

Narrating the self: intersections between the public and the personal

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Regina Karousou researches special educational needs and learners' experiences as students and professionals/practitioners at the University of Chichester. She has participated in several internally and externally funded (HEA, ESRC) projects that aim to explore the personal, academic, social and cultural challenges facing non-traditional students during their transition to and from university and between university and professional settings. Her research interests include teaching and learning in higher education, widening participation, e-learning, transitions and narratives. She has presented papers at national and international conferences in all of these fields and has contributed to peer-reviewed articles.

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Abstract

This paper explores the intersections between private and public settings of narratives and narration: the way that individuals narrate 'the self', and the way narratives are created and used. Drawing on critical theory and complexity theory, we analyse the relationship between narrators and facilitators. Empirical evidence is drawn from case studies in two universities, which used in-depth interviews. Questions are posed regarding narrative dynamics, the extent to which contexts can affect the way meaning is negotiated, and the implications for individuals and education. Narratives can provide rich data for learning in higher education institutions, with a strong ontological emphasis over and above epistemology.

Key words: narrative, emergence, Freire, communities, ontology, epistemology

Introduction

Stories give us space to share, co-construct, explore and articulate aspects of ourselves, and to reflect on our epistemological positions and ontologies. Underpinning these processes are attempts to resolve tensions between public/personal domains, epistemological/ontological issues, and subject/object relations.

In this paper, we explore studies from two universities to develop a framework for understanding the intersection of the public and personal in the way narratives are used. We argue that, in broad terms, narratives are used for two purposes: for epistemological enculturation and for ontological development.

A number of researchers have outlined the value and transformative power of narratives (Burnett, 2008). Narratives can, on the one hand, serve the objective of epistemological and disciplinary enculturation by articulating and reflecting on personal experience in relation to social theory (Harling-Stalker, 2009). On the other hand, the process of creating narratives yields rich accounts of ontological development, transitions and negotiated meaning and identity. The ontological cuts across 'epistemological enculturation' (Osberg and Biesta, 2008). There remain epistemological and methodological questions, which this paper addresses, regarding the validity of narratives and the degree to which they can be objectified (Chase, 2005; Sikes, 2010; Riessman, 2008).

Theoretical framework

We draw on two theoretical approaches: critical theory (Freire, 1972) and complexity theory (Cilliers, 2005). Both approaches emphasise ontology (what we are) over epistemology (how we know).

Critical theory

Freire's view of education originated with teaching literacy to Brazilian peasants in the 1970s, yet his views can be relevant today: an oppressor can be viewed as anyone who hinders another's pursuit of self-affirmation. Formal education was for Freire a 'banking' system where knowledge is deposited rather than critiqued, rendering people passive and dehumanised. He favoured collaborative, problem-posing education whereby teacher and student together critically engage with a situation, based on shared experience and knowledge. It can be argued that 'banking' education is prevalent in England, with many teachers 'teaching to the test' and with micromanaged learning outcomes in higher education (HE).

Collaborative learning, as constructed by Freire, is based on an awareness and critique of reproducing social systems and power; it is embedded in personal action, agency and biographies (Freire's 'conscientisation': 1972, 1995). Freire suggests that when the oppressed share their oppression by way of mutually created dialogue, they arrive at liberating new knowledge and ways of seeing the world (Shor, 1993). While our collective, sociopolitical setting is not the same as for Freire, a narrator-centred approach also emphasises the exploration and articulation of tacit understandings and ontological development.

Complexity theory

In complexity theory (Cilliers, 2005, 2010; Snowden and Boone, 2007), learning is seen as 'emergent' and 'adaptive', which is to say that it arises out of the interaction between the learner, the learning context and the broader social context. It is not predictable, and it can offer surprising insights as the basis for new knowledge. In emergent learning, intellectual inquiry is open and is further enabled by networked learning, that is, learning in the communities, underpinned by social software in which 'agents and system co-evolve' (Williams, Karousou and Mackness, 2011: 45).

These two theories inform the analytic framework (below) and the discussion of the case studies in this paper: the Central University case studies are informed mainly by critical theory, and the Southern University case studies by critical theory. The focus of our discussion in this paper is not the detail of these (different) theories but rather what they have in common: both emphasise the importance of ontology.

Analytic framework

Narratives enter and intersect with education in different ways, each entailing a different relationship between the narrator and the HE event (for example, tutorials, workshops). What is at stake in the intersection is the incorporation and transformation of private experience into public data. In the process, personal experience and anecdote are subjected to the taxonomies and the epistemological gaze of HE disciplines, which transform subjective experience into objective data. The narrator may either be acknowledged or recognised, or objectified, marginalised or even rejected.

The framework distinguishes between different types of teaching context and narrative process, different possibilities for the status of the narrator and different purposes for the use of narratives.

Teaching context and narrative process

The teaching context is a continuum. At the didactic, prescriptive end of a spectrum of methods are courses or workshops in which narratives must comply with predetermined course outcomes, either explicit or tacit. At the collaborative end of the spectrum, there are wider learning and social contexts within which the narrator has more freedom to negotiate and even contribute to the context. We distinguish between three types of narrative process: facilitated, enabled and collaborative.

Facilitated narratives

Facilitated narratives are created within the explicit requirements of a course. Alternatively, they may be requested rather than required, in which case the expectations are often more tacit and depend on implicitly shared understandings.

Enabled narratives

These are created within a particular relationship between narrator and facilitator. For the narrator, they are based first in an awareness of their own learning, on their own terms and in their own voice, and second, in the social embeddedness of learning and emergent identity. Drawing on complexity theory, we call this a 'facilitated emergence' approach because the narrative is based on the narrator's own 'gestalt', rather than on a predetermined research agenda, and it is open to surprising insights and the exploration and articulation of tacit knowledge, that is, knowledge that the narrator 'did not know that they knew' (Polyani, 1967).

Collaborative narratives

Collaborative sense-making is informed by critical theory, in which the articulation of the tacit is framed from the start by a social and political agenda rather than by individual context only.

Status of the narrator

The status of the narrators and their experience can vary. They can be: an object in a prescribed curriculum; an object *or* a subject in more tacit narratives; or an individual object *and* a subject in either certain forms of negotiated narrative-making or in the specific framework of an emancipatory Freirian discourse. Power relationships depend on whether the narrator is an object or subject, whether the narrator can move freely between the two and, in extreme cases, whether the narrator herself becomes transformed into an Other.

Purpose of the narratives

The purpose of narratives and the way they function varies. In broad terms, we can place *epistemological enculturation* at the didactic end of the teaching spectrum and *ontological development* towards the collaborative end. Both *ontological and epistemological* narratives are possible in facilitated, enabled and collaborative narratives.

The research context

The research context influences how narratives are told, created and used (Sikes, 2010). The narratives here were collected at two universities, largely outside the classroom setting. We will refer to the cases introduced by Mallia (2009) as 'Central University' cases and to those presented by Williams, Karousou and Gumtau (2009) as 'Southern University' cases.

Central University

The following narratives were collected as part of a doctoral research project focusing on mature women 'returners' to education as undergraduates at a Russell Group university. The study examined the skills the women brought with them, the skills they developed at university, how the women valued the skills themselves, and their perception of how the skills were valued by their peers and the Academy. It was a longitudinal, qualitative enquiry based mostly on interviews with a small number of women before, during and after their time of study. Most women had studied on Access courses and were becoming full-time students, studying a range of different courses. The women were negotiating 'fractured' identities (Bradley, 2000). We present the narratives of two students.

Anya's narrative

Narrative

Anya is studying critical theory as part of her English degree. In a seminar on mental health, she mentions her stay in a mental institution. The other students

become silent. While Anya wants to share the information to show there is no stigma attached to mental illness, she achieves the opposite. She realises that she has made a mistake: she feels a shift in her colleagues' perception of her and, in her own mind, she feels they see her as what she refers to as 'the mad woman in the attic', drawing on two texts she studied on her Access course (Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The yellow wallpaper*).

The irony is that the seminar group is discussing the fragmentation and displacement of women's lives and subsequent loss of control, precisely the kind of topic that would seem to demand an approach broadly sympathetic to Freire's notion of critical praxis, and to Anya as a person. Anya clearly thinks her experience offers a real-life example of survival. She also thinks that the fact that she has had six children is positive, as it gives her a wealth of experience. But, after the first negative reaction, she says: 'I thought I'd better let it slide.' She does not speak out again.

Comment

This is a clear and painful case of the failure of a narrative mode, which presents as both a *facilitated/tacit narrative* and a *collaborative/animated narrative*. The narrator makes three assumptions: 1) the university and the course are places where experience can be aired, explored and analysed, against the existing body of knowledge, in an objective, fair and inclusive intellectual debate; 2) real case studies are welcomed and valued as a contribution to empirical enquiry; and 3) the course operates on the basis of peer interaction, based on mutual collaboration and tolerance (at least a weak form of Freire's pedagogy). In short, she assumes that she can explore and transcribe her own experience into objective data, as a subject, in a supportive and challenging environment.

Anya was, in principle, right to make these assumptions. They are fundamental to critical theory, which was being discussed, and to the profile of the wider HE

community. Her particular course, however, was not managed along these lines, either by the lecturer or mutually by her peers. She clearly felt marginalised and rejected, and she also internalised the fault as her own; in her own mind she had become the 'mad woman in the attic'. This is hurtful, and turns the narrator as subject on herself and into an object of derision: an Other.

Anya's narrative can be seen in terms Freire's insistence on the need to challenge the status quo. The other students in the seminar had either been socialised to regard those who suffered from mental health issues as Other or they were inadequately equipped to deal with it. Freirian dialogue and conscientisation would seek to challenge this mystification of the world and this false consciousness, which many internalise as 'the way things are' rather than as only one possible version of 'the way things could be' (Freire, 1985). This was just not possible in this context.

Susanne's narrative

Narrative

Susanne, who is in her early forties, is a white, working-class single parent of two Anglo-African children. She has had a troubled childhood and an abusive relationship with the children's father. She moves to Central University to make a new start with the children and to find a fulfilling career for herself. She enjoys English and history on her Access course but decides to read social policy at university because she feels she has a lot to offer in terms of life experience:

Most of what we're studying I've experienced, and I think, hey, I've lived that, I love a good argument, I mean I'm very vocal in the lessons, and I'm quick in my ideas, in my mind. Social Policy is ideas I can hold onto.

Susanne has a clear sense of her own personal value and worth, and believes that she can add value to the course by challenging the dominating epistemology in relation to social order.

Comment

This is a facilitated/tacit narrative, as well as a potentially collaborative narrative, because the narrator chose to contribute to the intellectual debate by putting herself on the line and revealing part of her own experience in order to provide a different perspective.

In her first interview with the researcher, Susanne was candid about her past life. She wanted the interviewer to understand where she was 'coming from'. While some disclosures were off-tape, she nevertheless trusted the interviewer enough to talk about intimate and possibly scandalous aspects of her life which were not for publication.

In subsequent interviews, Susanne's self-perception changed, which influenced the type of narrative she engaged in. While previously she took pride in her background and how she was coping, she became defensive about her choices. This change can be seen to result from how people in her situation were perceived by their peers and/or lecturers. Her narrative seemed, to the class, to be on the borderline between the facilitated (explicit) and the facilitated (tacit), although she assumed that the context was more Freirian. This is illustrated by her later experiences.

Six months into her course Susanne was struggling with the practical difficulties of attending classes and managing two young children. She was also disillusioned. When she started the course, she felt that her life experience would be valued – the reason she chose social policy was to use her insight into what it was like to be poor and black – but she experienced rejection. This was demonstrated in one

particular seminar on why poor children don't achieve. When she pointed out that her own children were achieving, despite being poor and black, she felt that the tutors would not depart from their set theoretical perspectives, and that the other students would not empathise with her and were unwilling to engage in such a discussion:

It's just, you know, the fact that I'm a single parent, I'm poor, my kids are black, you get fed up of sitting listening the whole time about the problems of society from the top down. Certain lecturers may go on about cultural richness from the top down, I will pipe up, 'So you could say the working class are culturally rich?' 'Yes, we'll talk about that next time.'

This highlights the difficulty of the intersection between the 'private' and the 'public' domains. Susanne had told her story to the interviewer (private domain), including certain 'secrets' in a context of trust. However, when she tried to tell her story in the 'public' domain, by highlighting and teasing out the core aspects of the course, by playing the role of the devil's advocate, she was made to feel patronised and humiliated (Murphy and Fleming, 1996; West, 1998).

Susanne gave up her course in her second year and returned to the city she originated from, relinquishing the idea of university all together. She had been encouraged to talk about her life, as both the object of the narrative and the subject within it. She was shocked and angry when her story was not valued.

Susanne's story exemplifies the tensions that operate in people's lives and what fractured identity means. There are multiple layers of class, race and gender at play. Susanne was oppressed by attitudes towards her that she felt were personal and based on ignorance. Central University is a place of privilege and she commented that she would have been 'better off' in a different type of university, thus internalising the problem as her own; she was silenced. Yet, despite being

thwarted, she was also challenging the claims to truth and control over who can speak and create knowledge in society (Foucault, 1978). As Freire states:

The pedagogy of the oppressed is a pedagogy which must be forged with, not for the oppressed (be they individuals or whole peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity.
(Freire, 1972: 25)

Freirian collaborative sense-making was untenable in Susanne's context, and the intersection of her confidential narratives with the public space of the classroom was, for her, thoroughly negative.

Southern University

The narratives from Southern University, one of the leading post-'92 universities, formed part of a qualitative research project, funded by the Higher Education Academy, which aimed to capture the student experience of learning. The project used a facilitated narrative methodology (Williams, Karousou et al, 2009; Williams, Karousou and Gumtau, 2009). The students, who were taking various foundation degree courses, were generally mature students with full-time jobs, studying part-time and often negotiating several identities: as practitioners, students, family members, and so on. We present the narratives of two first-year students from a total of ten who were interviewed as part of the project.

April's narrative

Narrative

April is in her late thirties. She works full-time as a manager of a pre-school and studies part-time for a Fd(A) Early Years, Care and Education (EYCE). April's self-perception as unconfident comes from her lack of knowledge of her new academic environment: 'From the moment I decided I was going to do this course, I was very apprehensive as to whether I would actually complete it ...'

She negotiates her identity and status as a student at home too. She needs sole access to the computer in the home at times, and has to gain her family's support and acceptance that her course means changes. She feels out of place, inarticulate and unconfident, even more so because she is not based at the main campus but at a satellite college, where she perceives the level of support to be less.

Halfway through the interview she repositions herself in relation to the context. Reflecting on the relationship between students and staff, she begins to talk about herself in the third person, as the object of her narrative. More specifically, she talks about wanting a more shared level of understanding between senior staff and students. She re-evaluates her role, both her personal circumstances and at work. She is aware that, as a manager, she needs to keep up-to-date and perceives this as essential to how she interacts with her staff: 'I felt I needed to be one step above them [her staff] and at least to be able to ... erm ... have their respect, I suppose, and prove that I was justified in being the position I'm in.'

April's ontological journey is challenged further when, as part of a field trip, she visits a Montessori nursery school that has a great impact on her:

... thinking very positive, erm, how much the nursery influenced me ... how the children behaved, it was a very quiet nursery as, in comparison to my pre-school, where my children seem to be very loud ... There were certain things that stuck in my mind about their environment that was completely different to my own. For instance, they have glass bottles, glass vases with flowers on the tables. And really, the fact that the children were so well behaved and quiet made a big impression, thinking: how can I influence my children to be quieter?

As a result of the visit, April embarks on a radical change management of her classroom. Although she is inspired, her staff do not initially share her enthusiasm and vision: 'I think they were a bit surprised at the things I wanted to bring in. Some of them can be very focused on what they're doing with their work, they don't seem to see outside the box.'

Comment

April engaged in an *enabled* type of narration. She talks about herself as an object and a subject, and attempts to make sense of her identity as perceived by herself and by others.

April's engagement in collaborative sense-making with her staff and later with her tutors at university raises a new set of questions about using one's personal experiences and tacit understandings to inform practice. April was able to build on challenges, opportunities and negative past experiences, and also, more importantly, to use them to go beyond what was required in both the curriculum and her professional practice.

Mike's narrative

Narrative

Mike is in his early forties, a full-time paramedic with a family, who lives a four-hour journey from the university. He already has a BSc and registers for a paramedic foundation degree because he is required to do so, although he also says he wants to improve his professional qualifications and status. In the first weeks he struggles because the course turns out to be 'research based' rather than 'practice based'. He is not critical of research per se but rather of its value to his practice. There is no easy solution to this, for the university is faced with the dilemma of teaching students to demonstrate both academic rigour and professional rigour in the same course.

Comment

Mike's narrative demonstrates a conscious attempt to manage the relations of power in his learning context and community, by trying to make sense of his expectations and perceptions of learning in HE. This is reflected in Mike's resistance to the practices and values of HE as a whole. He said that the course tried to:

give us an underpinning knowledge of everything we do ... but the majority of people in the class ... don't find it relevant ... it feels as if it's too in depth for what we need to know ... I don't want to know the chemical compounds of an aspirin ... I don't want to be doing experiments at university.

However, he added that, in another module:

... the lecturer ... was, um, asked last year to – what can I say? – basically readjust the way she presented the course – er, the lectures, with regard to relevance to our profession, which she has done, and people have noted that ... the lectures and the module itself, everybody's found very interesting.

Mike's and April's 'enabled' narratives (an initial narrative followed by layers of nested sub-narratives) provide rich accounts of how they negotiated their emerging learning and identity. Mike, prompted to add 'more detail' to what he had already said, also articulated a rich account of two clashing discourses: the research-based discourse of academia and the practice-based discourse of emergency intervention. Both usefully draw on detailed scientific epistemologies and knowledge but within quite different discursive frames, within different professional ontologies and personal expectations.

Discussion

Narrating the self

Narrators create accounts of what happened to them and ascribe meaning retrospectively. A story is told 'externally' and in the process it often becomes a story about who the narrator becomes 'internally' – in terms of perception of self, in relation to memory, aspirations and specific communities.

The students whose narratives we have presented here are, broadly speaking, part of the 'widening participation' discourse, which overlaps with the discourses of 'employability' and 'professional education'. As narrators, they have the opportunity to make the transition from being objects in these discourses to becoming 'subjects' instead (or as well). As subjects, they were invited to explore and articulate their personal experiences and to contribute to the transcription of these subjective experiences into objective data, the currency of academic capital.

April redefined herself and her role as a manager. Anya and Susanne redefined themselves, at least initially, as successes in overcoming almost insurmountable barriers to become fully fledged 'students', only to face even bigger challenges. Mike worked through the conflicts he faced as a professional practitioner within the course's expectation that he should become more of a professional researcher.

Nearly all of the students commented on the cathartic nature of being able to talk about their experience at length in a non-judgmental context (Grauerholz and Copenhaver, 1994). Facilitated narratives provide opportunities for narrators to 'think through' the tacit knowledge of their own experience in new ways, which even they can find surprising.

Reflecting on personal experience

The amount of personal experience disclosed, and just how private and confidential it was, varied along a continuum, from unsurprising events (which

affected them minimally) to highly charged events, where the initial event and/or the telling of it was deeply moving. It might be useful to distinguish between *instrumental* narratives, which are about whether an 'objective' task or procedure is successfully completed, and *ontological* narratives (Harling-Stalker, 2009), which are about changes to self and identity, and about acceptance or rejection in a community (Williams and Karousou, 2009).

Sharing in audio or written text

The media or mode in which stories are created and shared has a number of implications. Personal 'voice', even just in audio, can provide richer accounts for sense-making of learning and for identity development. However, this often crosses the boundary between 'personal' and 'private', so ethical care is needed (Grauerholz and Copenhaver, 1994). Properly managed, however, audio stories provide rich material for negotiating meaning and for understanding the effects and constraints of social structures.

Transcripts allow for anonymity but detract from the richness of 'raw', primary data. Transcripts shift the centre of gravity from the narrator to the researcher, as the narrator can be reduced to an anonymous text, an 'object' in many ways – no longer a subject in the research process, as the researcher's voice takes over.

Intersection of the public and confidential

Telling a story based on personal experience is risky because it depends on how it is received, whether the narrator is judged by the audience and, if it is received badly, whether this is internalised as the narrator's failure. A story can be seen from a completely different point of view by others, and the narrator may regret telling their story if it is dissected by others in an impersonal and unsympathetic way.

The narrator needs to trust the people who have access to the story, and the process needs to work for everyone concerned. This includes the alignment (or disjuncture) between personal and public accounts and between biographies and social theory, and the epistemological validity of transforming rich audio recordings of personal experience into the sparse formats of objective data and text. Life experience is about identity formation, which can be fragile and multifaceted.

The intersection of narration with HE

We can make a useful distinction between the intersection of HE with, on the one hand, the narration in the HE context and, on the other hand, the students' own narratives, which take place within the wider context of their lives.

In the creation of narratives in HE, personal experience is transformed into and incorporated into objective data. In the process, the object of study (a marginalised person) may be invited to become a speaking subject, and her ontological integrity and development may be extended and challenged, marginalised or even derided and violated.

In the cases of Anya and Susanne, the particular epistemological gaze cut right across the ontological 'project' of a person who was not only learning academic competencies but also aspired to 'become an academic'. Specific university courses may only provide space for a restricted range of biographical narratives: highly 'normalised' and hegemonically confined 'experiences'. Any other experiences are taboo (they cannot be spoken) and the person who breaks the taboo may become an Other, as in Anya's case.

Mike's ongoing personal aims and expectations, as a professional paramedic, were at odds with his research-based course. To indicate that the two didn't join up, he called his story 'Distance education'. April's experience took her well beyond

the boundaries of her 'first-year' curriculum, so there was little chance that her experience could be recognised in the curriculum 'outcomes'.

The intersection of the lived narratives with HE

By definition, biographical narratives are ongoing. The narratives in this paper are interludes in much longer (life) stories.

The lived narratives intersect with HE in interesting and surprising ways. What students bring with them to university and what they learn at university are manifold. Some of this comes to light in the narrative process, as the narrator explores and articulates the transformation of experience into useful learning and of formal learning into useful professional application (or not).

Both Anya and Susanne arrived at university confident of contributing to the discussion of agency and structure which was central to their disciplines, through exploring their own personal narratives and experience and, perhaps, by contributing to a better understanding of how such experience might be transformed into the objective data of academic capital.

April's professional lived narrative, as a manager, and then as a change agent, developed at a tangent after her initial school visit. Her experience didn't 'fit' into the data and reports that she had to write: it could not be fully captured in the 'first-year' assessment artefacts. She could objectify her experience in her own professional reports, and she could capture her experience in her narrative, which she might make available to others, but the university was not involved. April negotiated her status as a 'subject' in two quite different contexts, at work and at university, both of which she was initially unsure.

In Mike's case, there was a complete disjuncture between the narrative of the HE and his professional, lived narrative. He expected his course to enhance and

challenge his experience as a paramedic and improve his professional capability. But his professional experience was not taken into account. He was offered a research-based course instead, under the guise of a 'professional qualification'.

Crucial aspects of all four of the narrators' experiences were excluded by the hegemonic gaze of their particular courses and institutions, albeit in quite different ways. It seems that epistemological enculturation is dominant in and endemic to the practice of HE. Ontological development, in terms of the marginalised 'subjects' of widening participation policy and the more recent policy discourses of 'employability' and 'professional development', leaves much to be desired, at least in these particular cases.

Conclusion

We have drawn attention to the increasing use of biographies and narratives in HE and the reasons why this is desirable and useful. To be able to describe and analyse the dynamics of the intersection of the public and private, the subject and object, we outlined a spectrum of teaching methods, from didactic to collaborative, and defined three kinds of narrative process: facilitated, enabled and collaborative. We have described different types of narrative space and narrative contexts, and outlined some ideas on how subject–object dynamics apply across these categories. We have also analysed some of the purposes of narratives, from epistemological enculturation to individual and social ontological development and engagement. All of this has been placed in a theoretical framework, focusing on ontology, which draws on critical theory and complexity theory.

This framework has been applied to the description and analysis of four student narratives from two universities. We have explored the student cases to discuss the relative weight, focus and resources allocated to epistemological enculturation

on the one hand and to ontological exploration, articulation, reflection and development on the other. We have demonstrated that the ontological tends to be treated as a one-off addition to the often more 'privileged' status of epistemological enculturation. Ontology and epistemology are not seen as integrated.

It is not easy for anyone involved in this process – the narrator, the teacher or the writers of this research paper – to manage the delicate process of transcribing and transforming personal experience into objective academic capital. An attempt has been made here to keep the *presence* of the narrator alive by using the present tense in the descriptions of the 'narrative' in each of the case studies. However, in the 'comment' that follows each narrative (and in the more substantive 'discussion' section later in the paper), we revert to the past tense to make the research more suitable for circulation within conventional academic discourse.

We propose a cyclical process in which narratives have a critical role to play and in which the two are not seen as 'either/or' options but as equally essential for 'personalised learning' (Jaros and Deakin-Crick, 2007), which is, at the same time, social and socially embedded learning. The alternative is a reduction of HE to an instrumental alignment of 'employability' and epistemological enculturation.

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