
Postgraduate Certificate in Narrative Psychology

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative Inquiry: Narrative inquiry is a research method that involves studying the stories or narratives that individuals tell about their experiences. It focuses on understanding how people make sense of their lives through storytelling and the meanings they attach to their experiences.

Key Terms:

Narrative: A narrative is a story or account of events or experiences. It often includes characters, a plot, a setting, and a resolution. Narratives can take many forms, including personal stories, myths, legends, and fairy tales.

Inquiry: Inquiry refers to the process of asking questions, seeking information, and investigating a subject. In narrative inquiry, researchers seek to understand the stories people tell about their lives and the meanings they convey.

Meaning-making: Meaning-making is the process of creating or interpreting meaning from experiences, events, or stories. In narrative inquiry, researchers explore how individuals construct and make sense of their lives through storytelling.

Subjectivity: Subjectivity refers to the personal perspectives, experiences, and emotions that individuals bring to their storytelling. In narrative inquiry, researchers recognize and value the subjective nature of narratives and the importance of understanding stories from the teller's point of view.

Context: Context refers to the broader social, cultural, and historical factors that shape and influence individuals' narratives. In narrative inquiry, researchers consider the context in which stories are told and how it impacts the meanings and interpretations of those stories.

Emplotment: Emplotment refers to the way in which narratives are structured or organized. It involves the arrangement of events, characters, and themes in a coherent and meaningful way. In narrative inquiry, researchers examine how individuals emplot their stories and the significance of these narrative structures.

Plot: The plot of a narrative refers to the sequence of events that unfold in a story. It includes the introduction, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. In narrative inquiry, researchers analyze the plot of individuals' stories to understand the key events and turning points.

Character: Characters are the individuals or entities that feature in a narrative. They can be real people, fictional beings, or symbolic representations. In narrative inquiry, researchers pay attention to the characters in individuals' stories and how they contribute to the overall meaning.

Setting: The setting of a narrative refers to the time and place in which the story takes place. It includes details about the physical environment, social context, and cultural background. In narrative inquiry, researchers examine the setting of individuals' stories to understand the context in which they unfold.

Resolution: The resolution of a narrative is the outcome or conclusion of the story. It often provides closure or a sense of completion to the events that have been described. In narrative inquiry, researchers explore how individuals resolve the conflicts or challenges in their stories and what this reveals about their experiences.

Storytelling: Storytelling is the act of narrating or recounting events, experiences, or ideas. It is a fundamental aspect of human communication and is used to convey meaning, share knowledge, and connect with others. In narrative inquiry, researchers focus on the ways in which individuals tell their stories and the purposes they serve.

Interpretation: Interpretation involves making sense of and assigning meaning to a narrative. It requires analyzing the content, structure, and context of a story to uncover underlying themes or messages. In narrative inquiry, researchers engage in interpretation to understand the significance of individuals' stories.

Temporal dimension: The temporal dimension of a narrative refers to the ways in which time is represented or experienced in a story. It includes the sequencing of events, the passage of time, and the use of flashbacks or foreshadowing. In narrative inquiry, researchers consider how individuals' narratives are shaped by time and temporality.

Dialogicality: Dialogicality refers to the interactive and relational nature of storytelling. It recognizes that narratives are co-constructed through dialogue, conversation, and interaction with others. In narrative inquiry, researchers explore the dialogical aspects of individuals' stories and how they are influenced by social interactions.

Plot twists: Plot twists are unexpected or surprising developments in a narrative that challenge the reader's expectations or assumptions. They can add complexity, suspense, or depth to a story. In narrative inquiry, researchers pay attention to plot twists in individuals' stories and their implications for understanding their experiences.

Agency: Agency refers to the capacity of individuals to act, make choices, and exert influence in their lives. It involves a sense of autonomy, empowerment, and responsibility. In narrative inquiry, researchers examine how individuals express agency in their stories and the ways in which it shapes their identities and experiences.

Counter-narratives: Counter-narratives are alternative or opposing stories that challenge dominant or mainstream narratives. They offer different perspectives, voices, or interpretations of events. In narrative inquiry, researchers explore counter-narratives to understand the diversity of experiences and meanings that exist within a community or culture.

Multiple voices: Multiple voices refer to the variety of perspectives, viewpoints, or voices that can be present in a narrative. They can include the voices of different characters, narrators, or storytellers. In narrative inquiry, researchers analyze the multiple voices in individuals' stories and the ways in which they contribute to the richness and complexity of the narrative.

Collaborative storytelling: Collaborative storytelling involves the co-creation of narratives through shared participation and interaction. It can occur in group settings, interviews, or collaborative projects. In narrative inquiry, researchers engage in collaborative storytelling to elicit diverse perspectives, co-construct meaning, and build connections with participants.

Retrospective sense-making: Retrospective sense-making is the process of looking back on past events or experiences and making sense of them in hindsight. It involves reflecting on the significance, patterns, and lessons learned from previous occurrences. In narrative inquiry, researchers explore how individuals engage in retrospective sense-making through their storytelling.

Narrative identity: Narrative identity refers to the way in which individuals construct and interpret their identities through storytelling. It involves integrating past experiences, present actions, and future aspirations into a coherent narrative of the self. In narrative inquiry, researchers investigate how individuals' narratives shape their sense of identity and self-understanding.

Practical Applications:

Clinical Psychology: Narrative inquiry is used in clinical psychology to explore clients' life stories, experiences, and perspectives. Therapists may use narrative techniques to help clients make sense of their past, cope with trauma, or envision new possibilities for the future.

Education: In education, narrative inquiry is used to understand students' learning experiences, challenges, and achievements. Teachers may incorporate storytelling activities into their lessons to enhance students' communication skills, critical thinking, and self-expression.

Organizational Development: Narrative inquiry is applied in organizational development to explore employees' narratives, values, and motivations. Managers may use storytelling workshops or interviews to foster a sense of community, resilience, and shared purpose within the workplace.

Social Work: Narrative inquiry is used in social work to uncover clients' strengths, resources, and aspirations. Social workers may use narrative techniques to empower clients, challenge oppressive narratives, and advocate for social justice and equality.

Community Development: Narrative inquiry is applied in community development to document, preserve, and share individuals' stories and histories. Community organizers may use storytelling events or digital platforms to amplify marginalized voices, promote cultural diversity, and strengthen social bonds.

Challenges:

Ethical Considerations: Researchers conducting narrative inquiry must consider ethical issues related to consent, confidentiality, and power dynamics. It is important to respect participants' autonomy, privacy, and cultural beliefs when collecting and analyzing their stories.

Subjectivity and Bias: The subjective nature of narratives can introduce bias or interpretation errors into the research findings. Researchers must be aware of their own biases, assumptions, and perspectives when engaging with participants' stories and strive to maintain objectivity in their analysis.

Interpretation and Validity: The process of interpreting narratives can be complex and subjective, leading to questions about the validity and reliability of the research outcomes. Researchers must use rigorous methods, triangulation, and member checking to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of their interpretations.

Power and Representation: The power dynamics between researchers and participants can influence the storytelling process and the meanings that emerge from it. Researchers must be mindful of their positionality, privilege, and influence in shaping participants' narratives and strive to amplify diverse voices and perspectives.

Cultural and Linguistic Diversity: The cultural and linguistic diversity of participants can pose challenges in narrative inquiry, including translation issues, misinterpretations, and cultural misunderstandings. Researchers must be sensitive to the cultural nuances, values, and practices that shape individuals' storytelling and ensure that their narratives are accurately represented.

Collaboration and Engagement: Collaborative storytelling requires strong communication, trust, and mutual respect between researchers and participants. Building rapport, establishing boundaries, and fostering a safe and inclusive environment are essential for successful collaboration in narrative inquiry.

Overall, narrative inquiry is a powerful research method that offers unique insights into individuals' lived experiences, identities, and sense-making processes. By exploring the stories people tell about their lives, researchers can uncover hidden meanings, challenge dominant narratives, and promote social change and understanding.