

calling the kettle black??

Week 3 (October 8-9, 2004)

Metadisciplinary narratives; Narratives and science; Pedagogical narratives

Barone, T. E. (1992). A narrative of enhanced professionalism: Educational researchers and popular storybooks about schoolpeople. *Educational Researcher*, 21(8), 15-24.

Matsuda, P. K. (2003). Process and post-process: A discursive history. *Journal of Second Language Writing* 12(1), 65-83.

Shehan, R. J., & Rode, S. (1999). On scientific narrative: Stories of light by Newton and Einstein. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 13 (3), 336-358.

Smith, J. K. (1997). The stories educational researchers tell about themselves. *Educational Researcher* 26(5), 4-11.

Comments in general: Interesting set of readings! Several points I didn't agree with, but there were probably more that seem fair enough. Of course, that science stuff sounds comfortingly familiar 😊

Comments on Barone:

Somehow the Red Baron comes to mind every time I look at this article (yes, the original was in the news recently, and I've long been a Snoopy fan).

OK, some serious thoughts now...one point with which I certainly not argue is Barone's contention that "images of schools and schoolpeople influence public policy on education" (p. 15). Yes, I see too many stake-holders or would-be stakeholders (even C-students from Yale) who see fit to try to impose their thoughts on educators and education... This also shows up in House's (1991) comments about deprofessionalization during the Reagan years in which outside policymakers pushed mandates for achievement testing, teacher accountability, and so forth. ✓

One fault I perceived with Barone's article had to do with the notion of a "true professional". What exactly does that entail? Again under the deprof argument outlined one pp. 16-17, we

find rather harsh criticism of corporations having a hand in the till and unduly influencing educational policy... Funding dictates research (according to this outline), and thus a "true professional" would or should shun such funding, looking instead for other sources (p. 17). Why? On two counts I beg to differ: why should corporate sponsorship necessarily be viewed as skewed? Second, are there enough other options to actually fund research? God knows we've blown enough American money in foreign wars that should have gone to research, education, and progressive sorts of things...

Barone, however, suggests that his "enhanced professionalism" would allow researchers to have greater control over their scholarship. The nitty-gritty (my father used to cringe at that phrase) is that researchers should communicate forthrightly and intentionally with "the polity" (p. 19) by authoring narratives that are accessible, compelling, and morally persuasive (pp. 19-21).

An interesting point here is that Barone seems to address the exemplary works by Kidder and Kotlowitz rather harshly—they are, after all, outside the education sphere (they are journalists... gasp). Barone seems to say that professional educators should be telling the stories of schools and schoolpeople. This leads, of course, to famed educator Charles Dickens, whose "superbly crafted, morally sensitive, oppositional, but still hugely popular, educational storytelling" are "classic examples" (p. 21). Hmm. I guess I always considered Dickens as more of a writer than an education insider—details, details.

And speaking of stories for the "general public", Barone jumps on the bandwagon to brazenly assert that the public is "less and less intellectually present" (p. 21) and bemoan "the deleterious effects of the modern culture industry on popular literacy" (p. 21). As below, we the people are dumber than we ever were. On behalf of the people I know, work with, am related to, and probably millions of others, I resent that generalization—I'll be the first member of my family to earn a doctorate. Nearly a

The fundamental problem here is that corporations have a bottom-line profit motive. Although a few (misguided?) voices differ, I think most educators feel strongly that education (health, too) cannot be driven by profit w/out serious damage to their enterprise.

nonfictional

If we believe that D. wrote of his times, his own life, school experiences, with an eye for accurate detail, then he might be both, 7" & 12"?

I was, too.

hundred years ago my grandfather managed one year at Purdue in pre-WWI America, which was quite a feat. My other three grandparents and my step-grandfather never finished high school. Yada, yada, yada. I look at my kids, dealing with an increasingly complex world, and marvel at how slow I seem.

I also object to Barone's reliance on Agger and Jacoby. Those two make Eeyore look cheerful, carrying around their heavy, heavy dose of pessimism, it seems (one need only check the cited works, whose titles include "decline" and "last intellectuals"). On page 22, for example, we find that "intellectuals [having] no need to write in a public prose... did not [and] finally could not..." Wow. Every last one could not. I guess that explains why my *Scientific American*, written by science professionals for laypeople, is such a flop. Uh-huh.

As an aside, I'm reminded of the work of Roy Miller, whose writings on Japan became widely read. In one of his final works, published shortly before his demise, his acerbic pen turned on the Japanese language itself; granted that Miller was quite a scholar, but in his final years he came to be strongly influenced and perhaps blinded by his own pessimism. Miller claimed, in that last work, that young Japanese had become so sloppy with their spoken language that the "can do" form was audibly unintelligible (i.e., kaimasu sounded the same as kaemasu). Rubbish, pure and simply rubbish. Yes, some young people are sloppy (often intentionally so), but I'd argue that old people are the ones with (occasionally) unintelligible speech.

My point is that pessimism often shares a positive correlation with advancing age, and it seems that Barone, Agger, and Jacoby fit that stereotype nicely. "Young people now can't write kanji, can't use keigo, don't study, yada, yada, yada..." That is simply not universally true, nor was it true that young people in the past could—rose-colored memories are, however, difficult to challenge.

OK, off my soapbox now (I'll have brought this up in class, too). I do agree with Barone's overall point about the necessity to accurately portray what we educators do to the laypeople

I don't really know what the trend is, if any, in the U.S. There are lots of stories like yours (and mine), but also lots of evidence that people are not reading or thinking much. ~~It's~~ ~~not~~

I've never read anyone so acerbic about Japan/ Japanese as RM.

cool! 太さ"えい!

right.

whose tax money or tuition money we depend on.

Question for Barone: What makes you think that talking directly to the polity about education will actually bring results?

As one wag once put it, "Would you buy a ticket to watch a scientist [or teacher] work when you could buy a ticket to a sports event?" Indeed, would this savior of a polity read such educator-authored accounts? As you note, could a modern-day Dickens shake the dust from the rafters?

Comments on Sheehan and Rode:

Goodness, me-oh-my, something I understand reasonably well!

The first part of the article deals with similarities between narrative and scientific discourse, which Table 1 strikingly illustrates. Second, S & R spend some time on themes (340-341), which they maintain "draw the discontinuous events of a narrative into a whole, creating an overall meaning for the narrative that is greater than the sum of its parts" (340).

Thereafter they wander into the influence of mechanization on how humans conceptualize natural phenomena (the heart, solar system, etc.), after which they note that opposites offer, naturally, different ways of conceptualizing natural phenomena (shades of Hegel?).

OK, enough being nice. S & R then go on to compare Newton and Einstein's treatises from different eras for two reasons: each was the dominant theory of light in its respective era, and each illustrates a different way of narrating scientific experience (p. 342). This is all good and well for comparison's sake, but there are problems with this approach. First, as S & R note, *Opticks* was a much less technical work than *Principia* (indeed, although one can argue that neither was very reader-friendly). I would suggest that *Opticks* was authored with an eye toward the public (i.e., the lay public) rather than exclusively for the scientific public; here we see shades of Barone's concern about writing for the polity. Einstein's narrative, however, appeared in *Annalen der Physik*, thus targeting a different audience. A further point to bear in mind is the temporal dimension inherent in this comparison: in the early 1700s there were far fewer

Perhaps were stories engaging enough, they'd be read by some (as some of the good works are now), with the hopeful result that the public would not swallow the facile sound bites from media & politicians about the need for more standardized testing and for less trust in teachers.

Was there such a large divide back then? I don't know.

scientists investigating light, far less knowledge about light and the workings of the universe, etc. It's not a stretch to see why Newton was playing the enlightened educator of the masses, while Einstein was writing for the scientific community more explicitly.

An interesting and quite true comment is at the top of page 356: "An acknowledged problem in much of scientific research is that successful theories, or narratives, have a tendency to crystallize into dogma." Woof. That is true in science, in EFL, and probably in just about any field.

I really need to see some proof about this statement: "Often, if we consider the history of science, the great scientists have been as likely to find the origins of their revolutionary scientific beliefs in close readings of the works of others as they have been to find them in a laboratory" (p. 357). I'm skeptical, to say the least...

In addition, this seems to suggest that just examining narratives will lead to further scientific advances... Yes, it may yield textual themes, but is that transferable to scientific themes?

Comments on Matsuda:

Yup. Took me about five times through this to make much sense of it, but perhaps I've finally got a sense of where he's "coming from." Having said that, I do enjoy Matsuda's writing, in which I find a strong meta-linguistic awareness (witness his comment on page 66 about trying to minimize the effects of discursive construction). An interesting point that Matsuda makes begins on page 71 where he notes how the process movement developed as it was constructing a "narrative of transformation"; this in effect reified the older current-traditional movement as "a caricature against which the process movement developed." Then on page 74 he notes how "second language writing emerged as [an] agenda by constructing its own current-traditional pedagogy to blame: the audiolingual approach. Later in the article we see how post-process "presupposes the existence of the process era",

Would it not support their point, then, that there 2 very different traditions relied on narrative to communicate to their respective audiences?

Read some of the work in the history & sociology of science.

I didn't fully understand their point here.

As one who has lived through some of these transformations, I can attest to the reality of the blame game. (And today, try to tell Rod Ellis that "task-based learning" focused on form has anything wrong with it.)

which Matsuda notes is rather difficult to pin down (p. 76). I suppose that what is true for movements is also true for people: not quite sure about things until after the fact, are we?

I also thought Matsuda did well to emphasize (pp. 78-79) that "post-process might be more productively defined as the rejection of the dominance of process at the expense of other aspects of writing and writing instruction."

Comments on Smith:

Jolly good fun to have mud all over, isn't it?

Nice clean article, in spite of the mud splattered about from the "data". I don't have much to add except that I found Smith's closing comments extraordinarily insightful. Indeed, does a proliferation of languages (Babeling, are we?) represent cause for despair or cause for celebration? Schrag's optimistic comment on page 10 notwithstanding, there is cause for concern... perhaps some of which may be traced to the "dissensus, incommensurability, irretrievable conflicts of interpretation, and hermeneutical nihilism..." (of the present American political scene).

— This is why the L2 ed (esp. composition/wrtg.) field is lucky to have Matsuda around as a hitman.