Researching life history narratives, adopting multimodal approaches: discursive transitions and uncomfortable silences

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The question to be addressed in this presentation is: what can be learnt from the context and process of conducting life history narrative interviews? This question will be addressed by critically reflecting upon the experiences of conducting research with school teachers who are studying professional development programmes designed to enhance special educational needs (SEN) provision in English schools. The presentation will investigate the pedagogy of facilitating a multisensory approach to narrative interviewing and consider the process of capturing and analysing different forms of communication, rather than the content of the interview.

The pedagogy applied during the research drew upon the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) in order to address how the discussion that occurred within the interview context involved a jointly developed narrative that facilitated the hearing of many voices. I extended this pedagogy to make it multi-modal (Kress, 2011) by inviting those involved in the interview to produce a drawn life history as this is a multisensory tactile and visual engagement as well as oral and aural. I feel this enables recollection and active engagement, which can be particularly beneficial for those with memory difficulties. Adopting this approach also enables the researcher to chronologically track the stories being told.

My discussion of the data will be an interpretivist, multi layered discursive analysis of visual, textual and audio data derived from sixteen individual interviews with teachers. I will consider the similarities and differences within the visual life histories that were produced. I will pay particular attention to the uncomfortable moments of transition that punctuate discussion such as switches in style and topic, displays of emotion or moments of silence. In doing so I will think through my data to address how multi-modal narrative interviews can enhance communication and understanding between participants, becoming events of meaningful exchange within which individuals produce themselves as subjects, aligning themselves with particular values and perspectives. I also critically reflect upon the pedagogy applied to rethinking the analysis of interview transcripts in enhancing understandings, and discuss the possible advantages for interviewees and researchers of using this approach.

