

# **Ringling the inner voice: Students' Experiences of Teacher-Feedback using *Narrative Frames*.**

## **Short abstract**

In this session, we will examine the use of a narrative inquiry method called *Narrative Frames* within the context of a study on undergraduate students' experience of teacher-generated feedback. Experiences are hard to observe and limited to make sense of with a questionnaire approach. In addition, researchers can sometimes feel limited in their conclusions when following a purely qualitative approach (such as interviews) with a small sample. Therefore, the use of *Narrative Frames* may provide an opportunity to gather considerable data without compromising its quality. Discovering this method may provide researchers with new insights into how to elicit hidden evidence, such as unspoken and untold stories, that enrich our understanding of the invisible processes and experiences of students or teachers.

Supported by the application of the method and empirical evidence, the session will primarily focus on designing research with *Narrative Frames*, through the examination of the study's exemplar, and will engage the audience in interactive exercises to unpack the different elements and principles of this approach.

**Keywords:** story, narrative inquiry, listening, experience, perception, marginalization, power, privilege, empathy, qualitative research

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## **What are Narrative Frames and why use them in educational research?**

*Narrative Frames* are a narrative inquiry method developed by Barkhuizen and Wette (2008) that have been used to investigate teachers' experiences in the context of teaching and teacher education. The method consists in developing a series of sentence starters or partial text containing blank spaces. Through these fill-in-the-blank exercises, participants can share their own lived experiences by adding their voices to the pre-filled text and telling their stories in a succinct manner.

While this approach is qualitative, it is not limited to a small sample and can therefore be used with 100+ respondents as an alternative to a traditional questionnaire, in the context of addressing questions pertaining to emotionality, perceptions, and lived experiences. Inspired by the unusual capacity of a qualitative method to capture breadth (and not only depth), we will explore the essential features of narrative frames through the use-case of students' feedback experiences.

## **Taking a qualitative lens**

Feedback is becoming one of the most popular strategies that embed formative assessment into the fabric of our educational institutions. However, feedback can only be effective when it is acted upon. Therefore, engagement with feedback and the internal experiences of feedback reception is an area of great interest in educational research.

Traditionally, the literature on feedback is largely anchored in measurement theory with a strong focus on the instrumental value of this pedagogical device and the cognitive processes that it entails. In this transmission paradigm, the teacher actively *gives* feedback, and the student passively *receives* it.

In contrast, the dialogical paradigm posits that feedback is co-constructed between the teachers and students and that the emotional landscape must be considered (Winstone & Carless, 2019). More attention is paid to the pedagogical alliance between teachers and students and feedback is not merely offered by teachers but intentionally designed for uptake (Carless & Boud, 2018). Embracing this perspective equalizes the power between teachers and students and promotes collaboration and co-regulation through the unfolding of the learning process. With this model, we

aim at making students 'feedback literate' so they can more effectively navigate the feedback they receive or seek, and therefore be more likely to act upon it.

With some exceptions located in the dialogical paradigm, most of the research on feedback is focused on its effectiveness and falls into the dominant evidence-based paradigm, subject to critiques from decolonial researchers (Shahjahan, 2011) and educational philosophers (Biesta, 2007). We propose the adoption of qualitative methods that narrow the gaze, and that helps us uncover data that might be hidden, untold, or overlooked. The onto-epistemological background of this study is therefore concerned with critical theory, which strives to address how students' experiences might be shaped based on power and privilege.

### **The feedback encounter**

Feedback experiences are not simply collected and analysed but generated through 'knowledging' which refers to "the activity of meaning making, learning, or knowledge construction" (Barkhuizen, 2011, p. 395). *Knowledging* expands our view of what constitutes 'evidence' and 'scientific knowledge' and holds space for plurality and authenticity of voices. To truly ring students' inner voices and crystalize their experiences, we have designed the *Narrative Frame* in ways that operationalized feedback as an interruption. An interruption disarms rather than equips students (Biesta, 2023), forcing them to confront themselves and the Other (e.g. the teacher). In an encounter, we cannot expect students to respond in a pre-established fashion, drawing from a toolkit. Instead, students face their own subjectiveness through the tension of being both subjects and subjected.

The feedback encounter is therefore an event of awareness and an interrogation that forces the student to consider 'how' they are and what might be their next steps (whether to respond to the feedback through action or not, for instance). This is the precise liminal movement of coming into subjectiveness that we attempt to capture so as to engage with the diversity of encounter arrangements.

### **Conclusion**

This non-conventional method can allow researchers to consider how experiences can be shared through stories, to invite all voices and leave creative space for students to express themselves. On the one hand, students make sense of their experiences - which can be transformative - and on the other hand, the researcher is able to 'observe' the internal and invisible feedback reciprocity processes through the storification of experiences by students.

When designed adequately, the *Narrative Frames* become ‘boundary objects’ (Star, 2010), holding multiple meanings and interpretations, that contribute to listening to the plural truths of the human experience. The process of storying allows participants to connect to all their senses, to reflect and liberate different ways of knowing. In turn, the stories generated through *Narrative Frames* can be disseminated in creative ways in teachers’ training, to co-sense and promote listening and empathy.

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