

Avoiding the pitfalls of 'conventional' narrative research: using poststructural theory to guide the creation of narratives of children with HIV

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ABSTRACT The purposes of this article are to acknowledge challenges to traditional narrative inquiry raised by poststructural theory, and to demonstrate how poststructural thought can guide narrative research. After placing narrative inquiry within the broad historical context of educational research, and offering a poststructural critique of 'traditional' narratives, the author uses this critique to guide the development of narratives of children with HIV. Excerpts of a narrative of a nine-year-old HIV-positive boy, and excerpts from the author's own construction of the research and 'stance', are provided.

KEYWORDS: *HIV/AIDS, narrative research, poststructural theory*

For some time now, narrative inquiry has gained acceptance in education and related fields as a mode of research that avoids the shortcomings of positivistic methods. However, narrative inquiry itself faces challenges from poststructuralist thought, particularly the work of Michel Foucault and his followers. In his extensive work on the history of madness, punishment, sexuality, and other topics, Foucault suggested viewing the subject not as the originator of language, but rather as 'a variable and complex function of discourse' (1984: 118), even questioning the viability of the concept of the subject itself (1984). But if the subject is understood to be merely a function of larger discursive systems, then the method of narrative inquiry, which creates a tale of an autonomous individual capable of negotiating the world in a unique way, can prove problematic. By relying on the idea of the autonomous subject, narrative research runs the risk of constructing a tale that reproduces conventional and dominant language, and creating, despite its oppositional intent, yet another form of hegemonic discourse.

My purpose in this article is to acknowledge challenges to narrative inquiry

from poststructural thought and to suggest a reconciliation by demonstrating how poststructural thought can guide narrative research. After placing narrative inquiry within the broad historical context of educational research, and offering a poststructural critique of 'traditional' narratives, I describe how I use this context and critique to shape the development of narratives of children with HIV. I share excerpts of a narrative of a nine-year-old HIV-positive boy, and explain my thinking in the construction of the narrative and my 'stance' on the research.

Theoretical framework

HISTORY OF NARRATIVE INQUIRY AND INFLUENCE OF POSTSTRUCTURAL THEORY

One reason for burgeoning interest in narrative inquiry in the field of education in recent decades is a reaction against positivism. In the 1980s narrative researchers began to feel that positivistic educational research, with its aspirations to being 'scientific', was elitist, because it treated the informants as mere objects of investigation (LeCompte, 1993). Initially, narratives held the promise of providing solutions to the problems of positivism by making space for formerly silenced voices and offering emancipatory potential. These narratives (which some would call 'modernist'¹) typically adhered to conventions such as the absence of the researcher's voice, heavy use of quotations, and interpretive omnipotence (Emihovich, 1995). They often took the form of almost raw data, in an attempt to free the participant voices from the researcher's interpretation (LeCompte, 1993). Nonetheless, these narratives typically ended with a clear conclusion or resolution (Nespor and Barber, 1995).

However, these 'modernist' or totalizing depictions ignored (and continue to ignore) the role of the researcher who, however invisible, always constructs the narrative. English (2000), in his critique of Lawrence-Lightfoot's technique of 'portraiture', cites an example of the new power dynamic found in this method of narrative research:

What remains shrouded in portraiture is the politics of vision, that is, the uncontested right of the portraitist/researcher to situate, center, label, and fix in the tintured hues of verbal descriptive prose what is professed to be 'real' (p. 21).

But while the role of the researcher is a significant problem for 'traditional' narrative research, some poststructurally oriented scholars suggest modifying the process of narrative research rather than dispensing with it. In contrast to traditional narratives, poststructural narratives problematize the act of constructing the narrative itself. In addition, rather than relying on extended direct quotation of the subject's voice as a way to capture the 'truth', post-modern approaches to narrative emphasize creating a text which invites the reader into a vicarious experience: "The reader should come away from such

texts with a heightened sensitivity to the lives being depicted, and with some flavor of the kinds of events, characters, and social circumstances which circumscribe those lives' (LeCompte, 1993: 37). Finally, poststructural narratives resist the conventional 'resolution' of standard narratives that stabilizes meaning and implicitly favors a single interpretation. Instead they 'describe situations as portions of complex journeys that continue to unfold' (Nespor and Barber, 1995: 60), emphasizing the openness of both narratives and the meanings we can ascribe to them.

Methodology

Although this piece is primarily a discussion of qualitative methodology, I will briefly describe the methodology of the larger study of children with HIV. The five child participants in this study were selected through a school advocacy program in an interdisciplinary clinic, located in a hospital in New York City, for children whose lives have been affected by HIV/AIDS. At the time of the data collection for the study I was the director of the advocacy program. This study went through an extensive Internal Review Board approval process at the hospital.

The children's narratives were composed from eight interviews conducted with each of the five child participants.² The children's caregivers and therapists were also interviewed. Observations, documents, and photographs taken by the children were collected. The data collection period began in October 1998 and ended in July 1999.

In this article I share excerpts from Joseph's narrative. I tutored Joseph for three years before the data collection for this study. I also had helped his mother through his move from a mainstream to a special educational classroom, and then to a new school. In the following section I describe my aims in constructing the narrative. All names are pseudonyms.

THREE AIMS IN CONSTRUCTING POSTSTRUCTURAL NARRATIVES

Overview In an attempt to avoid the pitfalls of 'conventional' or 'traditional' narrative research, I used poststructural theory to guide the production and analysis of the narratives in the larger study. Rather than simply quoting the children's words in what Van Maanen would call a 'realist tale' (1988), I chose a narrative style closer to the 'impressionist tale' which Van Maanen describes as having the potential to be more 'real' than realist accounts. The choice of an impressionist narrative rather than a realist one is based on the postmodern understanding that 'so-called objective interpretations are impossible' (Denzin, 1994: 507). In other words, even a seemingly objective presentation of children's narratives would still provide only a partial story whose form and content are shaped by conventions and forces of which the researcher and reader may be unaware. There are many subtle interpretive aspects to research; the questions I asked and how I listened and responded

affected the forms that the children's stories took. Thus, by including my interpretations and descriptions of my relationships with the children, and by adding contextual information to make a child's story more comprehensible or sharing background information unknown to the child him/herself, I believe I provide a richer story for the reader. This narrative technique may help the reader to more fully appreciate the child's individual experiences than simply sharing the child's words. This is not to claim, however, that my account is final or complete – only that it aspires to provide a complex representation.

I have pursued three related aims in creating these narratives. The techniques I use to achieve these aims sometimes overlap. Here I will describe these three aims and will offer examples from Joseph's narrative that illustrate how I tried to accomplish them in the larger study.

The first aim: complex lives, shifting identities The first aim is to resist a totalizing interpretation that claims to be a singular, 'accurate' version of the children's lives (Tierney, 1993). Poststructuralists believe that individuals are not 'fixed, but constantly in process, being constituted and reconstituted through the discursive practices they have access to in their daily lives' (Davies, 2003: 11). In this spirit, I resisted reducing the children to, or merely identifying them with, their illness. Instead I strived to present the complexity of their lives and the fluidity of their identities.

One of the most important techniques I used to achieve this aim was the use of thematic rather than chronological organization. In this aspect of the narratives I followed Tierney's (1993) model of a narrative of a man with AIDS in which he depicts the man's 'multiple selves'. Thus, rather than presenting Joseph's interviews in chronological order, I grouped passages according to the particular issues we discussed, pasting together passages or 'data' taken from across my eight interviews with him. First, I selected eleven 'themes': 'describing myself', 'missing school', 'on having friends', 'explaining stuff', 'my relationship with my "big brother", Tim', 'on taking tests', 'things I learned in school', 'my feeding tube', 'my family', 'my medicine', and 'the ways things work in school.'³ Next, I compiled what Joseph said about a given theme in the various interviews. I then edited out my own questions and requests for clarification. Next, I edited his own words, cutting out 'ums' and 'uhs' that didn't seem to add to his unique voice. I also 'winnowed' (Ely et al., 1997) the data, pulling out phrases that seemed off the subject or to be repetitive. Over time I felt more and more comfortable with editing Joseph's direct quotations from the transcripts to get more of what LeCompte (1993) would call the 'flavor' of his experiences. (I realize that editing Joseph's words 'alters' his voice, but *any* presentation of a child's voice would involve making such choices, although some choices may be less visible to the reader than others.)

As a result, in my research, Joseph's narrative – which in its complete form is approximately 19 pages – is organized not chronologically but thematically,

with different themes bringing out different 'identities'. Presenting multiple identities helped to create a narrative that gave sense of the constant re-interpretation that took place throughout my interviews with him. It also helped me to avoid reducing Joseph to any single aspect of his identity and to escape the trap of suggesting progress toward a final enlightening moment (Lincoln, 1993).

Techniques in constructing Joseph's narrative Sharing further details about the process of constructing Joseph's narrative can help to underscore the extent to which this narrative is my own configuration of talk with Joseph and not some singularly authoritative truth about the real Joseph. Making my choices clear to my readers is an effort to share my motives in my construction decisions. In the following pages therefore I discuss some of the many decisions I had to make in composing Joseph's narrative. One recurring decision was how to handle Joseph's fragmentary, sometimes seemingly nonsensical speech. In aiming to 'evoke' Joseph in his complexity I often kept his language as it was, even though it was grammatically incorrect, or simply did not make sense. For instance, in the section when he speaks about his 'big brother', Tim, (which I excerpt later in the article), I preserved Joseph's changing pronunciations of the 'floatation devices' he used at the swimming pool. As the reader will see, Joseph sometimes referred to them as 'floating utations' and the like. These are not typographical errors, but representations of how Joseph actually speaks.

Joseph's speech was difficult enough for me that in the beginning of my data collection, as I was transcribing my interviews with him, I began to wonder if I had made a mistake in selecting him for the study. It was often difficult to speak with him in depth about significant issues in his life.⁴ However, at the same time, because Joseph was representative of many children with HIV, I felt that his perspective should be part of the study. The following excerpt from one of the interviews demonstrates Joseph's struggle to express himself and my struggle to understand him:

- J: It, it was Saturday. It was Saturday. Right?
 M: When?
 J: Last week, it was Saturday.
 M: When, what?
 J: It was it was, Monday, what day was it, in the other week?
 M: The other week, what, when, what happened?
 J: When, it was the other week when um when I don't get to see you.
 M: Why, I saw you.
 J: It was, it was Sat, what day is it now?
 M: Today is Thursday . . . I don't think I saw you last Thursday . . . Did you not come because it was icy out?
 J: No cuz it was all snow.
 M: Yeah?
 J: No, cuz it was a holiday.

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- M: On Thursday?
 J: No it was snowing on holiday, on the holiday.
 M: On Monday?
 J: What (inaudible) tomorrow?
 M: Tomorrow it's snowing?
 J: It's snowing tomorrow. Next tomorrow.
 M: Yeah?
 J: Last tomorrow . . . I don't know why . . .

This sort of difficulty in communicating was common in our interaction. However, I usually felt that with some effort I could understand Joseph.

As a general rule, then, in Joseph's narrative I aimed to share Joseph's voice as much as possible, though not always through mere quotations. Instead, I strived to do what Tyler (1986) in 'Writing Culture' describes as 'evocation'. Tyler explains that when researchers evoke, they give meaning through understanding rather than through direct representation. It is more effective for the researcher to show elements of a person's character than simply to label the participant with a descriptive term. By sharing Joseph's complicated, often fragmented descriptions, I try to evoke his character, even at the expense of disorienting or confusing the reader of the narrative. Joseph has complex thoughts about his history and his illness, but does not communicate these thoughts easily. In telling Joseph's story, therefore, I try to evoke the frustration with communicating that is part of his day-to-day life.

Another challenge was discerning themes in Joseph's talk. He often jumped from one topic to another in his unique style of conversing. It seemed that to separate his talk into subjects, or themes, would detract from the overall meaning. At one point, Joseph began to talk about how he and his classmates were supposed to take their portfolios home from school to show their families, then shifted to a description of his family. The idea of family led into discussing how his biological parents had died; that topic led into religion; religion led to a description of pictures of Christ he had seen at the 99-cent store, which led to how he was learning about Africa in school. In situations like this, I wasn't sure if I should break these topics up in constructing a narrative arranged by theme, although I usually did, so that I could follow approximately the same format that I had used in the other narratives in the larger study. In this case, however, I felt that it was important to maintain how Joseph associated one subject with another, and chose to put the entire line of thinking under the topic of 'family':

We bring our portfolios home to our families to see our grades. That what I think. Sometimes we got to bring our reports. My ma sees it, and Willy, my uncle. Other kids bring it to their Mommy or their Dad, or somebody else. Or they godmother or somebody else . . . I don't know mommy, Titi is my guardian. My Titi is my guardian. My mommy. My mommy is my guardian. Cuz my other mom died. So that means she's my guardian. If you have a sister and you have a, and your other sister, like taking somebody, taking somebody here and they

have a son, and when they die, that means you're a guardian. Now I call her my mommy.

I got a picture of my mommy [biological mother]. At home. It's standing on my closet [shelf]. My mommy is in a dress with her sister [current guardian, he now calls mommy]. My mommy name is Teresa. They almost look that the same. Yeah but her sister is a little fat, so, so, her sister is a little skinny. The other sister. I like the picture.

My, I'm in a picture frame. I was a little boy driving a toy car. At my grandpa's house. The seat was wet. But it was cool. I like to drive it all day long. But now it's wet in the shed. It's in the shed. That's my father's. The, the toy car.

My father was Chinese. He was Japanese. Almost. He didn't speak Japanese, he was almost Japanese. His eyes were like Japanese. His face look like Japanese and his body too. But he, but he didn't speak Japanese. My father was black, my father was white, and my mother was black. I almost look like my father.

My dad died. Cuz he, he had a heart, heart attack. But he die, he still died . . . Right now he's where the big man is! The big gi- the big white man. God. The big white man in the sky. I don't know what he is like. Anyway, his hair is dark. And his um, I don't know, if he's really like that, that picture. Every people saw. That picture every people saw. I know how his face looks like. Cuz he got, I think he got a beard or something. I saw the picture at the 99-cent Store. Those Asia people's.

That picture where he was killed by man. When he was killed by bad men. With that that hair, that uh what is it. Bad man with that, bad people with that thing. On the head like. On they head. With that thing. When they do like this. I don't know. It like sweep or something. Like a sweep or something. But I know who killed him easily. Somebody I know. They live far away. They live in Africa. And even they jump real high without bending their knees. I know somebody real far away from Asia and Africa, from Africa, they live in Africa. And they jump high without bending their knees. Cuz they jump like bounce thirty feet. Thirty feet like up there, like this, like, like to there. Not real high. They they there black people. And the warriors jump real high. They seven eight, eighteen feet. No, because my teacher was absent. And I was in another class. So they, some um, some other class just told, the story to kids.

In an effort to maintain my poststructural framework, I will refrain from giving my own authoritative interpretation of Joseph's words, and why I think he may have connected these different topics in the context of first talking about his school. In constructing Joseph's story, I decided merely to share that he made these connections and to allow the reader to speculate on the reasons behind them. There were other times in my construction of the narrative that I felt that it was my own questioning that encouraged such shifts in conversation, so preserving this movement in the narrative seemed less significant. In those cases, I separated the topics into themes.

Within specific topics I also had to decide what to do with the tenses of his language. I included Joseph talking about the same topic, such as school, many times, to maintain the repetition in the data which demonstrates the prevalence of certain issues in the interviews. In addition, I left blank lines

between the sections in the themes to show that the thoughts on the topic came from different interviews.

There were also times where my goal of 'evocation' directed me to preserve the cleverness of some of Joseph's remarks. In the following excerpt Joseph describes his medications:

Bleh. Nasty. It tastes like, what what your not favorite food? No, not your favorite. Bananas? It tastes like bananas, but it tastes worse than bananas. It tastes like rotten bananas. With rotten apples. And poison ivy. That's what it tastes like. It's to help your diet. To cool down. What I need is something to cool down. You know that purple thing to cool down anything? For diarrhea, nausea, to cool down your diet. For your stomach ache. Those. That's what I need. When I taking that thing. What I still need. What that taste like? What it does taste like? Melted. Now I know what it taste like.

That that you know that commercial? When it helps your diet, diarrhea and things, and nausea and things like that. And you don't need everything for everything, you just got all the vitamins, little. I think it tastes good, but I want it, cuz I don't want, want that nasty medicine. I don't why. I just stick with that one. I just want. Cuz I don't, I don't need to be carrying a lot of medicine. Then Mommy don't need to be, carrying a lot of medicines. Because I only to be taking like sixteen hours of medicine, I take one. The purple one. I just like it cuz I take those things it's gonna look like the three stooges. Look, the white one, it tastes nasty. And Mommy mix things up with it. And the other one tastes really nasty. It tastes sweet, and the other one, uh it tastes like rotten bananas.

I don't get no free time with those medicines, so that's why I want the purple one.

As mentioned, I tried to create a narrative that would evoke Joseph. For example, Joseph described the taste of his medication by asking me what my least favorite food was, and then giving his answer in terms of that food (bananas) so that I would be sure to understand him. Because I thought this interaction was important to maintain in the narrative, I edited this section so that the reader could see that I had answered 'bananas'; in the narrative Joseph asks, 'bananas?', articulating my answer for me. In actuality, Joseph never repeated what I had said, but this technique preserved the cleverness of his response.

In sum, I worked to accomplish my first aim of representing Joseph as a person with complex, shifting identities by organizing the narrative by theme rather than chronologically, winnowing data and editing out questions, but at the same time working to preserve the flavor of Joseph's language and thinking; and sharing even small decisions about what to include and where to include it. The overall goal here is to 'evoke' in a way that invites interpretation rather than to represent Joseph in a way that forecloses interpretation.

The second aim: making the researcher visible The second aim of these narratives is to understand my own role as the researcher in the study, and the ways in which I am invested in the sociohistorical discourses which I try to

undermine and in the alternatives toward which I strive. I recognize that I am not an objective authority who operates independently of social constraints. I attempt to provide such self-reflexive understanding through descriptions of my stance in the research and of my choices in the construction of the narrative.

My stance on research with Joseph I had a well-established relationship with Joseph before I began the research. In fact, I had known him longer than I had known any of the other children in this study; at the time of these interviews, I had been tutoring him for three years, and we had forged a close relationship. Before the data collection period I had visited him at school several times and had supported his caregiver, his maternal aunt, Sandra, in the process of transferring him to a special education classroom in a better school. I had visited him in the hospital several times when he had been struggling with illnesses related to HIV. I had become very friendly with Sandra, whom Joseph called 'Mommy', and would casually chat with her when she came to the clinic. Both Sandra and Joseph would often greet me with a hug and kiss.

In the larger study (Blumenreich, 2001) I also worked to accomplish this second aim of being self-reflexive when I examined the entire research project as a form of discourse and knowledge production. I can only summarize that examination here, but even a summary can suggest the ways in which those of us who construct narratives work to make available for scrutiny the many social forces impinging on our research. In that larger study I explore my own shifting identities throughout the research process. I reflect on how my identities ranging from researcher, to teacher, to mother, all shift throughout the research, both helping and hurting the research process. I examine institutional power carried with me in my role as a university researcher (Richardson, 1997), question the risks of this research reinforcing the idea of children with HIV as being 'special cases' (Alldred, 1998), and emphasize through explaining my choices in this construction that I have selected to represent these children in this way – the narratives may not be how the children would choose to represent themselves. Taken together, such a discussion suggests the ways in which power circulates through narrative representations and the shifting and multiple subjectivities of both the children and myself.

The third aim: creating an oppositional picture My third aim is to work to create an oppositional picture of a 'child with HIV' and to challenge the dominant discourses through which our society understands those who suffer from HIV. I actively resist dominant tales that represent HIV-positive children as 'little heroes' and their mothers as 'deviants' or villains or members of 'risk groups' for whose sins the children pay (Lincoln, 1993). Even seemingly positive simplifications can have negative consequences, and romanticizing these children's struggles does not give a rich description of their lives – which is what narrative research ostensibly intends to do. Therefore, I tried to create

complex and sometimes contradictory tales of the children by sharing as many aspects of their lives as became visible in my research. This meant resisting the urge always to depict the children in as sympathetic a light as possible. For instance, in the following example, Joseph talks about how the girls get preferential treatment in his school:

Anyway, cuz that not fair, when the girls go outside first. But good because they didn't go outside because um, all the time when the girls get to go outside we don't go. So that not fair. They say for a little week, but but they almost let me go outside because, because I was a little good, but. I was keep playing. I was playing a little, I was playing a lot because I was . . . I was playing but I was putting my elbow down, and. I was doing something but. If you look, if you don't behave, they don't, they don't let you go outside. But you're right, because they let other boys go outside. Girls can go outside only. Oops. No cuz, uh for a week we don't get to go outside . . . No cuz sometimes, all all the boys get in trouble and sometimes me and everybody, but um, sometimes all the boys doesn't do nothing in our class. They talking all the girls in my class can go outside.

By his own account Joseph, like many children his age, sometimes gets into trouble in school. He misbehaves or is wrongly accused of misbehaving and is angry when he doesn't get to spend recess outside. This depiction differs from typical media descriptions of children with HIV as simply innocent victims. In this next example, similarly, Joseph mentions that he was considering cheating on test at school:

At school today I didn't do the bonus test. I was doing the, the, the ultra bonus test. I was going to do the make-up bonus test. It was a hard but it was easy. But but because I was going to cheat, but, it it couldn't it couldn't. But I, I, I think real hard and I sound out the words . . . I sound them out. Ands all easy. Everybody got em. Everybody got tens and eights. I got fifteen. Next time I'm gonna get a math test. Real hard one.

It is not clear whether Joseph chose to work the test problem out on his own and ultimately succeed. But he does mention considering cheating on the test. While hardly a terrible sin, this admission differs from the two-dimensional media depictions of this population as 'innocent', and also gives a sense of his school pressures and struggles.

Along the lines of creating an oppositional tale I also tried to resist the temptation to share only those aspects of the children's lives that are sad or peculiar. Mundane aspects of daily life are often left out of narratives because the researcher is trying to create a 'good read' (Fine et al., 2000). This practice can create narratives that make the life of the participant appear exotic. I tried to avoid this by portraying a range of the children's experiences, the mundane as well as the exceptional. In the following example, which is an entire theme from the narrative, Joseph describes his relationship with his 'big brother', Tim. Note that this theme was developed with data from several interviews. Spaces between the text indicate a discussion from a different interview.

My relationship with my 'big brother', Tim

Tim, he like my brother. But he, he's my friend. But uh uh he was sick cuz he got dneumonia [sic] or something. A fever. When he's not sick we go everywhere, I think. Like, the pool to swim. But the water is too deep so I, I just gotta wear floating utations [sic], so we can't go in anymore. Because the uh pool didn't let us use the floating utations cuz I don't know. And he wrote, wrote a nasty letter cuz we cuz we need the floating tations cuz if we don't need it, how like, a like, a little child couldn't swim needs to use floating utations. How how is he swim?

I'm scared swim. I think I'm going to drown. He was he was making me try to swim, so I did. I tried and I tried and I tried, but I couldn't do it. Like I moving I was. I got to move my legs and move my arms. So he, I was reaching, I was reaching so he want to reach. I got gotta swim. I couldn't because I'm scared.

Tim wants me to swim cuz I couldn't swim so he's teaching me how to swim. He wants me to move my legs and move my arms, because I was holding on the bars because I want, I didn't want to move, cuz I was scared. I move and I was drown-ing, he catch me . . . I was this close to drowning. He catch me.

He took me out in the mountains so I could go roller blading. Last week. It was fun. I went down the hill. I was a little scared about the big one. I was scared about the big one. I wasn't scared about the other ones. Cuz I thought I was in a mountain. I was scared, I thought I was going to slip. I thought we was down hill. This kind of hill. When, I wasn't scared this hill. I thought, but I stopped, I thought I wasn't on a hill, but I keep going . . . Because we went up, if you go up up, cuz we going down hill, down hill make us go fast. Up hill make us go real slow. Tim held hands. It's scary. It's very scary. When you go on that, you got to be holding on somebody's hand and go whooooo. It was scary, because if you walk, or, or move still I go fast. I was a little scared I was going to fall. Whooo. I was so scared I was almost going to almost hit my leg. I almost fell. I don't think so. But I'm going to do it again, and again, and again.

He brought me to his apartment for Easter. And I hunt for Easter eggs in his house. Chocolate ones. It was fun. I couldn't, I couldn't find all of them. I couldn't find all of them, at once. So I couldn't find much. He lives downtown. My mom and I went there by train and we stayed and in a while when it gets a little dark, we left.

It was three other people there . . . I forgot their name. And then the four of us a fifth one came. It was, it was four males and. . . two, two um females. He met them before. Like like I met I met um Tommy . . . Tommy wasn't there. No, I mean I just asked like, like I just, like he, he met them he met them. He met em . . . like me and Tommy. We met met, a long, long time ago.

In this last comment Joseph explains that Tim has an old friend, just as he has 'Tommy', his friend from the clinic. This theme of his relationship with his Big Brother is not particularly exciting. Joseph describes sharing a series of experiences, learning to swim, learning to roller blade, and an Easter celebration, with Tim. Although Joseph's descriptions of these typical experiences as 'scary' tell you something about Joseph's character, my decision to include these aspects of his life is an effort to depict a fuller picture of Joseph as a child.

This piece of the narrative, I believe, represents Joseph as a person who is able to connect with others – with Tim and Tommy; forging relationships such as these is a strength. Depicting children with HIV as being more than victims, as having strengths of character, helps to subvert dominant representations of children with HIV/AIDS.

LIMITATIONS

Joseph was not asked to read my portrayal of his story in order to find out whether he agreed with my depiction of him. Because Joseph was not openly aware of his HIV status, I felt that I could not ethically share the entire study with him. I also chose not to show him pieces of the study, for the same reason.

Conclusions

By using poststructural critiques of narrative research, I have developed three aims to guide my constructions of narratives of children with HIV. These aims remind me to consider the child's shifting identities, my own actions and thinking as a researcher, and oppositional pictures of a 'child with HIV'. As this discussion and the excerpts from the narrative reveal, Joseph has complex life experiences connected to living with HIV. By presenting Joseph's thoughts on multiple aspects of his life, this narrative demonstrates that he expressed a range of feelings and experiences. As a result, his thoughts and feelings can appear to the reader as inconsistent, self-contradictory or even nonsensical. He struggles with aspects of HIV such as taking multiple medications, understanding the deaths of his biological parents, rushing off to doctors' appointments, and living with the secrecy and stigma that is related to HIV. However, these struggles do not constitute the entirety of his experiences. The narrative tries to resist the simple depiction of HIV-positive children as passive patients and victims. The narrative also does not describe Joseph as exotic or heroic, as is sometimes done. Instead, by developing and keeping these post-structurally informed aims in mind while constructing the narratives, the final piece presents his life in a fuller way. He has positive and negative aspects of his life, and of his personality. Sadness and struggle are real aspects of Joseph's life, and of the lives of other HIV-positive children, but they are not the whole story.

Implications

Narrative research has been celebrated as having the potential to make space for formerly silenced voices and to offer emancipatory potential. But post-structural theorists problematize the very act of constructing narratives by positioning narratives within wider sociohistorical contexts and calling attention to the role of the researcher who, however invisibly, actually constructs the narrative. Such a critique of narrative research can prevent this relatively

new form of educational research from becoming, as LeCompte describes, 'idiosyncratic frameworks which are as doctrinaire and orthodox as those they discard' (1993: 13). Although some theoretical work critiquing narrative research from a poststructural perspective exists, few models use these critiques as guidelines to construct actual narratives. This article will be useful to narrative researchers, not only for its poststructural critique, but also because it provides an example of striving to avoid conventional pitfalls of narrative research.

NOTES

1. Scholars in education often describe totalizing research which strives to find 'truth' as being part of a modernist conceptual framework. In literary theory, however, the relation of modernism and postmodernism is in dispute. Some see the postmodern end of 'metanarratives' as a reaction against modernist totalizing, but others see postmodern fragmentation as an outgrowth and continuation of modernist artistic techniques (Joyce, Picasso) and ideas of truth (Nietzsche, William James). These theorists don't see modernism as being opposed to postmodern thought, as it is often described (Calinescu, 1987).
2. In the following section I will describe how I 'composed' these narratives according to poststructural thinking.
3. If I were sharing the entire narrative in this paper, I would explain what I omitted from the interviews. However, because this article only includes excerpts from the full narrative, a discussion on what was omitted from the entire tale would not be relevant.
4. Joseph was born HIV positive to parents who were drug users. Children like Joseph born in these circumstances often experience a confounding of challenges, such as developmental and learning disabilities, due to prenatal exposure to drugs. Joseph had severe language difficulties that made him difficult to interview and sometimes to understand, but in his struggle to speak one can see some of the challenges with which he contends.

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