
INSUFFICIENCY OF ENTITLEMENT CRITERIA AS JUSTIFICATION FOR KNOWLEDGE CLAIMS IN NARRATIVE RESEARCH

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Narrative research is a commonly employed research methodology.¹ In narrative research, researchers capture the testimony of their participants on a myriad of topics, e.g. how they feel about teaching or how they feel their ethnic background influences the way that they analyze concepts. Such testimony in narrative educational research commonly relies upon teachers providing explanations of how their background, knowledge and expertise have shaped them to teach in the manner in which they do teach. Furthermore, narrative researchers provide their own interpretation, as a form of narrative evaluation, to the testimony contributed by the subjects. To what extent can we take either testimony, that of the participants or the researcher, as knowledge? That is what Caduri considers in her article “On the Epistemology of Narrative Research in Education.” While she argues that knowledge claims of researchers are not justified, we can be intellectually “entitled” to accept them. Caduri provides three criteria which, when met, allow for entitlement of knowledge claims. I argue that while such criteria are necessary for warrant/justification, they are not sufficient. In order to be warranted, in any capacity, knowledge claims must have evidentiary reasons for acceptance. I shall argue from a pragmatic perspective to make this argument.

Objective truth is not necessarily conveyed in narrative research by any form of testimony provided. It is understandable that narrative research, as a type of qualitative research, is more along the interpretive line of research than quantitative approaches. In such a methodology, researchers interpret the information provided. Such interpretation will be based upon their own backgrounds and expectations. Without a validated analytical tool or measure, such interpretation may be too subjective for general interpretation. While this is an accepted tenet of such research, it should not be so for reasons I will describe below.² Furthermore, the testimony provided by the participants, no matter how detailed and context-rich, is not necessarily a conveyance of truth. Indeed, Caduri states this notion by providing a distinction between historical truth and narrative truth. This distinction outlines the reason that researcher knowledge claims fall short of the correspondence theory of truth, which holds that what makes an idea

¹ Galit Caduri, “On the Epistemology of Narrative Research in Education,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 47, no. 1 (2013): 37–52.

² Yvonna S. Lincoln, “Emerging Criteria for Quality in Qualitative and Interpretive Research,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 1, no. 3 (1995): 275–89.

true is its correspondence to facts, the state of the world.³ The truth-maker is the objective state of the world.

CRITERIA FOR ENTITLEMENT OF NARRATIVE RESEARCHER CLAIMS

Caduri grants three criteria to allow for entitlement of narrative researcher claims of knowledge: 1) the meeting of hermeneutic standards such as plausibility, adequacy and persuasion, 2) the inclusion of teacher stories about their pedagogical practice, and 3) the meeting of ethical criteria that connect the way a teacher acts to a vision of the good or end-in-view.⁴ In order for there to be justification, a truth as correspondence must be revealed in some capacity. This truth as correspondence draws upon the positivistic and post-positivistic approaches which favor the methods and principles of logic and science to guide all fields of inquiry, including narrative research. Admittedly, because of the inability to secure such truth in narrative claims, any interpretations or conclusions derived from the narrative researcher may not be tenable.

The first criterion for entitlement is necessary, though not sufficient, as warrant for knowledge claims. This criterion requires that the narrative researcher meets hermeneutic standards such as plausibility, adequacy and persuasion. To provide support for this criterion, Caduri maintains that a narrative researcher can provide valid (in a qualitative sense) accounts via interpretive tools: e.g. thematic analysis, structural analysis, or researcher reflexivity on potential bias. These methodological approaches allow readers to see the researcher's rigorous analysis of and detailed inquiry into the testimony provided.⁵ However, there are potential threats to validity that the meeting of this criterion does not remedy. As stated by Josselson:

Relatively few theorists of narrative research have taken up the problem of the consumption of research findings. Researchers writing reports of narrative studies often go to great pains to temper and contextualize what they wish to communicate to others only to see their tentative understandings transmuted in someone else's paper into something that resembles fact. After struggling with all the problems of reflexivity and

³ Marian David, "The Correspondence Theory of Truth," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2015 Edition), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/truth-correspondence/>.

⁴ Hanan A. Alexander, "A View from Somewhere: Explaining the Paradigms of Educational Research," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 40, no. 2 (2006): 205–21; "Traditions of Inquiry in Education: Engaging the Paradigms of Educational Research," in *A Companion to Research in Education*, eds. Alan D. Reid, E. Paul Hart, and Michael A. Peters (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2014), 13–25; and John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1938).

⁵ For example, see Catherine Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2008).

representation, we shudder in horror at the idea of certain ideas being extracted and enshrined, most likely in distorted form, as a citation in someone else's paper.⁶

That there is so much support for, discussion about, or argument against information provided by narrative researchers being cited accurately in other studies begs the question as to the validity of such information. Polkinghorne brought up this concern in a 2007 paper outlining potential threats to validity in narrative research.⁷ In addition to concerns about historical versus narrative truth, the unstable relationship between the "storied texts" (e.g. the testimony) and interpretations of those texts provides a threat to the validity of the researcher's claims. An assumption of great pains to properly and most appropriately convey the information of previous studies brings forth a certain level of skepticism on my part. These threats to validity suggest that the meeting of hermeneutic standards in this criterion, while necessary, is insufficient grounds for accepting knowledge claims.

Second, Caduri describes the importance of the inclusion of teacher stories about their practice. As part of narrative research, the testimony provided is a description of the life story, the life influence, the characteristics and experiences that lead a teacher to teach the way that he or she does. By including stories about teacher practice, Caduri argues that evidence is provided to the professional knowledge base. This supplies greater context for narrative researchers' interpretations and evaluations so that we are better able to understand why they conclude and interpret testimony the way that they do. Without the inclusion of such professional knowledge, we lack sufficient evidence to be entitled to accept researcher narrative, e.g. narrative testimony. I do not believe that accounting for professional knowledge in teacher testimony is a problem in any classification of justification or warrant. Because teachers provide testimony of the way that they teach, the inclusion of such testimony in fact seems expected as a default.

Finally, Caduri includes a criterion about linking the way the teacher teaches to a vision of the good, or end-in-view, by meeting of an ethical standard. These standards are based upon whatever norms, values, language, history, tradition, etc. influence the teacher. "In the case of narrative research, of the relevant sort, this means the teacher's understanding of what counts as good teaching practice or what is considered as a worthwhile activity."⁸ These ethical views demand commitment to what Alexander called conditions of ethical discourse, the assumption that people are: 1) intelligent, 2) free, and 3) fallible. It is not out of the ordinary to expect that a teacher has all of these characteristics.

⁶ Ruthellen Josselson, "Narrative Research and the Challenge of Accumulating Knowledge," *Narrative Inquiry* 16, no. 1 (2006): 5.

⁷ Donald E. Polkinghorne, "Validity Issues in Narrative Research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 13, no. 4 (2007): 471–86.

⁸ Caduri, "On the Epistemology of Narrative," 49.

If the teacher tries a specific tactic, e.g. harsh discipline, and finds that it does not work, she will have demonstrated each of these characteristics. The standards expected of teachers demand that they are intelligent and critical in their thinking. This is especially true given the standards and accreditation demanded of them. Teachers must demonstrate the ability to reflect on their teaching styles.⁹ When teachers show an ability to think back critically to their own ways of teaching, it demonstrates all three characteristics. They are intelligent beings tasked with teaching the future, they are free to choose their own path, and they also may realize that some of their tactics and teaching practices may not be appropriate or ideal given the current educational climate.¹⁰ Only by providing ethical context for teacher testimony can we be warranted in any capacity to accept any information provided in narrative research from the participant or researcher.

The above criteria are all necessary, however, from a pragmatic standpoint, they are not sufficient warrants for acceptance of narrative researchers' knowledge claims. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie call for the necessity of mixed-methods research.¹¹ Relying on the work of the original pragmatic thinkers, Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey, they argue that the pragmatic position provides the necessary philosophical framework for such a research methodology. Although narrative research is strictly qualitative, the ideas presented by these authors, I contend, demonstrate why Caduri's three criteria for "entitlement" are not sufficient grounds for accepting knowledge claims by narrative researchers.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PRAGMATISM

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie describe characteristics of pragmatism which, I argue, should relate to all information provided in narrative research, whether by the participants or the researchers themselves.¹²

One characteristic of pragmatism that gainsays warrant for knowledge claims by narrative researchers involves human inquiry.

⁹ Kenneth Zeichner and Daniel P. Liston, *Reflective Teaching: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2013); and Edward G. Pultorak, "Stimulating Critical Reflection in Novice Teachers," in *Reflectivity and Cultivating Student Learning: Critical Elements for Enhancing a Global Community of Learners and Educators*, ed. Edward G. Pultorak (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 163–71.

¹⁰ Carolyn Wallace, "Authoritarian Science Curriculum Standards as Barriers to Teaching and Learning: An Interpretation of Personal Experience," *Science Education* 96, no. 2 (2012): 291–310.

¹¹ Burke Johnson and Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie, "Mixed Methods Research: A Research Paradigm Whose Time Has Come," *Educational Researcher* 33, no. 7 (2004): 14–26.

¹² *Ibid.*, 18. Due to the size of the table, I do not think that it is necessary to include the entire table in this paper. The table itself is located on page 18 and is titled *General Characteristics of Pragmatism*. To ease the burden for readers, I will focus on the characteristics that I believe are important towards the goals of the paper. However, I urge readers to look at the table to get a full picture of the characteristics.

Human inquiry, (i.e. what we do in our day-to-day lives as we interact with our environments) is viewed as being analogous to experimental and scientific inquiry. We all try out things to see what works, what solves problems, and what helps us to survive. We obtain warranted evidence that provides us with answers that are ultimately tentative (i.e. inquiry provides the best answers we can currently muster), but, in the long run, use of this “scientific” or evolutionary or practical epistemology moves us toward larger Truths.¹³

It is likely that in a teacher’s testimony he conveys how he developed an inquiry process with regards to his experiences and influences. However, the narrative researcher’s interpretation and evaluation of the teacher’s testimony do not occur in this fashion. Rather, elaborate interpretation involves the researcher bringing forth her own ideas, influences and perspectives in evaluating the merit of the teacher’s testimony.¹⁴ Without the ability to engage in an inquiry process to this level of sophistication ourselves, we cannot be warranted in any capacity to accept narrative researcher knowledge claims.

A second characteristic of pragmatism that gainsays warrant for knowledge claims by narrative researchers involves the nature of truth.

Capital "T" Truth (i.e., absolute Truth) is what will be the "final opinion" perhaps at the end of history. Lowercase "t" truths (i.e., the instrumental and provisional truths that we obtain and live by in the meantime) are given through experience and experimenting.¹⁵

Denzin provides a fascinating consideration of the nature of narratives.

Narratives do not establish the truth of such events, nor does narrative reflect the truth of experience. Narratives create the very events they reflect upon. In this sense, narratives are reflections *on*—not *of*—the world as it is known.¹⁶

Whether it is “T” truth, or “t” truth, the expectation of truth as a critical component of the pragmatic position is not present in the focus of narrative research. Rather, it could be conveyed that “truth is in the eye of the beholder,” where truth *for that individual* is captured. Such truth may contain a discussion about the general state of the world, but it does not necessarily capture that

¹³ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁴ Molly Andrews, Corinne Squire, and Maria Tamboukou, eds. *Doing Narrative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2013).

¹⁵ Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, “Mixed Methods Research,” 18.

¹⁶ Norman K. Denzin, “Foreword: Narrative’s Moment,” in *Lines of Narrative: Psychosocial Perspectives*, eds. Molly Andrews, Shelley Day Sclater, Corinne Squire, and Amal Treacher (New York: Routledge, 2000), xii-xiii.

precise state of the world. Truth is not absent in narrative research it is just not a focus or expectation of what is provided. Given that truth is a critical component of knowledge, this reveals the necessity to incorporate the pragmatic position into narrative research.

IMPORTANCE OF VALID REASONS FOR ACCEPTANCE

Absent valid reasons for acceptance, we cannot be “entitled” to accept narrative researcher knowledge claims from a pragmatic perspective. The critical requirement of an inquiry process, engaged with the rigor and methods of a scientific approach, is absent in narrative research. Part of this absence has to do with the distinction between historical and narrative truth. Without the ability to guarantee that whatever testimony is provided in either level, from the participant or the narrative researcher, has historical truth, then pragmatically there is insufficient warrant to accept knowledge claims. This, of course, does not insinuate that there is not any knowledge provided. To do so would be incredibly short-sighted to the reality of qualitative research methodology in general, and narrative research methodology in particular. Rather, the key “ingredient” that is necessary involves establishing valid reasons for acceptance.

One possible way to allow for a valid acceptance of researcher claims is an integration of interpretivism and pragmatism in narrative research. Such was the procedure outlined by Goran Goldkuhl.¹⁷ A consideration of some differences between the two positions helps to show the benefits of integrating both philosophical approaches. To assist readers, I am including the original table here.¹⁸

Pragmatism vs interpretivism: ideal-typical differentiation

	<i>Pragmatism</i>	<i>Interpretivism</i>
<i>Ontology</i>	Symbolic realism	Constructivism
<i>Empirical focus</i>	Actions and changes	Beliefs (socially constructed cognition)
<i>Type of knowledge</i>	Constructive knowledge	Understanding
<i>Role of knowledge</i>	Useful for action	Interesting
<i>Type of investigation</i>	Inquiry	Field study
<i>Data generation</i>	Data through assessment and intervention	Data through interpretation
<i>Role of researcher</i>	Engaged in change	Engaged in understanding

First, the empirical focus of pragmatism involves actions and changes, while for interpretivism, the focus is on beliefs (socially constructed cognition).

¹⁷ Goran Goldkuhl, “Pragmatism vs. Interpretivism in Qualitative Information Systems Research,” *European Journal of Information Systems* 21, no. 2 (2012): 135–46.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 142.

When looking at teacher testimony, it is possible to consider the ways in which the teachers teach, or their past influences that contribute to their teaching pedagogy.¹⁹ By considering the ways in which teachers use those influences to guide their teaching practice, we can satisfy both of these empirical foci. Likewise, any interpretation provided by a narrative researcher based on that testimony will identify both the mechanisms by which teachers construct their beliefs as well as their understandings of the actual pedagogical practices. Importantly, such an interpretation from the narrative researcher will be based upon both of these empirical foci, which enhances justification for their claims.

Second, the type of knowledge for pragmatism is constructed, while that for interpretivism is understanding.²⁰ With pragmatism, this is most poignantly captured by William James in *Pragmatism*. “*True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate, and verify. False ideas are those that we cannot.*”²¹ Truth and knowledge are intertwined in this fashion. Knowledge is that which is constructed, based upon the manner in which we can construct it. This link was captured by Dewey: “my analysis of ‘warranted assertability’ is offered as a *definition* of the nature of knowledge in the honorific sense according to which only *true* beliefs are knowledge.”²² Although he uses a unique term, Dewey’s assertion from the pragmatic understanding of knowledge and truth matches up with James’s statement about the importance of what makes an idea true and the actions which an individual undertakes to assure of a true idea. With interpretivism, of which narrative research is a part, knowledge is based upon understanding. The way in which an individual interprets or makes sense of information grounds knowledge. This is captured in narrative researchers’ interpretations. When they evaluate the information provided by their participants, they make knowledge claims which are predicated on understanding.

INTEGRATION OF PRAGMATIC AND INTERPRETIVE APPROACHES FOR NARRATIVE RESEARCH

Only by integrating both positions can there be valid means to accept knowledge claims. How can we be sure that what is provided by either position reveals knowledge in any capacity? We must understand the ways in which individuals acquired knowledge as discussed in the pragmatic approach. Likewise, we must understand the way in which a narrative researcher understood that information and used it to provide his or her own interpretations, as in the interpretive approach. Only by integrating both of these types of

¹⁹ Caduri, “Epistemology of Narrative Research.”

²⁰ Goldkuhl, “Pragmatism vs. Interpretivism,” 142.

²¹ William James, *Pragmatism and Other Writings* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1907/2000), 88, emphasis original.

²² John Dewey, “Propositions, Warranted Assertability, and Truth,” *Journal of Philosophy* 38, no. 7 (1941): 169.

knowledge can we be assured of a valid reason to accept narrative researcher claims from a pragmatic point of view. This is substantiated under pragmatism, in which we start in a position of doubt.²³ We do not merely accept what is provided, no matter how detailed or informative. We must understand the mechanisms that were utilized to provide that information. Only then are we able to be assured that what is captured is knowledge and not just strongly held belief.

The type of investigation for pragmatism is inquiry, and requires an active approach by the researcher or reader.²⁴ The mode of inquiry is captured by John Dewey in *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*.²⁵ We first start in what is termed an indeterminate situation, a situation in which we do not know of the outcomes. We start the inquiry process by questioning. Next, we institute the problem. We understand that the situation is a problem, with no known outcome. Third, we determine the problem's solution. During this step, we come up with possibilities of how to resolve the problem situation. Importantly, this is not just blind trial-and-error. Rather, we take what we previously have learned and use that to help us come up with solutions to solve the problem. We use our reasoning and active problem solving ability to resolve the problem situation, turning it from an indeterminate situation to a determinate one. This process utilizes scientific inquiry, the methods of science, in order to resolve the problem. This is an interesting approach for either the narrative researcher or the person reading the researcher's article for it requires such steps each and every time in order to acquire knowledge. The investigation is a very active, action-oriented process.

The type of investigation for interpretivism is field study.²⁶ A generic name for both historical and narrative research is interpretive research. While historical research involves analyzing documents, relics and interviews of the past, narrative research involves a study of the life of the individual, how a person's past has contributed to the way that person currently is.²⁷ The interpretation comes from the narrative researcher, who takes the testimony provided by her participants, and lends their own interpretation of the meaning behind that testimony. The data that is captured is mostly based upon field data, the data provided in the teachers' testimonies of their past influences and the ways in which they teach. While the researcher may/may not be capturing the data in the field, the information that is captured is solely based upon what occurred in the field, not in an enclosed lab or experiment. This provides real-world data and information that is useable by the researcher to gather her information for interpretation/evaluation.

²³ Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, Vol. 5 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

²⁴ Goldkuhl, "Pragmatism vs. Interpretivism," 142.

²⁵ Dewey, "Logic: The Theory of Inquiry."

²⁶ Goldkuhl, "Pragmatism vs. Interpretivism," 142.

²⁷ Lorraine R. Gay, Geoffrey E. Mills, and Peter W. Airasian, *Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Applications* (New York: Pearson Higher Ed, 2011).

An example of the integration of both approaches in the inquiry process reveals the benefits of such an integration. First, we must start in an indeterminate situation. In this case, the indeterminate situation is whether knowledge claims provided through the testimonies of the participants and the researcher's interpretations of those testimonies are valid. We start by questioning the testimonies or interpretations. This questioning can occur by challenging the statements made, seeking to contact the participants, interviewing the researcher, or questioning the rigor and knowledge base that establish the interpretations/analysis. Second, an institution of the problem is made. In this example, the problem is that we don't know how to assure the veracity of the knowledge claims. Third, the problem solution is determined by coming up with possibilities of how to resolve the problem. This might involve building from previously established knowledge, seeking out the participants to question them, having an independent individual verify the testimony, contacting and questioning other researchers who have conducted similar studies, etc. The process continues until the problem is resolved and starts again when new problems arise.

The above example reveals the importance of integrating both positions in narrative research. Interpretive research broadly and narrative research specifically suffer from pitfalls with regards to portrayal of truth and validity. These issues lead to questioning of the strength of knowledge claims that are generated within the narrative research project. This speaks to a greater concern in the current educational climate. Cho and Trent have captured this concern by discussing the current focus on quantitative research to the detriment of qualitative research.

In the USA, this increased attention is in part due to federal attempts to generally discredit qualitative research and its accompanying validity constructs. For example, the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* calls for "scientifically based research" and defines this as "the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to get reliable and valid knowledge."²⁸

It would be unjust to state that narrative research does not provide a wealth of information that can be of use to a plethora of individuals involved in education. The sad, yet simple fact is that narrative research, along with other qualitative approaches, must be designed in a way to appeal to a broader audience. Because of the different methodological approaches, narrative research should not abandon its basic tenets. The rich information that is provided in narrative research must be retained. However, to increase the validity and truth connections, which would be more in line with other methodologies,

²⁸ Jeasik Cho and Allen Trent, "Validity in Qualitative Research Revisited," *Qualitative Research* 6, no. 3 (2006): 319.

narrative research must also change. The integration of pragmatism with interpretivism allows for this change by strengthening the validity of the process without taking anything away that would diminish the unique qualities the approach generates.

CONCLUSION

I contend that an integration of both philosophical approaches, that of pragmatism and interpretivism, allows for valid acceptance of narrative researcher claims. The reach of pragmatism is to include all areas of inquiry and disciplines. Pragmatism, as a philosophical position, is somewhat at odds with the approach of narrative research regarding warrant for knowledge claims. However, by integrating the positions and characteristics of each philosophical type, we can offer valid reasons for acceptance of narrative researcher claims. The narratives provided by the participants and the researcher are rich with information, useful and practical for application and for their own sake. One possible way to advance the credibility of qualitative research methodology in general, and narrative research methodology in particular, involves an integration that has broader appeal. The integration of pragmatism with interpretivism, I have argued, provides for an ability to enhance the virtues while simultaneously covering up the pitfalls of narrative research methodology.
