

# Using biographical approaches to explore student views on learning and teaching

Hazel R. Wright, Anglia Ruskin University

## Biography

Dr Hazel Wright is a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Anglia Ruskin University. She teaches on a range of courses including the masters in Early Years Professional Practice and is currently pathway leader for the BA Early Childhood Studies. Previously she taught in further and community education following a career in publishing. Hazel's doctoral study used biographical approaches to explore the life choices of mature female students returning to work as parents. These student narratives are described and analysed in detail in her monograph *Women studying childcare: integrating lives through adult education*, published in 2011 by Trentham Books.

## Abstract

After a brief historical overview, this paper considers key challenges that arise when biographical approaches are used to explore education. It focuses on a specific context: a doctoral study of mature women studying to work in childcare that developed into a much broader analysis of their 'integrated lives'. This is an account of the students' views on learning and teaching that also draws attention to the ways that biographical strategies made visible such views. It reveals the holistic possibilities of biographical interpretation and demonstrates how its inherent flexibility enables the researcher to address issues that really matter to people.

**Key words:** biographical method, life history, narrative discourse, teaching–learning, women and education, childcare work

## Contexts and challenges

The linking of learning and life-history approaches is by no means new but it is only recently, with the 'biographical turn' in the social sciences (Chamberlayne et al, 2000), that this methodology has attracted attention beyond a select coterie of advocates. For a long time biographical methods had a limited application even within qualitative research. As recently as 1995, the essays in Hatch and Wisniewski's *Life history and narrative* were described as 'cutting-edge' and as occurring in an 'emerging field'.

In Britain, early application of biographical approaches in education related to teachers-as-learners (see Ball and Goodson, 1985) and reflective practitioners were encouraged to delve deeper into their historical roots. Jennifer Nias inadvertently adopted such practices in the 1970s when a chance encounter with a former student prompted a study of the working lives of newly qualified PGCE students, later published as *Primary teachers talking* (Nias, 1989). Giving a methodological account of this research, Nias (1991: 148) admits that it was 'initially conceived as a naïve and personal attempt to evaluate the course on which I was tutor'. It was only later that Nias realised that she had 'stumbled, almost unawares, upon a rich seam of data' (Nias, 1991: 151). Other work was more deliberate and studies by Woods (1981, 1985, 1993), Sikes and Troyna (1991), and Goodson (1991, 1992, 1995, 2003; with Hargreaves, 1996; with Sikes, 2001) led to a wealth of material analysing teachers' experiences. Since 2005, this has had a narrative-learning focus (Goodson, 2006, 2008).

European initiatives encouraged the application of biographical approaches to adult learning. West, Alheit et al (2007) identify a number of classic works, including Salling Olsesen and Vilic-Klenovsek's (1994) edited collection, *Adult education and the labour market*; Alheit, Bron et al's (1995) *The biographical approach in European adult education*; Bron and Schemmann's (2002) edited collection, *Social science theories in adult education research*; and, in Britain, West's seminal work *Beyond fragments* (1996). Erben (1998) supports this

methodological approach in sociology, and the University of Bristol Research Centre for International and Comparative Studies facilitated a worldwide exploration of the potential of narrative research into learning (Trahar, 2006). Biographical techniques are also used in a number of small-scale studies of women's education, particularly Edwards' *Mature women students* (1993), Merrill's *Gender, change and identity* (1999) and my own work, *Women studying childcare* (Wright, 2011).

Life-history methods became increasingly mainstream in Britain when, following on from Bloomer and Hodkinson's (2000) research into learning careers, the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) funded a four-year study (2004–2008) on the learning biographies of adults. Learning Lives was a four-site project with a pedagogical orientation. It generated an 'immense wealth of data' (*Learning Lives: Newsletter 3*, June 2007), accessible through the project website ([www.learninglives.org](http://www.learninglives.org)) and the final publications, *Narrative learning* (Goodson et al, 2010) and *Improving learning through the lifecourse* (Biesta et al, 2011). These overviews are vital. Large-scale projects disseminate so much material throughout their lifecourse that saliences can be rendered invisible, lost within the mass of words created.

Indeed 'wordiness' is typical of the biographical method and is one of the factors that make it time-consuming and unwieldy. The benefits of in-depth understanding have to be balanced against a loss of focus, structure and brevity, characteristics that facilitate comparison. The biographical researcher is constantly required to balance depth against breadth, flexibility against specificity, quality against quantity, during data collection and the processes of analysis and dissemination. Researchers enthralled by the richness of individual narratives must continually ask 'who cares?' and avoid the temptation 'to conclude an inquiry at the stage of field texts' (Clandinnin and Connelly, 1994: 424). As Atkinson and Delamont (2005: 823) claim, it is important that data is 'analyzed and not just reproduced and celebrated'. To this end, I developed an original 'integrated lives' model and 'capability chains' as a way of structuring

and summarising students' achievements. Like the very different 'diagrammatic summaries' created for the Wider Benefits of Learning project (Schuller et al, 2004), capability chains allow at-a-glance comparison of personal narratives. They also enabled me to demonstrate the individualised and unpredictable nature of lifecourse outcomes (see Wright, 2011).

Goodson and Sikes also recognise the need to interpret data and acknowledge the importance of balancing direct quotation and analytical commentary (2001: 37) but, perceiving the decision as context-specific, offer little guidance to others. They do, however (2001: 17), make a clear distinction between the 'life story' that the narrator constructs alone and the 'life history' which is co-constructed with the interviewer who attempts to put the 'story' in a historical context, adding 'a second layer and a further interpretation'. Co-construction is addressed in my own research through the adoption of psychosocial techniques (after Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). With these, the interviewer listens closely to the narrator and queries hesitations, contradictions and juxtapositions of ideas in the dialogue to bring hidden associations into conscious view. This often adds greater depth and credibility to the accounts but requires care not to overexpose the subject.

Unless the participants have agreed to contribute openly, researchers need to be constantly vigilant to protect identities. Working at the level of detail required for biographical analysis raises many issues of confidentiality, as the coherence of narrative accounts can identify individuals even when names are changed and affiliations blurred. Some researchers (for example, Clough, 2002) advocate the fabrication of fictional biographies that smooth out individual idiosyncrasies, claiming that this creates both credible and anonymised stories, but this process leaves the research open to accusations of falsification. Other researchers, like Christians (2005: 45), hold accuracy to be a cardinal principle, believing that 'fabrications, fraudulent materials, omissions and contrivances are both non-scientific and unethical', claims that are hard to refute.

Similarly, polarised positions are captured, after Bruner (1985), in Polkinghorne's (1995) processes of 'analysis of narratives' (collecting biographical accounts from which to discover typologies and categories) and 'narrative analysis' (shaping or 'emplotting' individualised accounts to produce stories), but neither process sets out to fictionalise data, so the division carries less significance. In my own project I took a pragmatic stance, combining both approaches as appropriate and developing a 'recall method' whereby individual and shared memories were used to co-construct meaning. This 'recall' form of biographical research requires sensitive interaction and empathy from the researcher and relies on trust: the student who believes that her story will be treated with respect and care will be more likely to offer honest insights and allow the interviewer to gently probe more difficult areas. Thus it is very different from that of the formalised biographic-narrative interpretive method (BNIM) where the researcher must remain distant and strive for impartiality (Wengraf, 2001).

## **The research context**

The doctoral study set out to examine the views about adult education of mature women who enrolled on a childcare diploma, often after volunteering or working part-time in an early years setting, usually a local community pre-school. I had access to ten cohorts of students, all of whom I had personally taught in a further education (FE) college in successive years from 1997. From a population of 150 who returned background questionnaires, I selected 33 individuals to study in depth. These women were predominately white British (but included a small number of women from mainland Europe and further afield) and held a varied range of prior qualifications, from none at all to graduate status. In both population and sample, 80 per cent were married and 70 per cent were living with children of primary age or below. The majority were working for little remuneration (often the minimum wage) but were strangely content with their lot, leading me to realise that, for them, being able to manage

their own lives was more important. They wanted to combine part-time work, part-time study and part-time childcare in order to have the 'best of both worlds'.

This understanding led to the development of a model of integrated lives, a triple triangle that demonstrates how interdependent links situate the student within a framework where family, work and educational needs reciprocally co-exist. The model and its associations are discussed more fully in *Women studying childcare* (Wright, 2011) but here it is relevant to point out how this theorisation arose from my responsive choice of biographical methods. I was working within an emergent methodological framework (Wright, 2009), actively choosing appropriate methods to solve the problems I encountered at each stage of the research process. In encouraging the students to talk freely about their lives, I adopted a broader perspective than was first intended and, later, found it difficult to separate the adult education narratives from the stories about childhood, schooling, families and work experiences. Eventually I realised that the data were telling me something other than expected. It was impossible to focus solely on education because the process of 'integrating lives' was fundamental. Far from challenging the gender imbalances common in family life, the women were developing supportive networks that stabilised their part-time status.

Furthermore, a holistic analysis of the biographical accounts supported the identification of repeated behavioural patterns, enabling me to create a set of attitudinal typologies and another occupational set based on the students' style of commitment to work in childcare: again, this was possible only because I could set their decisions within a longer chronological account. A more thematic analysis drew attention to ideas and practices common to the student group and to the multiple ways that these commonalities developed in individual lives. This makes interesting reading in itself, but here we need to focus on the more clearly educational elements in the data, pulling out the strands that can be separated from the overall picture.

### **Attitudes to college**

A notable finding was the extent to which childhood educational experiences coloured adults' views. In itself, this connection was anticipated but not the strength of the fears or the literal nature of some students' expectations. Hansa claimed she was 'very frightened to go back to education'. Arianne thought that in college she would be 'told off for talking' and, like Ingrid, was surprised that 'you could go to the loo when you had to'. Heidi admitted that 'you just worry about what people will think of you' and complained about 'waiting for a bus when it was raining or freezing cold'. These comments demonstrate the importance of hygiene factors in adult education (Herzberg, 1959), and the focus on basic survival makes sense in the context of their descriptions of compulsory schooling populated by 'this ogre who stood behind us and forced us to drink this milk', 'this horrible lady who used to quite traumatise us by shouting', a teacher who 'always used to be ... rubbing his hands up and down your back', 'teachers, you know, that would think I was stupid', a headmaster who would 'give us a hard time and make us stand up and humiliate us and stuff'.

Perhaps hoping to repair such negative experiences, students were very focused on the social elements of studying. The majority gained confidence from being 'in the same boat' but some spent time analysing the cohort with whom they studied. Heidi talked about groups of 'more educated and the less educated'. Ilsa joked about 'teachers pets' and 'cheeky monkeys at the back' before categorising the entire group: describing a 'working-class section', 'kind of normal people', 'elder people' and 'people that a lot of us felt placed themselves far too highly'.

The biographical narratives reveal how such social awareness was ingrained: it was vital if one wanted to 'survive' in secondary school. Arianne clearly explained how she straddled social boundaries to avoid further bullying:

I used to go around with the good people but I was friendly with all the ones that were troublemakers and there I was, sat there in the middle really, keeping safe ...

Imogen also described pack mentality: 'it was either be friends *with* them or get treated horribly *by* them'.

The students interviewed were fairly equally divided between those who voiced a negative experience of compulsory schooling, those who were positive and those whose views were neutral. Generally, but not exclusively, it was those who enjoyed and achieved at school who went on to study at higher levels prior to taking the childcare diploma but this was not universally true. Greta, who described her school as 'horrible' and 'harsh', 'almost a place where children were hidden away', achieved a degree in history in later years. Fiona, who 'skived school' where she 'got bullied for having good grades' and had to fend for herself as 'it wasn't safe for me to go home', achieved an A level in psychology prior to the diploma and this enabled her to enrol on a nursing degree later.

### **Attitudes to learning and teaching**

Through immersion in the data, I was slowly able to recognise patterns and connections within and between the individualised verbal accounts of learning processes, and develop insights that could not have been accessed through formal question-and-answer interviews. Comments like 'I enjoyed the science at secondary school', 'I've got a very short attention span unless I am doing something practical' and preferences for linear learning and the E-D-I-T system (explain, demonstrate, imitate, try) revealed an instrumental attitude to learning. Viewed alongside comments about wanting to be 'kept on the ball' and it being 'much better to have someone teach you something', these statements enabled me to place certain students in Belenky et al's (1997/86) *received knowledge* category (those who perceive knowledge as absolute and favour transmission).



Students moving towards a higher level, the *subjective* (where knowledge becomes personal and intuitive), were also identifiable when comments about education were combined with broader comments about everyday life; the biographical approach revealed attitudes that might otherwise have remained invisible. Heena described 'having an open mind about everything' and traced this to her parents realising that 'pushing us a certain way wasn't gonna mean that we were going to end up there'. Heidi demonstrated reflective skills when she described how you 'think about what you were like yourself and what you have been told about yourself and that's how you understand what other children are doing'.

Other students, who were able to engage in academic debate without fearing people's opinions, were beginning to work at the *procedural knowledge* stage, and again this is reflected in broader comments. Frieda talked of analysing assignments 'step by step', and being 'very systematic and logical' and realising that 'you might as well make this easy for the examiner', but also about the 'deep thinking approach' deriving from discussions. Felicity, too, understood the logic of success: 'if you want to get that grade you need to make sure you've covered that bit'. Daisy, the only student to display *constructor* characteristics (by adding an extra initial to a well-known acronym), was deeply reflective, pointing out that there are 'some things you learn and you are not quite the same afterwards'.

Belenky et al's classification fitted imperfectly, however, for a number of students appeared capable of functioning at a higher level yet favoured knowledge transmission, seeing it as an efficient mode of learning. Arianne, wanted handouts to take the stress out of studying: 'it is quite hard to be listening, concentrating and writing. It is much better to have someone teach you something and it's already recorded'. Many recalled needing the tutor to explain assessment criteria, finding, like Emily, that 'sometimes they were very grey to me'. However, commenting retrospectively, a surprising number viewed criteria favourably, finding, like Heena, that they allowed students to work 'in

little bits'. Together, these two findings demonstrate how time constraints affected study preferences. Students who had to work in odd moments when not needed by the family valued practices that supported fragmented study at home coupled with intensive teaching periods. Like Alex, they 'tried to make time on most days to do a little bit'.

Initially, this retrospective liking for assessment criteria confused me, as I remembered students complaining about them extensively and repeatedly in class. Without the biographical narratives that drew attention to the complexity of the students' lives, I might not have recognised how the criteria were instrumentally useful. The women's need to fit their other activities into school hours, their fuzzy life–work boundaries and protection of their maternal identity revealed a need to streamline aspects of their lives to fit everything in. Students had to keep the world at bay in order to study. As Bella said:

I'm never lonely – as a matter of fact it is more difficult to find some time for yourself. You sort of have to put people off and say 'I've got assignments to do'.

Many of the women who chose to study showed a sense of commitment similar to Bella's, although the ways in which this manifested differed. Several students accumulated qualifications systematically, demonstrating significant organisational skills. For example, Avril, who could be described as a serial student, collected numerous qualifications and found that education 'can be quite addictive'. She 'swapped' between generic teaching and specific vocational courses to develop her career but nevertheless studied for the love of it. Avril displayed a liking for knowledge and an ability to support her own learning: 'I've done a lot reading up on my own, not just during the course but since.' She worked to tight schedules and planned a 'really organised phase' when simultaneously enrolled on two different courses (something she did twice).

### **Attitudes to education**

Time played a significant role in students' initial decisions to take a vocational qualification. When asked about their philosophical stance on education, the majority claimed a liberal preference for 'education for its own sake' but recognised that they needed to prioritise vocational learning when time was scarce. For example, Irene, a graduate who may later want to train as a teacher, said: 'It's a time thing for me and ... working more towards a career for me is more important to me at the moment.'

Only two students gave purely vocational reasons for enrolling, and a further five mixed the liberal and vocational. In part, given the importance of hygiene factors, the choice of a childcare diploma relates to the availability of fee support. However, from other decisions and attitudes expressed, it was clear that the students were aware of the choices that were possible.

A few students focused on functional skills. Avril stated: 'Education has got to be gaining skills to help you in whatever you want to do in life', but she also recognised time constraints: 'I have to have certain kinds of knowledge for my job so that's got to take priority.'

Barbara, too, was keen to 'improve my knowledge and my skills' and 'use my education to improve my career prospects'. For Irma, skill development was essential if she was to make progress as she 'didn't even know what an assignment was', had never heard of a bibliography 'before in my life' and admitted that 'my grammar is not very good'. Like several others, writing assignments encouraged her to acquire computer skills, as initially she had none:

Every page I wrote I opened a new Word document because I didn't know that if you clicked you could turn on a page so when it came to a word count I am manually adding them up myself ...

Irma was good at learning from others, however. She enrolled on the course because a friend suggested it: 'She said, well why don't you do it too?' She had another friend who 'came round one day and she showed me some little tips like spelling and word count, margins. I didn't know all about that.' She had a husband who was supportive, staying up 'till 2 o'clock in the morning' to help her cut out excess words and acting as a critical friend throughout the course. Irma's neediness and her determination to succeed both made sense when you heard her fuller life story. She was a student who 'was seen as a rebel, a rebel I suppose because I didn't toe the line like everybody else', yet she listed her main faults as being late and wearing make-up and jewellery rather than being 'mouthy' or disruptive. Possibly the teachers were exasperated because she just did not care but Irma was 'absolutely shocked' and 'gob-smacked' to find herself described by them as a bully, when 'I just stood up for myself'. For Irma 'an unhappy home life' 'made school not important'. She left school with six CSEs and took a series of casual jobs at very low rates of pay before running a garage franchise for a while. For her, the childcare diploma counted as second-chance education and she decided that she did not want to continue to work in childcare: '[There is too much] washing paint pots and wiping ... snotty noses and bums'. More positively, she said, '[The course has] given me a lot of confidence' and she appeared to have overcome her previous sense of inadequacy:

I couldn't do it when I started you know but I got further and I did well and that great achievement is you know brilliant because it's got – I can do any course now.

This importance of education is evident in other ways in student narratives. When Celia described education, her language – 'impart', 'enrich', 'sharing' – created a sense that this was precious. When I asked her to explain 'progress' she did this readily, revealing a desire for self-improvement and demonstrating the power attributed to education.

... one surely grows through attaining more knowledge or understanding of the world or life and therefore you progress in life and you can move *on* and become a new person, a different person, hopefully?

Like Celia, Holly also sought personal growth, but in her case change was forced by circumstances. After a horrific attack by a prisoner, she was unable to continue in the police force and had to rebuild her life and learn to cope with the physical and emotional after-effects: in studying she was looking for ‘a different *me* as well’. Holly drew clear parallels between her old and new jobs and found she had transferable skills:

And doing children’s observations was much like interviewing a witness or even the perpetrator or whatever to a crime. You are looking at everything ... I knew what I was doing right away.

Holly described the attack graphically, and I have chosen not to relate it. As she said: ‘When you are trying to tell that to somebody, you ask yourself “do they understand, or is it just fascinating?”’ When carrying out biographical research it is important to keep an ethical eye on relevance and avoid the merely sensational. Many of the students told stories that were intrinsically fascinating but, to address my interest in learning and teaching, it is the overview and interpretation that matters, with detailed vignettes to illustrate key points. I choose not to overexpose any individual, even though the accounts are anonymised and the information and permission to use it are freely given. People’s life stories deserve respect.

## **Learning from a holistic overview**

We have seen already that biographical details enriched and contextualised the students’ comments about education and that sometimes the biographical approach was essential to make sense of ideas that a student was unable to articulate clearly. Frances was one such student. Initially I was flummoxed by

her claim that the diploma ‘made me stop going to playgroup – stop working in playgroup’. On further probing she admitted to ‘not feeling that what I was doing with the children was correct’ and careful analysis of her life story enabled me to make sense of contradictory statements. Frances talked at length about loving doing art with the children, loving creative activities, but – confusingly – of hating messiness. When I focused on her hobby, cake decoration, and her excitement at doing ‘a manicure course which I have wanted to do for years and years’, I began to understand that she liked creating small-scale and perfect artefacts and could see that she had been setting up adult-led activities with an end product. On learning that this ran counter to the diploma teaching, which said that children should be left to experiment with colour and texture and freely enjoy the physical, visual and emotional aspects of art, Frances lost confidence.

Her dislike of messiness made sense when I became aware of her earlier career as legal secretary and how she did not ‘like to be muddled’ and liked ‘to be in control’. Frances ‘loved children’ and ‘wanted to help them’ and found that ‘the business thing of it clashed with me a bit’ but she needed an administrative purpose and created a set of after-school club policy documents aiming ‘to get the paperwork as perfect as we could get it’. Again, she was holding two contradictory positions that she could not comfortably resolve and admitted to feeling dreadful if she was ‘brushing them [the children] aside’ to go and ‘fill out a form or do a bit of paperwork’. These broader insights enabled me to make sense of Frances’s attitude to studying. She could cope with coursework that had an end product like a curriculum plan but found the non-linear nature of the first assignment difficult as it required her to link her observations of a child to child development theory and she ‘couldn’t tie it all together’. When I considered the different aspects of her biography together, I was able to pinpoint difficulties with multitasking and synthesis that created a need for methodical progression, characteristics that make working with children, whose behaviour is spontaneous and excitable, challenging.

## Considering the benefits of biographical approaches

I have examined the findings from a biographical study of teaching and learning to demonstrate how biographical approaches support in-depth data construction and analysis. In doing this, I discussed some of the issues pertinent to this approach. To conclude, I shall now consider the significant advantages of this method of research and the points at which particular care is needed.

First, biographical approaches enable an alternative form of interviewing, one that is relaxed and only lightly focused and encourages the interview subjects to talk freely, hardly aware that they are having anything other than an informal chat. This makes the data 'flow', creating depth and a coherence that makes it intrinsically fascinating. As the focus is on a person's whole life rather than narrowly structured, the interview elicits genuinely held views rather than those newly constructed in response to direct questioning. If a topic is raised, it is one of significance to the interviewee rather than one politely addressed in deference to the interviewer.

Second, the interviewees set their accounts and opinions in context, often making direct links to prior experiences and related events. This gives the data credibility because the interviewer can see *why* and *how* things came about rather than simply receiving descriptions about *what* came about. These connections often make it possible to understand the reasons behind participants' decisions. Disfluency draws attention to inconsistency within narratives, enabling the interviewer to seek out denial and false attribution and take a step nearer to a shared version of truth.

Third, for many people, being encouraged to talk about oneself is an attractive proposition. Even those who are shy or embarrassed can become loquacious in the hands of a skilled and interested interviewer. Individuals can build up their stories piece by piece and, because they are in control of the interaction, are often prepared to discuss sensitive topics rather than shy away from areas of

personal concern. This enables us to ask about, and gain understanding of, subjects that may more normatively be kept in the personal domain.

These characteristics encourage interviewees to share their rehearsed accounts of their lives and their innermost secrets and this requires the interviewer to act with integrity. An apparently open and unstructured process requires careful, continual and conscious monitoring. The interviewer must be ethically alert and prepared to intervene if conversations start to stray into difficult areas, checking that the interviewee really wants to discuss certain topics publicly. Some 'truths' cannot be kept 'secret' once divulged, but others can be anodised or anonymised, or simply omitted from published accounts. In addition to protecting the participants from themselves, the interviewer needs a modicum of self-preservation. It is important to track the chronological integrity of the interview, to query issues that seem to be misrepresented or glossed over, and to steer conversations away from areas that lack any relevance, as the interviewer needs to find and maintain a position of absorbed listening throughout the process.



## References

Alheit P, Bron A, Brugger E and Dominicé P (1995). *The biographical approach in European adult education*. Vienna: Verban Weiner Voksbildung.

Atkinson P and Delamont S (2005). 'Analytic perspectives' in NK Denzin and YS Lincoln (eds) *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd edn). Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage.

Ball SJ and Goodson IF (eds) (1985). *Teachers' lives and careers*. London: Falmer Press.

Belenky MF, Clinchy BM, Goldberger NR and Tarule JM (1997/86). *Women's ways of knowing: the development of self, voice, and mind*. New York: Basic Books.

Biesta G, Field J, Hodgkinson P, Macleod FJ and Goodson IF (2011). *Improving learning through the lifecourse*. London: Routledge.

Bloomer M and Hodgkinson P (2000). 'Learning careers: continuity and change in young people's dispositions to learning'. *British Educational Research Journal*, 26 (5), pp 583–597.

Bron A and Schemmann M (eds) (2002). 'Social science theories in adult education research'. *Bochum Studies in International Adult Education*. Munster: LIT, pp 211–242.

Bruner J (1985). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press.

Chamberlayne P, Bornat J and Wengraf T (eds) (2000). *The turn to biographical methods in social science: comparative issues and examples*. London: Routledge.

Christians CG (2005). 'Ethics and politics in qualitative research' in NK Denzin and YS Lincoln (eds) *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd edn). Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage.

Clandinnin DJ and Connelly FM (1994). 'Personal experience methods' in NK Denzin and YS Lincoln (eds) *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage.

Clough P (2002). *Narratives and fictions in educational research*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Edwards R (1993). *Mature women students: separating or connecting family and education*. London: Taylor and Francis.

Erben M (ed) (1998). *Biography and education: a reader*. London: Falmer.

Goodson IF (2008). *Investigating the teacher's life and work*. Rotterdam: Sense.

Goodson IF (2006). 'The rise of the life narrative'. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 33 (4), pp 7–21.

Goodson IF (2003). *Professional knowledge, professional lives: studies in education and change*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Goodson IF (1995). 'The story so far: personal knowledge and the political' in JA Hatch and R Wiesniewski (eds) *Life history and narrative*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Goodson IF (1992). *Studying teachers' lives*. New York: Teachers' College Press.

Goodson IF (1991). 'Sponsoring the teacher's voice: teachers' lives and teacher development'. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 21 (1), pp 35–45.

Goodson IF and Hargreaves A (eds) (1996). *Teachers' professional lives*. London: Falmer Press.

Goodson IF and Sikes P (2001). *Life history research in educational settings: learning from lives*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Goodson IF, Biesta G, Tedder M and Adair N (2010). *Narrative learning*. London: Routledge.

Hatch JA and Wiesniewski R (eds) (1995). *Life history and narrative*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Herzberg F (1959). *The motivation to work*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Hollway W and Jefferson T (2000). *Doing qualitative research differently: free association, narrative and the interview method*. London: Sage.

Merrill B (1999). *Gender, change and identity: mature women students in universities*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Nias J (1991). 'Primary teacher's talking: a reflexive account of longitudinal research' in G Walford (ed) *Doing educational research*. London: Routledge.

Nias J (1989). *Primary teacher's talking: a study of teaching as work*. London: Routledge.

Polkinghorne DE (1995). 'Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis' in JA Hatch and R Wiesniewski (eds) *Life history and narrative*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Salling Olesen H and Vilic-Klenovsek T (eds) (1994). *Adult education and the labour market*. Ljubljana: SAEC.

Schuller T, Preston J, Hammond C, Brassett-Grundy A and Bynner J (2004). *The benefits of learning: the impact of education on health, family life and social capital*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Sikes P and Troyna B (1991). 'True stories: a case study in the use of life history in initial teacher education'. *Educational Review*, 43 (1), pp 3–16.

Trahar S (ed) (2006). *Narrative research on learning: comparative and international perspectives*. Oxford: Symposium Books.

Wengraf T (2001). *Qualitative research interviewing*. London: Sage.

West L (1996). *Beyond fragments: adults, motivation and higher education, a biographical analysis*. London: Taylor and Francis.

West L, Alheit P, Andersen AS, and Merrill B (eds) (2007). *Using biographical and life history approaches in the study of adult and lifelong learning: European perspectives*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

Woods P (1993). 'Managing marginality: teacher development through grounded life history'. *British Educational Research Journal*, 19 (5), pp 447–465.

Woods P (1985). 'Conversations with teachers: some aspects of life-history method'. *British Educational Research Journal*, 11 (1), pp 13–26.

Woods P (1981). 'Strategies, commitment and identity: making and breaking the teacher role' in L Barton and S Walker (eds) *School, teachers and teaching*. Lewes: Falmer Press.

Wright HR (2011). *Women studying childcare: integrating lives through adult education*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.

Wright HR (2009). 'Trusting the process: using an emergent design to study adult education'. *Educate*, Kaleidoscope Special Issue, December, pp 62–73.

Published as:

Wright, H.R. (2011) Using biographical approaches to explore student views on learning and teaching. In M. McLean & A. Abbas (eds), *Biographical methods* (themed collection on teaching through biography), *ELiSS: Enhancing Learning in the Social Sciences*, 3(3), Summer 2011.

For preference, please cite the original.