THE TRANSFORMATIVE POSSIBILITIES OF NARRATIVE INQUIRY

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Narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry is best described as an approach to research that is cross-disciplinary and extremely diverse theoretically and methodologically (Riessman, 2008). Narrative research in PE reflects this variety (Dowling, Garrett, lisahunter, & Wrench, 2015). Common across the disparate perspectives is, however, the notion that narration is fundamental to human meaning-making: we construct ourselves via the stories we tell. Individual and collective embodied experience is mediated, and indeed, made ‘real’ via the linguistic shaping and telling of stories, and the processes of their consumption. Narratives are thus inevitably relational. The teller and the ‘listener’ are active meaning-making agents, and ‘small’ or what we can call personal stories are inevitably linked to ‘big’ or societal stories that are socio-economically and culturally situated.

Stories are crafted at the intersections of identity axes and socio-cultural locations such that a young woman, for example, who narrates a tale of disaffection in PE classes inevitably draws upon biographical experiences as well as public discourses of gender, gender (in)equality in PE, and education more broadly. The narrative scholar’s research agenda will similarly be a narrative reflecting personal circumstances, PE’s research agenda, and educational research agendas in local, national, and global perspectives.

Narratives are thus imbued with power. Because of their different life experiences and resources, individuals in PE (students, parents, teacher educators, researchers) have different access to narrative repertoires and are differentially positioned with regard to ‘hearing’ and interpreting stories. Moreover, stories can be (ab)used to meet a range of political ends. Whilst recognising power at play it is, of course, important to recognise the agentic possibility of learning to retell or re-story one’s experience by using new repertoires and by constructing counter-narratives of resistance to challenge repressive stories (Harris, Carney, & Fine, 2001). Collective narratives of resistance can lead to the re-structuring of the inequitable matrices of public stories. Feminists and critical race theorists have long since recognised the potential for narratives to disrupt taken-for-granted social practices and evoke social change (hooks, 1997), as have critical pedagogues (e.g. Freire, 1971). Clearly the latter is of pertinence to our discussion of transformative pedagogies.
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In that light, this chapter will explore the potential of narrative inquiry to bring about enhanced understanding about the social worlds of PE contexts and to transform social inequalities within them. We will start by discussing how we perceive narrative inquiry, transformative pedagogies, and the social injustices that are prevalent in PE today. We will position narrative inquiry in a historical context and thereafter present an overview of the most relevant research carried out during the past decade. The collective findings of the various studies will foreground a discussion about how narrative inquiry can be developed in the future within the field of PE (theoretically and practically), and in particular, address what narrative pedagogical strategies might be useful, and why, for the purpose of transforming inequitable relations.

Transformative pedagogies

Turning to our understanding of transformative pedagogies, we share Giroux’s (2011) belief that the fundamental challenge facing educators today within the current climate of neo-liberalism is the need to provide the conditions for students to address how knowledge is related to the power of both self-definition and social agency. Central to such a challenge is providing students with the skills, knowledge, and authority they need to inquire and act upon what it means to live in a substantive democracy, to recognise anti-democratic forms of power, and to fight deeply rooted injustices in a society and world founded on systemic economic, racial and gender inequalities. (p. 72)

Against a societal backcloth of broad social inequalities, physical educators might, for example, more specifically need to help students understand how power operates in constructing contemporary PE lessons as a space where greater numbers of young men feel at home compared to young women; how White, Eurocentric physical movement traditions dominate today’s curriculum; how certain body shapes are valued more than others; how some young people engage in destructive self-monitoring body regimes whereas others resist them; or why some sports activities dominate PE lesson content whilst other movement forms are marginalised. PE teachers aiming to create transformative pedagogical classrooms would, in other words, aim to provide learning environments in which students can develop skills for critical analysis and self-reflection, become knowledgeable and willing to make moral judgements, and act in socially responsible ways as integral to the ongoing process of democratisation (Giroux, 2011). Cognisant of postmodern and postcolonial theories we acknowledge the need to perceive democracy as an on-going, unfinished project rather than being defined by a definitive formula (Giroux, 2011).

Drawing upon the wealth of philosophical perspectives that inform the broad field of critical pedagogy, such transformative pedagogical classrooms would be founded upon developing a culture of PE and schooling that supports the empowerment of the culturally marginalised and economically disenfranchised and unmasks claims like ‘all’ students have equal access to learning in PE. They would draw attention to the historicity of PE knowledge and practice and promote a dialectical view of knowledge that functions to unveil the connections between objective knowledge and the cultural norms, values, and standards of society. They would show how ideology operates at a deep, psychological personal level as well as in society at large and demystify the asymmetrical power relations and social arrangements that sustain the hegemonic interests of the ruling class. Transformative classrooms would also incorporate a theory of resistance and counter-hegemony and show how theory and practice are inextricably linked to our understanding of the social world and the actions we take. Finally they would illuminate the
rights and freedom of students to become subjects of their world (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003). Central to this approach to education is the dialogical relationship between students and teacher and a problem-solving pedagogy. Rejecting traditional notions of the teacher as expert who transmits privileged knowledge, a critical pedagogy builds on the premise that students learn from teachers and teachers learn from students via engaging in dialogue and analysis that serve as a foundation for reflection and action (Darder et al., 2003). Students and teachers alike can become emancipated via the development of a critical social consciousness (‘conscientisation’): they develop a deepening awareness of the social realities that shape their lives and discover capacities to re-create them.

Reflecting debates in education research more broadly, we acknowledge that there has been widespread criticism of a critical pedagogical approach to PE in schools and in teacher education from those who disagree with its premises (e.g. O’Sullivan, Siedentop, & Locke, 1992) and from advocates who have encountered the challenges of its implementation (e.g. Gore, 2003; Ruiz & Fernández-Balboa, 2005). We will not rehearse the arguments here but agree with Tinning’s (2002) call for a ‘modest’ critical pedagogy and address them below as they relate to our discussion of narrative inquiry. On taking a closer look at how narrative inquiry and a modest critical pedagogy may complement each other and transform social relations, we believe they enable teacher educators and students to individually and collaboratively critically analyse the lived experiences of individuals in PE and sport, as well as the broader structures that shape them (Oliver, 1998). In particular they enable the voices of the marginalised to be ‘heard’ and through their recognition of the socio-historical construction of knowledge pave the way for past ‘truths’ to be relinquished and challenged by alternative claims. They are both interested in interrogating and disrupting notions of master narratives and the processes of co-construction of truths (whose voice is heard, whose is silenced, and with what consequences?). They reject simplistic, universal knowledge claims and resist closure, acknowledging the complexity, moral ambiguity, and fragmentary nature of ways of knowing. They are both founded upon the principle that practice and theory are inevitably interrelated. Moreover, a modest critical pedagogy and narrative inquiry recognise that knowledge is both cognitive and emotionally embodied, as well as political; transformation most often occurs in unstable moments at the intersections of the (un)conscious and in relation to imagined (more just) worlds.

Narrative inquiry in physical education research: its historical context and current issues

Narrative research focusing on social injustices in PE contexts has been carried out in the broad field of qualitative research and draws upon different ontological and epistemological positions, mirroring narrative inquiry in general. Whilst recognising the vital role that interpretive narrative research has played in paving the way for more critical narrative inquiry, we shall nevertheless concentrate upon studies that have explicitly been concerned with the concepts of critical pedagogy, emancipation, and social transformation. (For readers interested in tracing more general developments in narrative inquiry in PE see Armour, 2006 and Dowling et al., 2015.)

Our discussion is limited to research publications written in English and can be seen to promote neo-colonial values, which is not our intention. The review is not exhaustive and there are inevitably oversights for which we apologise. We aim, however, to provide the reader with a feel for the emerging field and exemplify the similarities as well as the diversity in theoretical and methodological concerns. Narrative inquiry as a strategy in critical pedagogy research and practice can best be characterised as a new and emerging field. The first studies appeared in the late 1990s and there has been a significant increase during the past five years. Some scholars have
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been concerned with sharing their experiences of using critical pedagogy in their classrooms whilst others have had a greater focus on composing resources for critical pedagogy. A number of studies spotlight pre-service teachers’ experiences of potentially transformative learning situations whereas others illuminate the critical pedagogical worlds of teacher educators; a few inquiries straddle both. We will start by taking a closer look at the latter.

Tinning (1997) was a pioneer in using narrative in critical pedagogy. He developed a postgraduate course monograph that integrated personal, fictional tales from the classroom with multiple theoretical texts to illuminate the links between personal, political, and intellectual commitments, and values and beliefs in education. Another influential scholar in the field of PE/sport is Sparkes. Much of his early research was located within a broader discussion of the philosophy of science, challenging traditional positivist and postpositivist ways of knowing in PE culture and signposting the way for postmodern sensibilities. In 1997, he published an innovative paper in which he firmly rooted the discussion within a critical pedagogical framework. The paper addresses a number of issues ranging from his own awareness of oppressed gay voices in PE teacher education (PETE), his moral duty as a teacher educator to transform power relations that lead to oppression, and a growing recognition of the seeming dissonance between his espoused critical pedagogical philosophy and his actual teaching practices. Acutely aware that simply changing the course content of a module entitled ‘Ideologies in PE’ to include articles on sexual identity, “might smack of tokenism, particularly in an academic world that suffocates itself with the rhetoric of political correctness without any real hunger for tasting the dangers of political action” (Sparkes, 1997, p. 26), he embarked upon creating an evocative ethnographic fiction in order to engage students in critical reflection. He aimed to inform, awaken, and disturb pre-service teachers’ involvement in social processes that can be oppressive. By appealing to their narrative mode of knowing he intended “to cut through the scientised comfort zone of many students and allow them to explore often ignored or repressed dimensions of their own subjectivity” (Sparkes, 1997, p. 34). The ethnographic fiction is a tale about a gay PE teacher, a successful rugby player, a one-time popular jock, who is forced to lead a double life for fear of being stigmatised on account of his sexual identity. The story shows glimpses of family relations, the need to constantly negotiate challenging PE student situations, and the workings of heterosexual norms in schools and society beyond. Citing Ellis (1995), Sparkes aimed to draw readers to question the authenticity of the text, to reflect upon its contingencies and not least, their complicity in its existence. By refraining from providing the reader with theoretical explanations for the tale, his intention, like that of Barone’s (1995), was to enable the reader to tell self-stories and furthermore to engage in educational storytelling and sharing about possible interpretations of the ‘fiction’. Herein lies the narrative and critical pedagogical strategy for bringing about possible transformation although Sparkes readily admits that for many students the story concerns ‘Other’ PETE environments and it is seldom easily interwoven into individual student narratives.

‘Giving’ Voice

Indeed, a central lesson to be drawn from the paper, of equal importance today as it was nearly two decades ago, is the issue of ‘voice’. Sparkes (1997) addresses the dilemma of how to invite students to discuss inequalities and injustices in a non-threatening and supportive manner in a classroom which is inevitably wrought with power relations. He draws attention to the power dynamics in ‘giving voice’ to the marginalised – the narrative about the gay PE teacher is inextricably linked to Sparkes’ own heterosexual, privileged majority narrative – and the inevitable co-construction of knowledge. The reader is integral to a story’s construction and its consumption is unpredictable: is it taken on board, re-worked, and/or rejected? Whilst Sparkes witnessed students’ engagement with the text
he highlights the impossibility of knowing whether their ‘critical’ reflection acts as an “occasion for conspiracy”, leading them to borrow the story as a means for improving reality. The latter is a theme Sykes and Goldstein (2004) develop in their anti-homophobia work in PETE. They contend that juxtaposing narratives is necessarily unpredictable in the critical pedagogical classroom drawing upon postmodern pedagogy and queer theory. Recognising that meaning is perpetually being deferred and grasped, teachers and students alike must accept uncertain outcomes not least when acknowledging that the unconscious also plays a part in how we come to know.

Sykes and Goldstein’s (2004) Canadian study, whilst also addressing sexual identity, moves beyond Sparkes’ (1997) paper to explore the potential of more participatory engagement with the creation of texts as well as their consumption. Using a video based on interview data with gay and lesbian PE teachers, as well as interview transcriptions, students in an elective course were invited to deconstruct and disrupt institutionalised and individual expressions of homophobia and heterosexism in schools by writing and enacting a performance ethnography. This embodied enactment of ‘Others’ and subjective experiences of discrimination could potentially lead to ‘shifting positions’ in the visual classroom when someone recognises “a stuck place, a point of resistance, a moment that cannot be understood … a practice of coping in a fecund and affirmative way without knowing what must be done” (Sykes & Goldstein, 2004, p. 58).

In keeping with the notion of dialogical teaching and learning and the concept of praxis, the teacher educators and students alike were engaged in this process of problem-solving. One of the students reflected afterwards that she was more willing to take up the position of an activist in anti-homophobic work although this was not voiced by others. Once again we are therefore left with the impression that any transformation appears to be confined to a politics of recognition rather than a politics of redistribution (Apple, 2008).

Garrett’s (2006) study using critical storytelling as a means of giving voice to girls’ marginalised voices in Australian PE and to interrupt PETE students’ overwhelming positive and uncritical experience of PE as a school subject provides yet another example of the varying degrees of success with regard to transforming students’ positions. The project sought to combine multiple levels of critical analysis and practice. First, young women’s stories from PE classes were co-constructed with the teacher educator/researcher to recreate feelings of marginalisation. Second, pre-service teachers were asked to read these narratives made available online and to respond to them as part of an on-going dialogue with fellow PETE students about processes of domination in PE. Third, as a result of this dialogue, the pre-service teachers were asked to develop and teach micro teaching sessions that reflected possible means of resisting discriminatory teaching and learning situations identified in the girls’ stories. Conversations between the teacher educators and pre-service teachers revealed how some students developed greater empathy and emotional connections to the imagined PE worlds of marginalised students whereas others reported merely superficial engagement with their plights. In 2011, Garrett and Wrench built upon these findings and sought to use critical storytelling to address a range of inequity issues. They concluded that a major challenge in critical pedagogical classrooms using narrative inquiry is pre-service teachers’ (in)ability to engage in high level abstraction required to translate stories, via theory, into their practice.

**Resistance to narrative ways of knowing**

Another finding across several studies (e.g. Dowling, Fitzgerald, & Flintoff, 2015; Garrett & Wrench, 2011; Sparkes, 1997) is the resistance shown to narrative ways of knowing from both students and teacher educator colleagues. Steeped in bio-behavioural ways of knowing, dominant PETE discourses marginalise narrative modes of knowing, as they also tend to marginalise teacher educators who promote narrative inquiry and critical pedagogy. By crafting a ‘writerly
rather than a readerly text’, Dowling, Fitzgerald, and Flintoff (2015) invite readers to fill in the blanks of their collective narrative about trying to create more socially just classrooms in PETE by filling them with personal meaning from outside the text. Their study re-visits Sparkes’ (1997) observation about the seeming disjuncture between espoused critical pedagogical intentions and teacher educators’ practice. By sharing glimpses from some collective biographies in PETE they aim to provoke collective critical reflection amongst teacher educators concerning the extent to which taken-for-granted assumptions about knowledge claims are problematised. The study reveals how personal interests can dominate curricula initiatives and silence other equally relevant issues. The authors attempt to show the cracks in the rational dialogue of the Enlightenment and argue for the need to be more circumspect in our claims to know about how best to achieve emancipatory outcomes, echoing the earlier concerns of Gore (1990, 2003) and Tinning (2002). The postmodern study demonstrates the fragmentary and often contradictory nature of attempting to transform classrooms and pre-service teachers’/teacher educators’ beliefs. It highlights the vulnerability of engaging in this type of work in academia, steeped as it is in traditional forms of knowing, but simultaneously reminds us of the rewards found in creating the conditions for the ‘teachable moment’ of possible transformation. Imbued with human emotions, the insecure pedagogical space of recognising that a familiar story can be told in a new way and reveal cracks in an authoritative tradition, can prove exhilarating and is a motivation for critical pedagogues to continue to swim against the technocratic tide.

**Teacher educator self-reflexive narratives**

In fact, a recent development in critical narrative inquiry is the increase in studies about PE teacher educators’ narratives from the collaborative and dialogical classroom. Rather than merely inviting pre-service teachers to interrogate their storylines, scholars/teacher educators have turned a conscious gaze upon themselves and their relations to the production of knowledge and power in PE. Flintoff, Dowling, and Fitzgerald (2015) combine narrative inquiry, critical race theory, and a Whiteness lens to disrupt dominant ideas about ‘race’ and reveal the powerful silences in PETE research concerning antiracism. Sykes (2014) uses self-reflexive personal narratives to ‘un-settle’ assumptions about theories and methodologies used to research sexuality, gender, and sex in sport studies, in particular to illustrate how scientific racism and Western theoretical imperialism underpins much contemporary knowledge. By telling and sharing personal stories she becomes engaged in the process of relinquishing taken-for-granted truths in the belief that this can open up new imagined ways of being and her narratives invite the reader to (re)visit her/his own ‘colonial closet’. Together these studies represent a clear shift in PE’s critical pedagogy narrative from an early position that easily could be characterised as bordering on the dogmatic and founded upon restricted notions of emancipation (Tinning, 2002) to a position that grapples with the complexities of the on-going process of democratisation and social theory.

**Counter-narratives**

A relatively large number of studies fall into the category of providing PE culture with counter-narratives. Positioning their research within a critical pedagogical framework narrative scholars present evocative stories from a range of oppressive structures with which to ‘talk back’ and “expose the lies which hold together the ideological armour of privilege, domination and oppression” (Harris et al., 2001, p. 14). Acknowledging that teaching is a political act, Flintoff (2014) provides tales from the previously silenced voices of black and minority
ethnic pre-service teachers in PETE to show how ‘race’, ethnicity, and gender are interwoven in individuals’ embodied, everyday experiences of learning how to teach. Stride (2014) crafts analytic narratives to draw the reader into the agentic experiences of South Asian, Muslim girls in school PE/physical activity as a means to trouble stereotypes of them as passive, frail, and oppressed. Fitzgerald and Stride (2012) and Berg Svendby and Dowling (2012) challenge ableism in PE and deficit narratives of young people with disabilities. In 2012, an entire collection of counter-narratives celebrating difference in PE, youth sport, and health was published (Dowling, Fitzgerald, & Flintoff, 2012) that also included discussions of re-storying and deconstructing tales. It remains to be seen whether these studies can contribute to transformation but they symbolise the sustained interest in narrative inquiry as a possible tool for critical pedagogy.

Implications for evidence-based practice for current physical education challenges

Narrative inquiry does not provide the same kind of evidence as expected in some academic circles (Sparkes, 1997). It can appear removed from the techno-rational knowledge and truths of the bio-sciences and bio-behavioural research. While the form and content of narrative work are inseparable, texts are not intended to have one fixed meaning or social reality. Rather narrative researchers write authentic stories that mirror local realities and honour participants. They also recognise their constitutive role in crafting the texts when they attempt to capture the complexities, nature, and feeling of lived experience. In line with the principles of critical pedagogy in postmodern times, the way stories are written and whose voices are prioritised, have major implications for how they are understood and acted upon in transformative ways. Therefore in judging the quality of narrative work as an evidence base we are less inclined to draw from positivist thinking and ask whether a narrative is valid, reliable, or mirrors an objective reality. Rather it is more appropriate to ask: Is it useful? Is it connected and consistent? Does it ‘cohere’ with other research? In critical and transformative work narratives need to be authentic in the sense of being ‘true to life’ (Eisner, 1997; Smith, 2009). They need to persuade us to revisit taken-for-granted values and practices and provide a catalyst to develop empathetic understandings of ‘the world of others’. Stories should affect us in sensory as well as emotional and cognitive ways and should avoid closure in order to allow for new stories to evolve (Dowling, 2012).

Current and on-going challenges within PE extend to interrogating and demystifying dominant notions of gender, sexuality, performance, whiteness, and ‘healthy’ bodies that continue to underpin PE curriculum and pedagogy. Transformation comes with respecting difference in terms of ethnicity, gender, and body size as well as challenging self-regulatory technologies, performance codes, and a techno-rational version of PE that continues to alienate. In negotiating these dominant power relations interrogation is needed of the structures and cultures that shape participants’ stories within frameworks that celebrate, constrain, or oppress (Sparkes, 2006). This work is not without its challenges and must be positioned within a social and cultural landscape. The on-going and pervasive pedagogical work of the media continues to present narrow ideals around acceptable and healthy bodies which are becoming increasingly globalised. So too, in the absence of on-going professional development and narrow curriculum initiatives, the personal investment and subjective identities of many experienced teachers/educators in a techno-rational version of PE limits their openness to alternative versions. However, most powerful and limiting in the contemporary moment are neo-liberal schooling and university agendas that focus on accountability, self-regulation, and performance outcomes. These structural frameworks work to homogenise and globalise educational policy, curriculum, and pedagogy (Lingard, 2010). They can marginalise learning areas like PE and create risks for those
who challenge hegemonic truths where, by standing out as radical, we become visible and thus vulnerable (Shor & Friere, 2003).

In taking a transformative role, critical and narrative research in PE promotes a dialectical view of knowledge and unveils the social arrangements that sustain inequity. It is not just about the generation of knowledge for research, but helping participants produce knowledge about themselves (Enright & O’Sullivan, 2011) as well as the skills and authority to act upon their lives. In supporting Foucault’s (1979) assertion that ‘power produces knowledge and knowledge produces power’ the potential in narrative work is for young people to deconstruct dominant discourses, gendered ideals, and embodied identities. Teachers, too, can recognise their roles in the process of identity formation and enculturation as a means to produce alternative narratives. However, in working toward praxis where theory and practice are inextricably linked, noticing and understanding are not enough. Whilst narrative inquiry may open the door for multiple voices to be heard, transformation is enacted through awareness as well as action beyond practices that reproduce gendered, classed, raced, and narrow forms of physicality. This action is essential to provide the transformative spaces that allow a multiplicity of meanings about bodies, health, and physicality.

Future directions

This chapter has outlined how narrative scholars have developed their knowledge claims upon a range of ontological and epistemological theories. Whilst many claims have been made around the potential of narrative inquiry to bring about transformative change, changes in thinking, feeling, and understanding do not always lead to changes in practice, pedagogy, and outcomes for students. In altering power dynamics, giving voice and co-constructing knowledge we accept uncertain outcomes that are fragmented and sometimes contradictory. While it is difficult to say anything definitive about narrative genres, given their diversity and incompleteness, it is just as important not to collapse stories into categories where personal narratives are always more complex than any ‘cultural analysis’ can indicate (Squire, 2008, p. 57). Certainly circumspection is needed when making claims of emancipatory outcomes. While it is important to acknowledge what knowledge is gleaned from this research and in what ways these insights have informed practice, we must not overstate outcomes of change and transformation. So too, when researchers leave sites after data has been generated, participants can be left with more questions than answers. Dialogue might serve as the foundation for reflection but problem-solving and activism is then needed to take theory out of the abstract and into reality (Darder et al., 2003).

Nor do we wish to replace ‘what is broken’ by casting new norms and models upon others. In acknowledging insights from postmodernism, the challenge for transformation is to create a process that opens up possibilities for equality and inclusion in PE without substituting a new ‘replacement’ position or practice that is ‘better’ for an old one (Bain, 1997, p. 188). Rather, we aspire to develop self-conscious and self-critical practices that allow multiple representations in an on-going process of democracy (Giroux, 2011). In following Denzin (2010), we believe in a future characterised by mutual respect for different waves of qualitative inquiry and the types of knowledge insights they provide, as well as nurturing collaborative dialogue between narrative inquiry and activist research that is based on a body of narrative work (Oliver & Kirk, 2016). In striving toward linking theory and practice, praxis can be found in collaborative projects that work to identify the transformative, dialogical, counter-hegemonic strategies, practices, and pedagogy that provide multiple mainstreams and stories of success. Narrative research with its attention to temporality reminds us that our research agendas, methodologies, and theoretical lenses are neither decontextualised nor
historical. We must not discount persistent findings as ‘old news’ but rather hear ‘new stories’ framed within ever evolving and emerging theories that unveil new and novel insights (Dowling, Garrett, lisahunter, & Wrench, 2015).

In challenging neo-liberal agendas and moving toward praxis, a principal question for narrative inquirers is not the study of authorised curriculum revisions but rather how teachers and students make sense of curriculum in light of the social spaces and histories of their schools, the stories of their lives, and interactions with increasingly complex groups. This focus embraces a constructivist position that is different from traditional methods where students are assumed to be passive knowledge receivers and teachers are experts in executing the transmission of approved subject matter (Craig, You, & Oh, 2012, p. 272). Rather, the teacher is repositioned to negotiate curriculum ‘alongside the lives of learners’ (Murphy & Pushor, 2010). As self-acting agents rather than self-regulatory, teachers and students can tell stories, relive and retell, provoke changes in practices, and socially change the educational landscape. Stories of collaborative curriculum-making are meaningful not only to those who have lived and experienced them but to others for whom collaborative curriculum-making might inspire PE stories to live by (Craig, You, & Oh, 2013).

As a form of pedagogy, narrative has a potential to do critical work. It encourages critical thinking and creates spaces where those most affected in PE can speak on their own behalf and define who they are and who they want to be. It provides a framework for interaction and the challenge of hegemony by drawing attention to the centrality of lived experience and appreciating the intricate relationships between learning, teaching, and life (Chan, 2012). In creating pedagogies of possibility participants can be authors of change and generate stories of success that others might build on. Narrative inquiry can also contribute politically. It can contribute to equality, particularly in ways that perceive difference as a resource rather than a problem. Narrative can help us to work towards a re-negotiation of PE that broadens the legitimate learning spaces and directs us to new forms of physical expression. It offers a democratic and inclusive approach to knowledge construction that can meet the research challenges of a global postmodern world (Dowling, Garrett, lisahunter, & Wrench, 2015).

We must continue to listen. We must keep asking whose voices are not being heard. If we do not continue to take small steps and produce spaces where those most affected can articulate their experiences and their embodiment then nothing will slow the forces of dominant discourses and socially constructed ideals that continue to disempower.

Reflective questions for discussion

1. In the light of research findings that reveal persistent inequalities in PE contexts, such as girls’ disengagement (e.g. Garrett, 2006) or the marginalisation of students with a disability (e.g. Berg Svendby & Dowling, 2012; Fitzgerald & Stride, 2012), how can critical narrative inquiry contribute to a greater understanding of the complex ways in which these inequalities occur?

2. If dialogue and problem-solving are central features of a critical pedagogical PE class, how can narrative ways of knowing contribute to these learning strategies?

3. In an education system that currently values certainty of learning outcomes, what barriers might an educator espousing narrative inquiry encounter and how can they be resisted?

4. How can narrative inquiry help deconstruct the ways in which certain truths in PE become more valued than other truths? e.g. why bio-behavioural narratives dominate practice.
References


