

# Choosing less conventional paths in Methodology

Dr Robert Vella

# Contents:

- **Using Performance in Research**
- Some Aspects of Qualitative Research
- Case Study & Narratives
- Philosophical Assumptions
- Eliciting Stories from the Participants
- Data Collection and Analysis / Ethical Implications

# Using Performance in Research

## Fictitious Radio Drama

- “no matter how we stage the text, we—the authors [researchers]—are doing the staging. As we speak about the people we study, we also speak for them,” (Richardson, 1992, p. 131)
- Radio drama is a performance without a visual component and relies solely on acoustics like dialogue, sound effects, and music
- An important feature in radio drama is the actor’s voice, the spoken word, the emphasis the actor places on her/his voice together with “sign systems”: “language, voice, music, noise, silence, fading, cutting, mixing, the (stereophonic) positioning of the signals, electro-acoustical manipulation, and original sound (actuality)” ([Huwiler](#), 2005, p. 51)

# Using Performance in Research

## Fictitious Staged Performance

- “*performance* is an interpretive event involving actors, purposes, scripts, stories, stages, and interactions” (Denzin, 2003, p. 8)
- Performance is an alternative way of understanding and knowing the participants in the research; it “engages participants in a process of knowledge” and is “a unique and a powerful way of accessing knowledge” (Conrad, 2008, p. 609)
- Although it can be seen as different from traditional approaches, it is “a no less valuable way of creating understandings [...] The playbuilding genre recognizes that its processes structurally framework knowledge” ([Norris](#), 2008, p. 631)

# Some Aspects of Qualitative Research

*Qualitative research* is a situated activity that locates the observer in **the world**.

Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the **world visible**. **These practices transform the world**. They turn the world into

a series of representations, including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research

involves an interpretive, naturalist approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3)

# Case Study & Narratives

- Some researchers view case study research as a methodological approach with a rigid research strategy
- Others, consider case study as being less structural and closely identifying with the study by setting parameters and context of the research - one with a “strong motivation for discovering meaning and understanding of experiences in context”, where the researcher’s interpretative role is essential to the process, and “an interpretative position views reality as multiple and subjective, based on meanings and understanding” (Harrison et al., 2017, p. 8)
- “narrative analysis treats stories [...] as knowledge, which constitutes the ‘social reality’ of the narrative” ( Gibson et al., 2017, p. 173), and as stated by Goodall (2008), “narrative epistemology” is a distinct way of understanding the world and a “way of knowing” (p.14)
- A narrative is a story or account of connected events, real and/or fictitious, aimed at imparting a message. It is the “sequence and consequence” of organised selected text, which is eventually connected and evaluated as meaningful information

# Philosophical Assumptions

- An important aspect in every research is that the researcher reflects on and expresses her/his philosophical stance
- Creswell and Poth (2017) describe four philosophical assumptions
  - **ontological** issue relates to the nature of reality, which is socially constructed rather than being a given
  - **epistemological** assumption is the way knowledge is acquired, by getting as close as possible to the participants
  - **axiological** assumption is about the values in research, involving several statements on one's positionality, including the values endorsed and biases
  - **methodology** and **methods**, are the procedures used in the process of the research

# Eliciting Stories from the Participants

- There are several methods of how a researcher can obtain data – interviews:
  - spoken language is considered as one of the most powerful tools humans use to communicate with each other
  - an excellent method to obtain a comprehensive picture of the participants' experiences in their own words
  - explore multiple perspectives
  - two-way communication “for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information” (Cannell & Kahn, 1968, p. 527)



# Data Analysis / Ethical Implications

- Data analysis involves preparing and organising the gathered data
- It is the responsibility of the analyst to choose the best approach to interpret and find meanings from the data according to the phenomenon being investigated
- One suitable approach in qualitative research: ‘The Data Analysis Spiral’ (Creswell & Poth, 2017)
  - managing and organizing the data
  - reading and memoing emergent ideas
  - describing and classifying into themes
  - developing and assessing interpretations
  - representing and visualizing the data

“The most important ethical concern is to do all that we can to ensure that we represent lives respectfully and that we do not use our narrative privilege, or, put another way, our narrative power, to demean, belittle or take revenge” (Sikes, 2010, p. 16)

# Conclusion

[W]hen you talk with me about my research, do not ask me what I found; I found nothing. Ask me what I invented, what I made up from and out of my data [...] I am not confessing to telling any lies about the people or events in my studies/stories. I have told the truth. The proof for you is in the things I have made—how they look to your mind's eye, whether they satisfy your sense of style and craftsmanship, whether you believe them, and whether they appeal to your heart.

(Sandelowski, 1994, p. 61)

# Radio Drama

## **Behind the curtain**

**Thursday, October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020 at 10:00:**

*Josette, the presenter of 'Sharing Our Lives' programme from ABC radio station contacted Robert by phone to remind him about the radio drama on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> October. They discussed the time of arrival and the scenes in the drama. It was decided that Josette would introduce each scene, and speak the quotes at the beginning of each scene and those in the middle. Josette asked Robert about the possibility of sending her an email with the names of some music tracks and indicating in which scenes they should be included. Robert agreed.*

# Radio Drama

**Friday, October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020 at 17:30:**

*Robert enters ABC Radio station and is welcomed by the studio floor manager who shows him the way to the waiting room. The programme starts in thirty minutes.*

*At 17:55 Robert is shown the way to the studio. The final tune from a 1980s music programme is aired. The presenter shakes hands with Robert and the two have a short chat. Adverts are aired for two minutes. Josette and Robert wear the headphones and arrange the microphones.*

*The presenter is signalling the downward count with her fingers: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. 'On Air' red light on. Crescendo of instrumental music. Music fades out and remains in the background.*

# Radio Drama

*Gradual crescendo of Hannah Montana's 'Butterfly Fly Away'. Music fades out and remains in the background.*

**Presenter:**

## **Scene 3: Metamorphosis**

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.

Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”<sup>10</sup>

**Robert:** *(Inspirational tone)* Research starts with curiosity, with the “whats”, “ifs”, and “whys”, *(pause)* and my story begins with that of a butterfly hovering from one flower to another *(pause)* in search of nectar.

# Radio Drama

## **A Butterfly I Will Be**

When I Fly

...

*Full text of the poem is found at: <https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/451767406361505544/>*

...

days a Butterfly I will be. (Lonnie Horsey)<sup>50</sup>

*(Reading slowly)* Life is full of memories, sometimes of sadness but many a time of joys and blessings, it all depends on which side of the coin we look at. *(Pause)* These were just flashes of my life journey, sparks which have marked my existence. Some were somewhat bitter but most of them were sweeter than honey. With the curtain closing on this Act, I cannot but refer to a quote by the American actress Kelly McGillis: "Life is a journey and it's about growing and changing and coming to terms with who and what you are and loving who and what you are."<sup>51</sup>



# Staged Performance

## Play Conventions

The conventions used for Act 2, Parts 1 and 2, presented in two chapters, are as follows:

- **Bold typeface** represents the name of the actor;
- **Actor's name in bold typeface followed by normal typeface after the colon** indicates the participants' verbatim quotes from the interview, some of which had to be translated from Maltese to English;

# Staged Performance

## Poster for the Drama



Figure 5.1. Marketing poster for the drama.



# Staged Performance

## **Act 2: Part 1**

**Audience:** *(Chuckling and chattering)*

*Yiruma's track 'River Flows in You' plays. Gradual crescendo of music. After one minute, music fades out and remains in the background.*

*Screen slides down in front of curtain and the narrator takes his place in front of the microphone next to the screen.*

**Narrator:** Please take your seats so we may commence...

*Recorded voice introduces first scene.*

## **Scene 1: Leadership**

**Recorded voice:** "To have any real effect at local level, school leaders must know how and why the system operates as it does and exactly how some interests win out over others."<sup>2</sup>

# Staged Performance

**Narrator:** Belle is full of enthusiasm and she commends me warmly for my doctoral research.

She says that's one of her dreams, which she is fully intent on achieving. Belle describes herself as...

**Belle:** *(Sitting and talking to the other leaders)* Well ... I'm [Belle] and in brief this is who I am. *In my life I had the opportunity to move from one different job to another. This meant I had the chance to come across different professions. All these opportunities infused me with strength, energy and thirst to strive and aspire, particularly in consideration of the fact that I started my employment from a lowly position.*

**Cate:** *(Very enthusiastic with an air of self-satisfaction)* Well, from an early age, even from the tender age of kindergarten, and then primary and secondary, for some reason or another I was always given leadership roles. Even when it came to drama, I was always chosen for a main part. Many times, I chaired meetings and was always a smart organiser, maybe since I was always available for others, and it was always a great satisfaction for me.

# Staged Performance



Figure 6.1. 'Natural' Born Leaders Exist?<sup>44</sup>

**Audience:** *(Amused, clapping, chuckling, and chattering)*

*Presentation starts after a few seconds.<sup>45</sup>*

**Audience:** *(Clapping, chuckling, and chattering)*

*Gradual crescendo of Yiruma's 'River Flows in You'. After a few seconds, music fades out.*

# Staged Performance

**Belle:** Prioritising is very essential. In your life, in everything you do you work by priority, and if you really want something, you have to work for it --- VERY HARD, and sometimes harder. --- No one is going to roll over for you. So, I believe that we should be more aware of our priorities.

**Emma:** *Also*, a change in culture is required, where partners support each other and help each other in the sense that they balance each other and help each other in house chores and family affairs.

**Anne:** Our society needs to strike a balance between men and women in leadership, and unless we try to inculcate this type of culture, where both parents get involved in family matters, --- women in Malta will NEVER make it to the top leadership roles. If we are not going to build on a culture of dual parenting, --- and PROPER dual parenting, where both parents are present in their children's life, we will never reach the desired goal.

