

---

# Validity Issues in Narrative Research

Donald E. Polkinghorne

*University of Southern California, Los Angeles*

Attention to the judgments about the validity of research-generated knowledge claims is integral to all social science research. During the past several decades, knowledge development has been split into two communities: conventional researchers and reformist researchers. Narrative research is positioned within the reformist community. The two communities use different kinds of data and employ different analytic processes. In both communities, researchers develop arguments to convince readers of the validity of their knowledge claims. Both need to respond to threats to validity inherent in their designs. The threats particular to narrative research relate to two areas: the differences in people's experienced meaning and the stories they tell about this meaning and the connections between storied texts and the interpretations of those texts.

**Keywords:** *interpretation; narrative; research; validity*

Narrative research is the study of stories. Stories are ubiquitous, appearing as historical accounts, as fictional novels, as fairy tales, as autobiographies, and other genres. Stories are also told by people about themselves and about others as part of their everyday conversations. In addition to the stories that appear in people's ordinary conversations, narrative researchers study stories they solicit from others: oral stories obtained through interviews and written stories through requests. The study of stories and the "storying" process is undertaken by various academic disciplines including literary criticism, history, philosophy, organizational theory, and social science. Within social science, stories are studied by anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, and educators. It is the purpose of this article to inquire about the place of the study of stories in social science. In particular, my concern is the relation of the study of stories to the idea of validity.

## Validity and Two Social Science Communities

In the beginning decades of the 20th century, the community of social scientists had developed somewhat of a consensus about what counts as evidence and, thus, what kind of knowledge claims could be validated. However, in the early 1970s, a reform movement began to form under the epithet *qualitative inquiry* (Schwandt, 2000). The theme of the reform movement is that there are important aspects of the personal and social realms that cannot be investigated within the limitations of what has been conventionally accepted as evidence and arguments used to justify or validate knowledge claims.

The reformists, who include narrative researchers, posit that evidence, such as personal descriptions of life experiences, can serve to issue knowledge about neglected, but significant areas, of the human realm. In addition, many reformists have been influenced by epistemologies that question “realist” assumptions about knowledge. Over the decades the reformists have become a community that has “its own journals, academic associations, conferences, and university positions, as well as the support of publishers” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 189). Thus, contemporary social science now consists of two communities—conventional social science and reformed social science. Although there is some overlap in the membership of the communities, and although there is a general mutual acceptance between them, on the whole, social scientists give their allegiance to one or the other community.

I locate myself within the reformists’ community, although I am not an opponent of conventional social science research. The issue of validity is an overarching one and central to research conducted by both communities. Although the title of this article is “Validity Issues in Narrative Research” and is in a volume devoted to narrative research issues, the themes developed in the article are applicable to most research carried out by the reformers. Narrative research is but one approach in the repertoire of reformists’ inquiries. (To add a personal comment, narrative research’s attention to the temporal unfolding of human lives, gives it a special place in the reform repertoire.)

In the main, social science has passed through the “paradigm wars” between the two communities, yet there remain elements of nonacceptance of the reformists’ efforts. Two recent federal government documents have given support to the notion that social science should focus on producing the kind of knowledge that is advocated by the conventional social science community. The National Research Council, which advises the federal government on funding research, recently issued the report *Scientific Research*

in *Education* (Shavelson & Towne, 2002). It placed value on the kind of research that produces claims about cause-and-effect relationships that are generalizable to populations. It recommended that funding focus on producing the kind of knowledge claims that answers questions about “what works” (p. 108). The report recognized a limited role for claims based on qualitative interviews and document analysis. It stated: “They [qualitative descriptions] cannot (unless combined with other methods) provide estimates of the likelihood that an educational approach might work under other conditions or that they have identified the right underlying causes” (p. 108). The report assumes a realist epistemology and rejects the postmodern approach that is one of the epistemological positions advanced by some social science reformists.

We assume that it is possible to describe the physical and social world scientifically so that, for example, multiple observers can agree on what they see. Consequently, we reject the postmodernist school of thought when it posits that social science can never generate objective or trustworthy knowledge. (p. 25)

Grover Whitehurst (2003), assistant secretary of education, proposed that research for the No Child Left Behind legislation be limited primarily to randomized trial (true experimental) research that produces knowledge claims about what interventions work in education. He proposed that not all evidence is created equal. At the bottom of his list of credible evidence are case studies and anecdotes. He assumed that the knowledge of value to education is the kind that claims that certain interventions can cause desired effects and can be generalized across settings.

Nevertheless, general publications on evaluation research (Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Patton, 2002; Stringer, 1996) propose an increasingly important role for interviews and personal stories in evaluation research. Even the *Scientific Research in Education* (Shavelson & Towne, 2002) recognizes a role for “naturalistic research paradigms” in which researchers “observe, analyze, and integrate into the research process unexpected, constantly changing, and other potentially influential aspects of what is being studied” (p. 82). In some sections the report, written by a committee, recognizes the value of reformists’ studies; in more sections it clearly supports the conventionalists’ approach.

Typically, the issue of validity is approached by applying one’s own community’s protocols about what, in its view, is acceptable evidence and appropriate analysis to the other community’s research. In these cases, the usual conclusion is that the other community’s research is lacking in support

for its knowledge claims. I think this cross-community approach is unproductive and leads to a dead end because each community is making different kinds of knowledge claims. It is my position that different kinds of knowledge claims require different kinds of evidence and argument to convince readers that the claim is valid. Nevertheless, there is general understanding of the concept of validation that is applicable, and perhaps acceptable, to narrative researchers and conventional researchers. Both communities are involved in validating their knowledge claims, and in a general way their validating procedures parallel one another.

### The Idea of Validity

The general notion of validity concerns the believability of a statement or knowledge claim. Validity is not inherent in a claim but is a characteristic given to a claim by the ones to whom the claim is addressed. Sometimes people grant validity to a statement simply because of the authority of the person who makes it. However, for judgments about the validity of knowledge claims to have scientific merit, it is required that they are based on the weight of the evidence and argument offered in support of a statement or knowledge claim. The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that the etymology of *valid* is the Latin word *validus*, which meant strong, powerful, and effective; its definition of the English word *valid* includes: “Of arguments, proofs, assertions, etc.: Well founded and fully applicable to the particular matter or circumstances; sound and to the point, against which no objection can fairly be brought” (Simpson, 2002, n.p.). The *Encarta Dictionary* defines *valid* as “Justifiable: having a solid foundation or justification; e.g., It’s a perfectly valid argument” (Microsoft, 2003, n.p.). Thus, a conclusion is valid when there is sufficient evidence and/or reasons to reasonably believe it is so. The concept of validity is a “prototype” concept (Rosch, 1978), rather than a definitional concept (Murphy, 2002). Thus, there are degrees of validity rather than a claim being determined to be either valid or not valid. A degree of validity or confidence is given to a claim that is proportionate to the strength and power of the argument used by a researcher to solicit readers’ commitments to it.

Thus, a statement or knowledge claim is not intrinsically valid; rather, its validity is a function of intersubjective judgment. A statement’s validity rests on a consensus within a community of speakers. The validation process takes place in the realm of symbolic interaction, and validity judgments make use of a kind of communicative rationality that is nonrule governed

that differs from rule governed purposive-rationality (Habermas, 1981/1984). Habermas (1981/1984) proposed that for communicative rationality to produce consensus about the validity of a claim, it must approach the ideal in which only the cogency or soundness of argument and its warrants are allowed to influence the judgment. However, in the actual performance of validity judgments, the background beliefs and assumptions of different communities affect what they accept as legitimating evidence and sound reasoning. For example, a community that believes that only directly observable facts are adequate to support the validity of a claim would hold that no claim about people's mental lives could be justified or valid.

In spite of differing assumptions, I expect that both social science communities adhere to the general notion that judgments about the validity of a knowledge claim depend on the force and soundness of the argument in support of the claim. The community differences are about what counts as acceptable evidence and reasoned argument. It is the position of the reformers that what counts as evidence and what is acceptable as reasoned argument needs to be expanded so that knowledge claims about the understandings of human experiences can be included in social science. Validation of claims about understandings of human experience requires evidence in the form of personally reflective descriptions in ordinary language and analyses using inductive processes that capture commonalities across individual experiences. Validation of claims about relationships among variables or about causal effects on groups can make use of evidence in the form of scores and analyses using statistical processes. Because of the types of knowledge claims the two communities propose, it is important that a match holds between the evidence and analyses used to justify the different types of claims. It is not that the two communities necessarily hold different general ideas of what validation is; rather, they are seeking to give justification of validation to two different types of claims.

Conventional social science research makes claims that an instrument measures variations among participants in a theoretical construct. It attempts to produce convincing or validating evidence that the instrument's content accurately samples the kinds of things that make up the construct (the content validity); that its measurements are consistent with other instruments which measure the same construct (criterion-related validity), and that the instrument is actually measuring the concepts and qualities of the construct (construct validity; Isaac & Michael, 1987). It also makes claims that a particular intervention is the cause of measured results. The claimed results are that the mean scores from sample groups of people most likely did not occur by chance. To justify these kinds of claims, it attempts to eliminate

all possible explanations other than the intervention that could account for the measured results (internal validity; Campbell & Stanley, 1963). It also makes claims that its findings apply not only to the participants who were examined but also to all those in a comparable population. It uses randomized selection of participants and statistical procedures to convince readers of the validity of these generalized claims.

It is not the purpose of this article to argue about the sufficiency of the evidence and arguments used in conventional research to convince readers of the validity of some of their knowledge claims. Whether or not readers are convinced that a knowledge claim is justified is a function of their assessment of the power of its supporting argument. Not being convinced of the validity of a proposed knowledge claim occurs within both communities, and across communities. It is my position that what makes for a valid knowledge claim is dependent on the kind of claim that is made. Thus, if the claim is that an intervention causes changes in scores, then the claim is valid if the evidence and argument presented convinces me that the claim is justified. If the claim is that a person's story describes the anguish that the person has experienced about a personal rejection, then I also look to the supporting evidence and argument given by the researcher.

## **Validation of Narrative Research Claims**

I have been proposing that validating knowledge claims is not a mechanical process but, instead, is an argumentative practice. The purpose of the validation process is to convince readers of the likelihood that the support for the claim is strong enough that the claim can serve as a basis for understanding of and action in the human realm. Narrative research issues claims about the meaning life events hold for people. It makes claims about how people understand situations, others, and themselves.

Narrative researchers undertake their inquiries to have something to say to their readers about the human condition. Their efforts are not simply for their own private consumption. The knowledge claims they produce are meant to be taken seriously by their readers. This requires that they provide sufficient justification to their readers for the claims they make. Readers should be able to follow the presented evidence and argument enough to make their own judgment as to the relative validity of the claim. Thus, narrative researchers, in the development and emergence of their research activity, need to consider and anticipate the kind of evidence and argument

the research performance will yield to justify readers' acceptance of the plausibility of the resulting claims. And in their arguments, they need to anticipate and respond to questions readers may have about the acceptability of their claims.

Social science research reports are structured to present an argument for their knowledge claims. The research itself is carried out to gather evidence from which a claim can be generated. The report serves a rhetorical function; its purpose is to convince readers of the validity of the proposed claims. The report needs to organize and present the evidence and its interpretation to persuade its readers. Thus, the report is not simply a description or recapitulation of the research performance. The traditional report format presents its argument in four sequenced sections (Introduction, Method, Results, and Discussion sections). Bazerman (1987) says this rhetorical format originated to present arguments for claims proposed by behavioral research. Although many reformist researchers have maintained this format in presenting their arguments, I believe that adhering to this traditional format limits the strength of argument that narrative researchers can produce.

The general idea of validity allows for gradations in the confidence readers can have on proposed knowledge claims. Validity judgments do not yield simple acceptance or nonacceptance responses. Instead, they are about the likelihood or probability that the claim is so. The statistical analyses used in conventional research produce calculated gradations of the limits of confidence readers can be expected to have in proposed knowledge claims. Given the complex and changing characteristics of the human realm, narrative researchers do not ask readers to grant validity to their claims only when they reach a level of near certainty about a claim. Readers are asked to make judgments on whether or not the evidence and argument convinces them at the level of plausibility, credibleness, or trustworthiness of the claim. Researchers, thus, should not argue for a level of certainty for their claims beyond that which is possible to conclude from the type of evidence they gather and from the attributes of the realm about which they are inquiring.

Perelman (1982) provides guidelines for arguments that narrative researchers can employ for their claims. In his study of persuasive arguments, he found that these arguments have no predetermined structure. Persuasive arguments lead readers through a progression of evidence (quotations from the collected text) and explanations of why other interpretations (which may have been tried during the research process) are not as adequate as the presented interpretative claims. The thought procedures that informed the interpretation of the meaning of the storied texts can be presented. For example, the researcher can

defend the appropriateness of the meaning attributed to the words and phrases of the text by providing the context in which they were made; or the researcher can describe ways in which his or her own background experiences produced understandings through interaction with the text.

Perelman (1982) also noted that arguments have four primary characteristics, (a) they proceed informally, not according to the forms and rules of strict deduction and induction; (b) they are always addressed to audiences for the purpose of inducing or increasing the audience's adherence to the claim presented; (c) they nearly always involve ambiguity because their language is inevitably equivocal in some degree and because the terms that are available are often open to more than a single interpretation; and (d) they seek a degree of acceptance of a claim, not a total and irrevocable acceptance. Toulmin, in *Uses of Argument* (1958), provided another description of the general structures of a good argument. He says that the conclusion needs to be grounded in evidence, the evidence in support of the conclusion needs to be cited, the warrant connecting the evidence to the conclusion needs to be spelled out, and support for this warrant needs to be given. These characteristics and structures of argument provide useful approaches to the construction of persuasive narrative research reports.

In addition to argumentation, Perelman (1982) described a second rhetorical vehicle that is sometimes employed to justify conclusions. He termed this second vehicle *demonstration*. He described demonstrations as rhetorical processes grounded in the assumptions of formal logic and mathematical reasoning. In demonstrations it is adherence to the rules of calculation and logic that "demonstrate" the correctness of a conclusion. The "validity" of a "demonstrated" conclusion is correct whether or not an audience judges it to be so. However, demonstrations depend on commitments to certain axioms and principles whose appropriateness for developing claims about the human condition is questionable (Polkinghorne, 1983). In any case, the storied evidence of narrative research is not of a form susceptible to "demonstrative" rhetoric. The rhetoric used by narrative researchers to convince readers of the validity of their claims is properly the type of argumentation described by Perelman.

Narrative research, as well as conventional research, most often involves two performances: (a) the collection of evidence and (b) the analysis or interpretation of the evidence. Narrative researchers frequently move between these two performances choosing further sources of evidence based on needs derived from interpretations of the already gathered evidence. Narrative researchers need to argue for the acceptance of the validity of the collected evidence and the validity of the offered interpretation.



## Validation of the Assembled Narrative Texts

In narrative and conventional inquiry, researchers need to address the validity of the evidence they have gathered. In conventional research, the issue is the question of how well the scores produced by instruments are representative of the intended construct. In narrative research, the concern is clarification of what the storied text is intended to represent. Are the assembled texts understood to reflect their author's lifeworld? Are they the product of a researcher–author interaction and represent a co-construction? Are they distorted memories or projections about past events and happenings? For the reader to make an informed judgment about claims resting on the textual evidence, narrative researchers need to spell out their understandings of the nature of their collected evidence.

In the main, narrative researchers assemble storied texts that they analyze for the meaning they express. Evidence in the form of storied texts differs in kind from evidence in the form of scores or public observations. On the one hand, this difference is the strength of narrative evidence because it allows for the presentation of the meaning life events have for people. On the other hand, this difference lends support for conclusions in a different manner than scores. Storied evidence is gathered not to determine if events actually happened but about the meaning experienced by people whether or not the events are accurately described. The “truths” sought by narrative researchers are “narrative truths,” not “historical truths” (Spence, 1982). Storied texts serve as evidence for personal meaning, not for the factual occurrence of the events reported in the stories. Yet the meanings reported by the stories are responses to life events, whose descriptions need not be discounted wholesale. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) described a “middle-course” in understanding storied texts.

We do not advocate total relativism that treats all narratives as texts of fiction. On the other hand, we do not take narratives at face value, as complete and accurate representations of reality. We believe that stories are usually constructed around a core of facts or life events, yet allow a wide periphery for freedom of individuality and creativity in selection, addition to, emphasis on, and interpretation of these “remembered facts. (p. 8)

The storied descriptions people give about the meaning they attribute to life events is, I believe, the best evidence available to researchers about the realm of people's experience. Nevertheless, they have limitations and threats to their validity of which narrative researchers need to recognize in making interpretations and in arguing for support of their knowledge

claims. The recognition of threats to the validation of research claims is not unique to narrative research, however. Campbell and Stanley (1963) developed a list of possible threats to the validity of knowledge claims produced in conventional social science. Examples of the threats to the internal validity of experimental research include the effects of prior testing on the scores of subsequent testing, biases resulting from differential selection of participants for comparison groups, and the differential loss of participants from the comparison groups. A comparable list of threats to the external validity or generalization of knowledge claims.

The validity threats arise in narrative research because the languaged descriptions given by participants of their experienced meaning is not a mirrored reflection of this meaning. Participants' stories may leave out or obscure aspects of the meaning of experiences they are telling about. The validity issue about the evidence of assembled texts is about how well they are understood to express the actual meaning experienced by the participants. The disjunction between a person's actual experienced meaning and his or her storied description has four sources: (a) the limits of language to capture the complexity and depth of experienced meaning, (b) the limits of reflection to bring notice to the layers of meaning that are present outside of awareness, (c) the resistance of people because of social desirability to reveal fully the entire complexities of the felt meanings of which they are aware, and (d) the complexity caused by the fact that texts are often a co-creation of the interviewer and participant. A subsection will be devoted to each of these four sources.

1. Experienced meaning is more complex and layered than the concepts and distinctions inherent in languages. Although the meaning people experience about a situation is influenced by the conceptual structures inherent in their language, the experience itself is more intricate than can be articulated in language. To serve a communicative function, the structure of a language is limited to a commonly understood set of symbols representing concepts and categories and to a commonly held grammar that limits the kind of relationships that can be expressed among its concepts. Gendlin (1997) described the texture of experiential meaning as "more than conceptual patterns (distinctions, differences, comparisons, similarities, generalities, schemes, figures, categories, cognitions, cultural and social forms)" (p. 3).

The articulated descriptions by participants of their experiential meaning takes on a language-imposed structure and on the simplification and abstraction required to make use of the concepts and words offered by a language. To the extent that a language allows metaphorical and analogical expressions, descriptions convey more of felt meaning's complexity

than do literal expressions. Interviewers can assist participants to display the intricacy of their experiences by encouraging the use of figurative expressions. (Ricoeur, 1984, proposed that the narrative form itself is a figurative, not literal, expression.)

2. Another reason that felt meanings about a situation are always greater than what can be said about them is that not all of the meaning one has about a situation is available in awareness. Experienced meaning is not simply a surface phenomenon; it permeates through the body and psyche of participants. However, participants are able to articulate only that portion of meaning that they can access through reflection. As Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) described it, it is as if participants are asked to shine the light of reflection into a well. The light only carries so far, and the well is deeper than the light can penetrate. This deeper portion remains in the dark and, thus, cannot be observed. Freud, among others, has drawn attention to the unconscious and preconscious dimensions of experiential meaning.

Interviewers can help participants bring more of their experienced meaning into awareness than appears in an initial reflection. If a participant stays with his or her reflective gaze, deeper aspects of the experience will begin to appear in awareness and become reportable. Thus, interviewers need to allow time for participants to explore reflectively their felt meanings. Participants are more in touch with the meaning of their life situations than is first apparent. Focused listening and exploration can bring to the fore more of the intricate multiplicity of an experienced meaning.

3. People are often resistant to revealing self-explorations of their feelings and understandings to others, especially strangers. What is revealed is frequently meant to project a positive self-image to others; thus, participants' descriptions may have filtered out those parts of their experiences that they want to keep to themselves or that they believe will present a socially undesirable self-portrait. In many instances, however, participants will be more open to sharing their experienced meanings if they trust that the interviewer is open to accept their felt meanings without judgment.

Seidman (1991) holds that it is difficult to overcome the hesitancy of participants to reveal themselves in a single interview. He recommends that participants be interviewed at least 3 times so that over time participants can gain confidence and trust in the interviewer. Delimited responses given in the first interview, when the participant is unsure of the interviewer, may give way in later interviews to more open responses. Time between interviews also provides time for participants to reflect and deepen their subsequent responses.

4. Texts generated by interviews are not simply productions of participants. They are creations of an interaction between interviewers and participants.

The text is an artifact of the interviewer's agenda and the tone of the interviewer's demeanor. Mishler (1986) outlined the many ways in which interviewers affect participants' responses. The gender, the clothing, the accent and speech pattern, among other attributes of interviewers are used by participants to read what responses are expected. Participants attend to the interviewer's body movements and voice intonations for indications of whether their responses are acceptable.

The designated roles of interviewer and participant serve to place the interviewer in charge of the course an interview follows. Because interview texts are co-created, interviewers need to guard against simply producing the texts they had expected. By assuming an open listening stance and carefully attending to the unexpected and unusual participant responses, they can assist in ensuring that the participant's own voice is heard and the text is not primarily an interviewer's own creation. It is the interviewer's task to empower participants by acknowledging that they are the only ones who have access to their experienced meaning.

Because stories are simulations of participants' meaning, and not the meaning itself, these four threats to the validity of interview-generated evidence cannot be eliminated. The task of the researcher is to produce articulations that lessen the distance between what is said by participants about their experienced meaning and the experienced meaning itself. Arguments need to be presented to reviewers and readers to convince them that the ensemble of storied portrayals, although only partial, does not overly distort participants' meaning. Confidence in the texts can be induced by researchers' descriptions of how they dealt with the four sources of disjunction between participants' experienced meaning and the languaged text. Validation of generated texts can also be improved by use of the iterative process of returning to participants to gain clarification and further exploration of questions that arise during the interpretative portion of the research. Also, generated texts can be given to participants for their check on whether the description captures the essential features of the meaning they felt; if it does not, they can suggest alterations or expansions of the text to more closely display their meaning.

### **Validity of the Interpretations of Narrative Texts**

Not all narrative research includes an explicit interpretative section. The produced finding is held out as the stories themselves. The stories alone are

revealing enough to provide insight into the variety of lived experiences among the participants. The validity of the story is attested to by its rich detail and revealing descriptions.

In narrative research that includes a section devoted to the interpretation of the assembled stories, researchers need to justify their interpretations for the reader. The general purpose of an interpretative analysis of storied texts is to deepen the reader's understanding of the meaning conveyed in a story. An interpretation is not simply a summary or précis of a storied text. It is a commentary that uncovers and clarifies the meaning of the text. It draws out implications in the text for understanding other texts and for revealing the impact of the social and cultural setting on people's lives. In some cases, narrative interpretation focuses on the relationships internal to a storied text by drawing out its themes and identifying the type of plot the story exemplifies; in other cases it focuses on social and cultural environment that shaped the story's life events and the meaning attached to them.

In a manner similar to the Discussion section of conventional research, narrative research extends the understanding of a story by contextualizing it. Where interpretation in conventional research offers an explanation of the implications of the results of its statistical analyses, narrative interpretation often develops implications by comparing and contrasting assembled stories with one another or with other forms of social science literature. The development of narrative interpretations is less rule derived and mechanical than that often found in conventional research. Instead, they are creative productions that stem from the researcher's cognitive processes for recognizing patterns and similarities in texts.

Schwandt (2000) noted that there are two different major positions that inform interpretation in reformists' research. One position, which he terms the *Verstehen* approach, holds that "it is possible for the interpreter to transcend or break out of her or his historical circumstances in order to reproduce the meaning or intention of the actor" (p. 192). The other position, philosophical hermeneutics, holds that the interpreter encounters a text from within his or her "prejudices"; interpretation is like a conversational dialogue through which meaning is a product of interaction. The *Verstehen* position treats the text as an object that can be understood as the author intended. Through a process of empathic understanding the interpreter can step out of his or her present context to uncover the meaning that exists in the text. The philosophical hermeneutic position holds one cannot transcend one's own historical and situated embeddedness; thus, textual interpretations are always perspectival. Narrative researchers engaging in interpretation will make different claims about their understanding of a text

depending on which position they take. They need to let readers know which approach informs their interpretative claims.

The variety of interpretation approaches engaged in by narrative researchers has considerable overlap with the textual interpretations conducted by literary criticism (see Berman, 1988). In general, narrative researchers provide support for the validity of their interpretations in ways that are similar in kind to those used in literary criticism. For example, support for an interpretation that proposes the primary theme in the literary text Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is the tragic consequence of adolescent love. An argument for this claim requires that evidence from the text in support of the claim be cited. The argument also needs to address why passages that apparently do not support the interpretation do not serve to dispute the claim. The text from which evidence is drawn is hypothetically available to the reader for consultation. Readers should be able to retrace the steps in the argument to the text and to judge the plausibility of the offered interpretation. The claim need not assert that the interpretation proposed is the only one possible; however, researchers' need to cogently argue that theirs is a viable interpretation grounded in the assembled texts

## Concluding Comments

Prior to the reformist movement, the social sciences primarily modeled their approach to validation using conventionalist formulas. In this, they believed that the only kind of social science knowledge claims that could be sufficiently validated were those generated from numeric data and statistical analysis. The social science reformists, including narrative researchers, held that social science needed to explore and develop knowledge about areas of the human realm that fell outside the limits of what had conventionally been thought to be accessible to validation. These areas included people's experienced meanings of their life events and activities. Exploration in these new areas required the development of new approaches for the validation of findings about these areas. The creation of these new approaches required returning to the basic idea of validation that underlay the particular validity producing rules and formats employed by conventional researchers. This basic idea of validation placed the judgment of the worthiness of a research knowledge claim in readers of the research. It is the readers who make the judgment about the plausibility of a knowledge claim based on the evidence and argument for the claim reported by the researcher. The confidence a reader grants to a narrative knowledge claim is a function of the

cogency and soundness of the evidence-based arguments presented by the narrative researcher.

## References

- Bazerman, C. (1987). Codifying the social scientific style: The APA Publication Manual as a behaviorist rhetoric. In J. S. Nelson, A. Megill, & D. N. McCloskey (Eds.), *The rhetoric of the human sciences: Language and argument in scholarship and public affairs* (pp. 125-144). Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Berman, A. (1988). From the new criticism to deconstruction: The reception of structuralism and post-structuralism. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Campbell, D. T., & Stanley, J. C. (1963). *Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for research*. Chicago: Rand McNally.
- Gendlin, E. T. (1997). How philosophy cannot appeal to experience, and how it can. In D. M. Levin (Ed.), *Language beyond postmodernism: Saying and thinking in Gendlin's philosophy* (pp. 3-41). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Greenwood, D. J., & Levin, M. (1998). *Introduction to action research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Habermas, J. (1984). *The theory of communicative action, vol. 1, reason and the rationalization of society* (T. McCarthy, Trans.). Boston: Beacon. (Original work published 1981)
- Isaac, S., & Michael, W. B. (1987). *Handbook in research and evaluation* (2nd ed.). San Diego, CA: EdITS Publishers.
- Lieblich, A., Tuval-Mashiach, R., & Zilber, T. (1998). *Narrative research: Readings, analysis, and interpretation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of perception* (C. Smith, Trans.). New York: Humanities. (Original work published 1945)
- Microsoft. (2003). *Encarta Reference Library 2003* [CD]. Redmond, WA: Author.
- Mishler, E. G. (1986). *Research interviewing: Context and narrative*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Murphy, G. L. (2002). *The big book of concepts*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Perelman, C. (1982). *The realm of rhetoric* (W. Kluback, Trans.). Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1983). *Methodology for the human sciences: Systems of inquiry*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Ricoeur, P. (1984). *Time and narrative* (Vol. 1). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Rosch, E. (1978). Principles of categorization. In E. Rosch & B. Lloyd (Eds.), *Cognition and categorization* (pp. 27-48). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Schwandt, T. J. (2000). Three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry: Interpretation, hermeneutics, and social construction. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 189-213). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Seidman, I. E. (1991). *Interviewing as qualitative research*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Shavelson, R. J., & Towne, L. (Eds.). (2002). *Scientific research in education*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

- Simpson, J. (Ed.). (2002). *Oxford English dictionary* (3rd ed.). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Spence, D. P. (1982). *Narrative truth and historical truth*. New York: Norton.
- Stringer, E. T. (1996). *Action research: Handbook for practitioners*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Toulmin, S. E. (1958). *Uses of argument*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Whitehurst, G. J. (June, 2003). *Evidence-based education*. Retrieved June 20, 2003, from [www.ed.gov/nclb/methods/whatworks/eb/edlite-index.html](http://www.ed.gov/nclb/methods/whatworks/eb/edlite-index.html)

**Donald E. Polkinghorne** is professor emeritus at the University of Southern California. Formally he was professor of counseling psychology and holder of the Attallah Chair in humanistic psychology. He has published in the areas of qualitative and narrative research and the relation of research to practice.