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A narrative approach: The possibilities for sport management

A. Stride[a,*], H.F. Fitzgerald[b], W. Allison[c]

[a] Leeds Beckett University, Cavendish 214a, Headingley Campus, Leeds, LS6 3QU, United Kingdom
[b] Leeds Beckett University, United Kingdom
[c] The Football Association, United Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

This paper connects with practitioners and scholars in sport management regarding the utility of adopting narrative inquiry, and more specifically stories as a medium to re-present research findings. We map out the broad field of narrative inquiry and also discuss what features are required to constitute stories. Drawing from some sport management research undertaken on behalf of The English Football Association, we offer one story crafted to re-present data generated. We discuss the benefits and challenges of using stories as a means of data re-presentation. The paper concludes by offering our thoughts regarding the contributions stories make to research in sport management.
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1. Introduction

In her Earle F. Zeigler Award lecture in 2004, Frisby (2005) noted that sport management research is dominated by positivist approaches. These have undoubtedly proved useful in addressing many key issues within sport management. However, Frisby (2005) provides a compelling argument for drawing upon the critical social sciences to see and think differently about research to extend knowledge and understandings in the field. In the same year, Amis and Silk (2005) continue this debate in a special edition of the *Journal of Sport Management*, "Expanding Horizons: Promoting Critical and Innovative Approaches to the Study of Sport Management." They argue that "sport management is a field blinkered by its disciplinarity" (Amis & Silk, 2005, p. 360) and note the progressive work in areas like sport sociology to call for innovative thinking and approaches in sport management research. They propose that these developments can contribute to the ways in which sport management research can impact upon and have meaning for the communities it serves.

Yet, one decade later Knoppers (2015), using the work of Love and Andrew (2012) in *Sport Management Review*, highlights how the disciplines of sport management and the sociology of sport remain distinct, infrequently drawing upon each other. Knoppers (2015) asserts that adopting a sociological lens and critically reflexive approach can enable sport management practitioners and scholars to begin to better understand how societal issues are inextricably embedded within the management, governance, marketing, and development of sport. Amis and Silk (2005) concur, adding that it is this kind of critically reflexive outlook that will encourage a questioning of established management practices, structures and taken for granted assumptions and how these contribute to social inequalities. In so doing, the possibilities open up for new ways of organising and managing sport, as well as researching and teaching in the area of sport management (Amis & Silk, 2005; Frisby, 2005; Knoppers, 2015).

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: a.stride@leedsbeckett.ac.uk (A. Stride).

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In calling for an imaginative rethinking in the ways sport management research is approached, Amis and Silk (2005), and more recently Shaw and Hoeber (2016), critique the effectiveness of conventional research methods. For example, like Bonnett and Carrington (2000), we have found that traditional quantitative methods often conflate individual differences and diversity into a few tidy, simplistic, overarching categories that are subsequently reported neatly through numerical sets, pie charts, and graphs. Moreover, such data rarely portray the meanings, reasons, feelings, and emotions behind the findings reported. In recent years, it would appear that the field of sport management has begun to embrace the use of qualitative methods as a legitimate means of generating data (Shaw & Hoeber, 2016). However as Shaw and Hoeber (2016) highlight, this rarely extends beyond traditional semi-structured interviews, focus groups and case studies. Whilst these maybe viewed as somewhat alterative by some, for other disciplines interviews and focus groups have also been criticised. For example, failing to capture individualised stories that reflect the multiplicity, fragmentation and complexity of lived experience (Flintoff, Fitzgerald, & Scraton, 2008).

We cohere with Shaw and Hoeber (2016) that there is a need for those engaged in sport management research and practice to push the boundaries of their thinking, and be innovative, reflexive and critical in their methodological considerations. As critical researchers we extend this debate to challenge not only the ways in which data are generated but to also question the conventional ways in which data are re-presented. This resonates with Frisby's (2005, p. 5) concern that "we need to ask whether we know how to communicate our findings beyond traditional academic outlets so our research will have the intended impact." This paper attempts to connect with practitioners and scholars in sport management regarding the utility of adopting a narrative approach when re-presenting research findings. As Dowling (2012, p. 37) articulates, "such an approach can no longer be marginalized within the field when we live in a society permeated by narrative."

At this juncture it is worth noting that narrative inquiry is not marginalised in some academic disciplines but well established (Clandinin, 2007, 2013). The field boasts a number of journals such as *Narrative Inquiry, Storyworlds, Narrative Culture* and *Narrative.* In terms of disciplinary areas, Black feminism has long recognised the value of utilising poetry, song and storytelling to recount diverse social realities (Smith, 2000). Similarly, researchers within the field of education have used critical race methodologies that embrace counter narratives, biographies and family histories as a resource for articulating lived experiences (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Interestingly, scholars in the fields of sport sociology, physical activity and Physical Education have also embraced the narrative turn. For example, a special edition of the *Sociology of Sport Journal* in 2000 focused on narratives and sport research; and more recently a special edition of *Sport, Education and Society* (2016) explored the current tensions in narrative inquiry. Sparkes' (2002) monograph, *Telling Tales in Sport and Physical Activity*, the edited collection by Dowling, Fitzgerald, and Flintoff (2012), and the recent text *Life Story Research in Sport* (2015) by Douglas and Carless (2015), all discuss narrative as a method of inquiry.

Whilst the broader field of sport research is embracing the narrative turn and grappling with the methodological and theoretical debates this brings, sport management is conspicuously absent from these discussions. However, the work of Cohen and Peachey (2015), Smith and Weed (2007), and Thompson, Potrac, and Jones (2015) goes some way in beginning to address this gap. As Smith and Sparkes (2012, p. 80) eloquently articulate, we "swim in sea of sporting stories and tales that we hear or read or listen to or see. As such, there is much to be gained in engaging in the debate that surrounds the narrative turn in other disciplines." This positional paper offers practitioners and scholars working in sport management the opportunity to begin to engage in these methodological debates. In tandem, we draw upon some sport management research we recently completed on behalf of The English Football Association (The FA) to better illustrate the points being made. As part of this research, non-fictional stories were used as one means of re-presenting the key findings. The paper begins by considering the notion of narrative inquiry, focusing specifically on narrative as stories. The paper then contextualises the research undertaken for The FA, the rationale for the research, and the multiple methods used to generate data. This is followed by an example of one story crafted from these data, that of 'The FA Tutor'. With reference to this story and The FA research, the paper concludes by offering our thoughts on the benefits and challenges stories bring to research and practice within sport management. We hope this paper challenges practitioners and scholars in the field to consider the value of adopting a storied approach to data dissemination.

2. Narrative inquiry

2.1. What is narrative inquiry?

Whilst there is much debate about what narrative inquiry is, Clandinin (2013) describes it as an overarching term that encompasses the activities involved in generating, analysing and re-presenting stories of life experiences. Narrative inquiry then can be considered as a methodology that informs the collection of data (methods), analysis (of texts) and dissemination (re-presentation). Similarly, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) distinguish between narrative inquiry as 'living', 'telling', 'retelling' and 'reliving'. In relation to living and telling, as researchers we ask people to share their experiences of life. To aid in this process, a range of methods can be drawn upon including ethnography, autoethnography, interviews, journals, diaries, memoirs, photographs, artefacts, blogs and field notes. These methods provide a means of generating 'texts'; that is, interpretations of an individual's social worlds and their life experiences. Through analysis these texts become 'retold' or re-presented in a variety of ways including ethnodrama, poetic representation, autoethnography, fictional or non-fictional

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stories. Re-presentation in this way contrasts with the kind of more traditional approach that is typically used in sport management research, whereby data are represented through a series of interview quotes.

2.2. The three commonplaces of narrative inquiry

Whether it is the adoption of particular methods for generating texts or re-presentation of the data through retelling, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) believe narrative inquiry consists of three commonplaces. First, the *temporality* of an event or person is considered in relation to the past, present and future. Here the event or person should not be seen in isolation but rather constituted within a temporal boundary. For example, the stories of frontline sports event staff reflecting on working with volunteers might consider interactions with volunteers during and after the event, and the previous volunteering experiences of the frontline staff. By accounting for this temporal dimension, the story becomes layered in a way that moves beyond merely description to become more explanatory.

The second commonplace is *sociability* and is concerned with personal and social conditions. Personal conditions include the feelings, hopes, desires and reactions of the individual. How did the frontline staff anticipate working with the volunteers and how did they respond to working with them? Social conditions refer to the context the individual occupies such as the environment they are situated within and other people contributing to the structuring of that setting. For the frontline event staff this might include understanding their role, the extent to which they had contact with the volunteers, and the nature of this contact.

The third commonplace is *place* and relates to where the event(s) occur. That is, the physical boundaries of place or places. Of course, place may change in relation to the temporal account. For the frontline staff, place may be the different areas of designation they and the volunteers are allocated to work, for example, in the stands, competition area, media zone, training venues, and the transport used to and from the event. When scaffolded together Connelly and Clandinin (2006) believe these three common places offer 'checkpoints' for the narrative inquirer. They note that whilst other qualitative inquiry may address one or more of these commonplaces, a narrative inquiry is the simultaneous exploration of all three. In this way, narrative inquiry can be considered as an overarching methodology that informs each stage of the research process. In the research presented in this paper we were guided by the thinking of Connelly and Clandinin (2006) particularly in relation to re-presenting through stories. Therefore we would not claim that our methodology in this project is narrative inquiry per se. Rather that we were guided by some of the principles of this approach, particularly in relation to the re-presentation of the data.

2.3. Narrative inquiry and stories

A key feature of narrative inquiry is the notion of stories, whether this is the stories 'lived' by research participants, the stories they tell through their sharing, or the stories that get retold (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). As Smith (2010, p. 87–88) highlights, stories are part of everyday life:

> . . . . we live *in, through*, and *out* of narratives. We *think* in story form, make *meaning* through stories, and make sense of our *experiences* via the stories provided by the *socioculture realms* we inhabit. We not only tell stories, but *do* things with them. Stories do things *to, on,* and *for* people that can make a *difference*. They help *guide action; constitute human realities*; and help frame *who we are* and *who we can be*. Further, stories are a key means by which we know and understand the world. They offer a way of *knowing* oneself and others.

It is through the continuous process of storytelling, stories we tell about ourselves, and others, and the stories told by others about ourselves, that we begin to make sense of who we are. In telling stories we can bring an order and structure to the multiplicity of fragmented, and at times conflicting, experiences that constitute our daily lives (Dowling, 2012; Wrench, 2015). Within a sport management context, for example, people tell stories all the time. Whether it is the frontline staff mentioned earlier, talking about working with event volunteers, or customers discussing their experiences of being a member of a large health club, or children talking about their favourite part of the day at an activity club. The stories emerging within and from these settings enable others to make sense of how the storyteller is understanding their particular experience(s).

Polkinghorne (1988, p. 7) describes narrative as 'story' as "a special type of discourse production [whereby] . . . . events and actions are drawn together into an organized whole by means of a plot." In addition to a plot, Dowling (2012) adds contexts and characters as the key features of a story that effectively seeks to connect with and inform its audience. Dowling, Garrett, lisahunter, and Wrench (2015, p. 931) argue that the aim of the 'storyteller' is to develop a dynamic framework that links together disconnected data in an "evocative, engaging and *explanatory* way." To help in this aspect, a series of literary techniques including characterisation, flash backs and detailed description can be used (Gilbourne, Jones, & Jordan, 2014). In this research, we would define our stories as non-fictional to acknowledge that the stories are crafted from the data generated with the research participants.

To illustrate retelling narrative as story we next discuss some research undertaken on behalf of The FA which led to the crafting of a series of stories that were created for dissemination purposes. To provide some context to this research we next offer a brief overview of the rationale underpinning the research and the methods utilised to achieve the research aims. Next,

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the ways in which data were analysed are outlined, focusing specifically on how this process contributes to the construction of the stories. We end this section with an illustrative example of one of the stories developed, that of 'The FA Tutor'.

3. Using stories in research: The Football Association's research

3.1. Research rationale

In 2014 The FA commissioned Leeds Beckett University to evaluate its Coaching Disabled Footballers' (CDF) course that has been running since 2004. The course takes place over one day (six hours) and is available to anyone holding The FA Level 1 coaching qualification. The FA runs around 50 courses per year through its County FAs, equating to approximately 600 participants. Typically, it attracts a broad range of participants with the majority actively involved in coaching. The course does not have an assessment element, and as such, participants do not pass or fail but receive an attendance certificate. After a decade of being delivered, The FA was keen to establish if the course was still fit for purpose in its content and current format. The FA stipulated a research focus on the experiences of those involved in the organising (FA Officers) and delivering of (FA Tutors), and participating in (community coaches) the course. To achieve this the following objectives were developed: (1) Examine the experiences of key stakeholders including FA Officers, Tutors and community coaches involved in the organisation and delivery of, and participation in the CDF course and (2) Explore the strengths and challenges of the course from the different perspectives of these key stakeholders.

To capture the experiences of these diverse stakeholders, a multi-method approach was designed in consultation with The FA and the research undertaken across five case study County FAs. These were chosen by The FA for their differences in size, location, and practice. In developing the research design we recognised the benefits a multi-method approach would bring including the generation of rich and diverse data. Moreover, we were mindful that through cross-checking the different data sources, 'crystallisation'[1] (Richardson, 2000) can occur uncovering similarities and differences in experiences, thoughts and opinions. We also used the findings from some of the methods to inform the development of later data collection. The various methods adopted to generate data included: (a) a retrospective national questionnaire to 4800 past CDF course participants; (b) interviews across the five case study County FAs with 16 course participants, four CDF Course Tutors, and five County FA Officers; (c) participation in and observation of two CDF courses; (d) creation of a secure Facebook group to collect additional data including posts and photographs from course participants; (e) a web presence audit of the five County FA websites, and (f) a benchmarking exercise on a number of national and international Football Associations and three other sport organisations.

The FA was instrumental in encouraging the use of a variety of methods, including what some may deem to be less conventional such as our participation in the CDF course and use of Facebook. It was as a result of these positive conversations with The FA that we suggested the idea of stories as one means of re-presenting data. We noted that stories could offer a useful means of bringing coherency to the diverse data generated through the multiple methods. The FA was extremely receptive to these ideas and thus melded stories became a key feature of our data dissemination strategy. A melded approach brings together the data generated from multiple respondents. In the case of this research, 'The FA Officer' story was crafted from the five FA County Officers' interviews, 'The community coach' story was created from the 16 course participants' interviews, and the story featured later in this paper, 'The FA Tutor', was generated from the data collected from the four FA Tutors. It is to the crafting of the stories and how these were developed through the analysis process that the discussion now turns.

3.2. Data analysis and crafting of stories

Data analysis was ongoing or iterative, with the findings generated by methods used early on in the research process informing the development of later methods (Smith & Sparkes, 2012). For example, the questionnaire was hosted through an on-line system which enabled the generation of a series of descriptive statistics. We examined these data, noting recurring patterns, trends and interesting features. These included motives for course attendance; levels of satisfaction with the course; areas in need of development; and how the course had been drawn upon in coaching practice on its completion. With the audit of the five County FA websites, a number of key features were examined and differences in practice across the websites highlighted in relation to the visibility of disability football; location of information; ease of accessibility; and levels of information.

The initial findings from the audit and the questionnaire were used alongside the observation data and corresponding field notes to inform the development of the three interview schedules for the FA Officers, FA Tutors, and the course participants. As such, the interviews became valuable tools in the crystallisation process as they provided openings to explore divergences in the preceding data as well as opportunities to confirm and discuss the similarities (Richardson, 2000). For example, differences emerged from the questionnaire findings in relation to thoughts about the length of the course, relevancy of course content, and the ways this is drawn upon in practice. It was these kinds of differences that could be

[1] Richardson (2000) uses this concept as it deconstructs a number of the assumptions associated with triangulation including that there are three sides, or angles, from which to approach the world and research; and that there is a valid truth that can be reached at a fixed point using three methods.

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explored further through the interviews with all stakeholders. Similarly, slight differences in course delivery identified through attendance at and observations of the CDF course were used to invite discussions from the FA Tutors. And the opinions of the FA Officers regarding disability football could be partially established by drawing upon the findings from the web audit.

The in-depth, rich interview data became the key point of reference in the construction of the stories as these data had been used to clarify and check previous findings. For example, in revisiting the audit, questionnaire, and observation data through the interview schedules, the interview data represented an amalgamation of all data generated so far. Thus, for 'The FA Tutor' melded story we drew on some of the features of Smith and Sparkes' (2012) holistic-content analysis. In relation to the four FA Tutor interviews this involved immersion in the material, reading and rereading the data and manual coding with initial categories until a pattern emerged. Using a reflexive research journal each of the researchers then independently wrote down their initial thoughts, including similarities across stories, contradictions and unusual incidents.

At this stage, interview data continued to be cross-referenced with other data using memos to articulate links and connections between the multiple sources. These multiple readings, alongside the memos, led to the development of more sophisticated and refined codes in the form of sub-themes emerging from the interviews which were interpreted by linking to theory. These were then clustered into themes. For example, "Changes to current provision" as a theme from the FA Tutor interviews was developed from the sub-themes of: "Changing the length of time"; "Learning disability content"; "Mental health issues content"; "Simulation"; "Including disabled people as football participants"; "Local information"; and "Post-course support". It was within these sub-themes that similarities and differences in the FA Tutors' opinions began to emerge. Of course, in a melded story that constitutes data from multiple respondents, differences in opinion must be reflected alongside the similarities to ensure individual diversity is represented. As Smith and Sparkes (2012, p. 94) argue, it is the job of analysts "to strive to keep stories intact, hear how multiple voices find expression within any single story."

In crafting a story, the storyteller (Smith & Sparkes, 2008) must not only analyse the data, but consider how the story is structured. Once again, in our crafting of these stories we drew on advice from colleagues immersed in the narrative genre. For example, the need to use a dynamic framework to connect disparate sources in an interesting and evocative way (Dowling et al., 2015). In so doing, a number of literary techniques can be utilised including flash backs and detailed description (Gilbourne et al., 2014). As discussed earlier, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) argue that narrative inquiry should consist of three commonplaces, temporality, sociability and place. Similarly, Dowling (2012) articulates a need for a context, plot and characters. Thus the crafting of a story requires a multi-layered approach whereby the various elements are scaffolded together. However, as noted by Smith and Sparkes (2012), there is no formula or a set of discrete steps to follow in the crafting of a story. Whilst analysis must be rigorous, the construction of the end product, the story, is also a craft.

Heeding the advice of Smith and Sparkes (2012) regarding holistic-form analysis, we again turned to our research journals to reflect on our initial notes. These developed over time through the use of theoretical notes and memos and as a result of conversations between the researchers who acted as critical friends. As these notes became more detailed, discussions began to revolve around plot development, characters, and context. For example, the themes emerging from the interviews were used to form the plot of the story; one that focuses on a Tutor's reflections of delivering a CDF course, and in particular emphasises aspects of the course that work and those that need changing. In this way, temporality is considered in relation to past delivery of the course and possible future developments. Whilst the main character is the Tutor, the course participants -Joe, the Country FA Officer, and the partially-sighted squad - all feature to add to the sociability of the story. Direct quotes from the interview data were woven into the storyline to reflect the language, feelings and reactions of the FA Tutors, whilst field notes from the observations were drawn upon to influence the place or context. Drafts of the stories were revised and edited until both researchers felt that in their retelling the stories reflected the chief purpose of the research through the content and were constructed in a way that the target audience, The FA, could relate to. We were mindful to consider the balance, in terms of length of the stories and indeed the wider final report. We took guidance from The FA on this issue but were also informed by our previous experiences of using stories with different audiences.

What follows is the story crafted from the perspective of 'The FA Tutor'. To contextualise for the reader, the story is set towards the end of the day after an FA Tutor has completed delivery of a CDF course. The FA Tutor has a half an hour break before commencing another football role in his life; that of coach to an elite level partially sighted squad. The FA Tutor is using this time to reflect back on the day, specifically thinking about his delivery on the CDF course, and the course's overall strengths and weaknesses. It is through these reflections that different FA Tutors' opinions are captured. As such, the story contains a series of flashbacks, interrupted by moments in the present.

3.3. The CDF Tutor's story

I watch the rain swirling in the wind that dances across the green expanse of pitches, the floodlights cutting their glare through the misty night. An involuntary shiver passes through me at the thought of heading outside. I wrap my hands tightly round the warm mug of tea, bringing it to my mouth until I can feel the steam warm and wet on my face. I glance at the clock above the sport centre's reception, 6.30 pm, 30 minutes before I need to brave the elements and put tonight's partially-sighted squad through their paces. I lean back in the well-worn sofa and close my eyes, my body suddenly tired from the day of tutoring on the Coaching Disabled Footballers' course. I close out the shrieks coming from the swimming pool behind me, and the repetitious clunk of the entrance barrier each time someone passes through, and reflect on the day's course. As is usual in this County, a good turnout of 20 (mostly) eager volunteers. Typically, a pretty mixed bunch with some young lads

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looking for opportunities as coaches, a few parents of disabled kids, couple of disabled participants which was useful, some involved in disability football already, as well as some mainstream coaches with no experience of disability, just making up their 'Professional Development' hours.

Knowing their backgrounds in advance was beneficial; helped me to plan the groupings accordingly for the morning's theory session. But, as always, the six hours was a little rushed, and it was a struggle to cover all the material. Think I was right in only touching upon the qualities of a good coach, 'cause they had all covered that in the Level 1 course. But I had to gloss over the stuff on player pathways and exit routes at the end and I wasn't happy about that. Think that needs to be local to your County. In fact, a basic leaflet from the Officer informing them there's this or that, like different opportunities and contacts would be good. I'll have a word with Joe, see if he can put something together that I can give out in future. I do wonder what some of them do with the course after. They need to get experience really and the leaflet could help facilitate that. People need to know what's going on, and disability football's not that well publicised; like some haven't a clue that we have elite squads and national teams like tonight's lads. In fact, something like a DVD or memory stick could be really effective post-course. I make a mental note to chat this through with my colleagues at the next County Tutor's meeting.

I stretch out my legs, trying to ease the stiffness in my joints, and take a sip of my cooling tea. It's been a long day, setting off at 7 to start the course at 9. And I won't be back home till at least 10 tonight, maybe later if the lads get their way and I have to join them for a drink after. I close my eyes and let my mind drift back to the events of the day. I guess it is what it is, the CDF course, a general introduction, a broad brush stroke in relation to the different areas you need to think about to include disability groups more fully in your coaching. It's good at dispelling myths, and at reducing people's initial fears of working with disabled people. Like, it helps to demonstrate how to work with disabled footballers and gets coaches discussing how they would adapt sessions for different impairments. But there's still more that could be done. A lot's changed in disability football in the last ten years, and in the way courses are delivered. Like, instead of someone standing at the front of the class saying this is how it's done, nowadays there's more emphasis on delivering inclusive, interactive workshops. And that's fantastic, a better way for participants to learn, but the downside is that it takes longer. That's not been factored into the course's six hours.

I reckon more practical would be useful 'cause you could deliver some of the theory side in that. And the participants want to have a go at working with people with impairments and that's missing in the current format. That's why today's course was particularly effective. We had Mike in the wheelchair and the other two coaches, both with hearing impairments. Them being there really opened the others' minds as to how you need to change your practices and the ways you communicate. It's hard to get those messages across with 20 able-bodied coaches. And I've always said it, the equipment could be better. Most of the stuff I've got I've bought myself over the years; sound headphones, crutches, blindfolds for simulation purposes. I know simulation's not ideal, but if managed correctly it can be very effective. Mind you, that's becoming more difficult with the explosion of disability groups that have come to the fore in recent years. I mentally check off the various groups I've worked with - mental health, Aspergers, autism, learning disabled, partially-sighted. The reality is, coaches are coming across this variety more and more in mainstream situations, but the CDF doesn't touch on them.

I guess the issue is if you introduce new content, what gives? And to be honest it's all relevant for me. It could be longer I guess but that might turn some people off. Then there's the cost to think about. At the minute I don't think that's a big issue for people 'cause it's just a nominal fee really, but you'd have to increase that quite a bit more if it became like a two day thing. It could become an introduction to something else? Like, bolt on a weekend and top up to a Level 1 Coaching Certificate in Disability Football that's recognised. My mind starts to race as I begin to think of the options. You could do a route for grassroots football and an elite route with specialisms, like bring in Cerebral Palsy and learning disabilities to what's already out there. You could argue that for those coaches who want to deliver at the elite level they need a Coaching Disabled Footballers Level 1 course. It could be delivered at St George's Park as a pilot with elite squads present to give it the 'wow' factor. Then again, you could argue that disability should be considered in any coaching and that the CDF should be integrated into the existing mainstream Level 1. It could definitely link in with Youth Modules 1 and 2 'cause there's overlap there around adaptation, flexibility, getting coaches to think about an individual's challenges. I need to suggest some of these ideas at the . . . . A hard slap on my back breaks my thoughts and I turn to see half my squad grinning, waiting expectantly. Feeling energised from my brief respite and time alone, I jump up, grabbing my waterproofs and bag of balls, ready to brave the elements, and to put these lot through their paces.

Next we offer a number of specific benefits that using stories like this one can bring to practitioners and scholars working within sport management.

4. The benefits and challenges of working with stories in sport management

4.1. The benefits of working with stories in sport management

As noted it is through storytelling that we gain an understanding of ourselves and others around us. Stories can help us reflect and ask questions about relationships and experiences situated within local, national and global contexts. As Dowling (2012, p. 39) suggests, people lead both individual and socially storied lives:

> Our individual stories say something not only about us as individuals but equally something about the context in which we live and work; micro stories about individual lives are therefore also stories about macro societal relations.

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In a more recent paper, she asserts that individual 'small stories' are inextricably connected to society's 'big stories' (Dowling et al., 2015). Gilbourne et al. (2014) elaborate, noting that individual experiences are subject to, and formed through, the power dynamics and social structures of wider society. As such, stories can provide an effective means of reflecting how decisions made at a societal and/or organisational level can play out at the micro level, influencing individual daily lived social realities. In the context of the Tutor's story, The FA's CDF course represents an organisational level decision to offer coach education around disability. This course is couched within a wider commitment The FA has towards inclusion as evident through policy, a specialist workforce, and the expansion of competitive structures and opportunities (The Football Association, 2015). Whilst the Tutor's story centralises the CDF course it also reflects others aspects of The FAs work, for example, the Tutor's involvement in coaching the partially sighted squad. How this course is delivered and experienced at a micro level is reflected through the storying of 'The FA Tutor'. One of the overarching objectives of this research was to explore the strength and challenges of the course. To this end, this story emphasises strengths associated with dispelling myths and reducing the fear of coaching disabled people. More broadly within sport management, stories can be utilised to highlight how societal changes in legislation around disability rights (associated with access) are responded to at a micro level by sports facility managers and other staff working in sports venues. These stories could also include the experiences of disabled users accessing these facilities. Similarly, stories can provide a means of illuminating how austerity measures imposed at a societal level by national governments are managed by those working in local government and with community projects affected by changes in government funding (micro level). Furthermore, a storied approach could shed light on how these kinds of financial impositions are experienced by participants of community sports programmes.

Stories also offer opportunities to capture lived experiences in a more authentic and embodied way. Arguably, traditional thematic analysis can be prone to disembodying individuals by separating out aspects of their lives through a series of dry, largely un-contextualised interview quotes (Dowling, 2012). By attending to the three commonplaces of temporality, sociability and place discussed earlier, the texts from the research participants enable a story to be crafted that is situated and embodied (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). In this way, stories can bring research participants to life through their talk, actions, and feelings. In so doing, it is claimed a good story stimulates the senses to evoke emotion (Dowling et al., 2015; Sparkes, 2002). This particular quality of stories has the potential to enable the reader to make connections with individuals with whom they believe they may have little in common. In making these kinds of connections, it is possible for the reader to begin to recognise and value different ways of knowing social life (Tsang, 2000).

'The FA Tutor's' story attempts to capture the thoughts of those involved at the customer interface within a coaching context. Moreover, the story offers some important insights into the challenges these practitioners encounter in the delivery of the CDF course framed within the busy and often pressured contexts of their everyday lives. Therefore, the story offers The FA a potential means for better understanding the experiences of practitioners, including the Tutors who are tasked with delivering this professional development. Of course we recognise that the extent to which someone connects, or not, with the story will differ from reader to reader. For example, some readers may connect with the story because they associate with the setting, they may have experience of coaching (people with a disability), be a coach educator, or have familiarity with the work of The FA. Similarly, other features of the characters in the story, such as gender, may contribute to the connectivity readers make. What connects one reader and another may be quite different and evoking this connection is a challenge for those attempting to work with stories. Given that we anticipated the stories we crafted were going to be disseminated to those working within The FA, we developed the stories with these stakeholders in mind. However, the extent to which these stories actually connect and appeal to this audience is something that becomes very individual to the reader and therefore can never be fully accounted for when crafting stories.

Relatedly, stories also provide opportunities for voices that are often silenced to be heard (Douglas & Carless, 2009; Stride, 2014), and thus serve as powerful tools in challenging persuasive majoritarian or master stories. Majoritarian stories contribute to those dominant discourses within society that reinforce particular ways of being (White, male, middle/upper class, heterosexual, nondisabled) "as natural or normative points of reference" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 28). These stories serve to maintain the status quo, leaving positions of power and common practices unquestioned. For example, within a footballing context in England it is often professional, White, male players or male coaches of non-disabled players who court the most attention and dominate thinking about what football is and who it serves. Alternative, or counter, stories open up the possibilities to contest the master story and in this way trouble stereotypes that justify the subordination of particular groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Montecinos, 1995). We recognise 'The FA Tutor' story offered earlier to some extent reinforces dominant discourses within football that presume it is males who hold roles like coaches or tutors. However, the story goes some way to disrupting the assumed status quo by moving away from a professional football setting and drawing attention to players with disabilities and coaches that support them. Within the story the ethnicity and disability status of the Tutor are not revealed; we purposefully crafted the story in this way as we anticipated this may trigger valuable points for discussion around issues of Whiteness and ableism (Berger & Lorenz, 2016; Hylton, 2016). In providing a platform for silenced voices, stories can begin to address what Sparkes (1995) terms the 'crisis of representation' within sport management teaching, research and practice. We would argue this is particularly important in light of ongoing observations made regarding the absence of women and members of black and minority ethnic communities holding key academic and strategic leadership or management positions in sport (Aitchison, 2005; Ransdell, 2014; Sosa & Sagas, 2008; Strittmatter & Skirstad, 2014).

A further benefit of utilising stories for dissemination concerns the methodological contributions they can make. Indeed, in our research we have found stories are an effective means of capturing, and weaving together, the plurality of data sources

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generated from multiple collection methods. In so doing, we believe stories can bring a coherency to diverse data sources. For example, within The FA study, observations and soundbites gathered during two CDF courses, interview quotes from FA Officers, Tutors, and course participants, posts on Facebook, and quantitative data collected from the online questionnaire and benchmarking exercise were melded together and subsequently captured through the stories generated for The FA.

We have attempted to outline a number of benefits associated with adopting a storytelling approach to re-present data. We also see the merits of using this approach as it provides a resource that has the potential to open (our) minds to diverse perspectives. However, in taking this position we are cognisant that working with stories is not straightforward. Indeed, this genre is considered contentious in some quarters and continues to stimulate heated debate within sport and, indeed, other disciplines (Gard, 2014; Gilbourne & Jones, 2014; Gilbourne et al., 2014; Wellard, 2014). With these debates in mind we next consider the challenges of working with stories in sport management.

4.2. The challenges of working with stories in sport management

A key challenge for those using stories is to persuade other practitioners and scholars that this is a legitimate form of data re-presentation. In saying this, we recognise that we live in a world that highly values quantitatively-orientated information. Moreover, we acknowledge that within sport management settings, quantitatively-orientated benchmarks, Key Performance Indicators and audits are of paramount importance to the effective planning and delivery of products, services and programmes. For example, sport event organisers may choose to analyse consumer spending statistics in order to better plan the purchasing and marketing of products at future events. Sport facility managers frequently complete audits focusing on facility usage including gathering quantitative data on the demographics of sports participants. And, sport development officers routinely conduct post-programme participant satisfaction surveys. In these sport management settings, when presented with 'hard facts' it is easy to see how stories could be considered as far less straightforward and helpful. The more subtle and nuanced data that stories provide can be open to interpretation, and less easy to decipher. In this situation we are conscious that sport practitioners may find it more difficult to plan or strategise in relation to the subsequent actions to put in place.

In advocating the use of narrative inquiry and more specifically stories in dissemination we are not suggesting these stories replace the use or reporting of other quantitative or qualitative data in sport management. Rather, we would argue that they can be used in combination to compliment and extend our knowledge and understandings. For example, stories in data collection and dissemination can provide valuable information for sport event organisers regarding the complexity of the decision making process. More specifically, the ways in which socio-economic status intersect with other identity markers, feelings and emotions to influence and complicate what some consider a relatively simple, straightforward act. For sport development officers evaluating a programme of activities, stories add depth to numerically orientated customer satisfaction data. Here, stories could bring to life the daily experiences of those participating in the programme including their highs and lows, motivations, and the social and physical aspects of the programme, in ways that are difficult to quantify and capture through a series of descriptive statistics. Within the report presented to The FA, we feel that the use of stories for dissemination sitting alongside the other forms (including numerical data tables, thematic quotes, screenshots of webpages and Facebook entries) brought to life the experiences of those involved in the organisation and delivery of, and participation in the CDF course in more authentic and embodied ways.

Related to this first challenge is the debate regarding the meaningful dissemination through stories to practitioners and scholars. Indeed, there is an ongoing debate regarding the extent to which the story should be left to speak for itself or an interpretation offered. On this issue it could be argued that stories have the potential to be interpreted in different ways and the researcher's job is to offer some form of explanation for what is being presented. In his critique of Gilbourne et al.'s (2014) auto-ethnographic tale "Travel Writer," Wellard (2014, p. 110) argues,

> Can we automatically assume that the reader will be able to recognise the multi-layered forms of experience? The decision within such a narrative 'story' to leave the unpacking to the reader becomes more of a problem if one of the intentions is to challenge conventional thinking. In many cases, the conventional needs to be exposed so that it can be critically challenged.

In working with stories we have, in Wellard's (2014) terms, 'unpacked' the stories on occasions and at other times left them to be interpreted by the readers. For example, in our work for The FA, the three stories crafted were not left to speak for themselves. In combination with other data, an interpretation of the stories were provided and from these a number of recommendations offered. We acknowledge that for those working in The FA, like other sport management practitioners, these stories could be read and interpreted differently. We also recognise that for these interpretations to be useful, they must be made in conjunction with other available evidence. And, the actions emerging from these interpretations must be framed within wider political, social and economic dimensions. We are also aware that for those working in sport management, time is precious and opportunities to ponder the potential meanings of a story are likely to be a luxury. For those tasked with undertaking research in sport management there should be a duty to ensure data re-presentation is accessible and in a format that will enable practitioners to act upon this. Having said this, we also believe that in some contexts stories can be left untouched and not 'unpacked' by the researcher. In our work with decision makers in sports organisations, as well as within our sport management teaching, we have used the interpretative nature of stories as a valuable resource to generate debate and discussions. By providing opportunities to work with, share, and consider the

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opinions of others, this approach can support reflexivity, a mutual appreciation of diverse perspectives and generate possible actions, ideas, and solutions to the problems and challenges encountered in practice.

A final challenge we want to highlight concerns the process of writing stories. These stories require persuasive narrative skills and the ability to craft engaging dialogue that stimulates the senses and provokes critical reflection by the reader (Dowling et al., 2015; Sparkes, 2002). In other words, stories need to be well written and convincing. And herein lies a challenge for those wishing to engage with stories as a means of re-presenting data. Like the development of any new skill, the ability to write an effective and persuasive story takes time and effort. For many scholars this creates an additional pressure beyond the daily duties of teaching, administration, applying for grants, and engaging in other scholarly activities. As many of us can attest, finding time to engage in research can be difficult, an endeavour that is further complicated when we ask ourselves to think and behave differently in the ways we collect data and disseminate findings. Yet, we believe it is worth the time and effort to experiment, and push the boundaries of traditional methods of writing. In no way are we suggesting that the story crafted for The FA and presented in this paper is quality literary prose. We are attempting to learn the craft of writing stories, and see it as part of our ongoing professional development that enables us to engage with the sports industry.

5. Conclusions

This paper has sought to connect with practitioners and scholars in sport management regarding the utility of crafting stories as a means of re-presenting data. We have outlined a number of benefits and challenges to adopting this approach. Despite these challenges, which are in part associated with sport management's more positivistic outlook, we do not think these are insurmountable. We would encourage practitioners and scholars in sport management to perhaps experiment with stories, alongside more traditional forms of re-presenting data. Adopting this strategy could minimalise the risks associated with embracing a new and unfamiliar form of data re-presentation. Moreover, attempts to work with stories in combination with other more traditional forms of data re-presentation are likely to be fruitful in other ways, and some of these are discussed next.

Stories offer a number of practical uses for a range of stakeholders in sport management including students, academic staff, researchers, facility managers, and decision makers. For example:

- Stories could be used with undergraduate and postgraduate students of sport management in various ways. For instance, introducing students to alternative forms of re-presenting data as part of a research methods type programme. Alternatively, stories can be used in other sport management areas to introduce students to the diverse populations they will be working with, and their experiences of sport.
- Academic staff and researchers in sport management should be encouraged to think more laterally about how their research is disseminated. This could include stories and other innovative forms of data re-presentation (such as ethnodrama, poetic representation and autoethnography) that may enhance the accessibility of the research findings for a wider audience.
- For those responsible for the commissioning of research and evaluation work in sport management, we would encourage the inclusion of stories as a legitimate and worthwhile means of disseminating research. Either on their own, or in combination with other more traditional outputs, they offer an effective means of capturing the lived experiences of those being researched.
- Sports practitioners, like facility managers, could use stories when leading professional development workshops. For example, when educating staff about the experiences of disabled and/or female users, stories can assist with broader understandings of the practical barriers to participation but also of personal attitudes and experiences.
- Decision makers in sports organisations could draw upon stories to help in the development of strategy. For example, stories written from the perspectives of disengaged customers or employees could help strategic teams to generate critical questions around current practice and conceive of alternative ideas. In turn, this could enable more informed decision making, and an effective course of action.

Like Frisby (2005), we advocate drawing upon the critical social sciences to extend knowledge and understanding in sport management. For example, adopting narrative inquiry provides an effective vehicle for exploring the interconnections between societal issues, inequalities and sport management practice. Indeed, the story featured within this paper highlights some of the practical issues and challenges that emerge when attempting to consider disabled participants and their coaches within football. It is these kinds of societal issues that those working in sport management still need to grapple with and more effectively understand. To aid in these endeavours, stories have much to offer, and we encourage all in sport management to explore the possibilities they can bring.

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