
9-1-2004

Writing Truth as Fiction: Administrators Think about Their Work through a Different Lens

Diane Ketelle
Mills College, dketelle@mills.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr>

 Part of the [Quantitative, Qualitative, Comparative, and Historical Methodologies Commons](#), and the [Social Statistics Commons](#)

Recommended APA Citation

Ketelle, D. (2004). Writing Truth as Fiction: Administrators Think about Their Work through a Different Lens. *The Qualitative Report*, 9(3), 449-462. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol9/iss3/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Qualitative Report at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Qualitative Report by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact nsuworks@nova.edu.



Qualitative Research Graduate Certificate
Indulge in Culture
Exclusively Online • 18 Credits
LEARN MORE

NSU
NOVA SOUTHEASTERN
UNIVERSITY

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN

Writing Truth as Fiction: Administrators Think about Their Work through a Different Lens

Abstract

This article argues that school administrators can learn about themselves through fictionalizing their real world experience. Examples of this writing form are offered in the text to illustrate the form and possible function of this type of work. The author presents this alternate writing form as a reflective tool that can assist professionals in learning about themselves and as a result resituate themselves in the world of leadership.

Keywords

Autoethnography, Narrative Inquiry, Evocative Narrative, Alternative Narrative Research, and Fiction as Educational Research

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Writing Truth as Fiction: Administrators Think About Their Work Through a Different Lens

Diane Ketelle

Mills College, Oakland, CA

This article argues that school administrators can learn about themselves through fictionalizing their real world experience. Examples of this writing form are offered in the text to illustrate the form and possible function of this type of work. The author presents this alternate writing form as a reflective tool that can assist professionals in learning about themselves and as a result resituate themselves in the world of leadership. Keywords: Autoethnography, Narrative Inquiry, Evocative Narrative, Alternative Narrative Research, and Fiction as Educational Research

A year ago something wonderful happened. I realized that by fictionalizing my real world experience as a school administrator I could translate my real world experience in new ways. Experimenting with this writing form has assisted me in understanding myself and allowed me to resituate myself in leadership. The use of fiction has become a focus of my research and I have used fiction coupled with real experience to explore myself and my experience. My work is autobiographical, that is based in real world experiences, yet fictionalizing some aspects of it to create the distance necessary to see, feel and analyze the work. By fictionalizing I mean describing reality as experienced by the writer/researcher with certain license taken. For example, nothing written is fabricated, but it may be a condensation of several lived experiences. I do not claim that fictionalizing real experience is the only or “best” way to represent educational research; I do claim that fictionalizing real world experience assists in cultivating certain kinds of reflective knowledge that can enhance understanding of self and in turn resituate a leader in her context.

I entered academe five years ago after working as a public school administrator in rural northern California. Prior to becoming a public school teacher and administrator I spent nearly a decade working as a circus performer in Europe, walking high wires and working as a clown. If it were not for the birth of my son, his father’s abandonment of me the night of my son’s birth, and my need to do something purposeful while raising my son alone, I may never have found myself exploring real experience through fiction. When I came back to America I quit circus life, went back to school, and became a public elementary teacher. I continued my education and after four years of teaching I became an elementary school principal and also a small school district superintendent. While working as a school administrator I continued my graduate studies. My graduate studies focused on public administration and during that time my interest in alternate research writing forms grew as I became familiar with research work being done in fields outside education. It was at that time, in 1998, that I first read an article by Laurel Richardson (1998) in which she described exploring writing forms that helped her “relocate” herself

within her university, “I am grateful that the writing has brought me to new places within myself...I am in the process of relocating myself on a writing-map – indeed, of trying to figure out what is on the map” (p. 46). When I first read Richardson (1998) I realized that I needed to work to relocate myself in my work and to search for my own writing “map.” Richardson’s (1998) work moved me and made sense to me. I realized that I needed to find ways to express, explore, and examine who I am and how I situate myself in the world in order to reframe my work as a school leader. I realized that her inquiry could inform educational research and it influenced me as I explored narrative inquiry in my doctoral dissertation.

When I left school administration to enter academe many of the same critical questions I posed to myself in the field emerged in academic life. Who and where am I in my work? How can I fully explore “self” in the context of “work?” Finding my place in the world of scholarship has been somewhat complicated. Creating academic arguments does not come easy. Maybe I learned as a child, growing up the third of four girls, that arguing would never get me what I wanted and was also impolite, but a good story, based in fact or fiction, always resulted in a better outcome. This may be, at least partially, why academic arguments are less attractive to me than the exploration of human experience. I am intrigued with the examination of little noticed details in life and for me the examination of those details has resulted in learning about myself, others and the world around me. I learn primarily by making mistakes and the path to articulating the ideas in this article has not been easy. Most people would have given up on this idea by now, and if it were not for my tenacious and resilient nature, I would have also.

My academic research began with a focus on exploring administrators’ real stories (Ketelle, 2002). In the beginning I thought it was important for administrators to write about their “real” experience, but as I explored their narrative inquiry I began encouraging administrators to fictionalize aspects of their stories that were hard for them to process. I observed that when they fictionalized parts of their stories it became possible for them to talk about details of their work that otherwise remained inaccessible and unprocessed. I realized that when they could process the previously “unprocessed” they came to understand something new about themselves and their work. This led me to consider experimenting with alternate writing forms, fictionalizing real experience in order to gain new understanding of self and self in a context. Fictionalizing real experience presents a reflective writing form that can be helpful to school leaders in creating the possibility for the reconstruction of self and the resituation of self in leadership. When I write using this form I am telling *my* version of stories which I have created as a result of *my own* experiences. In this work I use the term “fiction” to represent the stories created because I allow for aspects of a story to change. These stories represent a “composite” truth in that they are based in real, lived experience.

The Evocative in Narrative

Fictional narratives are evocative and create the possibility for a mutual reconstruction of self and story. This is accomplished through careful reflection in concert with individual imagination. Fictional narrative provides an alternate form of inquiry by distancing the practitioner from her work in an effort to better understand it. Fictionalizing real experience represents a form of autoethnography. Autoethnography

connects the personal to the cultural, placing the self within a social context (Reed-Danahay, 1997). It is usually written in the first person and features dialogue, emotion, and self-consciousness. In this kind of writing there is a desire to achieve a degree of intimacy with the reader, who is addressed on an emotional level. Through the story, the I-you relationship provides a structure that is subjectively based. The subjectivity of the autoethnography has been questioned and criticized as “self-indulgent” (Coffey, 1999), but there appears to be a place for work that can place an individual in a cultural context in order to explore how she situates herself in that world. Behar (1996) notes, “The exposure of self who is also a spectator has to take us somewhere we couldn’t otherwise get to...a personal voice, if creatively used, can lead the reader, not into immature bubbles of navel-gazing, but into the enormous sea of serious social issues” (p. 14). Fictionalizing real experience is an exploration of personal voice that can connect the writer to “self” and “other.”

The emotive quality of the autoethnography is valuable and important. Angrosino (2002) notes that his fictional ethnographic writing has dealt more with his emotional response to an event than the traditional ethnographic presentation of data. For this reason autoethnographies offer a call to *witness* for the author and the reader (Sparkes, 2002). Frank (1995) notes that becoming a witness means assuming “responsibility for telling what happened. The witness offers testimony to a truth that is generally unrecognized or suppressed” (p. 137). Stepping back and fictionalizing real experience provides the opportunity to give credence to “unrecognized” actions.

Fictionalizing real experience offers an opportunity to connect to the less noticed through connecting to the evocative. The evocative narrative reveals aspects of human expression that are often left out of other types of inquiry. Kiesinger (1998) noted:

The evocative narrative as an alternative form of research reporting encourages researchers to transform collected materials into vivid, detailed accounts of lived experience that aim to show how lives are lived, understood, and experienced. The goals of evocative narratives are expressive rather than representational; communicative significance of this form of research reporting lies in its potential to move readers into the worlds of others, allowing readers to experience these worlds in emotional, even bodily, ways. (p. 129)

Evocative fictional narratives, when used as research, often surface significant questions. Are writers of such narratives producing pieces of creative writing or scholarship? I propose that evocative narratives activate subjective and emotional responses and for that reason may present examples of both creative expression and scholarship. Scholars in fields outside of education have been experimenting with alternate writing forms as research in order to explore human experience in new ways for some time. Richardson’s (1997) critical inquiry focused on the need for change in an academic environment, Ronai’s (1995) sexual abuse is the basis of her inquiry and how it relates to social policy, Gray and Sinding (2002) present performance ethnography focused on the personal stories of survivors of breast cancer, Krieger (2001) explores how experience can be wholly personal and also shared, and Bochner and Ellis (2002) explore literary representations of the ethnographic. These scholars can and should influence educational

researchers to explore alternate research representations in order to explore human experience in education.

The writing form I am presenting grows out of the work of these scholars, but also has roots in educational inquiry. Barone (1995) has described the heuristic functions of a work of literature as social research. Barone (1997) writes, "...artistic texts must invest in ambiguity. Good stories, as art, do not conclude, but suggest, eschewing direct summary statements for delicate hints about theme and thesis" (p. 224). In fictionalized narratives, the "theme and thesis" act as a starting point for the writer to explore and navigate, or re-navigate unresolved experiences from work life.

Robert Coles (1997) recalled how his friend, William Carlos Williams, chided him, "For God's sake, try to find a cure for that passive voice you use, for the third person, for all the highfalutin technical language – it's a syndrome!" (p. 97). Further, Williams told Coles (1997):

Take your readers in hand, take them where you've been, tell them what you've seen, give them stories you've heard. Most of all, write for them, the ordinary folks out there, not for yourself and your buddies in the profession of psychiatry. (p. 97)

As Coles (1997) followed William's advice he discovered a new style of writing, of reporting his research, and he not only began to write differently, but more importantly he came to think differently about the work he was doing. The way we write about what interests us impacts the way we consider what we are writing about. Richardson (1990) reminds us, "How we are expected to write affects what we write about" (p. 16). Coles (1997) learned this, when he began writing about his work in new ways; he thought about his work in new ways, which led to new kinds of learning about himself and his cultural context. This is what administrators can learn to do when they experiment with alternate writing forms.

The Theory of the Fictional Narrative Account

Fictionalized accounts of real experience are a form of "personal writing." DeVault (1997) notes "Personal writing can be more or less self-conscious, but it is most often designed to appear immediate and confessional. It speaks to the reader with an individual voice, and that voice often claims something like "Here is my truth, complete and unvarnished" (p.221). Krieger (1983) in, *The Mirror Dance*, reported her findings of her study on a women's community in a style that was deliberately novelistic, writing exclusively through the voices of various characters. Krieger (1983) advocates for the use of fictional methods to better understand what the writer is examining, to present conflicting evidence such as multiple points of view through the development of characters, and to add another methodology to inquiry into the social world beyond the more standard theoretical model of social science research.

Ross Mooney (1957) nearly four decades ago addressed the deeply personal nature of research:

Research is a personal venture which, quite aside from its social benefits, is worth doing for its direct contribution to one's own self-realization. It can be taken as a way of meeting life with maximum of stops open to get out of the experience its most poignant significance, its most full-throated song. (p. 155)

Mooney continues, "We want a way of holding assumptions about research which makes it possible to integrate the pursuit of science and research with the acceptance and fruitful development of one's self" (p. 166). Exploration of "the self" through narrative or autobiography can replace a researcher in the field in order to assist the researcher in understanding herself in order to move outward into the world. Through using fiction to re-examine my experience, a sense of "self" has emerged that is thoroughly grounded in experience and observation and is a highly "personal venture."

In this work I regard a focus on everyday, otherwise unnoticed interactions or encounters as "poetic." Wittgenstein's (1953) method of philosophizing is relevant here. Wittgenstein (1953) was aware that we "often fail to notice the momentary particularities in our own immediate circumstances, aware that we tend to see the world just as much through our words as through our eyes" (Shotter, 1998, p. 45). Wittgenstein (1953) encourages us not to describe our practical activities as we think they must be in theory, instead he encourages a poetic form of expression to focus our attention on "observations which no one has doubted, but which have escaped remark only because they are always before our eyes." (p. 415). Instead of viewing everything experienced through the theories of a discipline, he encourages us to notice how we actually live around each other in our daily lives. Wittgenstein (1980) further notes that "philosophy ought only to be written as a poetic composition" (p. 24). For Wittgenstein (1953) such writing would capture what ordinarily goes unnoticed. Fictionalizing real world experience affords an opportunity to attend to everyday experience in a new way, to revisit particulars that may have escaped notice the first time around. By experimenting with this writing form we embrace the *poetic*. Shotter (1998) argues that in order to embrace social poetics it is necessary to learn new things about our practice. To a certain degree this requires us to "unlearn" some of the things we have been trained to do

Further influencing the development of this idea is Denzin's (1997) observation that there is a crisis of representation in ethnography and his suggestion that research is actually a narrative process. Clough (2002), building on Denzin's observation, attempts to mesh the literary exploration of individual and life through fiction with some of the trappings of ethnography, in order to question and draw on different versions of the truth in his writing about disabled children. Herb Childress (1998) notes that stories of all sorts have a conceptual structure and for that reason can be considered research.

Why should ethnographic writing be set apart from those other fields? Why should we strive for some privileged position in the canon, some supposed area that lies beyond story? All well told stories have a conceptual structure – there has to be a framework under all that data, whether the data is presented by Joan Didion or Studs Terkel or Henry Glassie...The framework provides clues to help us see, allow us to draw

connections between events that seem distinct; making those connections, making sense, is the intellectual's job. (p. 251)

If the intellectual's job is to make meaning, methods of making meaning may vary greatly. Ellis and Bochner (1992) remind us that:

By making intricate details of one's life accessible to others in public discourse, personal narratives bridge the dominions of public and private life. Telling a personal story becomes a social process for making lived experience understandable and meaningful. (pp. 79-80)

Further, Richardson (1998) notes, "The fictional conversation...captures the emotional truth of [an] experience" (p. 47). Searching for the emotional truth helps some make meaning in new ways.

Self as Character

Bree Michaels is a fictional character I created a year ago through whom I have explored some of my administrative experience in education. Bree Michaels is not me, but perhaps I could say she is my alter ego. In a search to understand this character I turn to C. Wright Mills (1959) who argued that, "Everyman [is] his own methodologist!" (p. 123). Mills notes further that "methods should not prescribe problems; rather, problems have to prescribe methods" (p. 72). Through Bree Michaels I have socially constructed an identity, a woman who finds herself shifting and searching in the details of daily life. This combination of autobiography, ethnography, and fiction is a form of self-representation that is not a fixed form, but is in constant flux. The Bree Michaels stories now constitute a lengthy narrative. I have not shared the lengthy narrative publicly, but I share excerpts of the narrative in my teaching to encourage my students to explore their real world experience and I have included three excerpts from the Bree Michaels fictional narrative in this article to help clarify the form and possible function of this sort of writing. Bree Michaels is a public school principal and all the stories focus on issues and problems that arise in that sort of work. Each story begins with a focus. I may consider community, parents, students, and teachers and then I consider interactions or issues that were left unresolved in my experience. I then construct characters who never represent any one person I have met or known, but instead are a synthesis of many. I explore the unresolved through the creation of a situation, navigating around characters through Bree Michaels. The situations I write about are close to my lived experience and I fictionalize aspects of the story to assist in processing the previously unprocessed. There is nothing included in the Bree Michaels stories that I did not experience as a school administrator. The license given through creating stories affords me the possibility of new self-learning. Although Bree Michaels is a fictional character I have been surprised at how imperfect she has ended up being. I could have constructed her as the "perfect" principal, but doing that would not have allowed me to explore myself or my experience to the extent that I have.

I write often and I use the fictional writing strategy as one of several strategies. Sometimes I write fictionally to grapple with the unresolved, sometimes I write about a

real interaction, and sometimes I journal. I make a clear distinction between these types of writing even though each is highly personal.

Meredith

This morning Meredith, a teacher, was coming in to tell Bree how to handle a difficult student. Although Bree understood it was her own hard work that had taught Meredith that she should be open and share ideas, she was always amazed that Meredith knew no boundaries. She crossed double yellow lines in conversation constantly, usually defining “what is right” through her own personal worldview. Bree knew this was what life in organizations was like, but this morning she was especially tired. Meredith’s diatribe wasn’t interesting her at all and she ended up asking her to leave. “Let me handle my job and you handle yours,” she said as she opened the door giving Meredith the cue to get up and leave. As Meredith walked out her heels made a clip, clip, clip sound on the floor and Bree had to laugh. It was too noisy for just one person.

Personal Benefits of Re-placing Self in Practice

In the preceding excerpt Meredith the teacher, is a synthesis of many people I have encountered in administrative work. Through this encounter I was reflectively exploring my limits in interacting with others. In this brief excerpt I am considering the challenge of difficult people and my need to develop more patience. Oddly, even in a fictional form I find I lose patience. Bree does not get angry, but she definitely does not manage to place herself in Meredith’s shoes. After writing this interaction I asked myself, what does Meredith, the teacher, need from Bree, the principal? That is the critical question and representative of the learning that came from creating and writing about this encounter. After writing about this encounter I was able to reframe the situation, see it from the perspective of “the other” and surface new solutions. I have experienced situations similar to this one, but this narrative does not exactly represent any one situation. It has been created to aid me in considering myself.

There is a growing literature supporting the idea that research can have personal benefit to participants (Berger & Malkinson, 2000; Gale, 1992; Kiesinger, 2002). Working with adolescents, Murray (2003) found that, “By telling their stories, the participants took the first step in making sense of what had happened to them” (p. 232). In the same way, fictionalizing real experience can bring school leaders closer to their experience and through this creative process they can make sense of their work in new ways. By creating a new story, rather than working to discover the “real story,” educational leaders can move, as I have, to new levels of understanding, gaining a personal benefit.

Through fictionalizing my experience as a school administrator, I have been able to place myself in the work of administration and re-examine experience. By doing this, my understanding of my experience and the work of administration has increased. In my writings about Bree Michaels the ‘truth’ of what actually happened to me has faded in

importance as the core of my experience was fictionalized to assist in gaining deeper entrance into personal and professional understanding.

Susan

When something happened in the classroom that annoyed Susan, a fourth grader, she would quietly step out of the room, as if to go to the bathroom, then she would walk to the sidewalk in front of the school and take off running. The first time this happened Bree took off after her. A former track star, Bree prided herself on staying fit. The first time Bree staggered back into the office out of breath and said, "If it weren't for my heals, I would have had her."

To Susan, the fact that Bree had taken off after her was important. After all, Susan had been running away from school for years. No one had ever done much except call her mother, which generally involved leaving a voice mail message on the home phone. At first, for Susan, the fact that Bree would come after her constituted the ultimate cat and mouse game. A student running the principal around, literally. For Bree, it was impossible to resist the run. She understood something about why Susan behaved as she did. There had been many days when Bree had wanted to walk to the front sidewalk and take off running herself. Unlike Susan, Bree's fantasy never involved coming back.

Each running incident drew them closer together. Each was learning something about the other. Never turn here, never take that street, be careful of the ball wall, she'll hide behind it. There was nothing violent about their behavior; they were actually becoming friends through this silent process of motion. Susan would run, Bree would follow and together they would take a journey that eventually ended up back at school.

At regular intervals, Bree would decide to have a talk with Susan.

"Do you think running away is the best way to handle situations you don't like?"

"It has worked for me so far."

"What do you want to change at school?"

"I want to learn to belly dance, so I can go live in Paris and support myself."

This idea actually had some appeal to Bree and it was hard for her not to be distracted by it.

"Fourth graders can't live alone in Paris, and you are going to have to stop running away from school."

Over time their runs got shorter and shorter. Susan even seemed to be staying at school most days by the middle of spring. Over summer break Bree ran into Susan and her mother walking down the sidewalk in town. Susan's face lit up with the biggest smile you ever saw when she saw Bree. Bree laughed as she got closer to them and said to Susan,

"Are you going to run me up and down streets this year?"

*“No way,” Susan replied and they all laughed.
Bree doubted that was the absolute truth, but at least they could all laugh
about it, and that felt like progress.*

Stories and Self

In this excerpt I again create a character, Susan, the student, who is a synthesis of many children I have worked with who have had difficulty handling stress and pressures put on them. I constructed this example because chasing a child is thought by some administrators to be bad practice. Some administrators view going after a child as “giving in” or as being “weak” in front of a child. I once had an experienced administrator tell me, “If you chase a child who runs away, you’ll never be the boss.” This running issue is exactly the sort of unresolved issue I choose to explore through a fictionalized representation. In this story Susan and Bree gain understanding of each other and Susan comes to feel more comfortable at school and perhaps more in control of herself. Ultimately this story is about a relationship and about caring. Through writing this story I resituate myself in leadership and I re-examine my priorities. I was running schools to benefit the Susans, and creating and considering this situation made me stronger in myself to understand how I would manage problems in the future. When I was writing this story I was thinking about the students I have worked with who ran away from school or from home and I was considering them in a new way.

Narrative exploration in research is hardly new. Bruner (1986, 2002) suggested that there are two fundamental ways of knowing: 1) a pragmatic way which is the search for universal truth conditions, this is the province of the natural and physical sciences and 2) narrative knowing which looks at particular connections between events. Narrative ways of knowing can assist individuals in understanding their life as story. MacIntyre (1985) noted, “we are never more (and sometimes less) than the co-authors of our own narratives” (p. 213). Coles (1989) and Rosen (1998) also argued that the narrative mode of communication is a means of creating coherency in a chaotic world. The creation of a fictional story rooted in the real world of experience is a way of helping practitioners filter and focus their professional experience. Reflecting on a story leads to greater understanding of professional motives and workplace dynamics (Schon, 1991). Clandinin and Connelly (1991) noted that storytelling is a fundamental means of personal and social growth. Stories give meaning to lived experience through reconstructing the past and guiding future decisions (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Tappan & Packer, 1991). Grumet (1987) argues that writing a story pulls experience out of a continuum and places it in a new frame where it can be considered.

Dallas and Renee

Bree looked out her office window at the asphalt-paved playground. Weeds had overtaken the asphalt and although the custodian trimmed the weeds regularly, the situation made Bree crazy. To her, the way the playground looked wasn’t good enough.

Bree was constantly asking herself how she would get a new playground. The school didn’t have money in its budget for something

like that. The money was going to have to come from an outside source. But who? This concern was always on her mind and it wore on her. The school just didn't look good enough.

When Bree took the job as principal she met Dallas and Renee. They had two children in the school and Renee was active in the Parent Club. Dallas and Renee had made a lot of money in the wine industry and moved up the coast to retire. Renee had talked to Dallas about the playground and he had come in a couple of times to talk with Bree about ideas to raise the money. Then one day, out of the blue, Dallas told Bree he was selling a piece of land and he would repave the playground with the profits. Bree couldn't believe. It was more than she could have ever dreamed. That day Dallas became a sort of a saint to Bree. It didn't matter what he had done in the past, or what he would do in the future. Bree believed that it would all be absolved through this one generous, unselfish act.

The months that followed involved careful planning. Bree was out in the community bartering for anything and everything. She really didn't have anything to barter with, but she didn't behave as if that were the truth. She would come back from a meeting of the Rotary Club with her pocket full of twenty-five dollar checks. Mona, the school secretary, would always ask her how she managed to get so many donations and Bree would just smile. She knew there was something about her that was hard to resist. When she asked for something people really, truly, genuinely hated to say no. This quality came in hand and she knew it..

Then the day came. It was the hottest day of summer when all the trucks and machines pulled up to the playground. It took a while before the new playground could be seen in all its glory. Bree looked out over the sea of asphalt and she said to herself, I've never seen anything so beautiful. It took her breath away. After all that time, finally, a new playground. As she meditated on the huge accomplishment she reminded herself, write a note to Dallas and Renee. No, she thought, strike that, buy a plaque for Dallas and Renee.

The Power of Narrative

In this excerpt I am considering the school environment. In California it is not unusual to find schools that have not been fully maintained. This is not the fault of administrators necessarily, instead over time full funding has not been placed on school maintenance. It is a difficult issue and in this story I consider how Bree directly links the way the school looks to how the children who attend may come to feel about themselves. When Bree thinks, "It just isn't good enough," she is worried that children in her school community will associate their value and potential with the way the school yard looks. I explored this idea because it is an issue I encountered everywhere I was a school leader and I think schools should be beautiful. I think children should be able to see their value to our society and to themselves in all they do and experience at school. In this fictional story, which is something of a fantasy, Dallas and Renee fix the problem. I know that

does not happen very often, but I constructed this story considering how these types of facilities problems can be solved.

I tend to approach research as art. It seems to me that art should help people live their lives and I have the strange idea that research may be able to do the same thing. Using nonfiction fiction may be a way of doing this.

Fictionalizing real experience may be of assistance to some who are less inclined to reveal aspects of themselves or others in words or writing. The distance fiction allows freedom to explore experience and ideas. It allows experience to merge with the imagination and the result can be learning from experience through creativity and imagination.

This research work demonstrates that significant knowledge about “self” can be obtained through a reflective, creative process that does not engage a traditional social science research methodology or lexicon. The work is person centered and relies on the desire of an individual to enter her personal world in order to rediscover aspects of her experience.

Narrative provides the researcher with a degree of literary license. Thus the researcher can use devices such as construction of characters and situations, formerly only available to fiction writers. Certain facts in a story may be altered or captured and presented more dramatically than the actual physical experience would suggest. The result is a powerful presentation of the inner point of view; the reader sees the world through the eyes of Bree Michaels.

Bochner and Ellis (1996) make note that the autoethnography inspires a different way of reading, “It isn’t meant to be consumed as ‘knowledge’ or received passively...On the whole, autoethnographers don’t want you to sit back as spectators; they want readers to feel, care and desire” (p. 24). It is this different way of reading that invites a new way of responding and leads us to wonder how such writing will be judged. Questions emerge from the work presented in this article as to how creative forms of research will be evaluated and how contributions will be measured. Posing questions offers a starting point; Does the prose evoke an emotional response? Does the reader identify with the writing? Has the reader gained some understanding of the relationship between the evocative narrative and lived experience? Garratt and Hodkinson (1998) argue that choosing a list of universal criteria in advance of reading research of this nature will not provide a solution. Schwandt (1996) argues that guiding ideals should be applied to a work contextually. Applying this method the reader deliberates on how the research embodies qualities such as coherence, interpretive insight, and relevance. Sparkes (2002) argues that the tensions that exist in judging and interpreting autoethnographies should not cause anxiety. Instead, this kind of research should act as a means to explore and understand topics in new ways.

Through fictionalizing my experience I have learned about myself and as a result I can resituate myself in leadership contexts. By using an alternate research writing method it is possible to write about educational experience in engaging ways, reach a diverse audience, and acknowledge that knowledge of self is important to leading. My personal exploration of self through Bree Michaels was the motivation for this work. I encourage others to consider using this style of reflective writing to connect with authentic feelings about self in order to reconsider experience.

References

- Angrosino, M. (2002). Babaji and me: Reflections on a fictional ethnography. In A. Bochner & C. Ellis (Eds.), *Ethnographically speaking: Autoethnography, literature, and aesthetics* (pp. 327-335). Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press.
- Barone, T. (1995). The purposes of arts-based educational research. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 23(2), 169-180.
- Barone, T. (1997). Among the chosen: A collaborative educational (auto)biography. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3(2), 222-236.
- Behar, R. (1996). *The vulnerable observer: Anthropology that breaks your heart*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Berger, R., & Malkinson, R. (2000). "Therapeutizing" research: The positive impact of family-focused research on participants. *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, 70(2), 307-314.
- Bochner, A., & Ellis, C. (1996). Talking over ethnography. In C. Ellis & A. Bochner (Eds.), *Composing ethnography* (pp. 13-45). Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press.
- Bochner, A., & Ellis, C. (Eds.). (2002). *Ethnographically speaking: Autoethnography, literature, and aesthetics*. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press.
- Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux.
- Bruner, J. (2002). *Making stories*. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux.
- Childress, H. (1998). Kinder ethnographic writing. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 4(2), 249-264.
- Clandinin, J., & Connelly, F. (1991). Narrative and story in practice and research. In D. Schön (Ed.), *The reflective turn: Case studies in and on educational practice* (pp. 257-282). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Clough, P. (2002). *Narratives and fictions in educational research*. Buckingham, England: Open University Press.
- Coffey, P. (1999). *The ethnographic self*. London: Sage.
- Coles, R. (1989). *The call of stories*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Coles, R. (1997). *Doing documentary work*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Connelly, M., & Clandinin, J. (1988). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), 2-14.
- Denzin, N. (1997). *Interpretive ethnography: Ethnographic practices for the 21st century*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- DeVault, M. (1997). Personal writing in social research: Issues of production and interpretation. In R. Hertz (Ed.), *Reflexivity and voice* (pp. 216-228). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. (1992). Telling and performing personal stories: The constraints of choice in abortion. In C. Ellis & M. Flaherty (Eds.), *Investigating subjectivity: Research on lived experience* (pp. 79-101). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Frank, A. (1995). *The wounded storyteller: Body, illness, and ethics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gale, J. (1992). When research interviews are more therapeutic than therapy interviews. *The Qualitative Report*, 1(4). Retrieved February 6, 2004, from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR1-4/gale.html>

- Garratt, D., & Hodkinson, P. (1998). Can there be criteria for selecting research criteria? A hermeneutical analysis of an inescapable dilemma, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 4, 515-539.
- Gray, R., & Sinding, C. (2002). *Standing ovation*. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press.
- Grumet, M. (1987). *Bitter milk: Women and teaching*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts.
- Ketelle, D. (2002). Unfinished business: Five principals and a study of their stories. *Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development*, 14, 149-161.
- Kiesinger, C. (1998). Portrait of an anorexic life. In A. Banks & S. Banks (Eds.), *Fiction and social research: By fire and ice* (pp. 115-136). Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press.
- Kiesinger, C. (2002). My father's shoes: The therapeutic value of narrative reframing. In A. Bochner & C. Ellis (Eds.), *Ethnographically speaking: Autoethnography, literature, and aesthetics* (pp. 95-114). Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press.
- Krieger, S. (1983). *The mirror dance: Identity in a women's community*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Krieger, S. (2001). Things no longer there: Half Moon Bay. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7(6), 801-807.
- MacIntyre, A. (1985). *After virtue: A study of moral theory*. London: Duckworth.
- Mills, C. W. (1959). *The sociological imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mooney, R. (1957). *Research for curriculum improvement, association of supervision and curriculum development*. Washington, DC: Association of Curriculum Development.
- Murray, B. (2003). Qualitative research interviews: Therapeutic benefits for the participants. *Journal of Psychiatric & Mental Health Nursing*, 10(2), 231-238.
- Reed-Danahay, D. (1997). *Auto/ethnography*. New York: Berg.
- Richardson, L. (1990). *Writing strategies: Reaching diverse audiences*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Richardson, L. (1997). *Fields of play: Constructing an academic life*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Richardson, L. (1998). The politics of location: Where am I now? *Qualitative Inquiry*, 4 (1), 41-48.
- Ronai, C. (1995). Multiple reflections of child sex abuse: An argument for a layered account. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 23, 395-426.
- Rosen, B. (1998). *And none of it was nonsense*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Schön, D. (1991). *The reflective turn: Case studies in and on educational practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Schwandt, T. (1996). Farewell to criteriology. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 2, 58-72.
- Shotter, J. (1998). Social construction as social poetics. In B. Bayer & J. Shotter (Eds.), *Reconstructing the psychological subject: Bodies, practices and technologies* (pp. 33-51). London: Sage.
- Sparkes, A. (2002). Autoethnography: Self-indulgence or something more? In A. Bochner & C. Ellis (Eds.), *Ethnographically speaking: Autoethnography, literature and aesthetics* (pp. 209-232). Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press.

- Tappan, M., & Packer, M. (Eds.). (1991). *Narrative and storytelling: Implications for understanding moral development*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1953). *Philosophical investigations*. Oxford, England: Blackwell.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1980). *Culture and value*. Oxford, England: Blackwell.
-

Author Note

Diane Ketelle is currently an Assistant Professor in the School of Education at Mills College, Oakland, CA where she directs the administrative credential programs.

The author gratefully acknowledges Jane Bowyer, Ph.D. and the reviewers of an earlier version of this manuscript for their invaluable assistance.

Diane Ketelle, School of Education, Mills College, 5000 MacArthur Blvd, Oakland, CA 94613; Telephone: 510- 430-2189; Fax: 510-430-3379; E-mail: dketelle@mills.edu

Copyright 2004: Diane Ketelle and Nova Southeastern University

Author's Citation

Ketelle, D. (2004). Writing truth as fiction: Administrators think about their work through a different lens. *The Qualitative Report* 9(3), 449-462. Retrieved [Insert date], from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR9-3/ketelle.pdf>
