Jo Mensinga

Quilting Professional Stories

A Gendered Experience of Choosing Social
Work as a Career

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Appendix A – Describing the terms used to structure this inquiry

Although I draw on other approaches to narrative research applicable to the exploration of career choice stories, this project relies heavily on Clandinin and Connelly's work spanning the last twenty years. In the years that these authors have been investigating teachers' knowledge, they have coined metaphoric terms to describe the experiences their participants' encounter. Despite the fact that these have emerged from the education sector, many of the terms they have used can be translated into the welfare field providing a language that experientially describes the processes aspiring social workers engage in to legitimise their entrance into the profession. Following are terms that will be used in this research text. They are not offered as definitions, but rather to provide parameters of how they are used in relation to the experiences described in this text.

Australian Association of Social Work (AASW) – The professional body that oversees social work practice in Australia. Although not a registered body, employers generally expect practitioners to be eligible to join the Association before they will employ them. AASW is responsible for the accreditation of training courses throughout Australia and endorses overseas trained professionals.

Community Focused Learning (CFL) – The experiential learning approach developed at Central Queensland University to support the acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary for membership of the AASW. Embedded in Problem Based Learning, CFL facilitates learning in three arenas: (a) content knowledge for the completion of case studies and projects; (b) knowledge of group dynamics in

formal learning teams, and; (c) reflexive analysis of values and dissonance (deWarren and Mensinga, 2004:61)

Course – The name used to describe a unit of study that makes up a degree program at Central Queensland University, commonly called a 'subject'.

Field texts – Term used in narrative inquiry to describe the types and forms of data used to compile a research text. Clandinin and Connelly describe these as created artefacts that represent aspects of field experience of both participants and researchers (2000:92). They can include participant stories, journal notes, letters, conversations, research interviews, documents, life experiences and autobiographical writing. It is important to note that field texts themselves are filled with interpretative inferences.

Learning facilitator – Person employed by Central Queensland University, conventionally known as lecturer, to facilitate learning in the Bachelor of Social Work degree program.

Narrative – Although '... a narrative is understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected (Czarniawska 2004:17)', it is used in this text in a broader sense, as a metaphor that can describe 'a life course, a developmental theory, a reference to a totalising cultural force, and/or the method for interpreting oral or written narrative discourse (Daiute and Lightfoot 2004:x)'. It is when the word narrative is linked to others that it assumes a particular meaning.

Narrative method – Is an interpretive research method that is more specifically defined by a researcher's discipline and orientation. Riessman (1993) introduced this approach to social work. She says narrative analysis involves the interpretation of the 'informant's

story', analysing 'how it is put together, the linguistic and cultural resources it draws on, and how it persuades a listener of authenticity (Riessman 1993:2)' In education, the narrative work of Clandinin and Connelly's work is referred to extensively. These authors give significance to experience by entering a three dimensional space that includes: interaction, continuity and situation (Clandinin and Connelly 2000).

Narrative Inquiry – My interest for this inquiry includes exploring experience for its educational value in relation to social work training. While narrative methods have been used to study experience (Riessman 1993), I use the term narrative inquiry specifically to describe Clandinin and Connelly's narrative approach to researching it as a phenomenon. Building on Dewey's notion of experience, Clandinin and Connelly (2000:20) claim that 'narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience' that involves entering a three dimensional inquiry space with participants to explore and describe lived and told experiences over time, possibly in different places and usually using a number of different social settings. The inquiry itself is a collaboration between the researcher and the participants in 'the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives'.

Narrative space/three-dimensional space – A metaphorical term developed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) to describe their interpretation of Dewey's theory of experience. The term describes a space of inquiry that accounts for temporality/continuity (*past, present, future*) along one dimension, the personal and social (*interaction*) along another and place (*situation*) along the third.

Problem Based Learning (PBL) – A teaching and learning approach developed by McMaster University to educate medical staff. It is based on Dewey's idea of learning from experience. Several models of PBL exist, but most aim to give 'learners the

actual, ill-structured, open-ended and messy problems, or simulations of the problems they will encounter in their careers (Barrows 1999)'.

Program – A generic term describing the academic requirements that students need to complete in order to receive a degree in social work.

Social work program – Four-year degree program provided by universities and accredited by the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW). Individuals must complete the requirements of the degree program, including courses in psychology, sociology and law as well as key social work courses, to be eligible to join the AASW before they can practice as a social worker in the Australian community.

Social work student – Person enrolled in an accredited social work degree program at a recognised education institution.

'Stories to live by' – A term developed by Connelly and Clandinin (1999:4) to understand teacher's narrative professional identity. This term describes the link made by participants' in their stories between knowledge, context and identity when describing their personal practical knowledge.

'Stories of lived experience' – A term used to describe the stories participants tell about their lived experience.

Appendix B(1) – Letter to Respondents

Dear

After 2 years I have finally managed to complete the transcripts that I recorded for my research as to why you wanted to do social work. I bet you can't even remember participating ☺. However, I have now had the time to get this transcript typed and am sending it back to you. I hope you will enjoy reading it and reviewing what you said all those months ago – particularly noting the brilliant 'story telling' ability you have!

I haven't done any deep thinking about what was said by everyone, but what did emerge was the similarity in the way people told me about their decision. Since doing the interviews I have had the opportunity to do some research into 'life stories' and narrative research in general. It is clear that there seems to be an established pattern that we adhere to in telling our stories about the important decisions in our lives – you tended to follow that. Typically for a story to be considered 'true' and believable, it needs to have some congruity over time and some causal elements. There are other aspects too that I am happy to share with you if you are interested.

The thing that did emerge from all of the interviews though was that it appeared that the stories reflected how people saw their choice in terms of their identity rather than just **a** set of reasons. Moreover, the choice seemed to be a part of 'constructing' an identity rather than finding and following a career path. I have come to see the process like the construction of a 'quilt' where each of us decides to work on or tell a story about different parts of ourselves (including our career) in different ways depending on who we are talking to and what life circumstances are paramount at the time.

As a result, I have decided that I will be writing up my findings as if I am making a quilt. The front of the quilt will be made up of 'blocks' that you and I will construct using your transcript and the feedback you give me as I start piecing the information together. The other parts of the quilt will be made up of my own story and the theory around the area. (I think the quilt

metaphor also reflects the social work profession as quilts have been used as projects of social action and is traditionally a gendered craft that attracts more women than men to its ranks.)

I would be grateful if you could read the transcript and add or change anything. I would also be very interested in any other comments, thoughts, feelings you have about what you have said or any thoughts you have had since the interview – especially since it has been such a long time since the recording was done. I will understand if you no longer wish to be involved. Therefore if I don't hear from you I will assume you are happy with the transcript and don't wish to have any further involvement. However if you are interested in continuing to be involved, please return the transcript with your comments. I will keep in touch with you and let you know how I see the 'constructing' process evolving.

Thank you for your patience with this.

Kind regards,

Jo Mensinga

Appendix B(2) – Letter to respondents

Dear

After 2 years I have finally managed to complete the transcripts that I recorded for my research as to why you wanted to do social work. I bet you can't even remember participating ☺. However, I have now had the time to get this transcript typed and am sending it back to you. I hope you will enjoy reading it and reviewing what you said all those months ago – particularly noting the brilliant 'story telling' ability you have!

I haven't done any deep thinking about what was said by everyone, but what did emerge was the similarity in the way people told me about their decision. Since doing the interviews I have had the opportunity to do some research into 'life stories' and narrative research in general. It is clear that there seems to be an established pattern that we adhere to in telling our stories about the important decisions in our lives – you tended to follow that. Typically for a story to be considered 'true' and believable, it needs to have some congruity over time and some causal elements. There are other aspects too that I am happy to share with you if you are interested.

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Thank you for your patience with this.

Kind regards,

Jo Mensinga

Appendix B(3) – Letter to respondents

Dear

After 2 years I have finally managed to complete the transcripts that I recorded for my research as to why you wanted to do social work. I bet you can't even remember participating ☺. However, I have now had the time to get the transcripts typed and sent out. Unfortunately some of the tapes were not very clear and much of the detail lost. I was unable to gather much from the tape we did – we both spoke really quietly!

I haven't done any deep thinking about what was said by everyone, but what did emerge was the similarity in the way people told me about their decision. Since doing the interviews I have had the opportunity to do some research into 'life stories' and narrative research in general. It is clear that there seems to be an established pattern that we adhere to in telling our stories about the important decisions in our lives. Typically for a story to be considered 'true' and believable, it needs to have some congruity over time and some causal elements. There are other aspects too that I am happy to share with you if you are interested.

The thing that did emerge from all of the interviews though was that it appeared that the stories reflected how people saw their choice in terms of their identity rather than just a set of reasons. Moreover, the choice seemed to be a part of 'constructing' an identity rather than finding and following a career path. I have come to see the process like the construction of a 'quilt' where each of us decides to work on or tell a story about different parts of ourselves (including our career) in different ways depending on who we are talking to and what life circumstances are paramount at the time.

As a result, I have decided that I will be writing up my findings as if I am making a quilt. The front of the quilt will be made up of 'blocks' that the respondents and I will construct using their transcripts. The other parts of the quilt will be made up of my own story and the theory around the area. (I think the quilt metaphor also reflects the social work profession as quilts

have been used as projects of social action and is traditionally a gendered craft that attracts more women than men to its ranks.)

Even though you don't have a transcript to review, I would be grateful for any other comments, thoughts, feelings you have about what you said or any thoughts you have had since the interview – especially since it has been such a long time since the recording was done. I will understand if you no longer wish to be involved. Therefore if I don't hear from you I will assume you don't wish to have any further involvement. However if you are interested in continuing to be involved, please forward your comments. I will in turn, keep in touch with you and let you know how I see the 'constructing' process evolving.

Thank you for your patience with this.

Kind regards,

Jo Mensinga

Appendix C – Checklist of theories for analysis of stories

Theories for the analysis of narratives:

Gergen:

- Story must include:
- ▫ Valued endpoint... ...goal immersed in value
... ...value influenced by culture
- ▫ Events relate to the endpoint... ...make it credible, obtainable,
significant or clearer
- ▫ Ordering of events... ...determined by culturally determined
conventions, usually linear and temporal
- ▫ Stability of identity... ...all characters must have continuous and
coherent identity across time
- ▫ Causal linkages... ...offered explanations clove from previous
events
- ▫ Signals for beginning and end of story offered (Gergen 1999a:2)

1. Stable narrative – same
2. Progressive narrative – improve
3. Regressive narrative – deteriorate (Gergen 1999a)

Riessman:

- Story told to highlight identity pertinent to listener and situation,
need to focus on how teller performs social identity during their
narrative
- ▫ Context (local, cultural, historical)
- ▫ Teller's interpretation of how larger social structures have
influenced understanding of social positioning
- ▫ Attention to how narrative is told (Riessmann 2001)

Linde:

- When did professional story begin?
- Labov's analysis:
- Abstract... ...summarises the narrative

  ...evaluation of narrative to come

  ...offers how reader needs to interpret it

  and respond to it
- Orientation clauses...Maybe at the beginning or interspersed,

  establish:

  ...characters

  ...time

  ...place

  ...circumstances of the narrative
- Narrative clauses...form skeleton of narrative. Simple past

  tenses clauses, order established by order of events
- Coda...usually after last narrative clause given. Maybe spoken or

  implied
- Evaluative sections...extremely important socially!

  ...means the narrator conveys the point of

  the story

  ...conveys how the listener is to understand

  the meaning of the narrative sequence of

  events

  ...establishes what kind of response the

  narrator wants
- Coherence principles (important parts of the process of constructing

  the life story): (1) Causality and (2) Coherence
- Causality... ...character as adequate

  ...richness of account

  ...inadequate causality can be as a result of an accident or

  are discontinuous (take up strategies to explain it:

  apparent break, temporary discontinuity, discontinuity as

  sequence, self distancing, discontinuity as meta-

  continuity, without account)

- Coherence systems (belief system or cultural)…provides people with the vocabulary for creating a self e.g. Psychological theories, archetypes, common sense
- Common sense defined as '… an issue of morality as an issue of universal factuality.' (Linde 1993:195)

Feminism:
- Women have more endpoints in narrative and extra information (Gorgon)
- Women highlight grass roots caring role – preference for bonding, caring, nurturing and forming interpersonal communities (Gilligan 1982)
- Men highlight policy role – preference for autonomy, generality, impartiality and abstract (Gilligan 1982)
- Assess predilections for knowledge

Critical Theory:
- Awareness of power structure within the narrative re my position in relation to theirs (based on: (Fook 2002))
- Effect of power relations in student's meaning making process
- Use of value or ideological basis in meaning making
- Use of language
- Social positioning involves provision of views accepted by the dominant community
- Narrative favours alternate meaning making processes

Reflexivity:
- Based on (Taylor and White 2000) and (Fook 2002)
- Influence of my story on the process of interpretation and data collection
- Influence of my meaning making process on interpretation e.g. participant's response to my analysis
- How will the data affect the reader
- Influence of:

- The School's style of teaching
- Type of course
- Professional discourse
- What year the participant is in
- Geographical region
- Age
- Sex

White's (1988) adaptation of Bruner (In(Sax 2003):

- landscape of action questions encourage people to situate influential events within the
  - past,
  - present and
  - future.
- Landscape of consciousness questions inquire into the meaning of developments that occur in actions' which can include
  - perceptions,
  - thoughts,
  - beliefs,
  - speculations,
  - realizations, and
  - conclusions

Social positioning			
Story type (for example dominant cultural one)	**Position of narrator to audience** (and vice versa)	**How positions characters in relation to one another and to themselves**	**How positions themselves to themselves to make identity claims**
➢ **Professional Inside** - Intuitive - Need for education - Interested in life long learning - Sees marginalised - Demonstrated skills of advocacy - Able to work outside peer pressure - Drawn to helping the down trodden - Need to have facts to back up decisions, not just emotion - Is able to look at self - Doesn't like stereotypes - Likes to be with people, but not belong - Attracted to social justice	**Me** - * Unsure of self... - * Constantly checking the process - * Defers to my expertise - * Surprised to discover I am not the expert - * 'Offers' for me to take it up again - ^ Finishes on more equal power balance - - Other students - * Appearance of being on the outside of the group is own choice not as a result of not being accepted by them - * Knows this sets her apart and open to	**Institutions and elderly clients** * Clients need someone to advocate on their behalf * Elderly are supportive and proud of their children (mellowed with age) **Schools, staff and volunteers** * Supportive management can offer opportunities for those who volunteer... don't just need financial rewards * Staff development courses can be of benefit and character building **Centrelink and public**	Always drawn to the down trodden and fighting to help them overcome it Family script can be overcome Own script of low intelligence and low self esteem came from interactions with sister Being an outsider is her own choice... likes to mingle with people but not belong Exposure and success in educational courses has been beneficial and character building Had to find a new job, but wants to be recognised as

- Want to be able to describe situations from a professional standpoint not just use lay terms - Willing to take a risk to overcome change - Has experienced oppression - Willing to move beyond own personal myths - Use of a mentor is useful - Is a strong woman **Outside** - Decision to do social work not a passion - Clients are helpless ➤ **Feminine** **Inside** - Wanted to be a wife and mother - Didn't work when had children - Did volunteer work - Don't see herself as intelligent - Values support of other women - Intuitive	be being joined by the 'outsiders', but is happy to support them if doesn't really jeopardise her standing ■ - Authority figures - * Don't bother them unless you know what you want - * Are busy people - * Are usually supportive ■	* Has bad reputation with people * Can be helpful and refer you to appropriate resources * Is worth checking out the advice to match what the client wants e.g. recommendatio n to do TAFE course	someone Likes being valued Sticking to different values to those of her family has paid off ... no longer needs to please sister, mother now accepts her as she is, been accepted into uni School experience facilitated her belief in herself Able to form own conclusions Intelligence is important Still coming to terms with recognition of own intelligence and academic capacity Experience is important as a source of knowledge Women are able to support themselves financially

- Doing a 'women's' job - Supportive - Willing to talk about emotional issues and express them **Outside** - Able to support self financially - Taken on feminist ideas - Happy to go to uni - Is a strong woman ➤ **Town/cultural** **Inside** - Patriarchal - Likes being part of the community **Outside** - Going to university - Likes diversity ➤ **Family** **Inside** - Followed in family tradition re work and looking after family - Involved in family **Outside** - Divorced - Need for education - Interested in life long			

learning - Sees marginalised - Brings strays home - Willing to go to un - Has different values			
➤ **Education** **Inside** - See lecturers as expert - Wanting to learn and be self directed - Need to be intelligent to attend - Willing to fulfil administrative requirements - Believes it is beneficial and character forming **Outside** - Values her own experience - Hasn't a family history of attending uni			
➤ **Aged care sector** **Inside** - *Supportive of - aged care system - *Recognises it - is a larger system than the nursing home itself			

Outside			

- -Not prepared
- to accept
  abuses
- Sees the role
  of a social
  worker
- Will go outside
  work/ peer
  pressure to
  assure social
  justice			