Author's pre-publication article

Professional provenance and the narrative construction of 'reality' in education
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Abstract

Teachers' and teacher educators' capabilities to create and engage in humanizing and meaningful learning and development with the participants and communities they serve underpins purposeful education practices and curricula. Such capabilities are constituent in establishing professional provenance in education. Effective educators draw on a myriad of premediated knowledge and expertise, but in ways that respond to and sustain learners' and communities' ongoing development. The pivotal role of narrative in the project of establishing and sustaining professional provenance in education is presented in this chapter, together with a personal reflection on the importance and significance of Ivor Goodson's work, to the broader project of professional provenance in education. Goodson's commitment to meaningful and humanizing forms of education have characterized his life's research and work, and this chapter I hope offers a brief insight into this contribution, at a time when education nationally and globally, is becoming increasingly prescriptive and dehumanized.

Education under re-construction?

In an interview, *'The Narrative Construction of Reality'* the public intellectual, Stuart Hall, reflected on the reporting in the media of the Falklands war, highlighting that 'for the first time the journalists saw a re-construction of their own construction of events' (Hall, 1984, p.3). Fast-forward to the contemporary period and all around we find the contesting and reconstructing of narratives in a struggle for the dominant political narratives to explain the events of our time. Trump, Brexit, the re-emergence of political and religious extremism, buoyed by populist movements, all draw on the power of narrative in the age of digital social media, albeit in the service often, of dehumanizing and marginalizing agendas. Like Hall, Ivor Goodson's contribution to the understanding of the power and complexity of narrative within the micro, meso and macro intersections of people's lives and broader life histories, continues to have particular currency within intellectual debates of the times we find ourselves in. It has also been particularly influential in my own work. In this chapter, I will examine how I draw on Goodson's contribution to our understanding of narrative in both professional and political life, at a particularly pertinent time in which professional identities,

I argue, are in a state of re-construction more often towards increased banality and trivialization, as meaning, purpose and value – what I see as education's pillars of professional provenance - are at risk of continuing erosion.

Narrative, Power and Datafication

The explanatory and meaning making power of narrative in both the personal and collective social psyche has been exploited for centuries as a powerful propaganda tool but perhaps never more so than in contemporary society, as journalist John Harris noted in a recent series of BBC podcasts titled "The Tyranny of Narrative" (Harris, 2018):

> 'If a causal campaign wants to capture the public imagination or say, the votes of 17 million people, they definitely need a powerful story, that cannot only be told in full, but also be distilled down to a potent slogan that captures its basic elements, like: "Take back control".'

The exploitation of narrative power in politics is not new. But in an era of intensified digitization, I argue that so-called "big data" in kinship with narrative's apparent natural affinity towards the construction and reconstruction of 'realities', heralds new challenges to the provenance and integrity of professional work and identities. I define professional provenance broadly as the right, responsibility and capacity of professionals to create and engage in humanizing and meaningful practices with the participants and communities they serve (see e.g. Turvey, 2018). Consequently, this is not an argument for narrative as a panacea but an argument for engaging with and understanding at more than a superficial level, both the constructive and destructive contingencies in which narrative may be implicated. As Schostak warns, narrative holds contingencies both 'for entrapment and emancipation' (2006, p.162).

Goodson's research into narrative has addressed many aspects of the phenomenon over a lifetime of research, but it is in addressing the power and politics of narrative (2013), where the risk of narrative entrapment and the importance of understanding the significance of this is most evident in his work. He argues for example that it is essential to locate life stories within broader life histories, if they are to act as a counter narrative to reductive neoliberal agendas and become more than decoupled parochial stories ripe for exploitation and

manipulation. In reflecting on the importance of life history work or locating the subjective within the wider socio-cultural context, Goodson argues 'in the avoidance of human subjectivity, quantitative assessment and theoretical commentaries can so easily serve powerful constituencies (2013, p.33). In a contemporary context where the growth of digital data points enters into every aspect of people's lives, I concur with Goodson that there is a renewed and urgent need to repurpose narrative work generally and more specifically in education, towards the development of professional and pedagogical provenance, to which Goodson's conceptualization of life story and life histories lends itself. Centering professional provenance, I argue, can give us the means with which to contextualize professional work and identities in ways that can enable and sustain agency and meaningful connections with the broader purposes of education.

It is becoming increasingly evident that we cannot ignore the 'datafication' of people's lives (Mayer-Schonberger and Cukier, 2013). Such data has the potential to be more or less meaningful. As Eisner argues, (1997, p.175) the knowledge harvested from data has 'political ramifications as well as intellectual ones'. In trying to make sense of such ramifications, Cope and Kalantzis (2016) argue that professionals need to develop new sensibilities in which data analytics is a constituent element within a process of professional and pedagogical meaning making. But there can be mistaken assumptions, that more data is synonymous with greater meaning and that the automated rendition and analysis of data made possible by machine algorithms can only be a good thing. The secondary analysis of large-scale datasets is a common feature of a contemporary digital age in which Orben and Przybylski argue 'analytical flexibility' can be utilized to establish the correlations sought (2019). The proliferation and automation of data generation creates contrasting contingencies and the dangers of taking any data at face value are becoming increasingly problematic. On the one hand, Neff et al (2017, p.94) argue that stories and narrative are intrinsically bound up in data analytics because:

> "Stories occur before data production, during production, and are used in exchange to give data meaning across communities with different expertise, cultures, and practices."

On the other hand, increased datafication also heralds new opportunities for the manipulation, and thereby, avoidance of human subjectivity; a breaking up of this unity as stories or data

are decontextualised and reconfigured in support of different meanings across cultures and communities (Goodson, 2013). While concerns about the influence of data companies such as Cambridge Analytica in manipulating the voting intentions of particular demographic groups in election campaigns and the EU referendum held in the UK, have recently come to the fore, the exploitative and persuasive power of data and statistics, conscious or otherwise, is not a new thing. In the 1970s, Goodhart (1975) established the problem of statistical measures and their potential to influence or distort the phenomenon being studied, expressed as Goodhart's Law through the maxim that 'when a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure'. Whilst there is nothing new in the pitfalls of taking data at face value, there is perhaps something new in the speed and capacity with which digital data can be harvested, reconfigured and utilized both within and beyond its original context. While Cope and Kalantzis (2016) identify a need to develop new sensibilities to this changed social and political landscape of 'datafication' in education, another argument is that such professional sensibilities are being eroded by intensified datafication. As Goodson (1999, p.294) has long argued 'new alliances between theory and practice' can only be forged by teachers, continuing the tradition of praxis established in the 1970s by the likes of Lawrence Stenhouse who characterised the way teachers enact praxis as a process of creating stories of action within a theory of context (Stenhouse, 1975). Goodson's work over the decades has remained faithful to the concept of praxis, but has also developed it further in important and significant ways, as I explore next.

Goodson, as others who have developed the field of narrative methodologies (e.g. Goodson, Antikainen, Sikes, & Andrews, 2017) has often signalled the risks and parochial trappings that await an uncritical or naive appropriation of narrative. Stories may or may not speak for themselves and narrative and biographical methodologies can conceal any number of ethical, epistemological, ontological risks. One such risk is the failure to contextualise the individual life story within the wider social and historical context, which can also become a limitation of narrow approaches to praxis. As Goodson states:

> 'By moving our methodological focus from life stories to life histories, we can begin to redress the dangers of individualization and social and historical decontextualization.' (Goodson, 2013, p.31)

Storying professional and pedagogical lives and embedding them within their wider historical context – what Goodson calls periodisation – is a potential counter and form of resistance to the exploitation of datafication, automation and ultimately, the reconstruction of our professional work as educators. Without periodisation, Goodson argues (2017, p.89), the life story can simply become a de-contextualising device whereby 'specific empowerment can go hand in hand with overall social control'. So what form might specific empowerment masking overall social control, have already taken?

Social control as faux empowerment may be used, I argue, to characterise the wave of education policies pursued by the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) to which many neo-liberal economies such as the UK and US have adhered. Such economistic education policies, have failed to address issues of social injustice and inequity, often sustaining the injustices experienced by marginalised and minoritized communities by simply decontextualizing the problem to reconstruct it. Centre-left and centre-right political parties have all claimed the social justice and equity narrative with resounding calls for social mobility through education, but as Ellis et al highlight, the pursuit of 'economistic metaphors grounded in dominant values which mask and/or uphold inequities in schooling and in society' (2019, p.2), have merely acted to conceal the subjectivities and unjust realities of minoritized communities' experiences of curriculum, pedagogy and schooling. The narrative of dominant policy discourse predicated narrowly on a discourse of 'achievement gaps' and 'social-mobility' within neoliberal systems of education has masked what Ladson-Billings characterises more faithfully as an 'education debt' owed to marginalised communities due to the failure to adequately respond to their needs, embedded as they are in the various social, cultural, racial and historical injustices they have long endured (Ladson-Billings, 2006). That is, Ladson-Billings' focus on an 'education debt' challenges the dominant narrative, changing it from an economistic one that is indifferent and unresponsive to the subjectivities of those communities served poorly, to one that locates their subjective social, cultural and historical injustices as the starting point for educational reparation. What we see in a corpus of work by scholars such as Ladson-Billings (1995 and 2006) and more recently Paris (2012) or San Pedro and Kinloch (2017) is the power of narrative to talk back to dominant political and failed policies, when the life stories of individuals (the subjectivities) are located within the broader social, political and historical context (Goodson, 2013).

The interdependency between the subjectivities of people's lived experiences and the wider political and social context is at the core of Goodson's conceptualization of life story and life history. It is clear, as Goodson's work has highlighted, that narrative matters at different levels, and globally scholars are increasingly recognising the important role of narrative in bearing witness through an ongoing process of 'dialogic consciousness raising' for researchers and participants in education research (Paris and Winn, 2014, xvi). There is not scope in this short chapter to explore this more fully but I want to conclude by examining the importance of narrative at its most primary level; the personal, as a fundamental process of making meaning at the centre of education, as an essentially human process. It is here at the level of the personal and individual, I argue, we see the need for narrative to reconnect learning with the fundamental process of making meaning in ways that are purposeful and of value to individuals and their communities. To conclude the second half of this chapter I turn my attention to narrative learning and in particular, Goodson's contribution amongst others in sustaining this important aspect of education through challenging times.

Narrative learning

The influence of Goodson's work on both my own practice and research has been particularly through the concept of 'narrative learning'. Working in initial teacher education and research, it was the concept of narrative learning which led, in my doctoral research, to the development of a theory of narrative ecologies as a way of conceiving the myriad factors at play in student teachers' professional learning (Turvey, 2013). I came to the theory of learning as a narrative process, primarily through Ivor's work. I remember distinctively the sense of serendipity on reading *Narrative Learning* the opening chapters of which outline some of the genealogy of the theory of learning as narrative (Goodson et al, 2010). And still today throughout most aspects of my work, the construction of learning as a narrative process is still central. For me learning as narrative is central to the quest for professional provenance in education, and our capacity as a society to hold and protect education as a fundamental humanizing process of meaning making that should have both value and purpose for all individuals and communities. Against this backdrop of learning as narrative, I also want to discuss in this final section, how contemporary policies in education in England are, I believe, eroding this notion of learning as meaning making, in their continual shift towards economistic models of education predicated on learning and knowledge as remembering. The paradox, of course, is that storying and making meaning cannot occur without memory. So what is meant by narrative learning or learning as narrative?

In a 2006 paper, Goodson elaborates on the concept of 'narrative learning' in relation to his work on the Learning Lives Project, one of the aims of which was 'to deepen understanding of the meaning and significance of informal learning in the lives of adults' (p.16). The book, *Narrative Learning* (2010) written in collaboration with Gert Biesta, Michael Tedder and Norma Adair, and an output from this project, again centers the concept of narrative learning as a continual process of 'construction and reconstruction' at the service of meaning making throughout the life course. As Goodson et al elaborate (2010) storying and restorying our experiences are a fundamental means through which we make sense of our lives thus;

> 'Narrative learning is not simply learning *from* the stories we tell about our lives and ourselves. It is learning that happens 'in' and 'through' the narration.' (Goodson et al, 2010, p.2)

The antecedents of narrative learning or learning as a narrative process have their roots in the work of Jerome Bruner. As Polkinghorne (1988) asserts, Bruner established the significance of language and narrative form as a fundamental way of knowing and making sense of the world. In *The Culture of Education* (1996, p.121) Bruner claims:

> 'the most natural and the earliest way in which we organize our experience and our knowledge is in terms of the narrative form. And it may also be true that the beginnings, the transitions, and the full grasp of ideas in a spiral curriculum depend upon embodying those ideas into a story or narrative form.'

Bruner identified narrative thinking or cognition (1986) as one of two distinct modes of human thought, the other being paradigmatic thinking. Whilst the latter relates more to logic and reason, associated more readily with scientific domains, narrative cognition and paradigmatic cognition in Bruner's view are 'irreducible to one another' (1986, p.11).

This epistemological and ontological position of learning as a narrative and cumulative process of meaning making and understanding, in essence leading to more knowing, is not currently one valued under neo-liberal, market-driven ideologies of education. The machine of mainstream and social media in the UK and US is dominated, amongst others, by stories of

teacher shortage and retention issues, children and young people's rising mental health issues, increases in school exclusions, and lately in England, cases of 'off-rolling' or refusing to accommodate children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. Off-rolling is a phenomenon whereby schools move difficult-to-teach pupils off their rolls to boost performance data, which are a means by which they are held tightly accountable by government agencies such as Ofsted. One does not have to look far for evidence that in England, the neoliberal model of schooling built on an edifice of dehumanizing target-driven data outcomes is increasingly a model that fails to hold meaning, purpose or value for large numbers of children, young people and teachers. Even those at the heart of the establishment are beginning to raise alarm. For example, the chief inspector of Schools, Amanda Spielman (2018) has expressed concern that education is becoming increasingly lacking in 'substance' as the target-driven and outcomes orientated culture is so sedimented in schools' policy and practice. Spielman (2018) states that:

> 'For a long time, our inspections have looked hardest at outcomes, placing too much weight on test and exam results when we consider the overall effectiveness of schools.'

In their internal review of the inspection process, however, Ofsted seem unable to escape the data driven econometric machine of school effectiveness they have created. For example, despite Harford (2018) explaining that inspectors no longer 'need to see quantities of data, spreadsheets, graphs and charts on how children are performing,' he nevertheless continues to use the rhetoric of quantification talking not about learning but about progress and quantification, as he states: 'By progress, we mean pupils knowing more and remembering more' (Harford, 2018). Similarly, an overview of research carried out recently by Ofsted to inform its new framework for inspection of schools in England, draws heavily on cognitive psychology that tends to equate learning very narrowly, and some might argue dehumanizingly, in terms of changes in long term memory. For example, the psychologist John Sweller's work dominates this overview of research by Ofsted including the paper by Kirschner, Sweller and Clark (2006, p.77) in which they state:

> The aim of all instruction is to alter long-term memory. If nothing has changed in long-term memory, nothing has been learned. Any instructional recommendation that does not or cannot specify what has been changed in long-term memory, or that does

not increase the efficiency with which relevant information is stored in or retrieved from long-term memory, is likely to be ineffective.

Undeniably, there is a corpus of informative theory and research documenting the role and the significance of theories of memory which have significance within the process of learning and the development of schema. However, it is a corpus of research and theory that is frequently cherry-picked by policy makers who tend to emphasise theoretical models that focus on the significance of capacities of working memory in comparison to long term memory, derived from Atkin and Schifrrin's multi-store model of memory (1968), as opposed to more recent models which emphasize the complexity of memory and the importance of self-regulation as monitored by what Baddeley has conceptualized as the central executive (Baddeley, 2000). But, in our competitive and market-led education system, where even knowledge requires a superlative - "knowledge-rich" or "knowledge-led" label for teachers and schools to establish their unique selling points over other teachers and schools, the construct of change in long-term memory, I argue, is becoming a rather detached, impoverishing and dehumanizing synonym for learning. If the sole aim of 'all instruction' is a change in long term memory then there is a risk that 'specify[ing] what has changed in long term memory' is all we need concern ourselves with as educators; a rather narrow algorithmic view of learning, ripe for burgeoning datafication. As Biesta (2012, p.76) argues convincingly, such abstract 'learnification' is somewhat missing the point of education which is that 'students learn *something,* that they learn it for a *reason,* and that they learn it *from someone'* for as Biesta goes onto argue 'questions of content, purpose and relationships' are central to education as a meaning-making process. The erosion of professional provenance is what is at stake here. The abstraction and reduction of learning to a change in long term memory might serve the requirements of cognitive research design, but it does not even partially serve the purposes of the teacher faced with engaging their students meaningfully and purposefully with knowledge and understanding.

Ultimately, this quest for and debate about professional provenance in education spans Goodson's research and characterizes his own life history as one of resistance to the narrow neo-liberal reconstruction of education over the last 50 years. It is the tension between knowledge and curriculum as prescription, versus knowledge and curriculum as narration. Goodson's, *The Making of Curriculum* (1988)*,* contributed significantly to this debate in the 1980s, emphasizing that neither teachers nor pupils are 'passive recipients of the "espoused"

curriculum' and arguing for life history approaches to learning and curriculum (1982 and 1988). The curriculum and knowledge debates of the 80s contrast starkly with the reductive scientism of current debates in education. Take, for example, Woods' (1984, p.260) explanation that, 'a curriculum area is a vibrant, human process lived out in the rough and tumble, give and take, joys and despairs, plots and counter-plots of a teacher's life'. It is time to reflect, I argue, on professional provenance in education if we are to resist the narrow and dehumanizing reconstruction of our work as educators. Goodson's more recent work continues to resonate and sustain in the quest for professional provenance, so it is, to Ivor I give the last words on learning, curriculum and knowing (Goodson and Deakin-Crick, 2014, p.58):

> 'The process is formative and builds from the life narrative of the learner. The curriculum becomes a "narratable pathway" towards the formation of identity and agency when "knowing as storying" is valued, promoted and represented. Narratives provide and create space for "pedagogic moments" in which people can connect with themselves, each other, their own culture and tradition, their hopes and aspirations and ultimately an intentional mentored construction of knowledge, which serves their personal and public trajectories. This kind of narrative learning will provide an antidote to the prescriptive learning of curriculum that has disengaged generations of learners.'

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