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Combining Historical Research and Narrative Inquiry to Create Chronicles and Narratives

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Abstract

Stories about the Idaho State Library, chronicles and narratives, are reported in my doctoral dissertation (Wilson, 2005). The chronicles, reconstructed from documents and records, provided a presentation of the people, events, and activities to frame the stories. The narratives, excerpted from interviews, provided the rich description and unique perspectives of the two living State Librarians who directed the agency between 1962 and 2005. The focus of this paper is a presentation and discussion of the use of historical research and narrative inquiry to create chronicles and narratives.

Keywords

Narrative Inquiry, Interview Protocol, Historical Research, Chronicles, Stories, Case Study, and Qualitative Methods

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Combining Historical Research and Narrative Inquiry to Create Chronicles and Narratives

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Stories about the Idaho State Library, chronicles and narratives, are reported in my doctoral dissertation (Wilson, 2005). The chronicles, reconstructed from documents and records, provided a presentation of the people, events, and activities to frame the stories. The narratives, excerpted from interviews, provided the rich description and unique perspectives of the two living State Librarians who directed the agency between 1962 and 2005. The focus of this paper is a presentation and discussion of the use of historical research and narrative inquiry to create chronicles and narratives. Key Words: Narrative Inquiry, Interview Protocol, Historical Research, Chronicles, Stories, Case Study, and Qualitative Methods

Introduction

The 1901 Idaho Legislature created the “State Library Extension and Traveling Library Commission” with a charter to “give advice and counsel to all free libraries and to all public school libraries in the State, and to all communities which may propose to establish them, as to the best means of establishing and administering such libraries” (Idaho Senate Bill 7, 1901). Over the next 104 years, the Idaho State Library reached into almost every community in Idaho through its programs and services, yet the history of the Idaho State Library was by and large unknown and unrepresented in library or educational research literature. I chose to create chronicles and narratives to provide content and context to the puzzle of the history of the development of the Idaho State Library.

The central subject, uniting the stories of the various stages of development at the Idaho State Library, was the statutorily designated director of the agency, the State Librarian. Between 1901 and 2005, 15 individuals served as State Librarian. The first 13 State Librarians are deceased: Therefore, the reconstruction of their stories could only be recreated through examination of historical materials. Their stories represented the chronicles in the study.

The combined terms of service of the two living State Librarians of this era represented 43 years of the 104-year history of the Idaho State Library. Recording and sharing their narratives created an opportunity to explore their unique observations of the history of the Idaho State Library. Helen M. Miller became the State Librarian of Idaho in 1962. For the next 18 years, she led the Idaho State Library through a period of growth and expansion. In 1980, upon her retirement, the State Library Board of Trustees hired Charles A. Bolles as State Librarian. He led the State Library into the 21st century, and resigned as State Librarian effective January 1, 2005. Interviews with Helen Miller and

Charles Bolles added a primary source of evidence not usually available in an historical study. The narratives of their experiences provided a rich description of the events and activities of the Idaho State Library. The narratives, from the oral stories of the two living State Librarians, and the chronicles, from the written records of the Idaho State Library, provide perspectives and documentation of the historical development of the agency from 1901 to 2005.

The results of this study, the stories about the Idaho State Library, are reported in my doctoral dissertation (Wilson, 2005). Building upon the foundation of my dissertation, the focus of this paper is a presentation and discussion of the use of historical research and narrative inquiry to create chronicles and narratives.

The Puzzle

The search for stories of the Idaho State Library invited an inquiry into the records of the agency and the recollections of the State Librarians. The Idaho State Library was viewed as a single, bounded case among a group of 50 state libraries. The inquiry into the State Library's stories was more a puzzle than it was a problem to be solved.

Problems carry with them qualities of clear definability and the expectation of solutions, but narrative inquiry carries more of a sense of a search...Narrative inquiry carries more of a sense of continual reformulation of an inquiry than it does a sense of problem definition and solution. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124)

The Idaho State Library has provided services to the citizens of Idaho since 1901. The experiences of the two living State Librarians had not been written, recorded, or compiled. There was no cohesive collection of the chronicles and narratives telling the stories of the Idaho State Library. Bits and pieces of historical material existed in multiple formats that were compiled for various events and purposes. Glimpses of the history of the State Library were presented through examinations of the federally-funded Library Services Act in Idaho (Wilson, 1986) and public library development in Idaho (Nelson, 2004). Photographs were compiled and a brief video was created to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Idaho State Library in 2001. "Stories preserve our memories, prompt our reflections, connect us with our past and present, and assist us to envision our future" (Kramp, 2004, p. 107). The pieces of this particular puzzle resulted in the chronicles and narratives to describe the Idaho State Library.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

Creswell (1998) invited us to consider the following contributions of a qualitative study, "Besides dialogue and understanding, a qualitative study may fill a void in existing literature, establish a new line of thinking, or assess an issue with an understudied group or population" (p. 94). Merriam (1998) provided a justification for the use of case study design,

To gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research. (p. 19)

Henry Thomas Drennan served as Idaho State Librarian from 1959 to 1961. He died at the age of 89 on August 26, 2003 (People: Obituaries, 2003). Historian Alex Haley observed that when an old person passes away, a library is destroyed. Henry Drennan's piece in the puzzle became part of the chronicles of the Idaho State Library, created and related from the study of documents and artifacts. The sound of his voice was silenced, yet his deeds may still be reviewed.

Of the 15 women and men who served as Idaho State Librarian between 1901 and 2005, there are only two still living. The window of opportunity to hear and record their stories is limited to their lifetimes. They provided a unique perspective via their narratives concerning the events and activities of the State Library. Atkinson (1998) exhorted that "There is a vast difference between an animated story illustrating an event and a report chronicling or listing things that happened" (p. 31). The narrative contributions of the State Librarians provided a fabric of meaning and interpretation to this history of the Idaho State Library.

Creating the chronicles and narratives of the Idaho State Library did "...more than tell a story about the past. History also helps to make meaning about the present" (Rousmaniere, 2004, p. 50). Czarniawska (1998) proposed that "...the greater part of organizational learning happens through the circulation of stories" (p. 8). The chronicle of events and records created a structure for displaying the history of the agency. The compilation and organization of the financial and legislative data about the Idaho State Library created a framework, built from government documents, for the study. The chronological reconstruction of the appropriations of money to the State Library and the changes in statute established the bases for further study. The narratives of the two state librarians created a fabric of meaning and interpretation to this history. The collection and preservation of the State Librarian's stories imparted practical information for present and future agency decisions. The chronicles and narratives also offered resources for other inquiries into this particular state library and the state library agency as a type of library within the national, educational infrastructure. The telling and retelling of the stories might help others better understand the past, present, and future of the Idaho State Library.

Central Research Question, Sub-questions, and Objectives

What is the history of the development of the Idaho State Library? This central research question was expanded by one set of sub-questions and one set of objectives. The set of sub-questions corresponded with the State Librarians' narratives. These sub-questions served as a guide for me to collaborate with the State Librarians, Helen Miller and Charles Bolles, in the discovery and telling of what happened from their perspectives.

Sub-questions

1. What do the State Librarians relate as important to the history of the State Library?
 - What are Helen Miller's stories?
 - What are Charles Bolles' stories?
2. What are some of the interpretations of past and current events from the perspectives of two Idaho State Librarians?
 - How did we get to where we are today?
 - What are the precedents for current values and practices of the Idaho State Library?
 - What lessons or suggestions can we gain from their experiences?

The set of objectives related to the development of the chronicles. These objectives served as a guide for me in collecting and examining documents, records, and artifacts of the agency. The objectives guided the organization and expansion of knowledge about the history of the Idaho State Library.

Objectives

1. Document the financial history of the Idaho State Library
 - The biennial/annual appropriations from the Idaho Legislature
 - The Idaho State Library's actual expenditures
2. Document the legislative history of the Idaho State Library
 - Identify legislation related to the Idaho State Library
 - Describe changes in statutory authority

Definitions

To assist in the exploration of this case study, the following terms were defined to clarify their meaning within the bounds of this study.

1. *Documents*: "...are prepared for personal rather than official reasons and include diaries, memos, letters, field notes, and so on" (Hodder, 1994, p. 393).
2. *Idaho State Librarian*: The director (also referred to as the appointing authority) of the Idaho State Library as designated by Idaho Statute (33-2503(3)). The State Librarian serves at the pleasure of the Idaho State Library Board of Trustees. The Trustees, except for the ex officio Superintendent of Public Instruction, are appointed to 5-year terms by the State Board of Education.
3. *Idaho State Library*: The state agency created by the Idaho Legislature in 1901, with responsibility to foster and promote library services throughout Idaho—includes statutory references as the Idaho State Traveling Library and the Idaho Library Commission.
4. *Narrative*: "connects events, actions, and experiences and moves them through time" (Kramp, 2004, p. 110).
5. *Narrative inquiry*: "is a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and

- in social interaction with milieus....Simply stated...narrative inquiry is stories lived and told” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20).
6. *Puzzle*: “A question or problem, intricate enough to be perplexing to the mind” (Urdang, 1987, p. 1572).
 7. *Records*: “[are] prepared to attest to some formal transaction... [and] include marriage certificates, driving licenses, building contracts, and banking statements” (Hodder, 1994, p. 393).
 8. *State Library Agency*:
The official agency of a state charged...with the extension and development of public library services throughout the state. This agency has...authority...to administer state plans in accordance with the provisions of the [federal] Library Services and Construction Act [reauthorized as the Library Services and Technology Act in 1996], and is generally responsible for statewide planning and coordination of cooperative library and information services. (National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, 1975, p. 83)

Delimitations and Limitations

The clear delineation of boundaries, delimitations, and limitations assists the researcher, and subsequently the reader, in determining the focus and parameters of the case study (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003b). A puzzle is easier to ponder and possibly resolve with the establishment of borders and the ordering of pieces.

Delimitations

Merriam (1998) “concluded that the single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of the study” (p. 27). Factors used to narrow the study and establish boundaries of this case include:

1. The study was confined to the historical development of the Idaho State Library.
2. The study was bounded by the time frame December 1898 to December 31, 2004.
3. Documents and records focused on:
 - a. The identification and contributions of the State Librarians.
 - b. The programs and services of the Idaho State Library.
4. Key participants were limited to the two living State Librarians who served between 1901 and 2005, Helen Miller and Charles Bolles.

Limitations

In dealing with stories, written and told, I was confronted with limitations. Heron (1981) suggested, “Where the human condition is concerned it is better to be vaguely right than precisely wrong, better to own a fruitful confusion than mask it with irrelevant

precision” (p. 165). Conle (2000) described the open and often ambiguous state of the researcher using narrative inquiry as, “open-ended, but the outcome is not arbitrarily decided by me. Neither, though, is there one truth that I simply have to find and tell about. There is no past that, if discovered, completely determines the results of the inquiry” (p. 192). Recognizing these challenges, some factors posed limitations.

1. The study was conducted at the Idaho State Library using the data collection procedures outlined below.
2. The study included interviews with two purposefully selected participants, the only living Idaho State Librarians who served in office between 1901 and 2005. The focus of the interviews was on hearing their stories rather than establishing verification of events.

As Kramp (2004) suggested,

Each story has a point of view that will differ, depending on who is telling the story, who is being told, as well as when and where the story is told. Consequently, verisimilitude—the appearance or likelihood that something is or could be true or real—is a more appropriate criterion for narrative knowing than verification or proof of truth. (p. 108)

Riessman (1993) also helped clarify the limitations of using narrative stating that, “personal narrative is not meant to be read as an exact record of everything or even what actually happened in the person’s life” (p. 64). The reader was cautioned to recognize the parameters of the study when transferring the findings to other situations. “Historical truth is not the main issue in narrative; telling a story implies a certain, and maybe unique, point of view” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 60). The chronicles and narratives contribute to the development and presentation of the unique case describing the historical development of the Idaho State Library from 1901 to 2005.

Chronicles and Narratives as Scholarly Perspectives

To solve this particular puzzle, the history of the development of the Idaho State Library, I used a qualitative design to examine a single case. I used historical research to create the chronicles and narrative inquiry to present the stories of the key participants in building the case study. The mixing of foci and methods arose from the desire to examine the past and how that past was viewed today.

The distinctive contribution of the historical method is in dealing with the “dead” past—that is, when no relevant persons are alive to report, even retrospectively, what occurred and when an investigator must rely on primary documents, secondary documents, and cultural and physical artifacts as the main sources of evidence. (Yin, 2003b, p. 7)

The case study allows the integration of contemporary events and meanings as discovered through narrative inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested that

“narrative is the best way of representing and understanding experience....narrative is both the phenomenon and the method of the social sciences” (p. 18). Kramp (2004) stated that “narrative inquiry serves the researcher who wishes to understand a phenomenon or an experience rather than to formulate a logical or scientific explanation. The object of narrative inquiry is understanding” (p. 104). The narrative inquiry created a thread between the historical case and the stories, and deepened the meaning of events from the perspective of the state librarian in the study.

As a qualitative research method, narrative inquiry allows the researcher to provide a rich description, contextual understanding, and explanation of the person, place, or event under observation. The case study design strives to present a holistic understanding of the system under observation.

Qualitative Case Study

As a research methodology, the practice of conducting case studies may be traced back to life histories (Yin, 2003b). The study of lives as told in stories has a long, rich tradition. Research also tells a story. The goal of a research story is to gather data and develop findings, within acceptable parameters, to meet established objectives. Research is generally accepted to be a rigorous process designed with the intent to discover answers. Yin (2003b), however, invited us to consider that “one insight into asking good questions is to understand that research is about questions and not necessarily about answers” (p. 60). The iterative examination of questions and answers can fulfill the trademarks of qualitative research by describing, understanding, or explaining the case under study (Maxwell, 1996).

Understanding the case in its totality, as well as the intensive, holistic description and analysis characteristic of a case study, mandates both breadth and depth of data collection. Data collection in a case study is a recursive, interactive process in which engaging in one strategy incorporates or may lead to subsequent sources of data. (Merriam, 1998, p. 134)

The qualitative research design allows the researcher, and the subsequent users of the research, to follow the naturalness of the study. Creswell (1998) stated that “a case study is an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case...over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (p. 61). The researcher designs the study to work with the circumstances presented in each case. When no other cases are available for replication, the researcher is limited to single-case designs. The selection of the case seeks to maximize what can be learned within the constraints of time and resources available for the study. The unit of analysis defines the case (Yin, 2003b). The unit of analysis for this case study is the Idaho State Library.

The compilation of chronological events in an historical case is consistent with the use of case study design, especially where little research has been done, to explore the history of an education institution (Merriam, 1998; Rousmaniere, 2004; Yin, 2003b). The resulting chronicles of events provide a structure for filling in the gaps with stories of the

participants. As the chronicles are discussed and the stories are told and re-told, new perspectives are discovered through the sharing of experiences.

Historical Research and Narrative

Rousmaniere (2004) suggested that “there is no history until historians tell it, and it is the way in which they tell it that becomes what we know of as history” (p. 33). Narratives have been a significant way for people to record and make sense of their experiences. Denzin (1989) clarified that “A life lived is what actually happens....A life as told...is a narrative, influenced by the cultural conventions of telling, by the audience, and by the social context” (p. 30).

Narrative is a tool of the researcher for gathering the stories and for the subsequent representation of the stories to the reader. The transcriptions, or narrative texts, of these told stories may be interpreted as evidentiary documents of real life experiences. The text is checked against the reality of each reader and acquires meaning beyond the sharing of remembrances of the past. “Once a story is created, it opens up new possibilities for understanding—a point nicely made by Stefinee Pinnegar: ‘When a story is reinterpreted it becomes not just a new story but a new experience’ (1996, 13)” (Bullough & Baughman, 1998, p. 487). The researcher, acting as a narrative inquirer, is ethically bound to recognize the “layers of intention and reconstruction” (Lander, 2000, p. 150) in re-telling the stories.

In the qualitative design of an historical research study, the researcher “is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data” (Merriam, 1998, p. 20). The determination of the authenticity and accuracy of documents is part of the analysis process. For the historian, interpretation of past events is intricately related to the sources describing those events. The historian must assess the origination and intent of the source and its trustworthiness. The historical case study “presents a holistic description and analysis of [the case]...from a [sic] historical perspective” (Merriam, 1998, p. 35). We gather and analyze this data to reveal meaning and make sense of our past experiences in the context of our present situation. “For many educational historians the driving question of their research is simultaneously historical and contemporary” (Rousmaniere, 2004, p. 36).

The search for information about the past usually begins with a series of questions such as, what happened, why did it happen, who was involved, and what can be learned from past experiences? “We are interested in something because of what it stirs up in us...because of our own personal history” (Rowan, 1981, p. 134). As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) cautioned, “in narrative inquiry, it is impossible (or if not impossible, then deliberately self-deceptive) as researcher to stay silent or to present a kind of perfect, idealized, inquiring, moralizing self” (p. 62).

I am a librarian, historian, and teacher by virtue of my education, experience, and inclination. I spent 29 of my 39 years of library experience working at the Idaho State Library. I was deeply interested in collecting and telling at least part of the story of the development of the Idaho State Library in collaboration with Helen Miller and Charles Bolles.

Approach to Methods

Within the paradigm of humans as rational beings, it is accepted that the observable world is constructed of logical puzzles, which can be resolved through appropriate analysis and the application of reason. Quantitative analysis is used to measure the strength of an argument toward building inferences from known facts. Communication may be examined analytically as the transfer of information from one person to another. Written documents and spoken conversations may be parsed, coded, and mined for data to interpret meaning. In this view, knowledge and information are objects that can be measured.

Wheatley (1999) described the movement toward a different paradigm. Information is a process within a whole system of interacting patterns and potentials. “One of the primary ways...human beings make sense of their experience is by casting it in a narrative form” (Mishler, 1986, pp. 67-68). To describe meaning, is to say how an idea or event is related or connected to something else. The meaning is revealed in the context of place, time, and culture. A holistic view invites a collection and reflection through telling, hearing, and understanding the stories that shape a shared reality. The narrative form of inquiry is flexible, innovative, unpredictable, and full of rich details. Efforts to organize and classify narratives may be useful to describe the pieces and parts. However, no standard techniques or agreements on protocol have been reached on the use of narrative research because narrative thinking is not aligned with scientific, abstract thinking.

The practical consequence of this philosophical shift is that there is no way to logically or mechanically convert research questions into methods; your methods are the means to answering your research questions, not a logical transformation of the latter. Their selection depends not only on your research questions but on the actual research situation and what will work most effectively in that situation to give you the data you need. (Maxwell, 1996, p. 74)

The methods of inquiry in the study, therefore, while conforming to certain rigors for qualitative research design, did not follow a scientific model for defining or seeking quantitative truth. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) proposed beginning the inquiry “with experience as lived and told in stories” (p. 128). The study pursued stories on the development of the Idaho State Library using models from historical research and narrative inquiry.

The Role of the Researcher

The qualitative researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. “The doctrine of reflexivity argues that you are free to choose personally relevant issues of research, to draw on and make explicit, personal experience, to enjoy the wisdom and companionship of your ‘subject’” (Bannister, 1981, p. 199).

The historical perspective and the librarian’s viewpoint inform my interests, attitudes, and beliefs. I was quite comfortable in my roles as historian and librarian. Yin

(2003b) stated that the nature of qualitative research requires “an inquiring mind during data collection” (p. 59). My training as a librarian helped fuel an insatiable curiosity, while my graduate education in public administration and adult education sharpened my critical thinking and research skills.

Helen Miller served as State Librarian from 1962 to 1980. Charles Bolles followed her as State Librarian from 1980 to 2005. Their terms as State Librarian represent 43 of the 104 years of the agency’s existence. I was hired by Helen Miller in 1976. I worked with Charles Bolles during his entire tenure as State Librarian. Therefore, I chose a research role as an active learner and collaborator “to tell the story from the participants’ view rather than as an ‘expert’ who passes judgment on [the] participants” (Creswell, 1998, p. 18).

I had access to all agency records, an in-depth understanding of librarianship, undergraduate training in history, graduate education in public administration, experience as an interviewer, and a deep desire to prepare a document of practical use. I was regularly consulted by State Library staff and members of the Idaho State Library Board of Trustees for pieces of the agency’s history. Clients were referred to me for answers about the past, how we got to where we are today, and projections for the future. My previous works were cited by other researchers. I was humbly aware that, “Stories..., like the lives they tell about, are always open-ended, inconclusive and ambiguous, subject to multiple interpretations” (Denzin, 1989, p. 81). Therefore, I returned to my puzzle, to complete a qualitative study that resulted in the chronicles and narratives, to describe the historical development of the Idaho State Library.

Data Collection Procedures

Stake (1995) and Yin (2003a) explained triangulation as a tool to ensure accuracy and alternative explanations in case study research. Triangulation attempts to address issues of validity through the use of multiple sources of data.

Three tactics are available to increase construct validity when doing case studies. The first is the use of multiple sources of evidence, in a manner encouraging convergent lines of inquiry.... A second tactic is to establish a chain of evidence....The third tactic is to have the draft case study report reviewed by key informants [referred to as participants in the study]. (Yin, 2003b, p. 36)

Documents and records were used as the primary sources for the development of the chronicles. Interviews of two key participants were the primary sources in developing the narratives in the study.

Documents and Records

The research questions and objectives provided the focus for the study. These questions and objectives reflected the researcher’s thinking on the most significant factors for the study. The questions and objectives guided the inquiry and determined how data were collected. As advised by Merriam (1998), the data collection and analysis

were conducted as simultaneous activities during the study. The collection and analysis of documents to create the chronicles required choices. “With choice comes a narrowing, but not necessarily a narrowness...The issue is whether the choices made further understanding and hold promise for future inquiry” (Bullough & Baughman, 1998, pp. 486-487).

Documents and records “represent...the social perception of facts; and are all in addition subject to social pressures from the context in which they are obtained” (Briggs, 1986, pp. 13-14). The financial and legislative history of the Idaho State Library was primarily reconstructed from official records of the state. Yin (2003b) warned that “documents must be carefully used and should not be accepted as literal recordings of events that have taken place...every document was written for some specific purpose and some specific audience other than those of the case study being done” (p. 87). Financial records are subject to audit and review by parties not employed by the agency, thereby lending a modicum of accuracy in their reporting. Legislative records, tracked through the Session Laws, are also subjected to public scrutiny and continuous review by public officials. Yin (2003b) suggested that the researcher respond to contradiction in the data “much like a good detective” (p. 61). Contradictions were noted and, where practicable, investigated for alternative explanations.

Notes and observations from the field

The Session Laws provide access to all legislation that becomes law during each session of the Idaho Legislature. I discovered that the indexing is inconsistent and inaccurate. The only sure method of finding all references to a particular subject in the Session Laws is to read the text of every law. The other major resources for legislative research are the House and Senate Journals, and copies of the original bills introduced in the House and Senate. The original bills are housed in a special collection in the basement of the State Supreme Court Building. Since not all bills become law, a review of the House and Senate Journals is necessary to track proposed legislation. While the indexing is poor, there are often multiple entry points that allow a researcher to follow a particular bill. Unfortunately, the House and Senate Journals do not reproduce the actual content of the proposed legislation; bills are referred to by bill number and a short title. Therefore, to find the full text of a bill that did not become law, the researcher must locate the original bill.

The financial data is tied to the legislative process because all authority to receive and expend funds begins with an appropriation from the Legislature, at least in theory. Reality showed that over the 104 year period examined in the study, the budgeting and appropriations process, the procedures for the receipt and expenditure of funds, and audit guidelines often appeared to be mere suggestions. At least one appropriation bill was discovered for each budgeting cycle for the State Library. Multiple appropriations, special appropriations, and appropriations appearing in another agency’s legislation have been noted.

The expenditures of the State Library were reconstructed from budget and audit documents. Expenditures did not often match the appropriations. Anomalies include: the agency was allowed to collect and expend receipts without a specific appropriation; grant funds could be declared as “non-cognizable” to the budget office and expended without a

current appropriation; carry-over authority was granted to take un-expended balances from the general account into the next fiscal year; encumbrances were allowed to pay a current year expense, with current year funds, in the next fiscal year; appropriations were made in another state agency's budget then transferred during the fiscal year to the State Library to be expended; a continuous appropriation was used to allow ongoing receipts into a fund, with the only record being the expenditure report at the end of the fiscal year; and, finally, the Legislature and Governor always have the option of holdbacks.

Interviews

Seidman (1998) explained that "interviewing...is a basic mode of inquiry. Recounting narratives of experience has been the major way throughout recorded history that humans have made sense of their experience" (p. 2). Merriam (1998) suggested the use of interviews "when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. It is also necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate" (p. 72). The study presented the perspectives of the two State Librarians who have played a major role in leading the Idaho State Library over the past 43 years. The historical records and the stories from Helen Miller and Charles Bolles, the two living State Librarians, provided the data that was used to collaboratively create the narratives.

Briggs (1986) cautioned that "the use of interview techniques presupposes a model of social interaction. The interviewer specifies the issues to be covered, while the respondent supplies the information" (p. 46). Mishler (1986) observed that telling stories is a normal part of everyday conversation and interviewees will respond "with narratives if they are given some room to speak" (p. 69).

In interviewing terms, this means, for those who wish to allow the gestalt of the interviewee to become observable, adopting an interview strategy that minimizes (for as long as possible) the interviewer's concerns (system of values and significance) to allow fullest possible expression of the concerns, the systems of value and significance, the life-world, of the interviewee. (Wengraf, 2001, p. 69)

I employed a series of three, lightly-structured interviews to allow an in-depth exploration of the State Librarian's narratives. The interview protocol is set forth in Appendix A.

The first interview establishes the context of the participants' experience. The second allows participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs. And the third encourages the participants to reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them. (Seidman, 1998, p. 11)

Based upon Seidman's (1998) suggested protocol, I asked "participants to reconstruct, not to remember. Reconstruction is based partially on memory and partially on what the participant now senses is important about the past event" (p. 74). I asked

short, descriptive questions that invited the participants to respond in long, detailed narratives of their experience with the Idaho State Library. I assumed the role of a listener “to hear what the participant has to tell” (Kramp, 2004, p. 114). The stories told by the participants in these interviews provided the data for creating the narratives.

I contacted each candidate by phone to assess continued willingness to participate in the study. “The ethics of the research interview are that, at minimum, the informant [participant] should not be changed for the worse...the research interview is not designed to ‘help’ or ‘empower’, or ‘change’ the informant [participant] at all” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 4). I provided participants with a letter of invitation to join the study, which described the study, explained expectations, and acknowledged human subjects considerations (noting IRB approval from the University of Idaho) with a consent form. I set up appointments to meet in person and conducted the interviews.

The main threat to valid description, in the sense of describing what you saw and heard, is the inaccuracy or incompleteness of the data. The audio or video recording of observations and interviews, and verbatim transcription of these recordings, largely solves this problem. (Maxwell, 1996, p. 89)

All interviews were digitally recorded, with written consent from the participants. The interviews were conducted in their home or office. At each stage of the process following the interviews, steps were taken to secure the original data. The editing and analyses was done from copies.

Following the interviews, the digital files were locked to prevent erasure. The digital files were downloaded to the researcher’s personal computer and backed-up on CD-ROM. The CD-ROMs were stored in a fire-resistant safe. Copies of the digital files were used to transcribe paper transcripts of the interviews. The researcher used the voice-recognition software, Dragon NaturallySpeaking®, to transcribe the digital recordings into a Microsoft Word® document, a speech to text conversion process. The Microsoft Word® documents were backed-up on a flash-memory device until paper copies had been printed and proofread. Paper copies were printed from the Microsoft Word® transcriptions. The original, paper transcriptions were stored separately from the original recordings in a metal file cabinet. The researcher reviewed and edited the copies of the transcripts. The copies of the edited transcripts were presented to the participants for their review. The participants’ clarifications and corrections were added to the edited transcripts. The interview-transcription-review process was repeated for each round of interviews.

Notes and observations from the field

My perception is that I was more comfortable with the lightly-structured interview format than my key participants. They both seemed concerned that I was not getting useful information, all I was getting was their rambling stories. They repeatedly referred me to the written records to ensure accurate details and for the clarification of dates.

Helen Miller was a prolific writer as State Librarian and chose to provide written stories to more fully develop her responses to the first two interviews in lieu of participating in the third interview. She stated that it would give me more useable and accurate information than her “reminiscing about stuff from 30 years ago.”

Charles Bolles (2004) provided in-depth memories of many events. However, he also self-edited a number of instances where he and I shared the experiences working together at the State Library. His comments indicated that I could fill-in the blanks or tell the story myself if I thought it was relevant to the study.

Data Analysis and Interpretation Procedures

The purpose of this study was to piece together chronicles and narratives to present a history of the development of the Idaho State Library. Coles (1989) spent years listening to stories and writing narratives. He suggested, “What ought to be interesting...is the unfolding of a lived life rather than the confirmation such a chronicle provides for some theory” (p. 22). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) pointed out that “the purposes, and what one is exploring and finds puzzling, change as the research progresses” in narrative inquiry (p. 73). Atkinson (1998) viewed narrative as “a highly personal encounter” and states that analysis “may have as much to do with the quality and depth of the interpersonal exchange itself as with any theory that might be applied to the content of the narrative” (p. 59). Riessman (1993) directed attention to the making of meaning from the impressions and observations gathered during the research.

All forms of representation of experience are limited portraits. Simply stated, we are interpreting and creating texts at every juncture, letting symbols stand for or take the place of the primary experience, to which we have no direct access. Meaning is ambiguous because it arises out of a process of interaction between people: self, teller, listener and recorder, analyst, and reader. (p. 15)

Data collection and analysis is an iterative process in qualitative research. Analysis begins with the formulation of questions, moves to the first discovery in the field, and continues through each successive reading and interpretation of the study. Creswell (1998) indicated that case study research may divulge findings from data analysis through avenues of understanding. In the study, the main avenue traveled was the assertions or the “lesson learned” (p. 63) from the case. The data were collected from the historical documents and the recorded interviews. I used this data to write draft chronicles describing the history of the development of the agency. Each draft was read by the key participants and peer reviewers for inaccuracies or inconsistencies.

Methods of Verification

The rigors of qualitative case study design demand truthfulness of the data and integrity of the research process. Mulholland and Wallace (2003) advocated use of the following methods to give strength to the study, “considerable time spent in the field, use of multiple data sources, participants sharing in the interpretative process, presence of

researcher's voice, documentation of researcher subjectivity, interpretations subject to outsider audit, and discussion of limitations of the study" (pp. 7-8).

Time in the field

The researcher worked for the agency for over 28 years and kept journals throughout most of that history.

I see narrative, more than other types of communicative action, as highlighting an inner world of subjectivity to which the inquirer has privileged access. [...] It seems silly to argue with someone's experience. But self-deception is always a possibility and probably never completely avoidable. (Conle, 2001, p. 28)

The researcher used triangulation of data, key participant checking, and peer review and debriefing to balance the first-hand knowledge of agency events and notations from personal journals. The iterative process, as ordered above, was designed to address the subjectivity and bias of the researcher. By checking the data against my first-hand knowledge of the events, I was able to increase my awareness of viewpoint and voice in the construct of the chronicles and narratives.

Triangulation of data

Data was collected from documents, records, and interviews in order to create the chronicles and narratives. "Historians rely on primary sources as the evidence that is literally closest to the topic, although this does not necessarily mean that the source is the most accurate one" (Rousmaniere, 2004, p. 46). Discrepancies were noted and alternatives suggested where practicable throughout the data collection, analysis, and writing phases of the study.

Key participant checking

"In this work, narrative is used both for the gathering and the representations of data which are usually created and revised collaboratively between researchers and their 'subjects'" (Conle, 2001, p. 22). Key participants served as a check throughout analysis, interpretation, and reporting phases. This check ensured immediate validation as to the accuracy and credibility of the narratives. The transcripts of interviews were reviewed by the key participants and clarified prior to the writing of the narratives. The drafts of the narratives were vetted by both key participants and the peer reviewers after each iteration.

Researcher's voice

"Meaning does not reside in a text but in the writing and reading of it. As the text is reread in different contexts it is given new meanings, often contradictory and always socially embedded" (Hodder, 1994, p. 394). I take full and sole responsibility for the content and context of everything in the study not attributed to another source.

Furthermore, I have attempted to disclose interests, positions, biases, and assumptions that affect the design, conduct, and results of the study.

Peer review and debriefing

Two peer reviewers read the drafts of the study and assisted the researcher in assessing standards of quality in the study. One reviewer earned his Ph.D. in adult education. I collaborated on a research project with him during graduate school. He was selected for his qualitative research background and analytical skills. A member of my dissertation committee strongly recommended that I have a reviewer who could “English out” the prose created through this process. The other reviewer earned her B.A. in Communication with an emphasis in rhetoric. She was selected for her strong linguistic and editorial skills. The members of my dissertation committee provided direction and oversight in the construct and presentation of the study.

Standards of Quality

“Validity is a goal rather than a product; it is never something that can be proven or taken for granted. Validity is also relative: it has to be assessed in relationship to the purposes and circumstances of the research” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 86). The reader should be able to make sense of the processes used to create the chronicles and narratives to present the historical development of the Idaho State Library. The multi-tiered interview process places the key participant’s comments in context. The narratives of the State Librarians are “not meant to be read as an exact record of what happened nor is it a mirror of a world ‘out there’” (Riessman, 1993, p. 64) Within the tradition of narrative inquiry, “the object is the understanding of the evident perspectives of those who tell about their lived experience” (Mulholland & Wallace, 2003, p. 6). As Atkinson (1998) admonished us “...we do not judge, we make connections....a life story is a text....It can stand on its own....we are each other's teachers” (pp. 69-70). The tools of historical research and narrative inquiry provided the border to successfully frame the puzzle about the development of the Idaho State Library.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

First Interview

The participant was presented with two copies of the Participant Consent form. One copied was signed and retained by the researcher. One copy was left with the participant. The use of the digital recorder was introduced and described. The presenting statement to begin the first interview was:

I invite you to tell me the story of your life at the Idaho State Library; all the events and experiences that were important for you. Start wherever you would like. Please take the time you need. I'll take some notes for after you've finished telling me about your experiences. I'll listen and won't interrupt during the session. Any questions?

Any questions were answered with prompts to encourage the participants to reconstruct details of their experiences.

Second Interview

The first interview was transcribed. The researcher developed questions and prompts for the second interview on topics and events described by the participants in the first interview. The sequencing of the questions followed the same order in which the participant related the topics in the first interview. The presenting statement to begin the second interview was:

Today, I invite you to reconstruct details of your experience--stories about your experience on the particular happenings, incidents, or events at the State Library. I do have some prompts for you based upon the transcript of our first interview together. Are you ready to begin?

Prompts and questions were designed to elicit more information about the topic or event, such as,

“Can you tell me more about...?”

“What was it like when...?”

“Can you remember any examples of...?”

“What was it like?”

“Can you tell me in more detail what happened?”

“Can you remember any events involving...?”

“Was there some particular crucial time or situation you recall?”

“Is there anything else you would like to add?”

Third Interview

The second interview was transcribed. The researcher created an edited, combined transcript of both interviews. The combined transcript was forwarded to the participant for review. The participant was encouraged to add or delete information from the document. The participant received the following letter in preparation for the third interview.

Thank you for agreeing to the third interview to more fully develop your input to the story of the Idaho State Library. In this interview, I'd like you to explore your interpretation and explanation of important moments or events in the history of the Idaho State Library. Once again, I am most interested in hearing your reconstruction of the events to help me understand the story of the Idaho State Library from your perspective as State Librarian.

I have attached a timeline of events, activities or notices culled from the records of the State Library, our previous discussions, and the *Idaho Librarian*, the official publication of the Idaho Library Association. Please scan the timeline and note if an entry was, in your interpretation, relatively significant, neutral, or relatively insignificant to you as State Librarian. If I have missed something significant, please be sure to include it during the interview.

Finally, what lessons or suggestions would you make to the current and/or future librarians, library trustees, and others in Idaho based upon your experiences as Idaho State Librarian?

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