

Narrative Research: an experience with dialogic sessions

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ABSTRACT – Narrative Research: an experience with dialogic sessions.

This paper stems from the experience of a teacher training internship with the Research Group Teaching Staff, Communication, and Educational Research - Procie at the University of Málaga (Jan-Mar/2021) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The objective was to categorize, based on the researchers' narratives, the foundations and perspectives of narrative research. The methodology involved what we called Procie Conversations, consisting of three 1h40min meetings where participants freely discussed their conceptions based on pre-established guidelines. Three categories emerged: neoliberal individualism and its overcoming through interpersonal relationships, being a researcher in the narrative field, and ethics in narrative research. The Conversations proved valuable for discussing the praxis and foundations of narrative research.

Keywords: Narrative Research. Educational Research. Ethics in Educational Research.

RESUMO – Pesquisa Narrativa: uma experiência com os conversatórios.

Este trabalho resulta da experiência de estágio de formação docente junto ao Grupo de Pesquisa Profesorado, Comunicación y Investigación Educativa – Procie da Universidad de Málaga (jan-mar/2021), durante a pandemia de COVID-19. O objetivo foi categorizar, a partir de narrativas dos pesquisadores, fundamentos e perspectivas da pesquisa narrativa. Como metodologia foi construído o que denominamos de *Conversatórios* Procie, com três encontros de 1h40min, onde os participantes discutiram livremente suas concepções a partir de roteiros. Resultou em três categorias: individualismo neoliberal e superação por relações interpessoais, ser investigador no campo narrativo e ética em pesquisas narrativas. Os *Conversatórios* demonstraram-se valiosos para discutir a práxis e fundamentos da pesquisa narrativa.

Palavras-chave: Pesquisa Narrativa. Pesquisa Educacional. Ética na Pesquisa Educacional.

Introduction

This article examines and analyzes a teaching internship experience with the Profesorado, Comunicación e Investigación Educativa (Procie, or Teaching Staff, Communication, and Educational Research) Research Group at the University of Málaga, from January to March 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic¹. The objective is to categorize the fundamentals of narrative research based on narratives from researchers in this research group. Although the research internship was conducted in person at the College of Education Sciences at the University of Málaga, meetings with professors were only possible at the end of the internship. Thus, a strategy was developed to make better use of the time available for research, establishing what was called “Procie Dialogic Sessions”. In addition to this work, this research internship has also produced a collective work (Melo; Rivas Flores, 2022).

Three sessions were conducted, each lasting approximately one hour and forty minutes on average, all dealing with the same theme of narrative research from different perspectives. The meetings were held via Google Meet and recorded with the permission of the research group professors. Each meeting was conducted following a specific script produced by the mediating professor, shared in advance and reinforced at the beginning of each meeting. Everyone was free to express their thoughts without any interference from the mediator.

Ten participants attended each session, whom will be referred to by the following names in order to preserve their identity: Analía, José, Piedad, Esther, Daniela, María Jesús, Pablo T., Pablo C., María, and Virginia. All are members of Procie and professors at the University of Málaga.

The topics raised at each session were explored through extended discussions that unfolded into specific topics. Consequently, one analytical category was established per session, which proved to be central to the discussions. The categories presented here were listed after a thorough analysis of the recorded material, summarizing the most relevant ideas that emerged from the conversations.

The accumulation of discussions and debates around the theme constitutes a very rich source of analytical possibilities on narrative research, understood both as a research methodology and as a means of developing teaching activities at the higher education level, which is what Procie professors have been doing for several years and which they report on in various publications.

This text aims to report on this experience as a way of systematizing it and, in doing so, to produce a reflection that is the result of the contribution of all the professors involved in the Procie Dialogic Sessions. Thus, below we offer reflections based on the content of the Dialogic Sessions, following the categories of neoliberal individualism and its transcendence through interpersonal relationships, being a researcher in the narrative field, and ethics in narrative research.

For clarification purposes, only the translations of the conversations were reproduced in the article, refraining from placing in footnotes or in any other form the transcripts of the statements in the native language of the researchers of the Research Group.

Categories Of Narrative Research In The Experience Of Dialogic Sessions

The Procie Dialogic Sessions, conducted in three meetings via Google Meet® between January and March 2021, had their scripts shared in advance and displayed at the beginning of each meeting. The script for the first meeting included the following questions to drive the dialogue: “How do you see the contexts of vulnerability in Málaga, where you conduct your research, and how have you been affected by the pandemic and neoliberal policies?” In a second phase, the following theme was developed: “How is dialogue conducted with people in vulnerable situations in PROCIE?” Finally, the question was about how narrative research has impacted their lives on a personal level, based on their experiences?

At the second meeting, the conversation began with a reflection raised in a production by Procie professors: “How can marginalized subjects, visitors, and research participants speak and offer their own voices without the filter of researchers? What do the subjects represent to the researchers?” Another issue for reflection was co-authorship; after all, narrative research as a principle transcends the subject-object relationship. This led to the question: “Are the subjects of research co-authors? How can we designate the personal identities of subjects in the field of academic research?” And to conclude the discussion: “What are the results of this dialogue in pedagogical and political practice at the university? How does this epistemological diversity relate to the production of knowledge and university practices?”

The third and final meeting focused on ethics in qualitative research. The questions raised were as follows: “How do we designate subjects in the field of academic research? What are the results of this dialogue in pedagogical and political practice at the university? How does this epistemological diversity affect the production of knowledge and university practices?”

Given each script, at each meeting, the conversations extended and highlighted relevant issues to be analyzed in detail. It is important to note at this point that the meetings were held virtually, via Google Meet, and participation was strictly voluntary. The Dialogic Sessions were feasible in this format due to the long-standing relationship established between all those present, which gave this environment the freedom and openness necessary for the development of ideas, even when there were disagreements among those involved.

Thus, following reflections conducted at the conclusion of the Procie Dialogic Sessions, three categories relevant to further exploration of the issues raised in the participants’ statements were highlighted, in order to understand the foundations of narrative

research present in the narratives of researchers in the field. The three categories are: 1) neoliberal individualism and its transcendence through interpersonal relationships; 2) being a researcher in the narrative field; and 3) ethics in narrative research. Each category represents the fundamental theme explored in each Dialogic Session, numbered in the same sequence as the meetings. The topics presented at the beginning of each meeting yielded relevant reflections on each category, and through them, it is possible to explore the content of the main contributions of the participants.

It is worth emphasizing that the participating researchers will be referred to by a male or female name, as listed above, in order to preserve their identity and the ethics established for the dissemination of the content raised, without losing sight of the subjectivity and co-authorship that such contributions represent, thus detaching themselves from the positivist idea that research participants are mere sources of data. On the contrary, they are all authors, even though the responsibility for these reflections lies with those who authored the text.

Neoliberal Individualism And Its Transcendence Through Interpersonal Relationships

At the beginning of the first Procie Dialogic Session, the stated objective was to learn more about the fundamentals of narrative research. Thus, the central question was how contexts of vulnerability have been most affected by neoliberal policies. This topic, seemingly distant from what is known as narrative research, reflects the Procie Research Group's understanding of narrative research as a form of resistance and transformation of schools and society.

With this in mind, the contributions revolved around the fact that the pandemic caused by COVID-19 has highlighted and aggravated social problems, making individualism even more present in human actions. As José articulated, this represented a convergence between conservatism and authoritarian thinking, mediated by neoliberalism, which is now advancing into all areas of life. The pandemic created opportunities, the same researcher continues, for neoliberal and neoconservative policies, thereby obliterating the possibilities that solidarity would prevail in a pandemic situation. In addition, COVID-19 has meant an increase in forms of social inequality, and this has also been unanimously confirmed by researchers.

It is worth noting that neoliberal logic spreads across all spheres of society, being persuasive and manipulative, working in favor of the growth of individualistic capitalism, as clarified by Dardot and Laval (2016, p. 17): "[...] a set of discourses, practices, and devices that determine a new mode of government of men according to the universal principle of competition".

We see the news every day, people who struggle to eat, people who struggle to solve basic issues, such as food, but on the other hand, we see Messi's million-dollar agreement on the news, for example. So, what is happening brings out the best and the worst. I see people getting organized. I see new businesses. Because since the

pandemic, they have started to think that they are surviving, but on the other hand, there is a horrible individualism, and everyone is concerned about themselves [...] such an extreme indifference (statement by Analía).

Virginia, another researcher participating in the Dialogic Sessions, emphasizes the fact that there was a decline in community initiatives that had been developed before the pandemic in the schools themselves. In these contexts, the individual needs of school community agents are emphasized. She also draws attention to the challenges of bringing professors and the school in general closer to the concrete conditions of students, which the pandemic has proven to be fundamental.

Individualism as an ideological form and an outcome of the functioning of capitalist society causes the latter to adopt competitiveness and meritocracy as criteria, blaming the vulnerable and relieving the State of any responsibility. Such is the force of the isolation effect (Poulantzas, 2019; Melo, Pelissari, 2023) that people themselves accept inequality and pauperism as natural conditions of social life.

Since the late 19th century, meritocracy has been seen as the only fair and effective way of distributing (unequal) positions in democratic societies (Duru-Bellat, 2006: 1). It has become an essential dimension of elite selection and justification of their position. This model responds to the new practical and ethical demands of modern societies, presenting itself simultaneously as a mechanism for renewal, situated at the top of the social pyramid, and as an unquestionable principle of legitimacy, based on the reward of personal effort rather than inherited social privileges (Valle; Ruschel, 2018, p. 181).

The way to keep the privileged in power is to appropriate the justification that only those who sought this reality, whether through education, titles, or development, occupy the most advantageous positions. Saes (2005) calls this the characteristic of middle-class ideology. This tendency excludes the need for equity as a political obligation, making education increasingly focused on simple instruction, dominated by technocracy.

Discourse about scientific evidence serves as a mechanism for legitimizing particular political approaches. There is scientific evidence for all tastes, which is great, and the fact that now everyone in the world knows and everyone in the world is an expert, well, it's a way of eliminating all that. In the end, the rules are dictated by the Committee of Experts, and democracy is going down the drain, which seems quite serious to me. In education, it is very clear how this has shown that we have an educational system geared toward pure and simple instruction (Statement by José).

Democracy is weakened by the advance of technocracy, which is a way of keeping knowledge and techniques translucent or even nebulous, as they have not been subject to public scrutiny like elections. Technocrats act contrary to the classical legitimacy of the representative system. In the educational system, the advance of technocracy has transformed educational systems for the working class into a veritable mass process of providing the minimum education necessary for work and social life, all in the name of the efficiency and

effectiveness of the system and in the name of large-scale assessment rankings (Dardot, Laval, 2016; Freitas, 2018).

Given this scenario, and against forms of individualism, another question was raised: “How narrative research practice engages with and transforms individuals?” In other words, premise is that the political foundations of narrative research are not only absorbed by the desire to understand reality, but also to transform it. In this sense:

I realized that I learned to listen because I treated the narrative as an analysis, let's say, of conscience perhaps, because precisely this academic tendency to always have to have the last word, to always be teaching, saying what needs to be done, proposing concepts, proposing ideas or, as Pablo said, why don't we listen to the students? [...] So, we have this difference there, not learning to listen, but listening in a powerful sense, not listening to extract information, to judge, but listening deeply, and that gives me butterflies in my stomach (Statement by Analía).

Narrative research begins by shifting the focus away from people's individualism and, in the case of researchers, from their supposed objective and neutral position as observers of reality and subjects to be known, occupying a place from which they can judge everyone, hierarchizing, legitimizing, or delegitimizing knowledge, discourses, and insights. Narrative research is a principle that runs counter to the neoliberal strategy of individualism and isolation. It is about building solidarity in formative processes; after all, both researchers and research contexts are impacted when the form and content of research focus on the concern for transformation.

However, contrary to a certain avant-garde tendency, it is not a matter of illuminating the paths from an academic perspective, in the face of popular contexts, for example. On the contrary, it is a matter of co-construction, in which people are valued as subjects. These are the ones who carry as their own the experiences and life lessons about what ends up being of interest to the research.

Narrative research is based on the premise that the constitution of the subject occurs in intersubjective relationships. From this perspective, it is configured as a counterpoint to neoliberal ideology, which also affects academic dynamics and modes of knowledge production. This influence is also evident in qualitative approaches, which, although they depart from positivism in declaratory terms, often reproduce reductionist practices by treating participants as mere sources of information (Rivas Flores, 2022). Such practices can take the form of epistemic and symbolic violence, as argued by Smith (2017).

Furthermore, as highlighted by Analía in her intervention, it is necessary to be aware of the risk of intellectualism, characterized by the isolation of the researcher from concrete social contexts, resulting from an activity limited to the university space. In this sense, narrative research assumes an ethical commitment to social transformation, seeking to break with both the reification of subjects and academic confinement, promoting a situated, dialogical, and reality-committed production of knowledge.

In Piedad's words, narrative research, due to this and other factors, made her believe in academic research.

I found this in Procie. I found this sense of doing things differently. In a way that is more respectful to people. And more respectful to diversity [...] Conducting an interview without believing that it has value, and that this interview will lead somewhere, makes no sense other than to collect data [...] Narrative is a way of feeling and trying to transform (statement by Piedad).

In this sense, Pablo C. talks about his radical criticism of the idea of scientific method, that is, a single method that can explain everything. He defends the existence of methods, in the plural, which is where narrative research is located, from a critical political perspective, which is inherent to narrative research in the terms proposed by Procie researchers. For this researcher, narrative research is a form of confrontation, especially against a system that values this hegemonic scientific system.

Finally, José points out that the great legacy of narrative research is working with people, the relationships and encounters that develop in the course of research and beyond. In other words, it is what is built in relationships. It is, says the same researcher, a way of being in the world, therefore, beyond academia and the professional aspect. It becomes a form of self-analysis: of seeing what one is and how one can transform oneself on a personal level, based on one's own history, overcoming the neoliberal aspects of individualism.

The contributions analyzed demonstrate that the use of narratives has taken on a central role in the constitution of the researchers themselves, by enabling the production of meanings linked to the concrete experiences of the subjects investigated. In this process, narratives not only give visibility to diverse social realities, but also reposition research participants as protagonists of knowledge. More than sources of data, narratives express life trajectories intertwined with social relations, allowing access to reality from the perspective of the subjects who experience it, within the multiple investigative dimensions.

It is a strategy to give a 'voice' to individuals as participants in an educational, political, and social reality, from which it is possible to recognize different contexts through a process of ideological deconstruction. This interpretation clearly has an impact on relevant ideological and epistemological issues surrounding identity, experience, human action, etc. [...] As White (1987) proposes, the construction of narratives could constitute a basic way of assimilating our experience into structures of meaning that transform them into knowledge. These structures, I understand, are given by their socio-historical link with the social and cultural world of the subject, as well as by the universe of meaning in which one lives (Rivas Flores, 2022, p. 14. Author's emphasis).

This understanding reinforces the centrality of narrative as a methodological device that not only gives visibility to the experiences of subjects and enables the emergence of historically and culturally situated meanings, but also constitutes a means of social transformation of reality, valuing subjects as active beings in this transformation. Thus, the construction of narratives presents itself as a critical epistemological practice, through which individual experiences

are articulated with collective structures of meaning, contributing to the understanding of the complex relationships between identity, experience, and social action. Knowing this, narrative research represents a form of resistance to neoliberalism and contributes to the transformation of researchers and contexts, starting at the personal, professional, political, and educational levels.

Being A Researcher In The Narrative Field

During the second Procie Dialogic Session, the question of what it means to be a researcher in the field of narrative research was raised. The discussions on this topic addressed issues such as the relationships that are built during investigations, which, in turn, shape the researcher within the field of narrative research.

This means that the people with whom researchers connect through research come into contact with a wide range of realities and begin to understand the truth from the perspective of those who experience the field being studied. This practice encourages researchers to become facilitators, allowing excluded people to have a voice and, in this way, enabling change.

An important consideration made by José at the beginning of the meeting is the fact that narrative research is not an objectivist relationship between subject and object, nor is it concealed by the discourse of qualitative research. In this sense, the construction of the researcher takes place in a process of not considering oneself the only active subject in this relationship of knowledge construction, but sharing this position with other subjects. It is not about producing data, but truly listening to the subjects. Esther agreed, stating the difficulty she experienced in her training as a narrative researcher in overcoming the data, the quantitative aspect of what the subjects say, but focusing on the quality of the interaction, on the interest in what the subjects say, beyond the fact that what they aligns with the objectives pre-established by the research project. Approached in this manner, the narrative research process generates personal transformation and a change in professional practice.

In this sense, the following statement by Esther must be highlighted:

A challenge I recently encountered on the selection committee for TFM [Master's Thesis]² awards on gender. I vetoed one of the selected entries, precisely because if we are talking about gender issues, those that help us transform, yet all this work contained was data, numbers, percentages, and stereotypes. So, if what we want is to transform, in the case of this TFM, the voice of the people was missing [...] So, one of the problems is the format, but the other problem [...] is what we have been writing lately [...] without that, without their voice, the narrative would not make sense.

Anaía argues that narrative research constitutes an approach for researching with others, rather than on others. But, most importantly, it is necessary to devote time to building a relationship of trust with the subjects, because without this there may be a process in which they do not want, for various reasons, to commit to the research. Even so,

despite all the precautions, there will always be a reflection on the effective transformation of contexts, because there is also the need or imperative of academic work, which takes a lot of time and effort and can undermine the energy of effective work in the real contexts where education takes place, where people are.

Another dimension of the researchers' work is the interpersonal relationship: who constitutes 'the other'? How are they positioned within the research process? How do we treat them? Are they subalterns, as conceptualized by Spivak (2010)?³ In relation to what are they subalterns? And how does the social situation of these people relate to researchers? How does the university, from its position as an ostensibly enlightened institution, are other subjects and knowledge outside its walls considered?

José argues that the role of narrative researcher, especially in the decolonial context⁴, enables researchers to serve as facilitators, ensuring that marginalized and excluded individuals can voice their experiences, moving beyond their reduction to mere data sources. People who share their stories should not be reduced to mere empirical data points, as is often the case in conventional qualitative research, which may still be influenced by positivist approaches and ethical formalisms. Thus, narrative research stands out by considering participants as co-authors and active subjects, whose voices and life experiences are inherent to their individual experiences and contexts.

The decolonial perspective is not only found in the epistemological and practical sense of transformation, but also as a means of decolonization, in what we call decolonial practice, that is, in the very process of narrative creation. This is a contingent ethical space of co-construction, co-interpretation, and horizontal co-authorship, which invites us to be part of a diverse network in research, with the same framework of commitment and radically democratic, co-knowledge [...] and collaboration for another account of education and society, through decolonial actions/signs that configure – and are configured in/from/by/for – human feeling-thinking-doing. (Rivas Flores, 2022, p. 48).

Esther addresses another particularly significant concern, which is the collective constitution as a research group. Specifically, Procie, as a group, serves as a mechanism for collective transformation and, at the same time, of each individual who participates in it and develops their research, individually or collectively. This collective identity as a transformative agent requires recognition at a time when neoliberal logic leads people to think and act individually, competitively, as is often the case in the university environment. As Piedad points out, there is a lot of diversity in the group, and this constitutes a significant configuration, appropriate to the group's objectives, as well as to the narrative perspective adopted.

Daniela offers a relevant observation in her narrative of her research trajectory, specifically her PhD thesis, which is relevant for thinking about collectivity and how institutional hierarchy should be broken down in favor of collectivity in work and research.

I will return to 1998, when I completed my thesis, because until then I had always done qualitative research [...] I wasn't in Procie. It was a case study. My problem was that when I arrived in the field alone and started doing things, the school's management, coordination, and others, who had this culture of hierarchy, welcomed me into this university hierarchy, and I sought to dismantle that structure. That was the first step I set out to take. I wasn't the one who knew everything [...] They asked me and I said: it's up to you to decide. It's just that they put us in a role we don't want to have [...] If we take on this role, little research gets done, because this is a role of superiority, not equality. This was a very stressful experience for me [...] This is a struggle and a very stressful experience that I went through. I learned from the following research I did [...] However, this initial submission is repeated by researchers and subordinates [...] Once equality is restored [...] They already saw me as someone who knew more. When they asked me for the academic answer, I said I didn't know anything because I had no information about it. They started to see me differently, although not as an equal, but I had been transformed.

Daniela's experience represents a synthesis of what it means to construct narrative research. Her contribution to the discussions serves not only to portray her story, but is also present in other statements. Piedad even affirms that the idea of transformation is secondary because, in the process, there is necessarily a transformation of people, and it is these relationships that ultimately survive the research. Research conducted from this perspective constitutes a way of life, rather than an external activity, it becomes integral to one's lived experience and thinking. Analía reinforces this by questioning the hegemony of transformative thinking in the following sense: what constitutes transformation? Who determines its definition? Would defining this not constitute a form of academic presumption?

Virginia also describes how narrative research at Procie guided her to a process of transformation. In her case, in a study with a professor at the beginning of her career, she developed a profound relationship with this educator, and following extensive communication and systematic interviews, and time spent together, the professor herself came to affirm to her that her writing represented her own voice, which is a point at which narrative research fulfills one of its most important roles, in the challenge of horizontality, authorship, etc.

Nevertheless, the challenges facing narrative researchers extend beyond this point. The very differentiation from the research participants, by rendering them passive within the research process, places limits on this perspective. This is true even if the discourse on horizontality in research is considered.

In this idea of authors who are trying to talk about horizontal methodologies, what does horizontality really mean? It makes me think that it will become blurred, and I think the role of the researcher and the participant is fantastic. This distinction should not exist, but we are in a process of seeking knowledge where we are playing different roles, but not as researcher and participant. So, if we can move forward, can we even break down these labels? (Statement by Analía)

Analía's perspective demonstrates that being a researcher from a narrative perspective means seeking to break down the distinction

between researcher and research subjects. This stems from the understanding that those who are involved in narrative research, contributing with their stories and experiences, are also the authors of the work, since they are the ones who tell and show reality, in a relationship built with the researcher, as taught by Rivas Flores (2022).

Narrative research expands methodological approaches to inquiry, as it typically commences with theoretical foundations, and upon engaging with the narratives and experiences gathered through this process, we perceive the relationship between theory and practice, we constitute ourselves through reports, we approach reality, and we become part of the process of transformation, whether personal or social.

Narrative research is not only a way of constructing knowledge, but is knowledge itself. Therefore, it is both form and content. This places it in a unique perspective that incorporates the capacity for transformation. The narrative constructs reality, and we, as subjects, are constituted as we participate in narratives. Thus, participating in the construction of a narrative is also part of the process of social and educational transformation (Megías; Rivas Flores, 2019, p. 84).

It is evident that narrative research, functioning as knowledge, form, and content, as the authors put it, contributes to the process of social transformation, breaking with the positivist ideas present in the discourse of data collection to which people are subjected in other non-horizontalized research.

José raises an important discussion regarding responsibility. Narrative research does not operate with predetermined data and objects and a controllable context. Rather, it does not follow a causal process model. It is not possible to know the paths that the research will follow, except for the path that is being constructed. Therefore, the issue of the researcher's training is the responsibility we have in this process, since it is a process of relationship. What will be transformed or not is beyond our control. We do not even control what is transformed in the other.

The fact that I have a responsibility for what I am doing necessarily means that there is some kind of effect [...] As we are creating democratic, horizontal relationships [...] my responsibility is fulfilled because I am exercising this type of model of relationships, proposals, etc. [...] If I hold a position of authority, of hierarchy, I am exercising a responsibility, in the sense that it will affect something [...] If I want to exercise responsibility to transform something, as I want, I have to generate this type of [democratic, horizontal] relationship (Statement by José).

These responsible relationships shape the development of narrative researchers. These are professionals who walk alongside their research participants, who do not treat them as research objects or data sources, and who therefore do not place themselves artificially in the research, but rather with their whole being, from their political and ideological worldviews, with the desire to transform it. They do not achieve transformation through the subordination of others, even in research. They seek transformation, but this is not found in a result intended even before the research begins, but rather through the

research journey as it unfolds with participants. While effects will undoubtedly emerge, they remain largely beyond our control. Nor should this be the goal if traditional and positivist research models are to be overcome.

Ethics In Narrative Research

The final Procie Dialogic Session addressed a crucial topic in the field of narrative research, which is the relationship between research subjects, while also critiquing the objectified relationship between the subject and object of research, even within approaches academically designated as qualitative research. Within this context, questions emerged regarding the nature of research subjects: How do we designate them? What role do they play in research? The discussion further explored the possibility of co-authorship, to transcend the idea that participants merely provide data about reality to feed academic research. Consequently, ethics in narrative research emerged as the central theme of this third Dialogic Session, although, as seen, the theme also appeared at other times.

The first element of the discussion is to reject the idea of universal ethics, applicable to all individuals and contexts, especially when it comes to institutional formats. This type of ethical approach primarily emphasizes procedural focus.

Obviously, when we talk about ethics, we have to specify what kind of ethics we are talking about, because there is no single ethic or single way of understanding it. In the neoliberal period we are in, where the ethic of individuality is in charge, it is the ethic of procedures, rather than the ethic of the relevant, the significant, and so on. Well, it seems to me that it is important to situate ourselves there. At least we try to raise an ethical question that radically approaches the subject, which is respect for the subject as the bearer of knowledge, the bearer of narrative and, as we say, the protagonist of their life, and therefore the protagonist of the research. Not simply an object from which information can be extracted (Statement by José).

Contributing to this discussion, the Procie group appears to maintain a consensus that while no universal ethical framework exists, ethics remains essential in narrative research work, since this is a form of research that involves participants who share their lives, processes, and experiences in a relationship that involves trust. Therefore, preserving this relationship is a political act of narrative research. Pablo C. considers ethics a fundamental concern: "It is a concern requiring dedicated time and collaborative construction with participants with whom we participate in the research" (Statement by Pablo C.).

Ethics in narrative research is therefore related to the participants involved, as well as to the form and content of the reports presented at the end of the research, and to the research process itself.

Regarding the report, which took up a large part of the third Dialogic Session, this ultimately, despite formalistic academic requirements, remains a report constructed by the researcher, who ends up establishing the authorship of the text, and, therefore, the responsibility for what is written, its content and form, is of fundamental importance. There are two possible positions on this,

raised in the course of the Dialogic Sessions: to understand the voices of the subjects in an essentialist way, that is, as something that transcends relationships and must be preserved in the research as it appears in the research process, or to understand it as a relationship that perhaps transcends both subjects and places itself in a position that can and should be explored in its meanings in the research, thereby transcending individual authorial characteristics. In this second perspective, which appears more widely accepted, María Jesús states: "Rewriting another's history also has a dialogical meaning with the other [...] It is a process of mutual learning".

Continuing with the topic of research reports, consider Analía's observation:

In the case of my thesis, I tried. Precisely in the first [chapter] are the stories from the interviews. But, of course, these stories, even though we talk and discuss them, I wrote them down from the interviews, even though the whole interpretive process comes later. So, perhaps, how to proceed. Maintain the voices of the people we work with, and, on the other hand, our voice as parallel [...] I don't know [...] I believe this represents a critical juncture in the ethical dimension.

In fact, narrative research faces the political aspect of the relationship between participants and their contexts, as these are invariably understood within context rather than in isolation along with their statements, experiences, and narratives. However, positivist traditions require an academic account, which extracts the lived experiences embedded within participants' voices from the final product of the research. On the contrary:

The democratic-deliberative perspective that we advocate allows for an intersubjective construction between the subjects involved, in order to enable more horizontal relationships based on deep respect for the other - the subject under investigation - as the bearer of knowledge and sovereign of that knowledge and of their life. (Rivas Flores et al., 2022, p. 89)

As these authors demonstrate, relationships among participants traditionally follow hierarchical patterns, objectifying those who participate in the investigations. Narrative research methodology seeks to transcend these protocols, treating relationships horizontally as co-constructions. This is precisely what García, Arcos, and Megías (2022) explain about the co-construction process in this proposal, as the relationship that exists in the research allows researchers and participants to reflect together and rework actions.

Another element related to the relationship between research subjects was raised by José, and refers to authorization. His conceptualization of this issue follows.

Because it's not a question of format, but fundamentally depends on the type of relationship and bond with the subject. [...] You have to do it, you have to reciprocate, and so on. I think these are procedures that can be like a crutch to start with, but in the end it's the type of story, the relationship we establish with the subject. [...] The idea of authorizing comes from the relationship we can ultimately establish; they authorize me to use their voice to the extent that we are building something in common and that sometimes the subject does not have, let's say, the

desire or the intention or the possibility to speak with their own voice, for themselves, so there can be many formats in this sense, right? (Statement by José)

José demonstrates that specific formats are unnecessary for maintaining ethics, but rather a democratic relationship in which people agree to share their experiences. Even participant anonymity requires case-by-case consideration. When does anonymity become essential, and why? Fundamentally, this is a question to be decided jointly, but in any case, the safety, care, and preservation of participants, when required, must be taken into consideration. This becomes particularly crucial for participants embedded within power relations, hierarchies and vulnerable situations, whose exposure might compromise their personal and professional well-being.

We understand that it is part of research ethics to reflect on the power relations that are generated in the research environment, which always exist, concealed under the colonizing and oppressive forces faced by many qualitative and narrative research studies (Denzin, 2017). In this sense, aspects such as gender, social class, sexual orientation, race, nationality, position, and interests of the researcher, among others, are elements to be considered throughout the research process (Rivas Flores et al., 2022, p. 90).

Context is crucial for the development of research, so understanding the scenario, principles, beliefs, and relationships that have made reality what it is, becomes essential for creating meaningful research for all process participants.

The ethical implications of this form of research are important, as both research participants and the researchers end up exposed, through revealing their lives, trajectories, distinctive voices, and ultimately, their subjectivity (Rivas Flores et al., 2022, p. 87).

In this way, ethics and politics meet in the praxis of narrative research. Participant relationships are co-constructed to render their voices, experiences, and meaningful narratives visible and known to the widest possible audience, so that they become elements that transform reality, both for the subjects involved in the research and for the readers of the stories. However, as these are sensitive elements that are part of people's lives, this research relationship involves fundamental care for the preservation of these subjects, their voices, and their stories.

It became clear that there is no standard or recipe to be followed, and, as Analía stated in this third Dialogic Session, each research project is unique, and as Jesús and Pablo T. reaffirmed in the same vein, the famous Research Manuals are of no help in this regard. Much more important for the training of researchers is a deeper understanding of epistemologies, which ultimately leads to the praxis of research by forcing one to confront the problem of knowledge construction. Hence, in conclusion, ethics, politics, and epistemology form a significant unity in the field of narrative research.

Final Considerations

This work aims to provide a synthesis of the experiences of a research group specializing in narrative research (or rather, narrative research approaches, as this does not constitute a single format), based on the participants' own narratives about their experiences, which were shared in the Procie Dialogic Sessions. Three categories were identified and analyzed: neoliberal individualism and its transcendence through interpersonal relationships, being a researcher in the narrative field, and ethics in narrative research.

Each of these categories leads us to a possible dimension of narrative research. The first deals fundamentally with the political commitment of narrative research to transformation, whether of the environment, the community, the participants, the way research is conducted at the university, or even the researchers themselves. The second category questions the meaning and form of narrative research, the relationships among participants and their mediations, as well as the responsibilities that must be taken into account when developing research based on heightened sensitivities, such as those surrounding people's lives, their experiences, and their stories. This second category is complemented by the third, which calls for a specific discussion of the ethics of narrative research, facing the institutionalized formalities of academic ethics and the objectified relationship typical of positivism, as well as relating this ethics to politics and epistemology, as it is a way of constructing knowledge that begins by valuing participants' voices and overcoming objectification and hierarchization in the research process.

Narrative research challenges the positivist norms of academia, naturalized in a hegemonic process of knowledge construction, which reflects other relationships and objectives. It further challenges the possibilities of (co)authorship, as well as formalistic ethical principles, which disregard relational care but focus solely on determining procedural reasonableness.

The practice of the Procie Dialogic Sessions constituted a space where everyone could express their ideas deeply, and in qualified dialogue with peers in this debate, who are at the same time colleagues and research partners. There was a seemingly unanimous assessment of the need for the group itself to open up more opportunities like this, in which it is possible to step away from routine research and university work to reflect upon and reconsider research practice. People sometimes take assumptions for granted, as is the case with narrative in the context of narrative research. Nevertheless, these productive dialogues demonstrated the need to deepen and, at the same time, better define this essential tool with which the group has been developing research in recent decades.

Research of this nature, resulting from partnerships among diverse conceptual frameworks from different contexts, can be better explored so that research groups can align their theoretical and practical conceptions in an organic way.

The horizons of praxis in this regard are vast, and academia needs to be truly challenged to achieve community relevance rather than merely sustaining itself as a self-referential institution. Thus, we hope that this work will provoke reflection and new research practices.

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Notes

- 1 One of the authors was awarded a grant in 2020 from the Brazil-Spain Faculty Mobility Program of the Carolina Foundation, to whom we are grateful for their support. During this period, supervision was provided by another author of this text.
- 2 The Master's degree is not equivalent to the Brazilian Master's degree. It is a two-year complementary course after graduation and is a mandatory requirement for professional practice. The TFM is a work that is presented as the conclusion of this course.
- 3 It should be noted that for the Procie group, Spivak's seminal reflection on subalterns is one of the great inspirations for narrative research. This reference can be found in the following collective work by the group: "In this sense, Spivak's (1988) now classic question on this topic becomes very pertinent: can subalterns speak? Ultimately, we can consider whether the marginalized, the visitors, and the participants - in short, the subjects "objects" of the investigation - can offer their own voices, without the filter of the researchers. What does it mean to "be" a researcher in a scenario like this? (Rivas Flores et al., 2020, p. 53).
- 4 For at least a decade, Procie has been working on narrative research from a decolonial perspective, based on Latin American references. On this topic, we have produced a collective work entitled *Perspectivas decoloniales sobre la educación* (Melo et al. 2019).

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