CHAPTER 10

Into the Future

Introduction

This final chapter reviews the scope and findings of this narrative inquiry in a way which aims to reveal the generative and reflective character of qualitative research and the temporal nature of narrative inquiry specifically, by presenting a past, present, and imagined future for the object of study. The phenomenon of corporate sector partnerships in higher education creating credit-bearing EAP matriculation pathway programs in the United States is still new and limited in scope, hence not well-described in the literature, presenting both limitations and opportunities for contributions to educational research. The chapter closes with five accounts of universities’ institutional alternatives to the corporate-partnership matriculation pathway models.

Scope of the Study

**Planned Limitations**

Several limitations were planned into the narrative inquiry carried out in my Ph.D. dissertation research (Winkle, 2011a) prior to collecting participant stories. This study makes no formalistic knowledge claims to represent the phenomenon under investigation in any “objective” way. Rather, the claim which I, as narrative inquirer, present is solely that the personal anthologies of experience which are presented here are reflective of the study participants’ experiences in relation to the phenomenon and the research questions posed in this study. The aim is that through these experiential artifacts, readers will gain insights about the corporate sector partnership matriculation pathway programs and create for themselves “a new sense of meaning and significance with respect to the research topic” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 42).

An additional limitation is the fact that participants do not include corporate-partner representatives or university administrators, such as university presidents or provosts. The investigation also does not include the perspectives of students enrolled in corporate sector partnership programs or those of domestic students attending universities where such programs exist. Exclusion of these groups of stakeholders limits in the diversity of perspectives on the pathway phenomenon in this particular study while suggesting further
inquiries that might usefully be undertaken. Of course, all empirical inquiries must have borders or delimitations; and narrative inquiry is an extremely labor-intensive methodology of inquiry, so that the scope of the investigation needed to be feasible. Explorations into the experiences of other individuals impacted by the phenomenon of corporate sector partnerships creating in EAP matriculation pathway programs would be appropriate areas of inquiry for future research.

Another kind of limitation of this study can be seen in my own starting perspective or bias as a former English language teacher in higher education settings with early experiences teaching English language in both university-based IEPs and for-profit corporate settings. Thus, I, the researcher, may initially have approached research sites where corporate sector partnerships were in place with skepticism regarding a practice which I already perceived as corporatizing and commercializing higher education (Andrews, 2006; Dickeson & Figuli, 2007; Fink, 2008; Fulcher, 2009; Lerner, 2008). In fact, all research has a position or perspective from which it is conducted and reported, though this is not always obvious – much less declared explicitly. Likewise, all readers of research will, themselves, read from their own perspectives and positions of socio-historical orientation. I have taken pains throughout this book to present participants’ views as these were told to me while also making clear to the reader my positioning through reflexive narrative. Qualitative methods demand this transparency as a means to supporting claims of validity and trustworthiness (Merriam, 2009).

Other Limitations Arising in the Course of the Research

Additional limitations of the inquiry emerged through the course of the study and all of its iterative processes, negotiations, and re-negotiations.

First, because the topics being discussed during the interviews and the stories participants shared dealt with issues surrounding their occupation and primary source of income, and because of the rarity of the corporate sector partnership pathway programs in U.S. contexts, issues of anonymity became a concern for some participants. As described in Chapter 4, participants often hedged or softened stories during the restorying process to protect their livelihoods, relationships, and identities. Indeed, a participant who had at one point considered withdrawing from the study directly suggested that the methodology was potentially a limitation of the study:

I think your choice of using narrative [will] influence your results in a negative way. There really is no way for someone to be truly anonymous since the pool of people is so small to begin with, and the roles each of us