

Presenting your research findings using ‘performance’.

Robert Vella

Autobiography

Robert Vella is from Gozo, Malta. In 1992 he graduated with a B.Sc. (Melit) in Computer Science and Mathematics. In the same year he joined the teaching profession in a secondary school in Gozo, Malta. In 1992, Robert followed the Pedagogy Course in Education and graduated in 1994. In the meantime, he followed various courses leading to IT certifications. In 2004, Robert was promoted to a Head of Department (Computing). In 2015 Robert graduated with a PGDEL (Melit) – Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Leadership, and in 2016 he graduated with a MA (Melit) in Educational Leadership and Management. In 2016 he joined The University of Sheffield where he read a PhD (School of Education), focusing on the perceptions and experiences of senior female educational leaders in Malta– he was awarded the PhD in 2021. In July 2021, Robert joined MCAST (The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology) as a Deputy Director.

Abstract: How to present your research findings may cause uneasiness to the researcher, there is the dilemma to choose the best way how to present your results. Whatever way is chosen, a researcher must take into consideration what s/he wants to expose and the audience to whom the findings might make a difference. Exploring new paths are sometimes morerisky than just using the conventional way to showcase the findings. But, while new paths may be more challenging, simultaneously they open new paths that probably are more appealing to the readers. This short article explores how and why I used a fictitious dramaturgical praxis to present my PhD research findings from a qualitative perspective.¹

I. Introduction

After analysing the data gathered, a researcher will have to decide the best way to report the findings to the readers. Reporting qualitative data is much less bound by convention than that of reporting quantitative data (Monash University, 2020), but still the researcher needs to pick a suitable way to present the findings. Qualitative data can be anything like interview transcripts, which may include images and videos and/or written documents, which have to be analysed in some way and generally the data is broken down into themes. Themes than are somehow put into words. This article explores the use of a fictionalised radio drama script and fictionalised staged drama script – another way how to report research findings. While the radio drama is somehow a monologue performance – which I used to represent my autoethnographic experience in my thesis, the staged drama is a polyvocal act, and I used it to represent the voices of the participants.

II. Dramaturgical Praxis

Key issues in research include how the researchers place themselves in the text (St. Pierre, 1997), the voices these texts claim to represent (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), and the position of the audience for whom the researcher creates the textual representation (Denzin, 1994). So, after much reflexivity I decided that the best way to present my findings was using drama. Apart from my love for drama, my belief is that this method provided me an interesting way where the readers can better enter the story I presented them, and maybe can associate more this story with their life stories. Also, I was even more convinced since other scholars are in agreement to follow such path. Denzin (2003) asserted the importance of using performance to interpret events, while according to Conrad (2008) it is a way to offer a better understanding of real lives.

Performance gives a sense of fulfilment, as a distinctive experience from listening and seeing; the acting, including the backdrops, music, and lighting used, gives more meaning to the text, the story, and the characters. Sometimes, even the imagination of the audience might be carried away, probably not always following what the author had in mind—but this makes the performance more interesting. Fictitious drama scripts can offer the audience the opportunity to “enter” and enjoy the “theatre”, by imagining the performance, being a part of them, and feeling that the crafted stories can be their stories.

When presenting the findings in a performance, the researcher must keep in mind that s/he has different identities: a narrator or commentator, interpreter, and story-teller. And as Richardson (1992) asserted, “no matter how we stage the text, we—the authors [researchers]—are doing the staging. As we speak about the people

¹Thesis name: Leadership and Women: the *Space* between Us. *Narrating ‘my-self’ and telling the stories of senior female educational leaders in Malta.*

we study, we also speak for them," (p. 131). Denzin (2003, p. 8) claimed that a "performance is an interpretive event involving actors, purposes, scripts, stories, stages, and interactions," and from this perspective the researcher interprets and shares what s/he decides is important in the context of the study. Drama or performance is a means through which the audience can live, observe, and listen to the actor/s in particular events. From this perspective, the drama gives the opportunity to share the participants' experiences in a way that the audience can feel, be part of, and reflect on crafted stories. Concurring with Conrad (2008), reporting the findings as a performance helps to provide better insights into real lives, and facilitates the presentation of the participants' lived experiences more credibly and vividly, and thus generates information on the phenomenon being studied (Saldaña, 2008).

Radio drama is a performance without a visual component and relies solely on acoustics like dialogue, sound effects, and music. Radio drama can be so powerful that Crook (1999, p. 8) asserts that: "It is auditory in the physical dimension but equally powerful as a visual force in the psychological dimension," and thus, the listener can imagine the characters and the story. An important feature in radio drama is the actor's voice, the spoken word, the emphasis the actor places on her/his voice together with "sign systems": "language, voice, music, noise, silence, fading, cutting, mixing, the (stereophonic) positioning of the signals, electro-acoustical manipulation, and original sound (actuality)" (Huwiler, 2005, p. 51). All these generate meaning and better understanding for the audience. Nünning and Nünning (2002) in Huwiler (2005, p. 51) further add that radio plays in the form of narratives are "not merely a literary form or medium of expression, but a phenomenological and cognitive mode of self- and world knowledge".

Concurring with Barone (2007, p. 466), sometimes a researcher or storyteller using dramatised narratives do not look for certainties about "correct perspectives on educational phenomena but to raise significant questions [...] that enrich an ongoing conversation". Performance is an alternative way of understanding and knowing the participants in the research; it "engages participants in a process of knowledge" and is "a unique and a powerful way of accessing knowledge" (Conrad, 2008, p. 609). Transforming narrative texts from the interviews into a drama helps to "construct meanings" (Norris, 2008, p. 631), and although it can be seen as different from traditional approaches, it is "a no less valuable way of creating understandings [...]" The playbuilding genre recognizes that its processes structurally framework knowledge" (Norris, 2008, p. 631).

III. Conclusion

Reporting the findings, a researcher has to confront the inevitable problem of data representation, taking into consideration the link between lived experience, how the text is going to be presented, and the participants and the author. Koro-Ljungberg (2008) comments about the problems a researcher meets, "the tensions between the desire to know and the limits of representation" (p. 231). Concurring with Kuntz (2012), many times the representations will always be incomplete: "despite our attempts to enact as thorough a study as possible – creating thick descriptions of our participants' lives – representation will always remain incomplete" (p. 47). So, a researcher has to decide what is adequate for the crafted drama—bearing in mind that this will be her/his voice and interpretations, and other researchers might come up with a total different drama.

Presenting of the findings in a dramaturgical praxis moves away from the perhaps more traditional approaches, but "with this comes a need to pay attention to the ethical considerations" (Showunmi & Fox, 2018, p. 3). So, whatever the researcher deems best to present the findings, one must always be sure not to belittle the participants or other people mentioned in the study. Crafting a drama to present the findings in a research may offer readers a new way of thinking about the issues of the phenomenon being investigated. Reporting the findings in a dramaturgical format offers a different insight into the issue than that which may be provided by conventional research writing, thus it offers more originality to the investigation of the research.

References

- [1]. Barone, T. (2007). A Return to the Gold Standard? Questioning the Future of Narrative Construction as Educational Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(4), 454-470. Doi: 10.1177/1077800406297667
- [2]. Conrad, D. H. (2008). Performance Ethnography. In L. M. Given (Ed.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods (Vol. 2)* (pp. 607-611). California: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- [3]. Crook, T. (1999). *Radio Drama: Theory and practice*. Oxon: Routledge.
- [4]. Denzin, N. K. (1994). The Art and Politics of Interpretation. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (1st ed., pp. 500 – 515). California: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- [5]. Denzin, N. K. (2003). *Performance Ethnography: Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Culture*. California: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- [6]. Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Completing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 105 -117). California: SAGE Publications Ltd.

- [7]. Huwiler, E. (2005). Storytelling by sound: a theoretical frame for radio drama analysis. *The Radio Journal – International Studies in Broadcast and Audio Media*, 3(1), 45-59. Doi: 10.1386/rajo.3.1.45/1
- [8]. Koro-Ljungberg, M. (2008). Validity and validation in the making in the context of qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 18(7), 983-989. Doi: 10.1177/1049732308318039
- [9]. Kuntz, A. M. (2012). Representing representation. In G. B. Rossman & S. F. Rallis (Eds.), *Everyday Ethics: Reflections on Practice* (pp. 45-56). Oxon: Routledge.
- [10]. Monash University. (2020, February 24). Reporting and discussing your findings. Retrieved 31 August 2020, from <https://www.monash.edu/rlo/graduate-research-writing/write-the-thesis/writing-the-thesis-chapters/reporting-and-discussing-your-findings>
- [11]. Norris, J. (2008). Playbuilding. In L. M. Given (Ed.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Methods (Vol. 2)* (pp. 630-632). California: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- [12]. Richardson, L. (1992). The consequences of poetic representation. Writing the Other, Rewriting the Self. In C. Ellis & M. G. Flaherty (Eds.), *Investigating Subjectivity. Research on Lived Experience* (pp. 125-137). California: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- [13]. Saldaña, J. (2008). Ethnodrama. In L. M. Given (Ed.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods (Vol. 1)* (pp. 283-285). California: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- [14]. Showunmi, V., & Fox, A. (2018). Exploring research methods for educational leadership. *Management in Education*, 32(1), 3–5. Doi: 10.1177/0892020617748139
- [15]. St. Pierre, E. A. (1997). Methodology in the fold and the irruption of transgressive data. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 10(2), 175-189. Doi: 10.1080/095183997237278