

# Narrative Analysis: Demonstrating the Iterative Process for New Researchers

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Article abstract

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## **Narrative Analysis: Demonstrating the Iterative Process for New Researchers**

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This article demonstrates and describes an iterative process of narrative analysis for researchers who want to familiarise themselves with this methodology. The method draws on the six-step process of how to analyse a narrative, the four modes of reading a narrative and the three-sphere model of external context. The application of the method is demonstrated through describing the process of analysis of New Zealand school counsellors' narratives of strengths-based counselling. Furthermore, this article posits that committing to a narrative analysis process of repeated and in-depth engagement with participants' narrative data may facilitate a more robust and engaging research outcome than may otherwise have been achieved through more prescriptive methods of narrative analysis. Finally, this article highlights the use of story-map grids (tables) and models as visual aids to assist in the process of narrative analysis.

**Keywords:**

method, methodology, narrative analysis, iterative, construction, form, content, context, metanarrative s

## INTRODUCTION

In this article, we present an iterative, dynamic, non-linear process of narrative analysis that builds on previous models to enhance participants' experiences in terms of context and content (Grady & Wallston, 1988). The approach is situated in a postmodern paradigm which acknowledges the contribution of the researcher, the participants, and the reader to the outcome of the research (Tuval-Mashiah, 2014, Zilber, 2017, Zilber et al., 2008). This approach also aims to avoid the singular paradigmatic stance research design that Zilber (2017) warns against. This iterative perspective for new researchers undertaking narrative analysis steps away from research designs that choose fixed aims, questions, methodology and methods at the inception of the research process and allows revision of the research process during the analysis phase.

Interspersed throughout the article are examples of how the method was developed and used in the doctoral research project of the lead author (Bright, 2018), which include the models and story-map grids (tables) used as visual aids to assist in that research. While this article is co-authored, Bright has written in the first person whenever she discusses her doctoral research below. Although the iterative method was constructed with reference to a specific doctoral study regarding school counsellors, the authors welcome other researchers to adopt, adapt and alter the research design process described. This article may act as a guide to interactive narrative analysis for new researchers to encourage them to embark on the use of more non-traditional research designs thereby enriching their research process and outcomes.

We begin with a review of dominant narrative analysis approaches that comprise the origin of the iterative method and includes a selection of authors who engage with narrative as both theory and practice. More specifically, we review Clandinin and Connely (2000)'s narrative essence, voice, style and significance; Crossley's (2000) six-step process on how to read and analyse a narrative, Lieblich et al.'s (1998) four modes of reading a narrative for form and content, and Zilber et al.'s (2008) three-sphere model for analysing external context.

We then consider different modes of interpretation as parts of a narrative analysis process for multilevel reading of narratives. Significantly, engaging with Lieblich et al.'s (1998) four modes of reading a narrative and Zilber et al.'s (2008) analysis of external contexts results in rich, deep multilevel interpretation that progressively constructs the questions and aims of the research project itself. This is especially true when researchers keep their

research directions and questions undetermined (Maxwell, 2008) and allow models and story map grids to capture the direction of narratives and literature iteratively within the process. The method presented highlights not only reading dynamically between the narratives as a whole and their parts, but between form, content and context, but also highlights the need for extensive engagement with and an in-depth repeated reading of participants' narratives.

### NARRATIVE ANALYSIS: AN EVOLVING PROCESS

Narratives have multiple layers of meaning, as does human experience, but how do we access these meanings? Recognising narrative themes within stories requires researchers to repeatedly re-read transcripts (Crossley, 2000, Lieblich et al., 1998). Reading transcripts is an interpretive process that is “personal, partial, and dynamic” (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 10). Lieblich et al. (1998) and Crossley (2000) warn that with narrative research there is no absolute ‘truth’ or one most accurate interpretation of a text. The merits of top-down and bottom-up approaches are much debated and finding ways to both explore the narrator’s point of view fully and post-structurally ‘problematise truth’ requires multiple lines of interpretation (Foucault, 1997; Vitellone, 2021).

Researchers advocate for a pluralistic approach that takes subjectivity into account (Lieblich et al., 1998, Tuval-Mashiach, 2014) while providing a solid rationale for the methods used and a robust explanation of the interpretation processes that have shaped the results. Zilber (2017) examines methodological approaches to organise and interpret narrative data, suggesting that carefully moving between big and small stories, content and context, interviews, and everyday interactions that change the audience and context enables a rigorous multi-faceted view of the narrative under analysis. Here, we take a closer look at Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Crossley (2000), Lieblich and colleagues (1998) and Zilber and colleagues (1998).

**Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) narrative essence, voice, style and significance.** Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that to assist the researcher in the interpretation process, a participant’s narrative can be divided according to the themes of narrative essence, narrative voice (including metaphors) and narrative significance before the interpretation begins. Narrative essence goes to the core of each narrative and identifies taken-for-granted assumptions and the way in which each narrator chooses to present themselves as the protagonist. The authors (2000) see the voice of a narrative as belonging to the narrator for whom a text speaks.

They suggest the narrator's voice is more than the audio recording of the interview. It conveys a sense of the narrator's identity through the assumptions he or she makes, the tone of the narrative and the type of language used. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) further suggest that images, symbols, and metaphors used as part of the spoken word give us a richer understanding of the narrator's voice and add greater meaning to each narrative.

**Crossley's (2000) six-step process.** Linear, step-by-step methods, such as Crossley's (2000) six-step process on how to read and analyse a narrative can be a useful when beginning analysis of transcripts. Crossley's (2000) process is summarised as:

- Step 1. Read each transcript about five or six times to become familiar with them.
- Step 2. During reading, pay attention to narrative tone.
- Step 3. Look for imagery and metaphors.
- Step 4. Note possible themes evident from the reading.
- Step 5. Construct tables (story-map grids) for categories recommended from the literature or that stand out in the transcripts, focusing on imagery and themes. These tables provide a 'rough map' of each transcript, which can then be translated into a meaningful narrative.
- Step 6. Include these in the research report.

This type of methodology minimises the distinction between the interpretation and writing-up, which is crucial for allowing iterative, multilevel readings to develop throughout the drafting of a research report (Crossley, 2000, Smith, 1995). In the doctoral research referenced in this article, further extensive reading took place between Steps 5 and 6 to gain intimate understanding of each narrative. Instead of a linear, step-by-step method, the researcher allows the findings from each narrative reading to determine what is looked at next, both holistically within individual narratives and then categorically across the narratives, once a deeper understanding of the individual narratives form, content and themes is gained.

Crossley (2000) states that models are used in qualitative research to assist in sorting information and for providing structure and direction during the interpretation process. In the doctoral research informing this article, both the story-map grids (tables) and models were amended many times during the interpretation process. Examples of these amendments are included below to

clarify the iterative interpretation process and to give the reader practical examples to inform their own research processes. In this way, iterative methodologies that combine form, content and context in multilevel readings will be demonstrated.

**Lieblich et al.'s (1998) four modes of analysis.** Lieblich et al.'s (1998) analytical model outlines four modes through which narratives can be read: holistic-form, holistic-content, categorical-form, and categorical-content. Instead of adopting only the mode that best suits one's research purposes, as Lieblich et al. (1998) suggest, the methodology proposed in this article utilises the four modes iteratively. The holistic modes maintain the integrity of the entire narrative while the categorical modes segment the original narrative, assigning sections of the narrative to certain categories. The form modes look at things such as the plot structure, style of the narrative, and the choice of metaphors and words. The content modes look at "what happened, or why, who participated" and "the meaning that the story conveys" (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 12). Lieblich et al. (1998) stress that the different modes of reading a narrative have no rigid boundaries. Reading the transcripts both holistically and categorically for form and content does not involve separate and distinct processes; instead, the processes intertwine, connect and complement each other. Although it is important to outline the method of interpretation, this does not mean that interpretation methods must be pre-determined at the outset of a project (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, Lieblich et al., 1998).

Within such a methodology, categories and exploratory questions are used to guide the inquiry, but the direction of an inquiry comes from reading the transcripts, and research assumptions may then be produced from them (Lieblich et al., 1998, Maxwell, 2008). Researchers should be able to reach interpretive conclusions and alter them when necessary, after further readings (Lieblich et al., 1998). Likewise, the aims, research questions and method can be constantly revised and determined by the findings throughout the process (Maxwell, 2008). In this way the write-up is a narrative itself, developing to describe the research context and the interaction of various narratives, with each other and the larger narratives within which they are embedded.

While Crossley (2000) and Lieblich et al. (1998) point us towards deeper examination of the text of narrative through different modes, considering the context of narratives, whether in relation to intersubjective power dynamics or metanarratives, is essential in thorough analysis methodologies (Tuval-Mashiach, 2014, Zilber, 2017). Utilising Zilber et al.'s (2008) three-sphere model

of external content in this iterative methodology is key to its ability to analyse narratives in depth.

**Zilber et al.'s (2008) three-sphere of external context.** Methods of interpretation of text and context are interrelated and “for that reason, context analysis should be sought in tandem with content and form analysis” (Zilber et al., 2008, p. 1064). Zilber et al. (2008) proposes interpreting narrative by focusing on three spheres or contextual areas. Developed from ‘the three levels of interaction’ proposed by Plummer (1995), the three spheres are “the immediate intersubjective relationship in which a narrative is produced; the collective social field in which one’s story evolved; and the broad cultural meaning systems or metanarratives” that underpin and qualify the narrative (Zilber et al., 2008, p. 1047). Gergen and Gergen (1986) suggest our identity is embedded within our context and that our stories are told within this social relational space. Tuval-Mashiach (2014), argues that “individuals cannot construct their identities in a void” (p. 108). Contextual examination can allow access to “understanding the narrator’s motivations, values, and meaning systems as well as the boundaries within which his/her identity is constructed” (Tuval-Mashiach, 2014, p. 109).

Zilber et al.'s (2008) three-sphere model of external context provides a framework through which to interpret context. While the three spheres are presented separately, they are in fact “interrelated, and the boundaries between them may be quite blurred at times” (Zilber et al., 2008, p. 1064). Each of the spheres is explained further below and then they are applied to the example project.

As researchers, we often start with clear ideas of the purpose or method for our research, but we propose that the nature of engaging with narratives requires flexible engagement in the progressive narrative of method development throughout the research process. As Josselson and Lieblich (1995) state, “Narrative research is a voyage of discovery – a discovery of meanings that both constitute the individual participant and are co-constructed in the research process – researchers cannot know at the outset what they will find” (p. 260). Reflection on our own assumptions, biases and metanarratives as researchers and on our engagement with participants’ narratives influences the way in which their narratives are storied, analysed and presented.

## IDENTIFYING THEMES: HOLISTIC-FORM INTERPRETATION

The holistic-form mode explores the discursive form of the narrative and identifies how an individual constructs his or her experience (Lieblich et al., 1998). This mode involves interpreting the structure or plot of the whole narrative for each participant. This approach is not about linguistic and stylistic features, but rather has to do with the narrative style or the genre reflected in the narratives. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), qualitative researchers must take care not to label these narratives or make them fit into a particular frame. Each narrative needs to stand alone and should be read for the story it wants to reveal.

To examine holistic-form and imagery, themes derived from literature can be utilised. For my doctoral research project, I initially explored Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) concepts of narrative essence (taken-for-granted assumptions and how individual narrators choose to present themselves as the central character), narrative voice (including choices of storying, tone, emotional expressions, images, symbols and metaphors), narrative style and narrative significance. The story-map grid (table) shown in Figure 1 is offered as an example of when holistic-form and imagery align with initial research direction. It shows a general working research topic (revised throughout each different mode of reading) as well as the literature-derived themes and questions. The grid was filled in during the initial readings of the transcripts to record themes that were recognised within each narrative.

With this initial story-map grid as a guide, the NVivo software package was used to organise interview transcripts. However, I realised that the coding process was restricting a full exploration of the transcripts. Theme identification segmented the narratives, and this appeared to clash with the holistic interpretation of each participant's story. I therefore put NVivo aside and chose to develop my own method to keep the holistic integrity of my interpretation intact. This involved six readings of each transcript, with a different focus for each (see Author, 2018, for detailed descriptions). This method allowed for note-taking and interpretation while moving back and forth from details to big picture and from the details of the narrative to the holistic-form, checking for maintaining the tone and integrity of each transcript throughout the process.



**Figure 1. Holistic-form-focused story-map grid**

<b>Working research topic</b>			
Which philosophies are reflected in the narratives of school counsellors who use strength-based counselling approaches as part of their professional practice?			
<b>Themes from literature</b> (Clandinin, 2007, Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, Crossley, 2000)			
Narrative essence (heart)	Narrative voice (identity)	Narrative style (genre)	Narrative significance (message)
What is the story about? What are the narrator's assumptions?	Who is telling the story?	What kind of story is this?	What can we learn from this story?
<b>Themes recognised in transcripts</b>			
Practice stories Relationships Counselling outcomes Adolescent narratives Occupation narratives Deficit narratives	Archetypal image Tone (conveys emotion) Metaphors Personal ideology	Key events during counselling: Past experience Present realities Future hopes Plot structure Archetypal story/genre	Core message

I wrote out, from memory, the narrative essence, or core message, of each participant's story and searched to see if the themes I had identified could be found within this core message. Themes that were less relevant were removed. Then, again from memory, I wrote a section for narrative essence, narrative voice and narrative style. This process became faster with each transcript, until I was able to gain a depth of understanding built upon by my previous interpretations.

The themes and subthemes I had identified in Pam's story, for example, gave me an understanding of the archetypal image, archetypal story form (genre), plot structure and the core message of this narrative. Pam's narrative had a progressive plot structure (Gergen & Gergen, 1988). Pam portrayed the archetypal image of the mentor, and her narrative echoed the archetypal story forms of rebirth

and the quest. To represent narrative voice, I selected the metaphors in Pam's narrative that epitomised her story. The core messages of Pam's narrative from a holistic-form point of view were:

- The necessity of supporting adolescents in a non-blaming way to give hope for the future.
- The importance of counsellors having support from colleagues, parents, and the community.
- The flexibility required by school counsellors to deal with the unpredictable nature of school counselling.

An excerpt from Pam's narrative that summarises her counselling philosophy is "It takes a positive village to raise a child".

This interpretation uncovered further areas and directions I wanted to explore, beyond what a singular mode of viewing the narrative had revealed. The iterative methodology was adopted from the need for an approach that did not inhibit the analysis, nor require the participants' narratives to be stretched to fit within specific, over-generalised, recognisable images (such as a holistic archetypal story form or figure). This approach appeared too interpretative on its own, and so reading for holistic-content was determined as the next iteration of the narrative analysis.

### **PLAYING WITH PLOT AND ROLES: HOLISTIC-CONTENT INTERPRETATION**

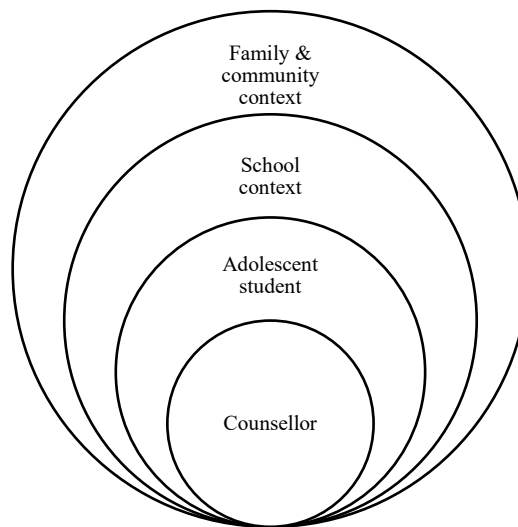
Like the holistic-form mode, the holistic-content mode also looks at each participant's narrative in its entirety (Lieblich et al.'s, 1998). However, instead of focusing on plot structure, this mode focuses on the content inherent within the narrative, as the researcher looks for general themes and emerging foci across each entire narrative. This analysis method preserves the integrity of each participant's narrative, because, while parts of the story are interpreted, their meaning is derived from the entire narrative. According to Lieblich et al. (1998), this highlights discourses or clusters of assumptions and the distinctive features of the narrator's voice (including the use of metaphors). This process and the knowledge gained assisted iteratively with recognising metanarratives for later steps of interpretation.

While re-reading my transcripts, I recognised different 'role-players' present and contributing to each counsellor's narrative: the school context, the counsellor, and the adolescent student and then subsequently the family and

community context. I created models as visual aids to reflect this holistic-content. The model used to interpret Jessica's narrative is shown in Figure 2.

When I looked at adding the four role-player categories at later stages of the research process to a more comprehensive model, I became aware that the positioning of the circles could appear to represent a hierarchy; the ramifications of this are discussed further below. The emphasis here is not on the end device itself, but on the invaluable learning and rich interpretation that was gained in exploring the narratives in this way.

**Figure 2. Model to explore holistic-content – Jessica**



Excerpts from Jessica's transcript and my own interpretation of it were brought together to form a holistic-content view of her narrative, which I titled 'A Story with Heart'. A quote from Jessica's transcript that aptly describes her counselling philosophy is 'I have a real heart for this place... I think the girls know . . . I have a really big heart for them.'

The model developed during the holistic-content narrative analysis were a vital guide for the remaining interpretation phases. Eventually, a participant's transcript could be divided into segments that were placed under the headings for the various role-players from only two readings of their interview. This sped up the interpretation process immensely, and it is hoped future research endeavours will similarly benefit.

## **THE BIGGER PICTURE: INCORPORATING CONTEXT INTO CATEGORICAL-CONTENT INTERPRETATION**

Preserving the integrity of the entire narrative is recommended by Bishop (2012), especially when a researcher is from outside the socio-cultural context of the narrator. Adopting a holistic approach to interpretation achieves this. At the same time, however, staying open to universal themes emerging across narratives is also emphasised as important (Bruner, 1991, Elliott, 2005, Lieblich et al., 1998). People who have experienced similar events would have commonalities as well as differences in their experiences and moving from holistic to a categorical (or thematic) viewing of narratives allows these as well as contextual influences to be seen. Comparative interpretation or categorical analysis provides the interpretation method to bring unique narratives together as a whole (Bruner, 1996, Elliott, 2005, Lieblich et al., 1998).

Lieblich et al. (1998) suggest that if the researcher wants to look at phenomena shared by a group of people, the categorical-content mode of reading is the one to use and in doing so a collective story unfolds (Elliott, 2005). The categorical-form mode of reading a narrative focuses on “stylistic or linguistic characteristics of defined units of the narrative” across participants’ narratives (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 13). According to Lieblich et al., these units of analyses focus on the emotional and/or cognitive content reflected in the telling of a person’s narrative. Narrative categories within the research topic are named and sections of transcripts from all the participants’ narratives are assigned to these categories. In this way, the narratives are processed analytically by dividing the text into “small units of content and submitting them to either descriptive or statistical treatment” (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 112).

In addition, Lieblich et al. (1998) state that the categorical-content mode of reading is commonly known as content analysis, where the researcher knows (carrying from a literature review) what the important categories are prior to data analysis (Stewart, Franz & Layton, 1988). Like thematic analysis, new categories may also be derived from the narrators’ transcripts, alongside evidence to either support or refute the predefined categories (Lieblich et al., 1998). This approach does not attempt to preserve the integrity of the whole account but rather takes a snapshot view of aspects of participants’ narratives as they arise (Lieblich et al., 1998).

To test this interpretation process, I used literature and the word-frequency search in NVivo to identify potential categories. Again, I found working with the transcripts without NVivo yielded a richer understanding. The story-map

grid below is an example of the categories I developed to provide an in-depth understanding across all school counsellors' narratives as to their shared and unique experiences regarding strength-based counselling.

**Figure 3. Categorical-content-focused story-map grid**

<b>Categorical-content/Themes</b>		
<b>Working research questions</b>		
What are school counsellors' practice experiences of using strength-based counselling approaches with adolescence?	How do school counsellors perceive and define adolescent wellbeing?	How do school counsellors' strength-based counselling practices contribute to adolescent wellbeing?
<b>Categories from literature</b>		
Practice experiences of strength-based counselling.	Adolescent wellbeing	Strength-based counselling and adolescent wellbeing

Categories from transcripts		
Counselling modalities	School counsellors' perceptions	Adolescent wellbeing
Practice experiences	Definitions of strength-based counselling	Counselling outcomes
Providing support		
Partnership		
Appropriateness of strength-based counselling		
Tools		
School curriculum & positive psychology		
Significant influences		
Skills		
Stresses & problems		
Triumphs		
Partnership/openness		

### CONSIDERING NARRATIVE CONTEXT

The application of Zilber et al.'s (2008) three contextual spheres – the immediate intersubjective relationship in which a narrative is produced; the collective social field in which one's story evolved; and the broad cultural meaning systems or metanarratives – in the doctoral research is described in the following subsections.

#### **Sphere 1: Immediate intersubjective relationship**

The narrator's audience, including the interviewer, researcher or others present, affects all aspects of the narrative (Peterson and Langellier, 2006). Klaussen et al. (2013) and later Klaussen (2015) emphasise the performative nature of narrative and how it occurs in a particular moment and in a particular setting. The intersubjective context sphere refers to 'the immediate relations and the interaction' between stage members and audience within the stage setting (Zilber et al., 2008: 1051). According to Tuval-Mashiach (2014), "The inter-

subjective context encompasses the usage of language (the very ability to understand each other); the moods, intentions, and motivations involved when telling a specific narrative; and the relationship between interviewee and interviewer” (p. 110).

Zilber et al. (2008) emphasise that the intersubjective effects are ever-present even if not everyone is aware of them “at the time of telling” (p. 1051). Researcher reflexivity in analysis is important as it builds awareness of the intersubjective context (Klaussen, 2015, Zilber et al., 2008). More specifically, Zilber et al. (2008) explains, “we need to know what the interviewee knew...; where and when the interview took place and why; who was present; the power relations between the parties, and so forth” (p. 1053).

## **Sphere 2: Collective social field**

Zilber et al. (2008) suggest that we all locate our stories “within certain social structures and historical events” (p. 1053) and see an individual’s social field as relating to “the personal depiction of the public time and space” (p. 1053) within which a story unfolds. The authors stress that the social field is imperative in understanding how societal rules and organisation assist in constructing the narrator’s story.

Zilber et al. (2008) caution, however, that the social field as seen by those within it is a “personal construction” of what is perceived and not necessarily “objective, factual, depictions of the social sphere” (p. 1053). That is, the social field is constructed by those within it and is not necessarily seen by others in the same way. When the participants and interviewee share the same social space “even though holding different positions within it”, the context may be taken-for-granted and not attended to specifically (Zilber et al., 2008, p. 1053). Tuval-Mashiach (2014) highlights that the strengths and weaknesses of insider versus outsider interviewers and narrative interpreters need to be considered (i.e., explanations to outsiders can be rich narratives for interpreters with insider knowledge, while candid insider conversations can be rich narratives for analysis for those with a lens from outside the referenced social structure). Considering all these implications both prior to deciding on narrative collection methods, and iteratively throughout the analysis process would aid the rigor of this and any methodology.

### **Sphere 3: Cultural meaning systems or metanarratives**

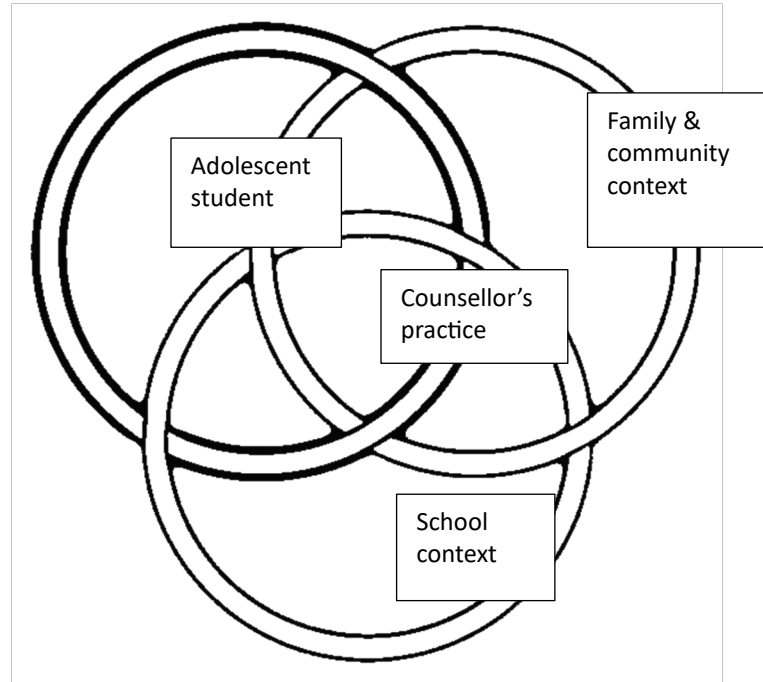
Zilber et al. (2008) sees metanarratives as “the collective web of meanings underlying the story’ sourced from ‘the available cultural forms that can be used by the narrator” (p.1063).

A metanarrative, according to postmodernists, is an intangible construct that professes to explain all knowledge or experience (Lyotard, 1986). Stephens and McCallum (1998) view the metanarrative as “a global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience” (p. 6). The word ‘metanarrative’ has two component parts: ‘meta’, meaning ‘layer’, ‘beyond’ or ‘about’, and a ‘narrative’, meaning ‘story’. Given these meanings, a metanarrative may be seen as a story with layers that can be interpreted, the pervasive story beyond the story that is told, or a story about a story that creates the overriding schemas into which other ‘little stories’ are corralled. The metanarrative may thus be seen as the story ‘underneath’ the story that may be recognised in the narrator’s words, often without his or her awareness. Giddings and Grant (2002) suggest that as social beings we cannot separate ourselves from the traditions or discourses (metanarratives) of our time. As these metanarratives (discourses) may be taken for granted, they can be difficult for those embedded within the discursive context to discern (Winslade & Monk, 1999). Winslade and Monk (1999) suggest that interpretation is thus from the researcher’s perspective.

### **Applying Zilber et al.’s (2008) three contextual spheres**

During the holistic-content interpretation process described above, the four role-players appeared to be the collective social field contexts of the narrative: counselling practice, the adolescent and his or her context, the school context, and the family and community context. Figure 4 shows the model that assisted interpretation of the counsellors’ practice narratives within the contexts that influence it. I called the interlinking rings ‘Rings of Influence’ as I felt they represented the influence counsellors have within the school and broader counselling context.



**Figure 4. Model for categorical-content: 'Rings of Influence'**

Reflecting on Zilber et al.'s (2008) theorising of intersubjective relations as context prompted me to add a fifth role/context: "researcher as co-constructionist". Just as a narrator chooses to include and exclude information from a story, so too does the researcher during their analysis of both content and context (Klaussen, 2015). As we analyse and present our interpretation of narrative text, 'we re-contextualize the text' we have repeatedly scrutinised and position this text in "a new context and hence change it" (Zilber et al., 2008, p. 1050). Zilber et al. (2008) stress that "the challenge for interpreters of stories is to balance between the contexts mentioned in the text (explicitly or implicitly) and the contexts that we create and bring into the story in the act of interpretation" (p. 1050). As mentioned above, Tuval-Mashiach (2014) take this idea further in showing the influence of both the interviewer and the interpreter on the research.

Figure 5 shows a story-map grid that includes the additional context of the researcher and illustrates one way of applying interpretation to these contexts. By using the five role-players as headings (indicated by an asterisk in the story-map grid/ table) and rereading the transcripts, I discovered new questions to ask of the counsellors' narratives based on context. These were not my initial research questions but became apparent after my engagement with participants' transcripts.

I called them ‘exploratory questions’ and used them as a basis for my story-map grid to guide the interpretation process.

**Figure 5. Categorical-content story-map grid focused on exploratory questions**

<b>Categorical-content/Themes</b>				
<b>Research question</b>				
How do the multiple discourses/metanarratives, which surround school counsellors, construct their strength-based counselling practice?				
<b>The counsellor</b>				
<b>Exploratory questions</b>				
The researcher as co-constructionist	The counselling practice	The school context	The adolescent student/ The family & community context	
	How do the discourses/meta narratives that are available to school counsellors construct their thinking concerning their practice?	How do the discourses/meta narratives of the school context influence a school counsellor’s practice?	What are school counsellors’ constructions of adolescent wellbeing?	How do the discourses/metanarratives of the broader community (within which an adolescent is embedded) influence a school counsellor’s practice?

The headings in this story-map grid went through several iterations. There was a constant back-and-forward from transcripts to devices as interpretation evolved. In this way, the device allows a constant reflexivity as it dynamically changed with each re-reading of transcript through a different lens.

A subsequent story-map grid to develop the thematic or categorical-content interpretation was then developed, placing categories derived for each of the role-players into the grid (Figure 6).

**Figure 6. Categorical-content story-map grid: Focused on categories**

<b>Categorical-content/Themes</b>				
<b>Research topic</b>				
How do the multiple metanarratives which surround school counsellors construct their strength-based counselling practice?				
<b>The counsellor</b>				
*The researcher as co-constructionist	*The counselling practice	*The school context	*The adolescent student / *The family & community context	
Reflections on the interview process	Counsellors' background: A shift to strength-based counselling	School context as ally to counsellors and strength-based counselling	School counsellors' constructions of adolescent wellbeing	Adolescent wellbeing and creating a community of support
Observations on materiality	Counsellor's philosophy: A metanarrative of human nature	School context as hindrance to counsellors	Adolescents and strength-based counselling	The importance of culture and context
Counsellor's becoming	Counsellor's views on strength-based counselling	What a counsellor brings to the school context:	Counsellor's positive reflections on the strength-based counselling process with adolescents	Parents and strength-based counselling
	Straddling metanarratives: Dominant deficit vs. subjugated strength metanarratives	Counselling in the school context:	Strength-based counselling with adolescents and suicide risk	
	Strength-based counselling as problem-story: Misinterpretation & simplification	Using strength-based approaches in schools		

**THE LAST EVOLUTION: COMBINING THE DIFFERENT  
WAYS OF VIEWING THE NARRATIVE**

In this final stage of shaping the interpretation (and with it the direction and writing-up) of the research, all the previous steps came together to show the whole picture. I now had one intersubjective and four collective social contexts (indicated by the five asterisks in Figure 6) and I recognised that each was a different contextual lens to read metanarrative through. Through a dynamic, iterative process, the metanarrative within various contexts, with both holistic and categorical understanding to inform it, became the research topic, specifically: How do the multiple metanarratives (discourses), which are available to school counsellors, construct their strength-based counselling practice?

At this final stage, I changed the ‘exploratory questions’ to ‘research questions’ and placed them under this main research topic. The categories pertaining to each of the school counselling contexts were slotted under the section headings and relevant research questions in the story-map grid. This final story-map grid for metanarratives, context and categorical-content provides the outline of my results sections. I also revised all the research questions under this heading (see Figure 7).

**Figure 7. Final categorical-content story-map grid developed from the iterative process**

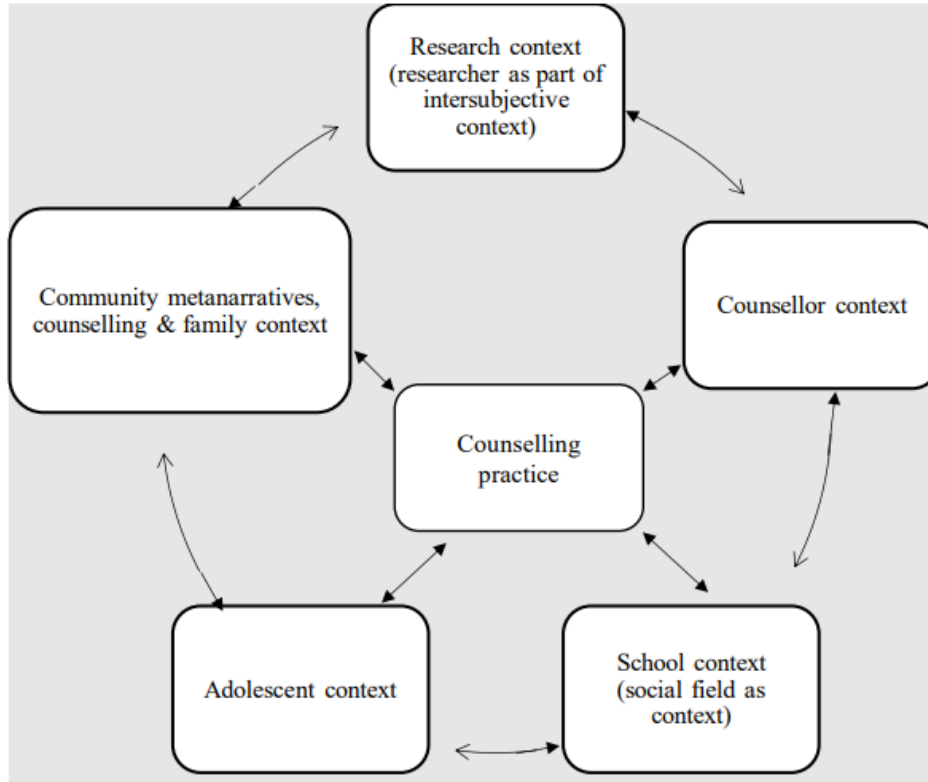
<b>Thesis title:</b>				
Counsellors’ strength-based practices in secondary schools: Managing multiple metanarratives				
<b>Research topic:</b>				
How do the multiple metanarratives (discourses) which are available to school counsellors construct their strength-based counselling practice?				
<b>Chapter headings / Narrative categories and contexts: The counsellor’s practice</b>				
Research context	Counsellor context	School context	Adolescent context	Community metanarratives, counselling & family context

Research questions				
What influence do my assumptions, biases and metanarratives as researcher have on the research process?	Which metanarratives are drawn on to construct school counsellors' practice stories?	How do the metanarratives of the school context influence a school counsellor's practice?	What are school counsellor's constructions of adolescent wellbeing?  How do school counsellors describe their strength-based practice as co-creating adolescent wellbeing?	How do the metanarratives of the broader community (within which an adolescent is embedded) influence a school counsellor's practice?  What are school counsellors' experiences of the adolescent's family during the counselling process?

In changing the layout of my results sections I again amended my model. I felt that the central point for counsellors' narratives was the counselling practice, and all the contexts (research context, counsellor context, school context, adolescent context and community metanarratives, counselling and family context) circled around that. All contexts/role-players interacted with each other and were acted upon by each other. In addition, the metanarratives (discourses) in all these relationships fed back into the counselling practice.

I used the final story-map grid for metanarratives, context and categorical-content and the above model to complete my final interpretation of the counsellors' narratives. Excerpts from transcripts were included in the results sections and I interpreted them from an etic perspective. The excerpts helped produce questions that directed the final interpretation process.

**Figure 8. Final model to explore metanarratives, contexts and categorical-content.**



## CONCLUSION

An iterative narrative interpretation methodology is not the easy option. It delves deep and turns the researcher one way and then another. It allows a constant checking of the participant's voices, the integrity of their individual narratives, the lenses through which different role-players may interpret the story, the different contexts influencing the story and exploration across the body of data and within individual narratives for the richer view of the whole and its parts.

In this article the method of narrative analysis evolved through a repeated and in-depth engagement with participants narratives. The thesis project is used as an example to show the steps through which narratives can be viewed through different lenses to develop a richer understanding.

Methods from narrative authors' have been synthesized to offer a methodology for future researchers to build on.

The preliminary research design, research questions and inter-subjective context all impact on the initial direction of the research. Narrators are co-constructionists, sharing a version of their story that they want to be heard. The article then presented the example of outlining the holistic-form of the central subject (Leiblich et al., 1998) where imagery and narrative voice (Clandinin, 2007, Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, Crossley, 2000) were examined. Holistic-content (Leiblich et al., 1998) and recognising role-players was outlined in the next section where it was demonstrated that there are multiple ways of interpreting transcripts that create a deeper meaning to the interpretation process.

Not only one storyline but multiple story lines exist within each narrative. Categorical-form and categorical-content allow thematic linking between the literature and each unique narrative. Although the article takes the reader through the research process step by step, the context within which this process occurs is accessed iteratively. The underlying narrative context (often obscured from the main reading of the narrative) and the social context (the setting in which the narrative takes place) are both crucial to the viewing of the narrative as a whole. The nature of the intersubjective context can take into account where the narrative is situated or focus solely on the story being told leaving the narrative context-less and therefore less complete.

This iterative methodology seeks to illustrate that interpreting a narrative from multiple directions, through multiple lenses creates more rigorous research projects with a richer, deeper understanding produced. It is not a simple or direct approach. Rather this iterative methodology steps between content and context, the whole and their categorical parts to allow the way in which a narrative is viewed and its many ways of being seen to interact and co-create the direction of the research itself.

### **Conflict of interest statement**

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article [and/or] its supplementary materials.

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