Polarising *narrative* and *paradigmatic* ways of knowing: exploring the spaces through narrative, stories and reflections of personal transition

CLEO91571

David Cleaver
cleaver@usq.edu.au
University of Southern Queensland

During my doctoral research journey, I focused on what I saw as the problematic paradox of subjectivity and objectivity in the process of formal, academic inquiry. Somehow, I could not divorce the intellectual exploration of the issues raised - with how subjectivity and objectivity questions related to my deeper life perspectives and way of experiencing the world. As I continued to study my own perspectives and the ideas of others in the academic literature, I saw that the division between subjectivity and objectivity were extensions of two distinct ways of looking and perceiving 'reality'. One was based on 'looking into the self' and the other looked 'into the world'.

It was at an important research moment of 'looking into the world' that I discovered Jerome Bruner's (1986) perception that there are two separated cognitive modes - a paradigmatic and a narrative 'way of construing reality'. I resonated with this idea and in an epiphanic and transformative moment, made a meaningful connection to the two modes and recognized them as correlating with my particular paradoxical 'objective' and 'subjective' ways of perceiving.

This paper is a narrative self-study that takes the form of storied reflections of perspectives that occurred during my doctoral research journey and also subsequently developing viewpoints. I use an 'arts-based' approach advocated by Barone and Eisner (1997) as I seek the potentially different and valuable kinds of narrative understanding and meanings that are contrasted with those generated by paradigmatic analysis (Barone, 2000; Kilbourne, 2001; Polkinghorne, 1988). The writing seeks to promote narrative methods whilst illuminating my personal academic journey and engagement with the 'spaces' between ways of knowing. I move between third and first person writing in order to highlight and further explore these spaces.

The 'genre-blurring' of the boundaries between social science and arts-based inquiry has invited researchers to disseminate knowledge through a greater variety of means. However, the products of research, emerging from the blur, have posed challenges for an audience who have been hitherto unbendingly dedicated to a type of rigour based on established forms of epistemology and ontology. In addition, new genres pose challenges for those researchers seeking to include artistic and personal forms of expression - but who have had little guidance.

An issue of 'authenticity' is that many people believe that artists create while researchers problem-solve. Contrary to that idea is the notion that this is simply where the blurring begins. Trying to locate the essence is difficult but it may be that more traditional forms of research seek to solve objective problems, particularly ones that provide generalisable solutions, while on the other hand, researchers working in qualitative and arts-based forms seek to solve or simply present and unfold subjective issues, ideas and meanings.

Prior to undertaking research and well before starting formal University studies, I had followed the arts and was always intrigued by the qualities presented by intuition and imagination. I tended to contrast and polarise these against processes of logic and reasoning. As a musician and creative arts teacher - and one who could admit to enjoying the aesthetic, abstract qualities of life and arriving from perhaps a lop-sided addiction to trying to develop an artistic intelligence - I pursued the chance to inquire through arts-based and narrative means, rather than means focused on the assumption of a conceptual reality dominated by notions of objective truth and factual realism.

A particular situation developed. I began to become interested in the idea of paradox in my own (and human, in general) *ways of thinking.* This was partly due to the inability to reconcile the intuitive, imaginative and artistic person that I was with the logical, reasoning and intellectual capacities that also drove my life. Coupled with this, and also confronting issues of objectivity and subjectivity in formal inquiry and academic literature, I was determined to explore these challenges as a parallel theme in my doctoral thesis.

It was at an important moment, whilst reviewing the literature that I discovered Jerome Bruner's (1986) perception that there are two separated cognitive modes - a *paradigmatic* and a *narrative* 'way of looking or construing reality' (p. 11). I resonated with this idea and in an epiphanic and transformative moment, made a meaningful connection to the two modes. I recognized them as correlating with my particular paradoxical, 'objective' and 'subjective' ways of perceiving and set about using doctoral research time as an opportunity to explore these modes further (see Author, 2004).

For my research project I selected narrative methods as the means to research the lived experience of student musicians and also myself in relation to them. I felt justification for the inclusion of 'personal narrative voice' into the research writing and found support from Clandinin and Connelly (1991, 2000), Richardson (1997), Barone (2001) and Bochner (1997, 2001). I was set the challenge of balancing the illumination of the lived experience of others with a parallel inclusion of self-study and 'learning through writing the self'. I particularly 'resonated' with the feelings of Bochner, (1997) who stated, "the desire to bring the personal self into conversation with the academic self was the major inspiration for my turn toward a personal narrative approach to inquiry" (p. 433).

Bochner (2001) also challenged the paradigmatic regulations of social science research that stress "rigour over imagination, intellect over feeling, theories over stories, lectures over conversations, (and) abstract ideas over concrete events" (p. 134). Following the sensibility of these ideas in my own research in music education (Author, 2004), I included vignettes and narrative episodes of personal experience and voice in order to provide an alternative to a paradigmatic way of looking at the music and educational issues being discussed and also to explore my own narrative thinking processes. The inclusion of episodes of personal voice was designed to foreground the contrasting operations between narrative and paradigmatic ways of looking and to unfold to the reader examples of each. This process served to demonstrate the different types of knowledge and understanding arrived at with their use. Importantly, my commitment to, and highlighting of narrative thinking was designed to explore the hypothesis that the narrative 'meaning generative process' provides a different perspective upon music and music meaning.

Support for the amalgamation of academic and literary reporting styles has warranted the inclusion of the narrative knowledge that is embedded in stories and

novels. 'Arts-based' research texts, written in a more literary style have, until recent times been considered outside the bounds of 'legitimate academic research'. However, back in 1982, Richard Rorty had sanctioned the blending of literary style into social science research. He stated that "if we get rid of traditional notions of 'objectivity' and 'scientific method' we shall be able to see the social sciences as continuous with literature – as interpreting other people to us, and thus enlarging and deepening our sense of community" (p. 203 - cited in Cherryholmes, 1988, p. 179). This knowledge provides potentially different and valuable kinds of understanding and meanings to those generated by paradigmatic analysis (Barone, 2000; Kilbourne, 2001; Polkinghorne, 1988).

Importantly, Richardson (2000, p. 926) gives an historical account of the introduction of literary forms into social science research. She describes how since the 17th century literary and scientific forms of writing were of two separate kinds. Scientific writing was unambiguous, about objectivity, truth and 'the real'. Literary writing was about subjectivity and when associated with fiction, was 'false' and ambiguous. The literary involved 'imaginary' writing, which produced a different account of society. However, as the 20th century unfolded "the relationship between social scientific writing and literary writing grew in complexity and the boundaries blurred particularly those between fact and fiction" (Richardson, 2000, p. 926). As a result, there was an "increasingly greater acceptance of inquiry approaches with features that were more naturalistic, interpretive, personal, literary and artistic" (Barone, 2001b, p. 735). This transition grew from a broadening of epistemological and ontological perspectives, and the sanctioning and valorization of narrative, storied knowledge and different ways of construing reality.

According to Barone and Eisner (1997), the infusion of aesthetic qualities into social science writing includes: the presence of expressive, contextualised, and vernacular forms of language; the creation of a virtual reality; the presence of the author's personal signature; the use of fiction; and a degree of textual ambiguity (Barone and Eisner, pp. 73-78). The meanings within narrative texts (or literary text – see Barone, 2000, p. 138) are often ambiguous but are designed to invite reader response, "raise fresh questions and deepen the conversation" (Barone 2001a, p. 170 and Eisner, 1991, p. 95). In this regard, literary and 'arts-based' forms of research seek to invite further interpretation and criticism. An important supporting idea for the inclusion of aesthetic and literary forms of expression within narrative research texts is that they serve to enhance the 're-creation of lived experience' (see Richardson, 2000, p. 931; also Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 71, and Barone and Eisner, 1997).

In the section that follows, I retrospectively look at my life in light of the problematising of the issue of paradox and narrative and paradigmatic thinking. I started writing this in the first person. However, using the voice of a third person gave me a distanced perspective that opened up fleeting ideas that until now I had been unable to capture – they were seemingly buried perspectives of my life – more like visual images that I could now describe – and ones that had qualities that define who I am. As a design feature, influenced by Barone (2001, see discussion p. 70), I incorporate the use of changing fonts to signal a shift in my thinking.

Perhaps it was not surprising that he became focused on exploring some of the paradoxical and polarised facets of his own conceptual understanding. The more he focused on and explored the details of his personal narrative, the more he seemed to highlight the contrasted meanings within the stories that made up his life. Firstly, his life had been paradoxical from the start – his parents were English but he was born in Africa. Later, he became a

David Cleaver

'scatterling', deported to a country that was purported to be his 'real' home. He found himself living in England but dreaming of Africa. An unsettling confusion remained with him. For example, once while standing looking at Eros in Piccadilly Circus, for no apparent reason, the Ruwenzori, the fabled Mountains of the Moon, flashed into his mind. In that fleeting, heady moment he smelled the savannah, saw the details of individual thorn trees in his mind and heard the soulful cry of a fish eagle in his ears. His reverie was disrupted when the roar of traffic came back into focus. It was the unfathomable, indescribable feeling in his bones that went part of the way to explain why he sought to always either look for the paradoxical or why he would, at various stages, find himself in widely contrasting life situations and experiences.

He began to develop an interest in concepts and theories about human experience, cognitive processes and the nature of consciousness – but always by looking for contrasting perspectives. In his late teens his attention gravitated to ideas and explanations that were seemingly polarised and contrasted. As he recollects, it started with a feeling of dissatisfaction after reading Freud – and how the contrasted perspectives of Jung helped the arrival of some balance of meaning. It was as if solving the struggle between opposites went some way toward explaining the domains of human complexity and that somewhere in between the outer reaches of contrasted meanings - there he would find the answer. Later in his life he reflected that it was all part of a desire to explain himself to himself.

A spiritual aspect to his searching developed - although this 'spirituality' took on an intellectual and reflective approach. Studying Zen and Buddhist philosophy was, he assumed, a prescriptive antidote designed to provide pragmatic answers to the mythology contained in the Bible, where he had trouble connecting with the metaphors. With a persistent spirit of inquiry, he explored and struggled with contrasting views about the nature of reality and the dichotomy of subjectivity and objectivity. He wanted to reconcile the perspectives that on one hand saw a spiritual dimension that looked 'into the self' for answers and the other, a materiality that looked 'into the world'.

When eleven years old he had discovered music and the playing of it and as he grew he sharply divided his interests between an intuitive, 'body', kinaesthetic, aural approach that included rock and jazz and an academic, technical and scholarly approach that included classical styles and 'cerebral' music (such as Stockhausen – who often included shortwave radio signals as they were 'music from the stars').

Moving from a life in music, he spent three years as a scuba instructor, diving everyday through coral gardens in the Great Barrier Reef. But after exploring the world through his breath and body, with a continuing spirit of unease and inquiry, he decided to spend time exploring the world with thoughtful reflection and academic study – more with mind in mind. He got out of the water and into the university, seeking time to think, research and learn. He remembers the day when, first standing in the middle of the University library, he could smell the aroma of books and from there he associated this with being surrounded by knowledge. The smell was strongest in the philosophy, psychology and religion sections. True to the idea of paradox, his learning became based around exploring opposites. He would stroll up and down the aisles, browsing the shelves and 'following his nose' to find opposing views and perspectives.

An interesting moment in his doctoral research occurred when he discovered Jerome Bruner's (1986) declaration that there are 'two contrasting universal human cognitive modes, the logico-scientific or paradigmatic mode and the narrative mode'. In an epiphanic moment of recognition he saw that the tendency to view the opposites in many situations had an accountability that

stemmed from himself and he made a connection to his conceptual mind map realising that he had been viewing life through both of these modes and his chase for the opposites was actually the process of viewing the world through different lenses. At one point he was an objectivist - a paradigmatic, logical and left-brained, quantitative, calculating technicist who reasoned about the issues of life and on the other he was a subjectivist – a narrative, right-brained, qualitative, intuitive creative arts romantic. It was little wonder that in the past, connections had not been made. The differences in the world were simply projections of his 'way of looking'. One view saw the flow and qualities of life and the other sought clear reason and truth.

*

As a researcher, interpreter and observer, part of the academic journey of inquiry has become a process of 're-storying through writing'. Through an examination of the spaces within ways of knowing I discover complexity but the problematising of it *is* the journey and I gain satisfaction from making connections between the way life is theorised and that way it is lived. I feel that I can 'meet Bruner face to face' – at a theorised but also an intuitive level – as an objective theory *and* a subjective experience – from both the head *and* the heart.

Illuminating facets continue to surface as I inquire and strive to recreate lived experience. I again use this reflective re-storying process to consider my lived experiences as a musician. Again the events became clear as I retreat to the third person perspective.

He explored and reflected on his own active musical practice and performance and began to see how the bodily operation of the two modes, the narrative and the paradigmatic, unfolded in lived musical experience. In a desire to be conscious and reflecting he identifies the apparent narrative/paradigmatic shifts as they occur. On occasions there is a bodily sense of flowing 'narratively' with sounds as they unfold with a recognisable similarity between the created 'musical ideas' and storied meanings. Sounds flow - connected as related events and episodes. He does not think or step 'outside the music' to find representative meanings for he trusts his bodily, intuitive grasp of sound relationships and interconnections. There is no thought or hint of 'explaining the music'. In this 'narrative mode' he is aware of a natural flow of experience, and whether spontaneously improvising or playing memorised repertoire, there is a sense of unification of mind, body instrument and sound. It is a 'body experience' because the body is included in the experience and he can move easily from sensations to thoughts. There is a feeling of watching himself but it is with passive acceptance of passing events. In this, the 'narrative mode', because self-awareness does not include emotional detachment, self-criticism or the process of comparing experience to wider concepts or issues, his improvisations are story-like.

On the other hand, he sometimes 'locks into' the opposite - the paradigmatic, cognitive musical mode. Operating within this mode he is more deliberate – thinking conceptually and logically - 'in his head' (with a 'disembodied mind' - see Johnson, 1987). A certain amount of critical reflection accompanies the process as the 'truth', and the 'right way to do it'. "How would Segovia, Joe Pass or my old teacher do it?" In this mode operations are tentative and in that respect, for spontaneous, improvisation-type performances, the processes are not productive. However, he productively and consciously uses this mode to engage in the more 'cognitive' activities that

might accompany thoughtful practice. In this mode he utilises a metacognitive process where he watches himself figuring-out technical problems, theorising, making connections, understanding harmonic relationships. He is critical, comparing and judging of his playing and finds himself classifying sections of it into neat concepts and also monitoring components such as 'tone-production', 'phrasing' and 'intonation'.

Importantly, he now derives satisfaction knowing that music has shown him something vital – and he now uses both modes to various positive ends and it is perhaps an individual idiosyncrasy that he recognises the paradox but does not struggle with or attempt to hold to a single dominant 'modality' - that is often the case where we might naturally resort to when constructing meanings, both linguistic and musical, about the world.

A narrative perspective helps him to balance both a conceptual and abstract knowledge of music, its universal value and significance - with a more direct observation and understanding of its operations in contextual and experiential use. Holding the narrative mode as a teacher, he looks at music as it functions within the identity of individuals and he sees its part in the life histories and stories of his students and research participants. It also reflects the personal voice of his own lived experience and it connects him to the personal voice of others. The lifeworld of each musical identity exists outside any singular paradigmatic vision of the truth. The art of pedagogy requires that we become immersed in a much broader vision than the paradigmatic perspective can allow –

*

In retrospect, four years later, as I consider the findings and processes of my doctoral thesis journey, I watch to see how transition manifests in my life. While developing my own personal perceptions of the research process I feel that I have resolved my own epistemological and ontological tensions. As a music teacher, I now uphold the subjective and social aspects of music engagement and respect the musical identity of each of my students. I strive to be phenomenologically 'present' to the nature of each individual musical lifeworld and identity, which in turn, helps me to understand the contextual effect that organised, formal musical experiences, may have. As a researcher and music/creative arts teacher my goal has been to continue to develop a phenomenological sensitivity to *the 'spaces' between ways of knowing*. Back in the classroom, narrative understandings and meanings have opened me to deeper and ongoing learning about teacher and student identity and issues within teaching and learning spaces.

The division that he created within these contrasted approaches did not merge until much later in life when he could finally see an all-encompassing picture. It was like bringing outstretched arms around in an arc so that the hands could finally clasp together in an embrace.

Bibliography

Author, (2004). *Illuminating Musical Lifeworlds: Phenomenological narratives of the musical lifeworlds of five senior secondary school students* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Tasmania.

David Cleaver

Barone, T. (2000). *Aesthetics, Politics, and Educational Inquiry: Essays and Examples*. New York: P. Lang.

Barone, T. (2001a). *Touching Eternity: The Enduring Outcomes of Education.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Barone, T. (2001b). 'Pragmatizing the Imaginary: A Response to a Fictionalized Case Study of Teaching'. *Harvard Educational Review*. Vol. 71, No. 4, pp. 734-741.

Barone, T., and Eisner, E. (1997). 'Arts-Based Educational Research'. In R. M. Jaeger (ed.) *Complementary Methods for Research in Education*. Washington: American Educational Research Assoc., pp. 71-116.

Bochner, A. (1997). 'It's About Time: Narrative and the Divided Self'. *Qualitative Inquiry*. Vol. 3, No. 4, pp. 418– 438.

Bochner, A. (2001). 'Narrative's Virtues'. *Qualitative Inquiry*. Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 131-157.

Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Cherryholmes, C. (1988). *Power and Criticism: Poststructural Investigations in Education.* New York Teachers College Press.

Clandinin, D. and Connelly, F. M. (1991). 'Narrative and Story in Practice and Research'. In D. Schön (ed.) *The Reflective Turn: Case Studies in and on Educational Practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Clandinin, D.J. and Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative Inquiry.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Johnson, M. (1987). *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kilbourne, B. (2001). 'Fictional Theses'. *Educational Researcher*. Vol. 28, No. 9, p. 27-32.

Polkinghorne, D. (1988). *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. Albany, NY: State of New York University Press.

Richardson, L. (1997). *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Richardson, L. (2000). 'Writing: A Method of Inquiry', In N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (eds.), *The Handbook of Qualitative Research.* Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

Rorty, R. (1982). *Consequences of Pragmatism: Essays:1972-1980*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press.