

THE NARRATIVE PROCESS OF IMPROVING VOCATIONAL CLASSROOM PRACTICE

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Abstract

This research inquires into the use of stories by vocational teachers. These stories are of interest because they are a fundamental feature of both the subject content and the social structures of vocational classrooms. The trade experiences of vocational teachers are brought to the classroom through stories. These stories have a secondary effect of shaping the identity, social and cultural connections. An awareness of the secondary influences of narrative can improve reflective practice particularly for vocational teachers who rely on narrative. Ten vocational teachers were interviewed about the purposes and functions of narrative, in order to confirm the central role of stories, and the teacher's awareness of its implications on both subject content and classroom structures. The results indicate that there is a need to further understand the role of narrative in vocational classrooms. This understanding would benefit both the literature on narrative and education, and the theoretical understandings within vocational classrooms.

The Narrative Process of Improving Vocational Classroom Practice

This research is an investigation into the purposes and functions of narrative in vocational classrooms to improve teaching practices in these unique contexts. As a vocational teacher, the importance of using narrative in everyday classroom practice was personally evident. The importance of narrative to my every day teaching practice surprised me as a new teacher. No part of my pre-service teaching program had prepared me for the central role that stories from my previous trade experience would have, when trying to relay subject content to students. Further, there was also the surprising effect that retelling trade stories had on my reflective practice. The more I told stories from my trade experiences in order to teach, the more students wanted to know about me as a tradesperson, and why I became a teacher. In turn, the more I told stories about who I was as a tradesperson, and why I became a teacher, the more I reflected on my changing identity, and how those changes shaped my teaching practice. The purpose and function of narrative that I personally experienced prompted me to investigate further in order to understand and improve reflective and daily classroom practices.

In an effort to learn more about narrative in education, a literature review was conducted. The literature review was informative about the general purposes and functions of narrative, and was useful for reflecting on my own use of narrative. Conducting the literature review also elicited an inquiry into the experiences of other vocational teachers in order to learn more about the specific purposes and functions of narrative in vocational classrooms. With funding and support of the Ministry of Education's Teacher Learning and Leadership Program (2008/2009) ten vocational teachers were interviewed about their use of narrative. The results of the literature review will be presented first, followed by the themes from the analyses as they are based on the concepts identified in the literature review.

Literature Review

Throughout the literature on narrative in education two basic themes emerged. The first theme to be presented is narrative as a way to teach and learn. The articles that approached narrative in this way discussed stories both for their subject content, and also as a method which had personal, social and cultural implications for the classroom. The second theme to be presented is narrative as a way to learn about teaching and learning. Stories used for reflective practice, focused on stories about teaching and learning, rather than subject content. This theme identified personal, social and cultural implications for teachers. In

conclusion this literature review will discuss the concept of "life history" (Goodson, 1995; Goodson, April 1995) in order to appreciate the role of narrative in shaping the agency and structures that exist for students, teachers and vocational classrooms.

Story can be a powerful way to teach and learn (Koenig & Zorn, 2002; Martin, 2000). Sharing stories in the classroom is a part of a deeper human impulse to share our experiences (Bruner, 2002; Zander, 2007). This sharing has a layered and circular, effect on both teller and listeners which includes personal (Alvine, 2001; Bruner, 2002; McLean, 2008), social (Koenig & Zorn, 2002) and cultural (Martin, 2000; Zander, 2007) purposes and functions. Story has the effect of constructing personal identity, socially connecting people, and in those connections with others we negotiate culture through context specific expression and communication of social expectations (Bruner, 2002). The cultural aspects of narrative are context dependent. As we encounter changes in that context, or move into new contexts, we revise and reconstruct who we are (Bruner, 2002; McLean, 2008).

Narrative is a way of negotiating the dialogue that occurs between context and our identity (Bruner, 2002; McLean, 2008). The nature of that negotiation is what makes narrative unique from other methods of relaying information. Unlike other formats used to convey information, narrative is not simply an objective account of experience; it is a version of our world as we want it to be, as we think it should be (Chafe, 1990). In this sense, story serves to balance past experiences with future possibilities (Polkinghorne, 1988), as well as our sense of freedom and responsibility or commitment (Bruner, 2002). Between each nested layer of existence, we bind to, and distinguish ourselves from those around us (Jung, 1991). This has unique meaning for teachers and researchers interested in stories of professional practice.

Story can also be a way to learn about teaching and learning. This function of story requires reflection and critical analysis of the process previously described, in which stories function as a way to teach and learn. Some research has focused on achieving this affect through practice related stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; McDrury & Alterio, 2000). Practice related stories however, still function within one or more of the three nested layers described previously. In order to consciously improve teaching practices which rely heavily on narrative, there must be an awareness of the underlying process that makes story an effective way to teach and learn at a meta-cognitive level. Being conscious of the interrelated purposes and functions of story supports our highest ideals for education including critical thinking (Alvine, 2001; McDrury & Alterio, 2000; Orr & Olsen, 2007), life-long learning, (McLean, 2008) and promoting active engaged citizens (Beane & Apple, 1995; Martin, 2000). This awareness of narrative also attends to recent concerns about the narrative turn in education.

The criticisms of narrative research in education contend that when story is emphasized in research in the name of liberating an unheard voice, for the sake of simply hearing that voice, or learning something about that individual, we run the risk of feeding into post-modern mechanisms for social control. Goodson (1995) explains this risk in the following way;

Storying and narratology are genres which allow us to move beyond (or to the side) of the main paradigms of inquiry – with their numbers, their variables, their psychometrics, their psychologisms, their decontextualized theories. Potentially then, the new genres offer the chance for a large step forward in representing the lived experience of schooling....Because of this substantial potential the new genres require very close scrutiny. For whilst they have some obvious strengths, there are I think, some weaknesses which may prove incapacitating. If so, we may be sponsoring genres of inquiry in the name of empowerment, whilst at the same time, effectively disempowering the very people and causes we seek to work with. (p. 93).

Goodson (April, 1995) explains the disempowerment in a postmodern context as reducing stories in research to nothing more than anecdotal bits of entertainment, and offers a solution;

As we witness 'the end of history' it's perhaps unsurprising that life stories are being divorced from any sense of history, any sense of the politically and socially

constructed nature of the 'circumstances' in which lives are lived and meanings made. Truly men and women make their "own history" but also more than ever 'not in the circumstances of their choosing'. We need to capture 'agency' but also 'structure': Life stories but also life histories. (Goodson, April 1995, p.11)

According to Goodson (April, 1995) life stories are an account of one's life at a particular place and time in order to understand their experience of events. The life history, on the other hand, contributes to life stories by providing data from other sources, such as, people, official records and transcripts which provide historical documentation to understand patterns and social relationships. It is for this reason, that an emphasis is placed on the awareness of the nested layers of our social spaces. It is not enough that researchers analyze "subjects" in schools for the purposes of hearing their stories. The tellers of stories must understand the process that narrative has on their ongoing professional identity, practice and relationships with others and the contexts they inhabit. Stories are central to both agency and structure, and as such, an awareness of the far reaching influence of narrative, supports its use as a life history for teaching practice, rather than an isolated story in a specific time and place. This is particularly relevant to vocational teachers.

Why Narrative in Vocational Classrooms

The vocational classroom is a unique place in that it is not your traditional classroom, yet it is not a work setting. It is a location in which the previous work experience of teachers must be transferred to the classroom in a meaningful way to students. In turn, students must also take the knowledge and skills they learn in the classroom, and transfer it to their future workplace. In this sense, the vocational classroom is a prime location in which students and teachers can do the work of organizing experience with story which has a personal, social and cultural meaning that link the past, present, and future.

Trade Narratives for Learning Vocational Skills

In a context of learning, the organization of past and future experience is crucial to students who are learning new skills, and making decisions about future occupations (McLean, 2008). Education that positions story as a central feature in the classroom acknowledges the link between cognitive development and socio-cultural activities (Moll, 1990). Vygotsky discusses the direct link between cognitive development and social interaction which is necessary for problem solving (Moll, 1990). Unlike other formats used to convey information, narrative is not simply an objective account of experience; it is a version of our world as we want it to be, as we think it should be (Chafe, 1990). Narrative is also important because at precisely the same time students are asked to learn new skills for the purposes of considering a future option for work, narrative enables the student to present who they are, coming into the class, how they are changing, and the opportunity to explore the culture of that workplace for future consideration. From this perspective trade narratives transform trade skills from routine procedures into practices that carry with it, personal, social and cultural connections and meaning. Further, narrative allows the student to learn and make changes to who they are in a way that gives them the knowledge to make appropriate decisions, and control the changes that occur during the course. The benefit of narrative in the classroom is not just for demonstrating student learning, but also for teachers.

Narrative Meanings for Vocational Teachers

Vocational teachers come to teaching as a second career. Their previous career in trades becomes their subject content. The personal, social and cultural benefits of trade narrative for student learning also holds true for teachers who are required to organize previous trade experience into course content under a new role and experiences within the classroom. In their explanation of transformative curriculum encounters, Orr & Olsen (2007) propose that curriculum making, and identity making, are intertwined and understood in narrative terms for the purpose of understanding the continuity and situations that shape our lives. The central role of trade narratives for both the student and teacher is reimagining our selves through story (Bruner, 2002) although for different purposes. For the student, story is a way to consider

"stories to live by" in the future (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Vocational teachers on the other hand, are telling stories they have "lived by" in the past, and in turn, reimage themselves as teachers in the process (Olson & Orr, 2007). Narrative is particularly important to successful adaptation to identity change (McLean, 2008). Narrative allows for the integration of experiences, in order to reflect on, and understand, who they are in a way that provides continuity and stability (McLean, 2008). In retelling trade narratives, vocational teachers can "articulate new insights about...early experiences. When those who plan to teach write about their own early memories of learning, they bring forward their embedded understanding about teaching and learning" (Alvine, 2001) by making them explicit (Olsen, 2000). Alvine (2001) contends that this process makes explicit, those beliefs that form the foundation of a fully integrated knowledge base for teaching. For vocational teachers this means integrating previous trade experiences and their identity as a tradesperson, with curriculum, classroom practice and their professional identity as teachers. I also want to understand if other vocational teachers are using stories for subject content, but also at a meta-cognitive level.

Procedures and Data Collection

A convenience sample was drawn from the population of interest. The sample was drawn from certified technical teachers currently working in an Ontario public technical secondary school or technical programs that exist within public secondary schools. A general invitation for participation was posted on a communication network for technical teachers used by the school board. Specific invitations were also sent out to several technical teachers I had previously worked with. 10 interviews were completed and used for this research. Of those 10 respondents, 8 were male teachers and 2 were female. The trade experience of the participants ranged from 8 to 35 years in their respective trade. Teaching experiences of the participants ranged from 4 to 35 years. The participants included, teachers from subject areas including; Personal Services (1), Hospitality (4), Automotive technology (3), and Construction technology (2). The pool of participants although small, represents a diverse group allowing for a varied and detailed look at how stories are used in a variety of vocational settings.

Seven teachers were interviewed in their classrooms during non-teaching school hours, and three teachers were interviewed after school at other locations for their own convenience. The interview included, gathering personal statistics and answering 7 interview questions which included examples of stories frequently used in their teaching practice. The interview times ranged from 1 hour to 2 hours according to responses which were not limited in any way except to ensure anonymity of the people mentioned in the stories collected. The anonymity of the participants is also protected by the use of assigned numbers instead of using their real names. The responses were delivered orally, and a code book was used to organize and record the key points in the interviews (see appendix 1).

Data Analysis

The data collected for this research sought to confirm the central role that narrative has in vocational classrooms. Secondly, this research seeks to understand what the purposes and functions are of narrative in vocational classrooms. In order to collect the appropriate data, open ended interviews were conducted which gathered personal statistics about the participants. The personal statistics were used to confirm that teachers met the criteria for participation (years of experience in teaching, vocational subject areas etc.). The personal statistics also allowed for later consideration if themes emerged that were specific to gender, or subject area. Teachers were asked explicitly how often they used narrative strategies in their teaching practice in order to confirm the expectation that stories are indeed frequently used. This answer often included student stories intended for the purposes of teaching. After personal statistics were gathered, participants were asked to share a specific story they frequently used in their classroom.

The trade narratives relayed in the interviews were not recorded verbatim as it was not my intention to analyze the content of the stories. The general content of the stories was used as an indicator of the purpose and function of the story. The teacher was then asked to explicitly provide the purpose and function of the story. Information about the intended purpose was

then compared to information gathered from the following question; how do students respond, or react, to the story? In order to understand if narrative was used as a way to provide continuity and change to personal, social and cultural classroom structures, teachers were asked; have you consciously changed or adapted this story over time? Depending on the response given teachers might also be asked; Why or Why not? Can you give me an example of the adaptations or changes? Why those particular changes? This last set of questions usually lead to teachers discussing how their teaching has remained the same or changed as a result of reflection, student reaction, or changed classroom dynamics. This discussion usually provided a nice segue into asking the final and more personal questions, such as; why did you decide to leave your trade and teach in a high school? Do you tell your students this story? These questions were asked in the hopes that teachers would offer information that would provide evidence for how narrative had shaped their teacher identity without being leading in my questioning.

Findings

Safety is an undeniable concern in vocational classrooms according to the evidence gathered via interviews and story collection. The theme of safety permeates every aspect of the personal, social and cultural features of these classrooms. If story is indeed a way that we organize our past experience with future possibilities, then the experiences of vocational teachers and the future work experiences of their students is about safety. This seems simple enough, however, stories of safety were used not only as a basic vehicle to deliver curriculum content, the personal, social and cultural implications (unintentional and intentional) were varied and complex. Two interviews in particular will be discussed for their evidence of explicit reflection on how narrative has shaped the teacher's identity, practice, as well as their classroom's social and cultural structures. These findings will be presented in four sections; Teaching and learning; Personal, social, and cultural influences of narrative; Narrative histories; and a summary of the findings.

Teaching and Learning: Narrative for Subject Content

Each and every vocational subject area involves the use of chemicals, machines and equipment for the purposes of providing a service, or producing a product. This being the case, every vocational class begins the semester with a unit on safety, which pertains to the respective chemicals, machines and tools the students will use. It is for this reason more than any other that safety is prioritized in the subject content of vocational classrooms. It sets a context in which the students and teachers can concentrate on teaching and learning skills. Although the unit ends at the end of September and February, the stories linger, and need to be re-told, and new safety stories emerge for the purposes of making the most of incidental learning opportunities. With the first tour of the classroom the students seem to get the "shock and awe" stories that squall the chorus of students who want to know; "when do we get to do stuff?" As students begin to "do stuff" the stories are meant to remain in their awareness as vivid reminders to follow the rules and procedures.

Two teachers also reported that the initial tour of the facilities along with the unit on safety is often a student's first introduction to trade specific terminology for tools, equipment and procedures. They are not meant to retain all of the terms and labels introduced initially, but this first impressive association to safety, and the stories that go along with it, are ideal, since the stories are often repeated and remembered by students (Participants 9 & 10). These same two teachers also reported that when students repeat and share stories in the classroom they informally assess them for use of trade specific terminology. These students are commended and encouraged in their use of trade specific vocabulary as it will help them obtain a job, and communicate in the workplace in a professional manner. Narrative that demonstrates learning, such as the proper use of trade specific terms, is one way that participant 8 assesses the learning and progress of her students. Participant 9, structures this sharing in "roundtable" discussions that occur every Friday. At these discussions, participant 9 uses a rubric to assess the reflections of students which often take narrative form, including stories of mistakes and how someone else helped out, or how it was corrected, and what they would do differently next time. The sharing of student experiences through narrative not only aids in assessment

of learning, it was reported that it also seems to help other students to remember to act differently when they attempt the same procedure later (Participant 9).

This affect on memory was also reported by a construction technology teacher who stated that after his first semester teaching the class he realized the impact one particular story had on the students. He noticed that students were very conscientious around the machine involved in the story, and had excellent recall on a safety test for that machine. He prepared for the following semester with a story for each machine and used story prompts during the test and found a dramatic increase in test scores for the test on machine safety (Participant 8). Physical story props in strategic locations were also used as memory aids in two classrooms.

One example of a story prop used by a teacher was reported by Participant 3, who keeps a picture of himself above the metal floor grate in the kitchen area. The picture reminds students of a story he told when teaching the safety and cleaning procedures for the kitchen. The picture depicts a younger version of participant 3. It was taken a few weeks after he received extensive burns to his hand, shoulder and torso, after falling on a metal drain on an unclean floor. As he fell, he automatically grabbed what was beside him – a large stock pot, full of hot stock. Participant 3 reported telling his students details about his experience in the emergency room and the pain of having his uniform pulled away from his burned flesh, and the several weeks of healing required before the pain began to subside. Although the picture depicts a cheerful but humble, and heavily bandaged young man, it is enough to remind the students of the details about what was underneath those bandages.

Another example of a story prop came from participant 8 whose students took it upon them self to bring in pictures obtained from the internet of work accidents which related to some shop rules, such as not wearing jewellery. The picture hanging in the classroom showed a hand with a wedding band that was jammed under the skin above the knuckle after it was caught in a machine, leaving no skin at all around the knuckle. The student relayed the story to the class after bringing it in to be displayed. Participant 8 stated that although the picture is graphic it was effective at getting students to follow rules, so we can move on to course content that relates to skills. Further, having a student take the initiative to contribute to classroom teaching is evidence of the level of engagement these stories bring to the class.

All of the stories shared by technical teachers for the purpose of relaying course content are very effective means of captivating student interest and retaining the information for later work and development of skills. As indicated by the literature though, story in classrooms also have an influence on personal identity building, social connections and cultural structures.

Personal, Social and Cultural Influences of Narrative

The data collected supported social connections not only between students and teachers, but also to characters in the stories, and to workplace cultures. Stories told in class were interpreted by students as a “break from teaching” (Participant 1) or a more “personal” way to teach (Participant 3 & Participant 5). As such, when stories are used to teach course content, students may interpret the teacher’s behaviour as more open and honest. Participant 5 reported that students see him as more human when he teaches with stories. Participant 5 however says that the fear of the more “gory” safety stories seems to bind students together socially, particularly the younger students in grade 9. Safety stories get new students past their other fears. Fears of a new school with new faces fade, and the gore and guts gets them talking to each other (Participant 8). Some also reported social connections to characters in their stories as indicated by highly emotional responses to characters similar to them self.

Two teachers stated that the stories which were most effective at eliciting an emotional response from students were stories in which the students identified with the victims of the accident. Participants 4 and 9 used stories that had not only physical repercussions but social ones as well. These teachers reported that what made these stories effective was the teenagers identifying with the character, and being able to imagine the same social damage in their own lives. Participant 4 tells a story of a young man who was working on his own car, under a car lift, when the car fell and crushed his chest. He suffered spinal damage and

oxygen deprivation which caused brain damage as well. This young man did not die, but lived to see his brother marry, and spend the rest of his life, with a young woman who had been the victim's girlfriend prior to the accident. The victim lost his first love because she could not cope with the injuries he had sustained. Participant 4 reports that students do react strongly to the physical injuries that resulted from an unsafe car lift, but they also react to his social loss and pain. In the same way subject content must relate to student experience to make it meaningful, narrative that students can relate to is more likely to ensure that student follow the safety rules in class. The same student reaction was reported from participant 9 who tells her class the story of a girl, who while receiving medical treatment from a paramedic in the kitchen, had to have her shirt opened. The strongest reaction from the students was not from the physical injury in the story, but the horror of possibly being partially naked in front of classmates. Based on the student's emotional reaction, the potential of having your shirt opened at school was more of a tragedy than the physical harm. Participant 1 reports that student's connections to characters in stories involving the personal service industry can also have professional benefits.

One story that was told by participant 1 indicated the value in having a strong relationship to repeat customers in a hair salon. During this lesson the participant would tell the story of a valued customer who had been getting her hair done at this particular salon for decades. The teacher provided a detailed description of the client as very kind, petite, elderly, and modest, so students will empathize with her. The teacher then goes on to explain that assistants working in popular salons can be extremely busy and are expected to manage many tasks at once. The teacher warned though, that no matter how busy you get, you always need to take the time to do your job right. The elderly and petite client required time and patience to be seated and positioned properly at the sink, but in a rush, the assistant did not properly secure the cape and the client's dress got soaked in water. To make matters worse, the dress was quite transparent when wet. After spending several minutes trying to towel dry the dress the client was re-draped to conceal the transparent clothing. When the stylist found out what happened, she was enraged, however the client having been a long time customer of the salon was very forgiving. This teacher knows the benefit of good social connections in a service industry that relies on repeat customers. By socially connecting to the character in the story the students will be more conscious of the procedures they carry out in class, and create good social connections in the workplace, perhaps through story.

Participant 1 notes that in the service industry, being a good storyteller is a great skill. So not only does the content of some stories function to teach, but the very act of storytelling itself models a work related skill. For this reason, participant 1 encourages students to hone their own storytelling skills which benefits the social atmosphere in the class, and also prepares them for future service roles. In this instance, storytelling has not only social, but cultural functions. Experience in a particular workplace culture allows for informal teaching of secondary skills to be successful in that context. Another example of narrative influence on culture is a story of a car rally hosted by the automotive shops in several local schools. Participant 5 recounts with excitement, how students swap work stories about the work they have done to cars in the show. The knowledge and skills the students have been learning all semester and year came shining through in their stories. On that day, participant 5 feels like the students became co-workers and colleagues instantly. Story in this case, communicates skill in a cultural setting that expects a professional level of terminology and knowledge. Participant 5 explains that the class feels like a team, even after they return to the class, students continue to discuss the cars in the show. It gives the students a chance to participate in a way that tests the grounds for their decision to continue on in an automotive trade.

All of the teachers who were interviewed indicated that stories had some influence on personal, social and cultural aspects of their classrooms, but few articulated the narrative process as a whole. In the next section of the findings the data obtained from participants 2 and 7 will be discussed as they provide evidence that understanding the underlying process of narrative contributes to professional reflections that in turn can be consciously used to shape the personal, social and cultural aspects of the classroom.

Narrative Histories

Participants 2 and 7 had very similar responses on their interviews, and both were unique from the rest of the group. The characteristic features which set them both apart from the group, was their years of experience in the hospitality industry, and in teaching. Participant 2 worked for 35 years as a tradesperson and 18 years as a teacher. Participant 7 worked for 20 years as a tradesperson and 20 years as a teacher. Both of these teachers knew why they were committed to the unique space of the shop classroom, and the role that space has for students. In each case a well articulated teaching philosophy was ever present in their daily practice of stories. The role of story in the classroom was very important for both these teachers as it served the function of treading a very fine line between limiting students for physical safety with tales of tragedy, and creating an emotionally safe space to make mistakes which help foster "learning by doing" (Participant 2).

Years of experience in the classroom taught both these teachers that stories that use too much fear and restrictions create excellent "workers" that are too afraid to build their talents and skills. Initial stories of safety must be followed with stories that support a culture of learning and critical thought. Both participants used stories during class for incidental learning. When students make mistakes in class it is an opportunity to teach critical thinking. These teachers make the most of these opportunities by stopping the student before, during or after the mistake, gather the class around and analyze the situation, letting the students, problem solve, ask questions and come to conclusions which support independent learning through habits of mind that are triggered when mistakes occur. Obviously this can be embarrassing for a student if the right context is not set up. This is where emotional safety comes into play. Both of these teachers spend a great deal of time telling stories about their own mistakes and how valuable they were to their learning. As teachers and students they all have the unique opportunity of having a space that prioritizes learning over profit and efficiency. These teachers stressed to students that once they entered the workplace profits and efficiency are expected of them, and now was a time for them to commit to learning and building the quality of their services and products. The secret to building quality in your work is learning from what you do. From this perspective, as long as students follow the initial safety rules, mistakes are expected, and needed, to learn. Of course learning opportunities also come from the success that students experience, but the point to be made here in our overall theme of safety, is that careful measures are taken not to restrict students too much and narrative was the key to keeping this balance in the shop classroom. Narrative and the underlying process of how it functions personally, socially and culturally, were clearly articulated throughout the interviews. The connections between the personal, social and cultural were explained when I asked each of these participants why they became teachers.

When I asked participant 2 why he became a teacher, he replied with a story. Participant 2 entered an apprenticeship at an early age with no experience in an industrial kitchen. He worked under a master chef in a very successful business. One thing he clearly remembers is learning very quickly to listen carefully and follow orders. Mistakes at work cost valuable time and money, and when mistakes did happen, this teacher remembers his boss exploding in rage. This teacher recalls pots full of food and tools among other things being thrown around the kitchen when his work did not turn out a product as planned. As an apprentice, participant 2 can recall being paralyzed by his boss' anger. Upon reflection, this teacher points out, that this experience was a lesson in the value of the classroom. Young people learning a trade need a teacher, not a boss. Of course, they must be adequately prepared for work, but in a safe environment that prioritizes learning first, before they earn a wage for their knowledge, skills and artistry. If the right environment is not provided then these young people simply become efficient workers for someone else's knowledge and skills. This same explanation of the role of narrative in the classroom was given by participant 7.

Participant 7 also became an apprentice at an early age. In response to my question why he became a teacher, he responded that he is committed to the unique space that a classroom provides students before they enter a work setting because it is a safe space to learn. Participant 7 recalls the painful memory of being stabbed in the leg by his boss after making a mistake. He does not like to talk about the experience, but he tells me about it because he understands the influence this experience has had on his philosophy of teaching, and why he

became a teacher. Like participant 2, participant 7 knows all too well that mistakes in the workplace are costly in more ways than one. By becoming teachers in a classroom they can create a safe space that supports authentic learning. In both cases the process of sharing their stories with students over and over, allowed for connections between earlier trade experience and their current role as a teacher and what they wanted to bring to the classroom. The connections made between their experience and their teaching perspectives also provided a more strategic use of narrative to create a social space for safe authentic learning. That strategy is using narrative to insure physical safety but then balance those rules with stories that provide permission to make mistakes. By setting students up to learn while they work, when mistakes do occur, it is alright to analyze it, figure out what happened, and use it in the future. This use of story in vocational classrooms is a prime example of narrative as it is described in the literature, and how it can be used meta-cognitively to improve reflection and professional practice.

Summary

In the literature on the role of narrative in education, stories deliver subject content, but in the process of delivering that content, they also have the capacity to reshape us personally socially and culturally. The "shaping" takes place when narrative strikes a balance between past constraints and future possibilities and freedom. For those teachers that understand this process, they consciously use narrative and the process described, to understand why they teach, and in turn, create a classroom that is consistent with their ideals of teaching and learning. Without an understanding of the whole process, narrative can only be used for specific lessons, or a classroom management issue. When narrative is identified as a consistent underlying process to vocational teaching is it consciously used to cyclically tie all the components together in an ongoing professional process (see appendix 2). This was evident in the interview with participant 2 and 7 who understood how early learning experiences influenced their current teaching practices, and identified narrative as a method of that insight and integration (Alvine, 2001; McLean, 2008; Olsen, 2000). The results of this, integration of experience, is the creation of a narrative history, rather than isolated stories we can use or learn from. It is in telling these isolated stories however that we begin to see connections. Once we are conscious of the patterns in the isolated stories they are integrated in a larger history resulting in a broader understanding. This effect is worth consideration for further study, and pre-service vocational teaching programs, as narrative histories may ensure the understanding of a balance needed between the constraints of physical safety, and emotional freedom. A balance, that could possibly mean the difference between, creating obedient "workers", or supporting critical thinking and life-long learning within vocational classrooms.

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- Participant 4. (October 6, 2008). Love Lost & Fear in the Classroom.
- Participant 5. (October 6, 2008). Assessing the Situation.

Participant 6. (October 6, 2008). Drama for Effective Stories.

Participant 7. (October 9, 2008). Expecting Mistakes for Learning & Artistry.

Participant 8. (October 9, 2008). Story Elicits Emotion for Memory.

Participant 9. (October 9, 2008). Mentorship & Wear Clean Underwear.

Participant 10. (October 23, 2008). Story Circles.

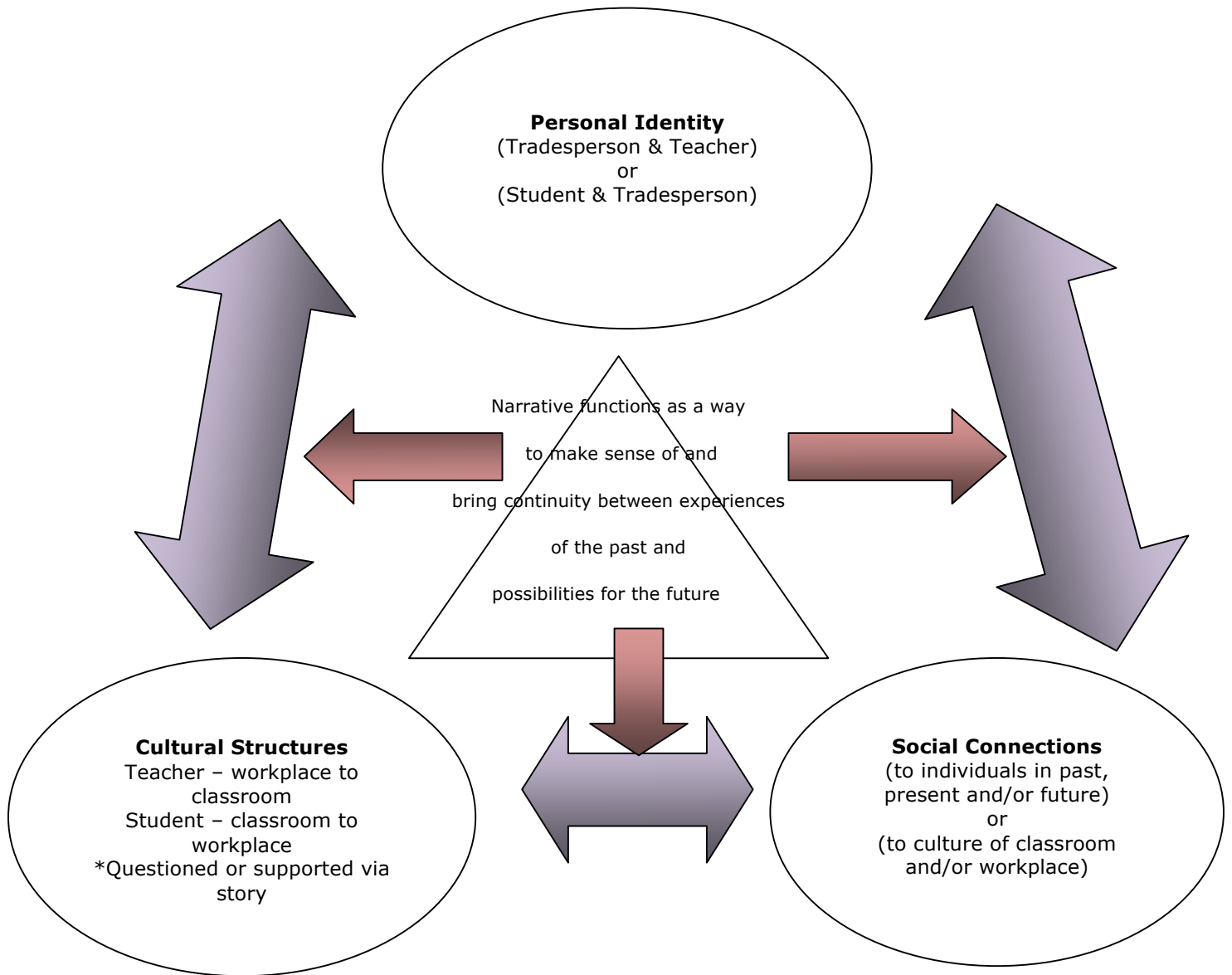
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Appendix 1

Code Book

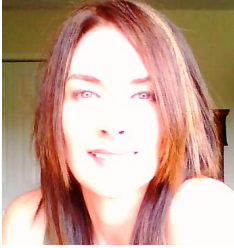
Participant	Personal Statistics were recorded here. Subject area. Gender. Years in trade. Years teaching. Frequency of story use.
Personal Indicators	Indicators of participants using story to relay trade identity and teacher identity or integration of both.
Social Indicators	Indicators of how story creates connections between people or to workplace and subject content as social spaces
Cultural Indicators	Indicators of overriding themes created and recreated in each class, such as workplace cultures recreated within the class, values, routines, habits and priorities emphasized in general
Indicators of negotiating past experience with future possibilities	Indicators of teacher experience used to influence student futures, themes of cautionary tales, identity changes, student changes and reasons for those changes.
Reflective Practice that is both specific to a lesson and general	Indicators of story being used to think about practices, teaching, learning
Life History Indicators	Any indicators of storytelling as a process that influences agency and structures of the classroom and workplace that includes personal, social and cultural aspects.
Notes	unexpected content not accounted for in interview questions but relevant to research questions

Appendix 2
Narrative Functions and Purpose



Awareness of the functions and purposes is a rich source for reflective practice. Not only does narrative serve personal, social, and cultural purposes and functions, but they can be consciously integrated into classroom management strategies. These management strategies can also be consciously utilized by students.

Biographical Note



Kathleen Y. Sharman is a PhD student at the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor. Her work focuses on the history of vocational secondary schools in Ontario. Current research for her PhD dissertation includes a case history of W.D. Lowe Technical School, 1923-1973. Her interest in vocational secondary schools stems from her experience as a vocational student, apprentice, and certified tradesperson, and a vocational high school teacher. Kathleen Sharman can be contacted at the University of Windsor; sharman@uwindsor.ca.