Discourses We Live By
Narratives of Educational and Social Endeavour

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What are the influences that govern how people view their worlds? What are the embedded values and practices that underpin the ways people think and act? Discourses We Live By approaches these questions through narrative research, in a process that uses words, images, activities or artefacts to ask people – either individually or collectively within social groupings – to examine, discuss, portray or otherwise make public their place in the world, their sense of belonging to (and identity within) the physical and cultural space they inhabit.

This book is a rich and multifaceted collection of twenty-eight chapters that use varied lenses to examine the discourses that shape people's lives. The contributors are themselves from many backgrounds – different academic disciplines within the humanities and social sciences, diverse professional practices and a range of countries and cultures. They represent a broad spectrum of age, status and outlook, and variously apply their research methods – but share a common interest in people, their lives, thoughts and actions. Gathering such eclectic experiences as those of student-teachers in Kenya, a released prisoner in Denmark, academics in Colombia, a group of migrants learning English, and gambling addiction support-workers in Italy, alongside more mainstream educational themes, the book presents a fascinating array of insights.

Discourses We Live By will be essential reading for adult educators and practitioners, those involved with educational and professional practice, narrative researchers, and many sociologists. It will appeal to all who want to know how narratives shape the way we live and the way we talk about our lives.

As with all Open Book publications, this entire book is available to read for free on the publisher's website. Printed and digital editions, together with supplementary digital material, can also be found at www.openbookpublishers.com.

Cover Image by Tom Perkins, CC-BY 4.0. Cover Design by Anna Gatti.
Outi Ylitapio-Mäntylä and Mari Mäkiranta discuss how to make sensitive interventions across cultural divides with a focus on the San people of Africa. In line with feminist practices, they outline how a caring ethos can protect the individual from some of the challenges customary within a neoliberal society but reveal that this is hard to achieve within a multi-nation collaborative project where value bases differ.

In the course of our academic careers, we have organized several international art-based workshops exploring the meanings of places, childhood memories and cultural sustainability, among other themes. In these workshops, we have been interested in people’s life histories, gender studies and pedagogical developments with multidisciplinary connections to education and art research (Mäkiranta & Ylitapio-Mäntylä, 2019). This chapter stems from our latest collaboration on a European-Union-funded participatory development project with young people; an international and intersectoral research study involving the San youth living in Indigenous communities in South Africa and Namibia.

Participatory Development with the Youth, or PARTY, was a four-year (2015–2019) EU Horizon 2020 project led by Professor Satu
Miettinen of the University of Lapland. It aimed to support the San people to plan their own services through a four-stage process based on the Double Diamond model proposed by the British Council in 2004/5 and developed further in association with eleven global firms. This model helps people to *discover* a problem, *define* it, and — moving towards solution — to *develop* plans in order to *deliver* desired outcomes. For PARTY, the stages were interpreted as helping people to *identify* their beliefs and values by collecting their stories; build a *shared vision* of what is needed and wanted; *plan ways to resource* this vision; and then to *activate* changes. In the terms of the research, these are stages of self-awareness, participation, evolution and action (Pierandrei, et al, 2018, p. 5). The methodological framework is underpinned by earlier theoretical and research activity on service design (see Miettinen & Koivisto, 2009), and the EU funding provided an opportunity for a group of researchers from Finland, Italy, UK, Namibia and South Africa to collaborate to put innovative service design ideas into practice. Their aim was to develop a tool book as a practical manual for carrying out such collaborative work with marginalized groups and, in the first instance, to assist in reducing unemployment and alienation, and associated poverty and social unrest, among the San people. (More detail is available on the PACO website¹ and in Miettinen, et al., 2018).

The San project involved youth aged thirteen to twenty-four years old who were living in poor neighbourhoods and either marginalized or facing the risk of becoming marginalized, but our work was focused on eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds. We were involved early in the project when the collaborators were still getting to know each other and finding ways of shared working, holding a workshop at a cultural centre for San people, related to curriculum planning. However, this chapter is not about the project itself but about the experience of participating at the early stages of a collaborative project, which made significant demands on researchers like ourselves. Rather than focus on an actual workshop we use the workshop as a channel to consider possibilities for supporting diversity. We ask: what kinds of challenges arise when researchers meet Indigenous young people and try to support diversity? Our theoretical framework relates to feminist pedagogies and neoliberal discourses in academia. Through this combination, we demonstrate

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¹ [http://www.pacollaborative.com/our-project/]
how productivity, efficiency and competition as neoliberal values affect our work and how we as feminist researchers can create the space for responsible encounters with Indigenous people.

Feminist pedagogies draw attention to researcher — participant relationships, the use of experiences in teaching and learning processes and the importance of hearing all voices in a teaching situation. A reflective feminist researcher listens with compassion and is keenly interested in participants’ stories (Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010). We aim to consider how to encourage collaborative co-construction of knowledge and non-hierarchical work, which appreciates varied experiences and knowing (see Sharp et al., 2007). Moreover, the emergent question is how to reflect issues of diversity (Markowitz, 2005). This can be challenging because we live in a neoliberal era that emphasizes internationalization. Other reasons include the need for external funding, the lack of time and space for ethical meetings with research participants, the need for slow thinking (stopping and taking the time to see and hear others) and the possibility of failure (Carpineiro, 2017). A further challenge is that theoretical developments nearly always occur in the cities and the global North. The issues relevant for the rural South can be marginalized in the world’s economy of knowledge (Connell, 2014). Additionally, a difficulty in studying Indigenous settings is that researchers learn the procedures, ethics and practicalities of research from a Western perspective. If Western researchers approach people from different cultures from these perspectives this can lead to problematic dynamics, meetings and relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (McGloin, 2016).

The Space for Collective Knowing

We met the San youth in March 2016 in the Western Cape, South Africa, through an organization that arranges training and education for them, in this case the workshop on curriculum planning, which aimed to assist the mapping of learning outcomes for the organization’s courses and pedagogy. Our preliminary work included collaborating with the participants and discussing how the curriculum would support their future. The idea was that teachers and students could continue developing their courses after our workshops.
However, the collaboration was not mutual, for, as Western researchers, we constructed the situations around the rules *we* had learned, but the San youth found these difficult to relate to. This disjuncture does not mean that we should reject all the theoretical and the methodological contributions we have learned (Smith, 1999). Rather, as feminist researchers, we should lead ourselves and others to ask different kinds of questions with an *analytical* effort (Naskali, 2013).

During the workshop, we photographed, video-recorded and observed the informants and facilitators, the communication situations and spaces and the materials produced. Positioning ourselves as observers while the participants worked, allowed us to witness the interactions among the people, the social space of the workshop and the participants’ voices. However, Western tradition has a tendency towards cohesion (unity of belief) or dichotomy (this or that) which feminist research has criticized (Naskali, 2013). Cultural mingling, even ‘conflict’, is necessary to shake up Western philosophical traditions, value sets, understandings and expectations and engender discussions about different kinds of cultural values. Those who subscribe to the Western intellectual tradition need to examine how academic philosophies and practices ignore, marginalize and exclude others (Kuokkanen, 2008). Conventional Western-based methods and scientific research approaches pay little attention to, and thereby restrict other activities and practices, like customs and traditions. They overlook the importance of folklore, songs, dances or symbolic cultural artefacts common in the Indigenous world (Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010). When the pace of interaction follows Western practices, the product-oriented and fast-moving academic context that is the norm leaves no space for slow thinking, for reproducing new ways of knowing together. Yet as researchers, we should also recognize our need for some time to think, analyse, ponder, read and write. As Rogowska-Stangret (2018) states, Western-based methods relate to the Foucauldian approach of neoliberalism, one that describes the relations and institutions, their power structures and modes of subjectification in the contemporary and effective academic world, and this can be a problem when transplanted to other contexts.

During the workshop, we faced a frustrating situation that demonstrated this problematic aspect of neoliberal values: insufficient
time was allowed for us to achieve our goals. Under neoliberalism, the academic world becomes a servant of the economy. Researchers, as well as teachers, are forced to produce knowledge with a market value (Byrne, 2017) and to do so efficiently. We felt that we did not have enough time to share our experiences and knowledge together or to build a space for dialogical educational practices with the San youth. As Merrill (2005) explains, dialogical feminism can offer the possibility of hearing the voices of ‘others’. This can further lead to an awareness of the structures behind our habits and practices, such as how we are guided by neoliberal values of effectiveness.

Grace and Gouthro (2000) discuss feminist pedagogies as positional, occurring when we use personal histories, knowledge, locations and experiences in the learning process. Learning is always a subjective experience; however, when a group of people gather to learn, it is also viewed as collective. A person is not only an individual but also a member of both public and private communities; ‘I am always part of a we’ (Griffiths, 2006, p. 389). This association contrasts with the notion of individualism that is emphasized in contemporary society and academia. When we meet others in a public or a private community, such encounters include opportunities to share knowledge and perhaps to form communities of practice (Wenger, 2015). ‘We’ is also a troubled word. As Naskali (2013, p. 33) states, ‘the problematic nature of presuming who “we” are and justifying “us” becomes visible when the dominant culture defends the rights of “we” in a nationalist sense’. For instance, some African feminists prefer to use the term womanism instead of feminism because the latter word is related to Western philosophies (Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010).

Notably, learning needs knowledge, which is always contextually bound to a specific time and place. In feminist research, it is important to ask how knowing is intertwined with the knower and who the knower is (Naskali, 2013). Therefore, knowledge is never static but constantly reconstructed. It does not only comprise theories and concepts; it is also connected to a material basis and bound with different ways of knowing, different places and times (Naskali, 2013). In learning processes, such as our workshop, knowledge produced in specific contexts is deconstructed and reconstructed through discussions. It is important to enhance critical thinking skills to enable participants to view knowledge
from different perspectives. This aim can be achieved by developing discussion techniques and working with others, by reflecting on the phenomena, asking questions and increasing skills in theorizing and reflecting (Vogel, 2002) but this requires sufficient time for people to truly benefit.

Through its activities, the workshop drew attention to knowledge creation as a process (something you do), not a product (something you did). Because knowledge was constructed in a collaborative and collective way in the teaching situation, it could not be deemed value neutral. Rather, it is understood as political (Lempiäinen & Naskali, 2011) and able to provide a framework to engage in raising consciousness, as well as a space to discuss, share ideas and hear multiple stories of life (see also Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). The goals of feminist pedagogies are to develop critical thinking and connect students to their learning, by using their experiences and skills as resources to enable a better understanding of the social and political aspects of everyday activities (Vogel, 2002; Weiler, 2001). Some people have stronger positions than others from which to shape political outcomes and are able to exercise more power over whose perspectives are heard and recognized (DeLaet, 2012). Feminist pedagogies stress that the learning process and meetings with participants are always political and conflictual, but that we can build shared knowledge (Costa & Mendel, 2017; Grace & Gouthro, 2000). We need to rethink our actions and make a transition from what to how we do them; thus, we should refute individuality and trace modes of individuation, which, in Jungian terms, is the process of making personal and collective unconscious views more apparent in order to better develop the individual personality (Rogowska-Stangret, 2017).

As knowledge is embedded in time and place, in diverse social agencies and certain methodologies, we claim that supporting diversity requires slow thinking, time and space to hear political voices as expressions of identities. It also demands that people produce knowledge in collaboration and occasionally in different ways than are common in Western academia and within specific disciplinary methodologies (see also Connell, 2014; Smith, 1999).
Managing Power

Working with the San community, we noticed that, as researchers, we need to understand that different human groups can hold values that differ considerably from our own. Even if we learn to know one another and reflect on our respective positions, power relations are still present. As researchers, we need to be constantly aware that we might make presumptions and even false assumptions by being blind and deaf to important insights and voices (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012). Thus, we should remember that we can never fully be either insiders or outsiders in a research process (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012). Hierarchies and power relationships are always present when researchers and participants meet each other. Even though an encounter may be intimate, researchers are still performing a professional role and this can be formal, maintaining distinctive boundaries that keep researcher and participant apart. Nonetheless, positioning can alter during meetings. This raises the question of who has power. Specifically, who is in a position to express personal values? Whose voice is heard? How does power emerge in the processes of a project? It is important that researchers understand the nature of power in a relationship and recognize that it is never stable.

During our Participatory Development with the Youth project, we became conscious of the complexity of our position and started to suffer the effects of institutional pressures (Carpintero, 2017), power structures and demands for speedy but effective outcomes. Although we understood the project’s high-level aims, we found that we were unable to operationalize them well enough as they made little allowance for local circumstances. It is hard to avoid the market orientation that seems to be a fundamental element of projects that sit within a huge transnational cluster, where researchers do not even know all the people with whom they must co-operate (Brunila, 2011). We faced an uncomfortable situation — a need to achieve specific goals without the resources to do this adequately.

For us, committed to feminist methodologies, a sensitive encounter with those we study is one that avoids exploiting or harming human subjects and understands the power differential between the researchers and the participants. The strategies underpinning feminist
pedagogies involve protecting the participants by trying to create a safe space in which the project unfolds and generate opportunities for empowerment (Burgess-Proctor, 2015). However, being appreciative and respectful is more than merely verbalizing an accepted opinion but also a way to act. It involves making space for different voices and encouraging critical thinking to ensure that respect is actualized (Costa & Mendel, 2017).

Reflexivity is a self-critical tool that helps researchers explore how the shape of a theoretical position and collaboratively produced knowledge can be studied. With a communal process, it is necessary to consider the structural, political and cultural backgrounds of both researchers and participants. Reflexivity increases engagement and participation in the study process and fosters both a less hierarchical and a more ethical study (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012). Feminist researchers pay attention to reflexivity, which necessitates questioning and understanding how the researchers’ social backgrounds, assumptions and feelings influence the research processes (Hesse-Biber, 2012).

Overall, we argue that, in feminist pedagogies, diversity is supported when we perceive participants as subjects rather than objects and recognize that a subject is always in relationship with others; also, that social reality is polarized and thus often conflicting. It is important to reflect on the researchers’ positions and focus on how they encounter the participants. Careful reflection includes an understanding of our own culture and background. It is important to realize from which culture ‘we’ are encountering other cultures (Lykke, 2010). Reflection also requires a discussion of the epistemology of positioning so that the contexts of domination and freedom can be taken into account (Costa & Mendel, 2017). Distancing ourselves helps us negotiate our positionality as researchers and recognize the shifting nature of power relations (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012). It is also vital to consider the research subjects’ right to self-determination. Such practices take time and cannot be rushed to meet deadlines.

Caring in a Neoliberal Context

Power is present in all encounters and communications, including caring situations. Caring means doing the very best for the other in
the relationship between the carer and the cared-for. Feminist pedagogies emphasize caring as an important factor in the learning process. It refuses commonly acknowledged views of the teacher as ‘knowing’ and the student as ‘unknowing’. Hence, teaching is a bottom-up (rather than a top-down) knowledge exchange (Luke, 1996), to create a nurturing atmosphere and close contact between the students and the teacher (Vogel, 2002). If the participants are involved in the development of the whole project, this helps reduce hierarchy, force, disrespect and indifference (Costa & Mendel, 2017). Such aims are often difficult to put into practice, especially when researchers have insufficient time for meetings with participants and are thus less able to develop trust. It is always a challenge to create a safe learning situation because of self-disclosure and vulnerability (Kishimoto & Mwangi, 2009) and time restraints make it difficult to address such issues.

Under neoliberalism, we have no time to care for others, or even ourselves, within academia. As researchers, we inhabit a publish-or-perish culture with no time to stop, to read and discuss and be present in the moment (Carpintero, 2017). Education is market oriented under neoliberalism, with learning a personal duty (Brunila, 2011). It is ‘old-fashioned’ to stop and learn together. Additionally, in a society where living well is an individual ‘project’, people are expected to be perennially busy, engaged in building their everyday lives but available to fulfil the requirements of the market (Brunila, 2011).

Despite these pressures, feminist teachers are highly involved and engaged in their work. They feel the pressure to be caring teachers who are committed to their students (Lempiäinen & Naskali, 2011). The practices of teaching create different kinds of emotional knowledge between caregivers and care receivers, but there are also similarities. Thus, teachers need to understand how emotion operates through responsibility and how it is connected to emotion in caring practices. Teachers should ask critical questions, about how this is, or can be, achieved. It is also important to recognize and to challenge the emotional burden of duties assigned to marginalized people who have to adapt to decisions made by the privileged (Zempylas, Bozalek, & Shefer, 2014). Even in academia, under neoliberalism, professionals are aware that responsibilities can be taken away because ‘money talks’ and there
are not enough resources to maintain the quality of academic work (Carpintero, 2017).

Overall, as feminist researchers, we claim that caring is an important step towards supporting people. It needs responsiveness, respect and attentiveness, which means that a caring person pays attention to others’ needs and reacts to them with sympathy and understanding. Responsiveness ensures that the cared-for people understand the requests made to them. Respect in caring maintains the idea that teachers are sensitive to those whom they support (Ylitapio-Mäntylä, 2013). Therefore, a caring ethos could support all participants in developing their everyday lives together without marginalization.

Caring can be related to the use of life stories. Producing life stories makes it possible to acquire experiences, which helps researchers hear other voices and visualize the world of the unknown. However, it can be dangerous to narrate stories about people from other cultures if research continues to legitimize views of Western discourses and disciplines (Smith, 1999). When using life stories, diversity is always present, especially when studying Indigenous people. Diversity is embedded in our different stories and the web of our world. However, the concept of diversity has become a ‘brand’ with marketing appeal in the commercial world, receiving a very different treatment to that which is traditional within academia, which should be a place where differences are welcomed (Ahmed, 2009). In social communities, difference is often a source of hierarchical power and control (Naskali, 2013). When Indigenous people become involved in the academic world and face Western approaches, the task often becomes one of determining difference (Kuokkanen, 2008) rather than making a political impact on their lives. The emphasis is on collecting stories of ‘difference’ (Naskali, 2013) and through ‘telling’ these, the difference is also reconstructed. Instead, when listening to life stories of marginalized people, the narratives need to be interpreted, not just heard. Indeed, marginalized people’s life stories can be contrary to expectations (Ahmed, 2009). When researchers analyse such stories, they produce new knowledge that has the possibility to change the subjects’ lifeworlds (Naskali, 2013).
Conclusions

In this chapter, we have examined the kinds of challenges that arise when researchers meet Indigenous young people. Additionally, we have asked what kinds of challenges emerge when we aim to support diversity. When people teach and learn together with those from different backgrounds, there are challenges in working with complex and multiple value sets, varying theories of knowledge, uncertain power structures and hierarchies. Therefore, it is important to support everyone who takes part and to study the processes that enable the participation to be meaningful. A reflective touch is needed, especially when studying people from other cultures. We need to fully understand that different human groups can have divergent values and standards. As Western academic researchers, we have learned specific disciplinary methodologies, which can make us, if not blind, not fully aware of different ways of knowing.

As Naskali (2013) established, there are similarities between feminist and Indigenous epistemologies. Particularly, critique and problematization are significant matters in the knowledge process: it is important to make an unknown and unseen world visible, to deconstruct dichotomies and reveal hierarchies. However, feminist epistemologies focus on and emphasize gender as important in the analysis of someone’s experiences (Naskali, 2013). When research is about Indigenous people, the methodological tools may be different and should be considered carefully and be designed to resonate with the participants’ worlds. This requires time for sensitive preparation before the fieldwork. Furthermore, the study should have a values and ‘other’ orientation rather than an action-oriented aim.

Overall, we argue that when meeting people from different cultures, supportive action is required to uncover tacit power structures, as well as the political and personal influences on learning and teaching processes. As feminist researchers we were concerned to ensure that people listened to each other with respect and to promote an ethos where emotions and feelings could safely be expressed. At times, when relationships appeared hierarchical and conflict arose, this caused us to question our efficacy and doubt our own credibility. To create supportive spaces requires time; time to collectively reorganize and sustain meaning
in everyday situations, with all the participants included equally in the study process. The point is to make everyone feel important and valued by creating sensitive settings where people care for themselves and others.

References


