2. ADHD is the latest diagnostic nomenclature for a condition that has had labels such as Attention Deficit Disorder, Hyperactivity and Hyperkinesis in past decades.
3. This poem was written by the author, based on his experiences while working with and hearing the stories of young people labelled with ADHD.
4. This poem was written and edited collaboratively by the researcher and a participant.
5. This poem was written solely by the author, based on reflections on the interviews and cover narratives in the study.

Notes on contributor

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