

# Narrative and Futures Studies: Introduction by the Special Editor

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The narrative approach has recently begun to influence the futures studies field, as researchers have become more conscious of the communicative and transformative aspects of futures studies. As well, that the dominance of the Platonian view of knowledge as a solely rational activity is giving way to a more Aristotelian view, that rhetorical and poetic expressions do have informative value as well. Jerome S. Bruner considers the paradigmatic or rational and the narrative to be very different ways to gain knowledge, but for him both are fundamentally valuable.

In this special issue we received articles and essays which present a rich variety of narrative approaches, both practical and theoretical - and with many applications. The underlying theme that brings the papers together is in fact a social constructivist view of narrative creation as a common learning process. The narrative project then becomes a “Zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky), a generative learning environment, where new meanings are created, and the futures specialist is both facilitator and participant learner. The common denominator is how narrative processes trigger change in participants’ narratives and thus open new paths for action.

My introductory article assembles the latest developments in narrative theory, with an emphasis on the linguistic discipline of narratology. My main thesis is that the narrative approach can be one answer to Michel Godet’s invitation for futures researchers to extend their participation – not only in the creation of scenarios as futures images – but as well in planning and the practical realization of the wished for futures. I have not paid enough attention to the dynamics of the collective creation process of narratives, but this gap is duly filled by other authors in the issue, who offer examples, ideas and critical evaluation of the narrative process.

Ivana Milojevic draws parallels between futures studies and narrative therapy. The focus of narrative therapy is in deconstructing destructive personal stories and constructing new empowering life stories, and thus reauthoring one’s life stories. Futures discourse is the core of the narrative therapy. Strengthening positive stories in a supportive therapy group enables people to redirect their efforts to realize their goals. She wraps her article around Hubert Hermans’ idea of multiple selves, any person lives in a dynamic field of differences, some conflicting, between socially constructed narratives. In futures studies this situation appears in individual situations as well as groups participating in futures work.

Debra Bateman’s gives a case study of an educational project, where the teachers learned through their pupils’ futures narratives. She leads us through three phases of teachers’ futures

narratives. In the beginning they have only a vague idea of what futures narratives could be and how futures orientation might be taught. The second phase is when there some conflicts with their parents, who suspect that futures education challenges their own stories. Finally the teachers evaluated the results of the learning process and commented, that after the project they were confident in integrating futures learning elements into their teaching in spite of these barriers and obstructions, allowing them to include futures in their curriculums.

Peter Stackelberg and Ruth Eira Jones develop the new domain of transmedia storytelling in respect to facilitating participation and learning. They state that “shaping the future means shaping popular perceptions of the future”. They argue that transmedia storytelling can be an efficient tool in sense-making and the creation of meanings. Storytelling can in their view either be an obstacle of change or facilitate and trigger change. Transmedia storytelling is a powerful means of narrative transportation, provoking both intellect, emotion and decision-making. They specify their approach discussing the design of transmedia narratives, where the storyworld plays a focal role. The storyworld is the environment where the participants’ actions - and learning - happens.

Zhan Li makes an opening towards a theory of scenariowork through introducing the concepts of sensemaking and translation as a means of narrative rhetorics. He considers Karl Weick’s theory of sensemaking – based originally on Lev Vygotsky’s ideas on the social construction of meanings – to be relevant in describing what actually happens in a futures project. Sensemaking reminds us of the Bakhtinian concept of heteroglossia, the dialogical process of language where some people tend to create their own language and some others try to unify the language to fit the interests of power. This concerns another concept, that of ‘translation’, a concept Bruno Latour uses in describing the process of organizing in open networks. Translation deals with the Foucaultian idea of tight connections between power and language. Li considers scenariowork and organizing to be narrative activities, understandings of which, through these concepts, would allow for new theoretical tools.

Marcus Bussey discusses how narratives enable emotionally laden *connaissance* knowledge formation, instead of the neutral *savoir* of the mainstream science. They thus offer an atmosphere of resilience. Narrative transportation happens such that “we live story while co-creating it within the communities of practice”. He agrees with the view that narrative is the basic mode of constructing our lives as well as cultures. To use narratives in futurework enables participants both to create new viewpoints and to question existing dominant narratives. At its best narrative work “as Ananta Giri (2011) suggests is a collective work of co-narration which calls forth the relational qualities of empathy, compassion, dialogue and listening.”

Andrew Curry and Victoria Ward discuss postcards as doorways through six case studies. They indicate eight ways in which postcards can be openings for new insights. These processes create what Peter Galison calls a ‘trading zone’, an interface where people with different backgrounds and different views are able to exchange and interact. “A narrative trading zone, by extension, is a space in which people from different academic backgrounds and disciplines are able to come together and create shared stories, in this case, about a shared future.”

Finally Kristin Alford, Steve Cork, John Finnigan, Nicky Grigg, Beth Fulton

and Michael Raupach present a case study on Australia's living scenarios process. Their focus is on creating archetypical scenarios, which can then serve others as a basis in their own creation of futures narratives. They not only report on the process as a story, but comment on the dynamics of the process of learning itself.

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