

Foreword: Multistoried Visualisations and Narrative Holes

I have a photograph of my father hanging on the wall of my study next to me as I write this Foreword. It must have been taken some time in the 1940s when black and white photos were later colourised. In the photo my father is wearing a sailor's uniform. He served in the Navy in the Second World War. He is young, probably still a teenager. It is an upper-body shot and he is leaning slightly forward, clasping his hands together. A gentle, unsure smile on his face. His clean white uniform with black edges and collar is a contrast against the smokey, blue-grey backdrop. The photo is mounted on a thin piece of cardboard, now aged to a nearly brown color and is bordered by a thin black frame. Immediately beneath the photo is the signature of the photographer.

I never knew my father. He died tragically when I was very young. So, he never got to tell me about his experiences while wearing that uniform. I never heard his stories. This photograph is bursting with stories, and my father is only one source of those stories. There are others. But before I get onto those, let me dwell a little more on him as a storyteller. As the only character in the photograph, he would be the most reliable source of information regarding his experiences of being a sailor during the war. These experiences include what he did, where he was, and his emotions during this time. To put it in academic terms, he could have constructed storied data about his life experiences represented in the visualisation. This is what we sometimes do with visual data, or with visuals that we use to generate further data when, for example, we ask an interviewee to tell us about what is happening in a photograph, or how it makes them feel. In this case, because my father is dead, he is no longer available to tell his stories about the photograph.

Stories could also have come from my mother. She never knew my father at the time the photograph was taken, but surely he would have told her about it later. The picture hung in our house for many years when I was growing up, so it had been around for a long time. And he must have told her stories about his experiences as a sailor during the war;

experiences that one would want to know about when looking at the photograph (like I still do). But possibly because of the tragic circumstances surrounding his death, my mother and I didn't really talk much about his past. I missed out on the stories that *my mother* could have told about my father in the photograph, just like I missed out on the stories *he* could have told. Two narrative holes.

So far then, we have a visual artefact with stories to be told about it; two potential sources of these stories – my father (the protagonist in the story) and my mother – have probably told stories about the photograph, but these stories are not available to me. I want to briefly mention three other sources of story in relation to this photograph. One is the photographer – the creator of the medium or visual that conveys the story. The photographer would have had a conversation with my father beyond just the technical aspects of the photo shoot. Whatever the age or gender (it is not clear from the signature), the photographer would have been alive at the same time and experienced, obviously in different ways, the World War. They must have spoken about it, even if briefly. The photographer would have been able to share what they heard from my father's story when fleetingly engaged with his story. However, that person too is no longer with us. Another hole in the sharing of my father's story.

The second further source of story is the photograph itself. Yes, it is an inanimate object, made of paper and cardboard with fading colors and a thin black frame. It cannot speak, but it tells a story. Anyone looking at it and examining it, can, based on what is represented, imagine the stories the depicted character might tell, the experiences he lived. They can also tell their own stories about the character; how they see him, when he lived his story, who and where he might be, and how it makes them feel. They will also be able to determine some facts, e.g. the man in the photograph is wearing a sailor's uniform, he is young. They could even tell what country he is from if they look closely enough – the Navy's national affiliation is printed on the left shoulder of the uniform in small letters. But there will be many narrative holes; there will be a lot they won't be able to imagine or that they will get wrong.

The third source also has narrative holes. This source is me, the son of the father in the photograph, the father he never knew. I can weave together bits and pieces of his story that relate to his image in the photograph. Something about the Navy, something about the war, something about his return to life after the war. I am intrigued by the uniform – it looks like something a child might wear in a school play. But it is real; it was worn in a war zone. But there is so much more I don't know about the stories that could be told about the photograph.

I have identified five potential sources of story that emerge from this photograph of my father hanging on my study wall: (a) my father, who is in the picture, and who never had the chance to tell me about it, (b) my mother, who must have heard stories about that time, but didn't share

them with me, (c) the photographer, who probably had a fleeting conversation with my father about shared experiences, (d) the photograph itself, that can't speak but tells stories, and (e) me, who has lived with the photograph for many years and imagines stories about it all the time.

Visualisations, whether they be photographs, digital pictures, drawings, timelines, or silhouettes to be colored in, are multistoried. As I have demonstrated with my father's photograph, each visual's potential for stories exists beyond just the owner or producer of that visual or who it is about. In research we need to always bear this in mind. Asking a research participant to talk about their photograph or to explain their drawing is but one source of story, or data. Paula Kalaja and Sílvia Melo-Pfeifer's *Visualising Language Students and Teachers as Multilinguals: Advancing Social Justice in Education* displays a wide range of options available to us to examine such multistoried visuals. The studies in the book show that stories come from all directions and are engaged with in multiple ways when we try to make sense of them. They show that considering the multistoried possibilities of visual and text combinations or visual as text enhance meaning-making possibilities and challenge the conventions of narrative and qualitative research that pay attention mainly to stories as language. The studies also show how working with visualisations enables progress towards filling the narrative holes that a language-limited research approach might generate – in addition to filling the types of narrative holes I described earlier, i.e. those associated with neglecting potential sources of story.

Finally, in working with visuals (e.g. collecting, analysing and interpreting visual data) – and again, the studies in this book demonstrate these processes in multiple ways – we are compelled to ask not only my three favourite questions when doing narrative research: (1) *Who* is in the story and how do they relate to each other? How do they position themselves vis-à-vis each other? (2) *Where* does the action of the story take place – in what physical places and social spaces? (3) *When* does the action of the story unfold? What happens over time? We are also compelled to ask *why* questions. Visuals draw us in, we want to know more, we wonder why things are the way they are. And especially when used with textual data, visuals seem to open up avenues for exploration not considered before. As inquirers, we want to know what has happened or is happening in the visual, but it seems impossible not also to ask why. This is one place where visual narratives generate opportunities for social justice in multilingual education, as the editors of this volume say in their introduction, 'Social justice in education is about agency and authorship of one's own story in one's own terms, critical dialogue, commitment to inclusion and transformation, and promotion of equity'. In constructing visual data, whether it be taking a photograph or drawing a picture, research participants have available to them new freedoms to tell their stories beyond the sometimes difficult manipulation of words, and researchers too, when

examining those visuals and attempting to fill narrative holes, are offered further pathways for understanding and consequently opportunities to bring about change.

Very few people have seen the photograph of my father in his sailor's uniform. It has never made it onto Facebook or Instagram, and never will. It is a multistoried visual, still, as it hangs on the wall. The photograph has ongoing meaning. But it is private and personal. In contrast, as we endeavour to understand the complex world of multilingual education, we need to explore alternative means of understanding language learners, their teachers, and teacher educators, and what they do together. To do this we need to share our methods and our findings. This book is a step in that direction.

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