RARANGA KORERO: THE UTILITY OF NARRATIVE ANALYSIS FOR
KAUPAPA MAORI RESEARCH

Diane Ruwhiu

Department of Management, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand

Email: druwhiu@business.otago.ac.nz
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ABSTRACT  This paper is a product of my experience as an Indigenous Maori business researcher, conducting research in Indigenous Maori organisations. Given the context of my research a major emphasis in my search for an appropriate method was one that would provide an avenue of authentic engagement with the Maori cultural field. One that could articulate, with integrity, the historical narratives and symbolic meanings, based in social processes entwined around ritual, myth and cosmology of Maori society. This paper presents narrative inquiry as a research strategy I engaged to accord full recognition of Maori cultural norms, value systems and practices.

Keywords: Narrative analysis

My intention with this paper is to articulate a response to the challenges I have experienced as an Indigenous Maori business researcher, conducting research in Maori organisations in New Zealand. A major emphasis in my search for an appropriate method was one that would provide an avenue for authentic engagement with the Maori cultural field. One that could respond to the ideological tensions created by the disjunction of applying methodologies that align with what I conceptualise as a mainstream Western view of knowledge creation, as well as maintaining the integrity of taking an Indigenous Maori worldview (For example see Bishop, 1996; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; L. T. Smith, 1999). I argue that exploring worldviews is an essential precursor to understanding the alternate philosophical orientation required for scholarly engagement in organisational research and practice. As Morgan (1980) suggests in order to understand the orthodoxy in organisation theory, we must understand the “relationship between different modes of theorising and research, and the worldviews they reflect” (: 606). I argue that this is particularly so in Indigenous contexts.

The choice of methodological orientation is a dilemma that is heavily influenced by what Bourdieu (1991) refers to as a ‘struggle for the monopoly of specific competence’ in research endeavours. It is important to note that here, at this site of ‘struggle’ between Indigenous and Western worldviews, I avoid an antagonistic ‘them’ and ‘us’ relationship. Rather I take the position from which an Indigenous worldview is located as a domain of knowledge that operates independently to, but also concurrently with other domains of knowledge, primarily in this case with those associated with
Western paradigms. This paper positions the perspective of an Indigenous Maori worldview as central and the term ‘Maori’ denotes the Indigenous peoples of New Zealand. Maori are tangata whenua, described here as the people of the land referring to their status as first nation peoples of New Zealand. Thus this paper presents my experience with the process of narrative inquiry as a research strategy engaged to accord full recognition of Maori cultural norms, value systems and practices, and cultural legitimation in both the process of information gathering and outcomes of research (Bishop, 1996; L. T. Smith, 1999).

Narrative inquiry operates as a culturally situated research strategy that has a ‘local capacity for accruing stories’ of experience (Bishop, 2008; Bruner, 1991), particularly practice grounded in kaupapa Maori. I define kaupapa Maori as the embodiment of living a Maori culturally informed life that takes for granted the validity and legitimacy of Maori knowledge and practice (G. H. Smith, 1997). In this paper, I outline the process of crafting and interpreting narrative within a socio-cultural context such as kaupapa Maori. I emphasise the utility of narrative inquiry as a method that sits comfortably with the more reflexive and critical approaches to the production and dissemination of organisational theory knowledge (for example Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000; Deetz, 1996, 2000; Hassard & Keleman, 2002).

**Narrative as a Research Strategy**

Genette (1980 cited in Tsoukas and Hatch, 2001) argues that narrative can refer to three separate things: the written or spoken narrative statement, the events and their relationships that are the subject of the narrative, or the act of narrating. Narratives use of language and text enables us to make sense of the individual experiences and social interaction, that are central to human practice (Bruner, 1990; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Tsoukas & Cummings, 1997). It is narratives’ preoccupation with the way we organise our experience and memory (Bruner, 1990), which resonates with the pragmatic orientation of kaupapa Maori. Thus, narrative is an expression of practice; a way of understanding experience
(Andrews, Sclater, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2004) and a record of “stories lived and told” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 20). For example, Polkinghorne’s (1988) conception of narrative is focused squarely around the study of human behaviour and the meaning systems that form human experience. That is, narrative provides a familiar and ubiquitous representation of the rich and messy domain of human experience and interaction (Bruner, 1991). Narrative inquiry therefore is a culturally situated research strategy capable of capturing the complex detail of Maori tradition and practice.

**Narrative Inquiry in an Organisation Context**

As a domain of research, narrative draws from many fields, such as, literary criticism, linguistics, psychology, gender studies, education, anthropology, law and history (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Rhodes & Brown, 2005). The utility of narrative as a research method is associated with the ‘linguistic turn’ that has occurred not just in the social sciences but also organisation studies (Boje, Oswick, & Ford, 2004; Deetz, 2003; Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001). In an organisational context narrative is viewed as a mode of communication and way of knowing and interpreting the world (Cunliffe, Luhman, & Boje, 2004). Indeed, narrative technique is increasingly employed as a “way of discussing diverse levels of meaning”(Grubbs, 2001: 378) in organisational research.

The use of narratives has grown in recent years reflecting the blurring of genres in the social sciences (Cunliffe, Luhman, & Boje, 2004). As a consequence there are a variety of terms associated with narrative, which are also gaining greater cadence in organisational research. For example, Grubbs (2001) used a literary form of allegory, as a narrative device to examine the symbolic aspects of change across an alliance of public sector organisations. Boje (1991) makes use of storytelling wherein organisations are viewed as collective storytelling systems in which the performance of stories is a key part of members’ sense making. I subscribe to the perspective offered by Cunliffe et al. (2004) who suggest that although ‘story’ and ‘narrative’ are often used interchangeably in narrative research, they are not the same. Narratives do not necessarily require the characters or a beginning to
end plotline. Thus, I position narratives as being constituted by stories, metaphor, allegory, and other forms of narrative devices.

*Raranga Korero: Narrative Inquiry in the Context of Kaupapa Maori*

Raranga evokes strong feelings of unity and the weaving together of people and spiritually, the weaving together of all of creation into a single cosmos. This avoids what Marsden (2003) identifies as risk of compartmentalising and isolating facets of Maori reality. Raranga korero thus serves as a symbol for this paper; the gradual weaving together of many narrative strands, which forms the nexus of social practice and systems of exchange distinct to Maori ways of knowing and knowledge. The narrative approach provides a forum for Indigenous peoples to construct their own ‘interpretive repertoires’ (Wetherell & Potter, 1993). These repertoires incorporate historically evolved discourses within their own frame of reference, logics and language, rather than that of the researcher or their associated field of inquiry. Bishop (1996) argues, narrative inquiry situates research into Maori contexts in a holistic, culturally appropriate manner “because storytelling allows the research participants to select, recollect and reflect on stories within their own cultural context and language rather than in the cultural context and language chosen by the researcher” (: 24). Given the context of my research an important consideration is narratives capacity to represent the metaphysical expression of Maori ways of life, customs, practices and institutions which are central to Maori culture.

Certainly, narrative resonates with the strong cultural preference Maori have for narrative forms of communicating knowledge (Bishop, 1996; Roberts et al., 2004). Tribal history and knowledge was delivered through narratives based around the ideology that all living things shared whakapapa, which is defined as a genealogical or a mental construct that places in layers, human descent lines and relationships (Roberts *et al.*, 2004). As Bishop explains, traditionally “Maori as an oral culture devised methods to pass on the multiplicity of knowledge that any culture gathers and constructs about itself. Story was one of the common ways of imparting knowledge” (1996: 25). However, what is crucial in
understanding narratives utility in Indigenous contexts is its capacity for engaging research in a specific cultural worldview and discursive practice. Within which the research participants function, make sense of their lives and understand their experiences (Bishop & Glynn, 1999).

**Crafting & Interpreting Narrative**

The process of crafting two years worth of dialogue and textual documentation into narrative composition was difficult. Not simply because as is noted frequently narrative material does tend to be more voluminous by nature (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Riessman, 1993), but also because of narrative requirements for maintaining the authenticity of the experience being shared. I was in a constant state of flux as result of negotiating between the competing systems of representation; the story as told by the community and the academic conventions of constructing a linear progression through facts, figures, findings, heading and sub-headings to focus the audience’s attention. Ultimately, however, I came to a point in crafting the narrative where my central concern was not how the text was constructed. Rather, it was how the story reflected the ‘construction of reality’ (Bruner, 1991) as shared by the participants.

**Making Private Words, Public**

What I would consider to be primary information was my handwritten notes, a verbatim transcript and the tape recording of each individual discussion. Information that I would categorise as secondary were my notes and documentation from the various hui, noted in this paper as a gathering or meeting (Ryan, 1997). Here my aim is to describe the process of writing, specifically, how I aimed to maintain the integrity of kaupapa Maori in terms of the narratives and experiences being shared and the co-joint construction of the narrative. The connectedness between myself and the participants brought with it a significant sense of obligation and responsibility to and even authority within the Maori cultural field. When I first started engaging with Maori cultural literature during the latter part of 2002, I came across the following description of a form of Maori exchange by Marcel Mauss:
“Speaking of the hau, the spirit of things and particularly of the forest and forest game, Tamati Ranaipiri, one of Mr. Elsdon Best’s most useful informants, gives you quite by chance the key to the whole problem. ‘I shall tell you about hau. Hau is not the wind. Not at all. Suppose you have some particular object, taonga, and you give it to me; you give it to me without a price. We do not bargain over it. Now I give this thing to a third person who after a time decides to give me something in repayment for it (utu), and he makes me a present of something (taonga). Now this taonga I received from him is the spirit (hau) of the taonga I received from you and which I passed on to him. The taonga, which I receive on account of the taonga that came from you, I must return to you. It would not be right on my part to keep these taonga whether they were desirable or not. I must give them to you since they are hau of the taonga, which you gave me. If I were to keep this second taonga for myself I might become ill or even die. Such is hau, the hau of personal property, the hau of the taonga, the hau of the forest. Enough on that subject’” (Mauss, 1970: 9).

I did not understand it. I knew Mauss was describing the value system that governed the nature of the taonga, noted here as something of value, treasure of gift, in a gift economy, where in essence, hau must be returned to the original gift giver in some form, to provide the balance of life (Mauss, 1970). I knew what the words in themselves meant, but the meaning of the story as a whole was lost on me. It wasn’t until two years later when finalising my participant’s contributions to the narrative that I reflected more deeply. Re-reading this story I now see how the practice of utu, or balanced exchange, and the idea of the hau offers culturally situated insight to the role of narrative inquiry. Providing a basis for reciprocal exchange - wananga atu, wananga mai, whakawhitiwhiti whakaaro (your wisdom for mine, as we cross our thoughts together) (Salmond, 1997).

This being so, it was not up to me as the writer, to hold onto the stories because in the spirit of hau to keep them would be dangerous, not only because it is illicit but because it comes orally, physically, and spiritually from a person. Therefore it retains a magical and religious hold over the recipient. The
experiences and knowledge shared by the participants to this research are valuable taonga, connected to their whakapapa and wairua, noted here as familial linkages or spiritual essence respectively (Bishop, 1996). Crucially, what was shared are not inert and one-dimensional constructs to be written down and codified as analytical constructs. My obligation did not end with the signing of consent forms, interpretation and representation of the narratives shared.

Narrative composition requires familiarity with the material with which one is working and my primary techniques were reading and listening. The interaction between participants and researcher influences the data. This influence is hard to detect in a first reading. As such, further meticulous work of sensitive reading or listening is required for gaining understanding pertinent to the research questions (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). My aim, through this process of reading and re-reading, listening and re-listening, was to portray the narrative beyond the words. Narrative material requires dialogic listening to three voices: the voice of the narrator as represented on the tape or in the text; the theoretical framework which provides the concepts and tools for interpretation; and a reflexive monitoring of the act of reading and interpretation (Bakhtin, 1981 cited in Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Thus, my representation of narrative offered three strands of prose aimed at capturing the dynamic interaction and constant negotiation of the story and its meaning, between the researcher and the research group, and the field within which we are embedded.

The first strand of narrative is episodes of reflexivity wherein ‘I’ present ‘my’ own experiences and interpretations. The interactive discussion between ‘us’, incorporating conversational dialog between myself and one other individual participant, provides the second strand of narrative. In these instances I’ve noted the exchange as a verbatim narrative excerpt. This process took a great deal of time. For each participant I constructed a narrative about their experience in the field of Maori business. Many of the individual participants took the opportunity to add further commentary or change the narrative to reflect their thoughts more clearly. I did find that there were some similarities across the individual narratives. These similarities formed the third narrative. In contrast to being a ‘grand’ or meta-
narrative, this three dimensional approach served to contextualise the narrative of Maori business practice in the experiences and practice of the research whanau. The notion of research whanau is depicted as the series of relationships, through culturally appropriate means of engagement, connectedness and commitment to the research participants (Bishop, 1996). That is it represents what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe as a sense of social significance by knowing that the ‘I’ is connecting with the ‘they’ reflecting the sense of researcher and participants being together in the midst of the narrative.

Features of Narrative Analysis

While traditional methods of analysis rely on systematic inferential processes, usually based on statistics, narrative work requires self-awareness and self-discipline in the on-going examination of text against interpretation and vice-versa (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Several times, I would find myself drifting back into the scientific mode of representing ‘truth’ as I saw it, only to find that as I read over the constructed narrative and re-listened to the tapes, it didn’t ‘feel’ right. Scholars of narrative inquiry make reference to narrative in an interpretive light (Riessman, 1993), or an art of research predominantly based on talent, intuition, or clinical experience (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). During narrative composition it became apparent that trying to ‘force’ a specific format onto the narrative of each member or community group of the research whanau simply didn’t work. Each person told their own narrative, and narrative within narratives. To impose a specific format and maintain consistency I would lose the essence of their narrative. For example, Mike drew from his own experiences to explain his conception of practice in the field:

“For example, a café, like the Tuna café. You go there and everyone knows it’s Maori. Why? The people behind the counter they say kia ora. They get into you, you know, ‘Geez five minutes late’ or it’s just in the way the talk to you and include you. You go to another cafe and everything might be perfect with the food service and location but it’s different. They have a worldview and their illustration of their worldview might not be necessarily written down in nice little words and a mission statement or anything like that. This is the way they do things. Everybody knows, you’ve got to go to
"the Tuna café man! Oh what’s on the menu? It’s not about the menu. It’s about the people. Maori worldview is important as it is reflected in ‘how you do your stuff’”.

I could have easily represented that story with a succinct statement such as the field is represented by its people. I could have supported that statement with little quotations “It’s about the people. Maori worldview is important”. But what we miss in that approach is a story reflecting humour, a sense of belonging and kinship amongst the people who work in the Tuna café and their customers. We also miss that it is predominantly the Maori customers who ‘get’ the meanings of the ‘hassles’. We also don’t get to attach the story to the personal experience of Mike, who reflected on the fact that while other cafes may offer similar products, the Maori worldview and all that it encompasses informs the practice of the Tuna café staff. To have forced this experience into a categorisation would have perhaps caught the sets of relations between the people involved in the story, but missed the significance of those relationships.

I view the process of narrative interpretation as not merely being just the word, or the sentence uttered. Narrative analysis offers “open-ended, contingent relations between contexts and actions and interpretations. The rules of a ritual are not the ritual. A grammar is not a language, the rules for chess are not chess, and traditions are not actual social behaviour” (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 43). It is this that reminds us to read the story, as opposed to the words, to capture the experiences being shared in the narrative. It is the story being told, the meaning being conveyed by the individual participants and research whanau that is of primary concern in interpretation. Thus, I do not subscribe to a thematic analysis, which involves the structured coding of data and the building of a set of themes to describe the phenomenon of interest as per (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Rather, the approach I took when organising the narratives resonates somewhat with van Manen’s (1997) existential approach to textual organising in which the objective is to avoid capturing "human
experience in deadening abstract concepts, and logical systems that flatten rather than deepen our understanding human life”(17). As Griffin (1993) states narratives capture a coherent relational whole that gives meaning to and explains each of its elements and is, at the same time, constituted by them. This supports the notion that human activity is not reducible to a set of hard and fast rules (P. Bourdieu, 1977; P. Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Flyvbjerg, 2001), that can be identified as a template for research involving human behaviour. I preserved the narratives as mean-making structures to maintain the holistic meaning of the narrative as a whole.

In constructing narrative it is of vital importance that we understand the role of the researcher who traditionally has taken the stories of the participants and reconstituted them (Bishop, 1996). A consequence of human agency and imagination has implications for what gets included and excluded in narratisation, and what it is supposed to mean (Ricoeur, 1980; Riessman, 1993). I see my role as gradually allowing the narrative to unfold from the diverse, complex and sometimes conflicting stories that people, documents and other evidence told me (Flyvbjerg, 2001). This refers to what Flyvbjerg calls a ‘polyphony of voices’ which provides space for a diversity of opinions and representations to be heard as opposed to just one dominant version. The resultant narrative is a reflection of the stories told by the participants but the analysis proceeds from my interpretation and mode of representation and through a particular theoretical lens that is a product of my own creative process. Indeed, it was the continual negotiation of experiences and reflections, by myself and the members of the research whanau that this method took more precise shape.

Finally, unlike traditional research analysis, narrative is freed from having to be presented as a one dimensional reading (temporally and contextually) where everything is said to everyone. Indeed it is the fluidity of the narrative composition and interpretation, which negates the search for an objective set of measures of validity and paves the way for a situation where multiple interpretations may be claimed. I focus on the shared experiences of the researcher and research whanau combined with the historical and contextual similarities told from different viewpoints that have emerged from the overall
threads of this research. Thus, in terms of narrative, interpretation took place in the community. Private constructions typically mesh with a community of life stories, engaging with what we do and what we say, acquiring significance only in a context provided by practice, a way of doing things that we share (Kivinen & Piirainen, 2006).

Reflecting on Narrative Inquiry

In writing my primary consideration has to be the integrity of the narrative, particularly given the obligation to operate in a kaupapa Maori knowledge space. Thus context is of central concern. Narrative engages with the complexity of human experience and the multiplicity of reflected interpretations where none is privileged beyond the sense in which it can be contextually verifiable (Bishop, 1996; Flyvbjerg, 2001). One way in which I maintain this is to ground each narrative in the context of the Maori cultural field. This necessarily draws from the value systems of kaupapa Maori which is embodied in the community of the research whanau. A key point here is that narrative seeks meaning that is derived from Indigenous participants immersed in their own cultural processes for negotiation of meaning. That is, narrative in allowing for contextual sensitivities to be involved in the process and taking for granted the existence of multiple realities (P. Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Bruner, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988). Ensuring that where possible all thoughts, ideas and concepts pertaining to the research project are expressed in ways that are culturally relevant and in keeping with the Indigenous Maori worldview (Bishop, 1996; G. H. Smith, 1997; L. T. Smith, 1999).

Narratives are a version of reality whose acceptability is governed by the conventions of the field from which it stems (Bruner, 1991). While I accept both the authority and responsibility for the representation and interpretation of narrative, I cannot claim free rein over retelling a narrative. Triangulation through the communal sense of knowledge creation of the research whanau, direct observation at hui and documentation achieves some degree of verification. Therefore, the process through which we make the claim for trustworthiness of our interpretations is the critical issue.
Trustworthiness and not truth is a key semantic difference: the latter assumes an objective reality, whereas the former moves the process into the social world (Riessman, 1993). Thus, narrative research is not a quest for absolute truth in human reality, rather, it is to achieve as closely as possible real life situations and views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

Prevailing concepts of verification and procedures for establishing validity rely on realist assumptions and consequently are largely irrelevant to narrative studies (Riessman, 1993). Narrative is not meant to be read as an exact record of a phenomenon in question, therefore there can be no set of formal rules or standardised technical procedures in analysis (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Riessman, 1993). Instead, we can determine narrative verisimilitude and veracity (Bruner, 1991), which are the platform on which narrative inquirers seek to make the case of persuasiveness, correspondence and coherence in judging authenticity. Additionally, the way different parts of the narrative create complete and meaningful pictures that makes sense and is plausible to the extent it is capable of convincing the audience and research community. Coherence can be evaluated both internally, in terms of how the parts fit together, and externally, against existing theories and previous research (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998).

*The Never-ending Story*

Narrative contains specific experiences based on actors and events, from their past, their current experiences (Flyvbjerg, 2001) and I would also include, based on my fieldwork experience, future expectations. That is not to say that there is no beginning or end; rather that I emphasise a ‘circularity’ of the research process. Narrative inquiry provides access into reflexivity, relational thinking, and a consideration of both the role of the researcher and the construction of the research object It therefore as an experiential quality that captures the pragmatic orientation of kaupapa Maori as a living thing ….. as a never-ending story.
References


