

# Enriching critical narrative research with speculative elements

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# Digitalization of higher education is a narrative

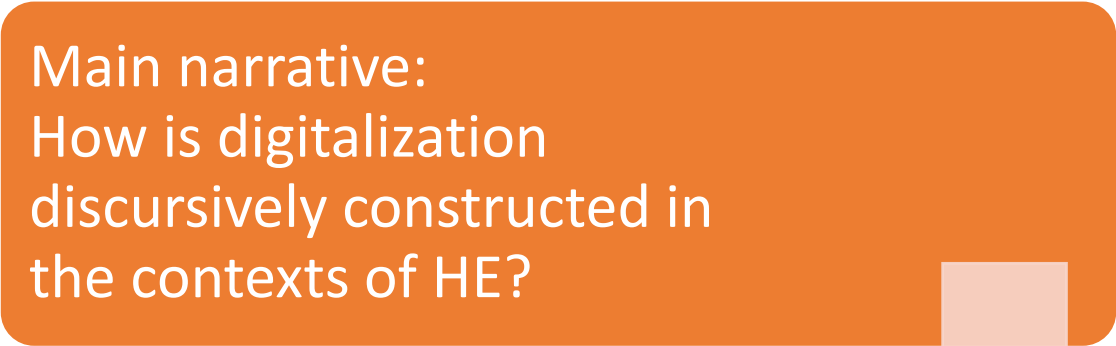
Who's telling the story?

Who are the protagonists?

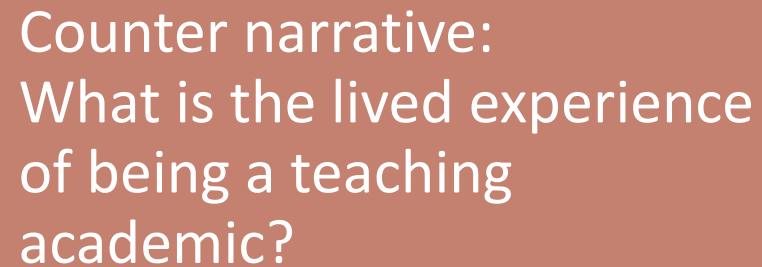
Who defines the ending?

# Speculative social science fiction of digitalization in higher education

Main narrative:  
How is digitalization  
discursively constructed in  
the contexts of HE?

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Counter narrative:  
What is the lived experience  
of being a teaching  
academic?

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Alternative narratives:  
How do academics envision  
desirable/undesirable  
futures?

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# How we do this

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METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

METHODOLOGY

DATA COLLECTION

REPORTING

Institutional Ethnography

Social Science Fiction

Document analysis

Interviews

MEBS

Future workshops

Main narrative

Counter narrative

Alternative narrative



# The Main Narrative of Digital Education

- Document analysis: EU, OECD, Ministry, University
- Digital technologies revolutionizing learning! Since A.D. X. (Koch, 1973; Postman, 1992)
- "Education is broken, technology will fix it". (Williamson 2020, Birch et al. 2020, Mertala, 2019)
- Closed universe of discourse: discussion only within a strictly defined space (Teräs, Suoranta & Teräs, 2022)
- This narrative goes largely unquestioned in educational policy and practice.



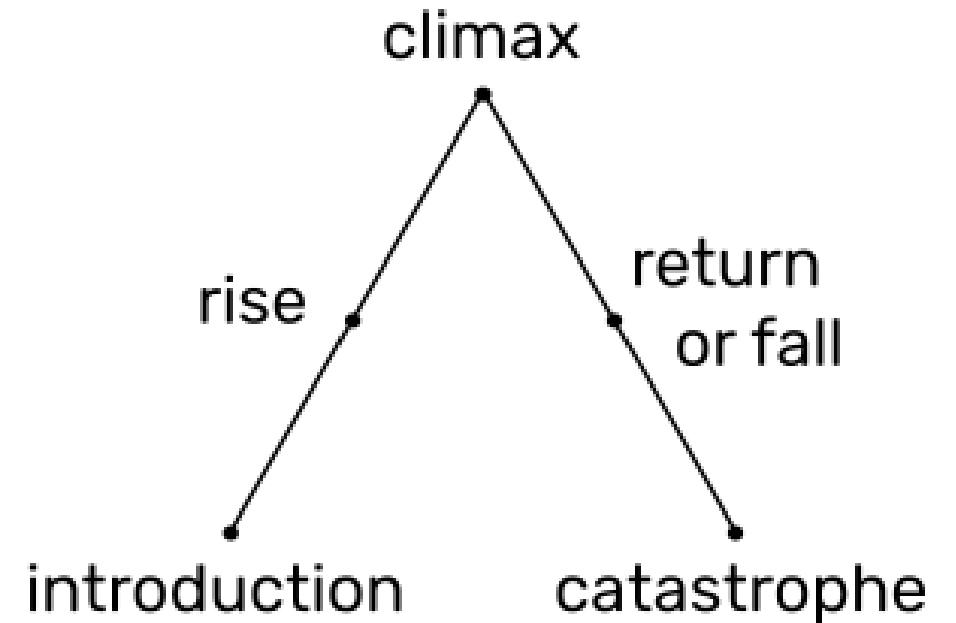


# The problematic

- Research focuses on teachers' digital skills, attitudes, or technology acceptance (e.g. Schrerer ym. 2019, Falloon 2020).
- Teachers are mainly seen as target group for PD activities.
- In this narrative, teachers are the object and digitalization is the subject.

# Counter narrative: the lived experience

- Narrative interviews with experienced teaching academics
- Analysis revealed the dramatic structure of a classical tragedy
- Catastrophe: loss of agency, hopelessness, cynicism, no light at the end of the tunnel





A conceptual image featuring a long, straight staircase made of light-colored wooden planks. The staircase is viewed from a low angle, looking up towards a large, bright blue circle that frames the top of the stairs. The background is a solid dark blue, creating a strong contrast with the light-colored stairs and the bright circle. The overall composition suggests a journey, a path, or a quest for a goal.

# How to change the ending?

Narrative research is helpful in describing the story of digitalization and bureaucratization of higher education but it hits a wall in that there is no resolution to the stories.





Do we even know where we want to go?



# Method of Empathy-Based Stories

## **Scenario 1:**

We are living in the year 2050. The practices of digitalization in education have progressed considerably. From the teacher's point of view the situation is good in every way. Why? Imagine a situation and write a short story about it.

## **Scenario 2:**

We are living in the year 2050. The practices of digitalization in education have progressed considerably. From the teacher's point of view the situation is bad in every way. Why? Imagine a situation and write a short story about it.



# Positive scenarios

1. Digitalization slows down and well-being increases.
2. Digital technologies genuinely facilitate teacher's work.
3. Advanced technology enables ubiquitous learning and quality of life.







## Negative scenarios

1. Pedagogy is no longer needed or valued – learning reduces to acquiring mechanical competences delivered by technology, teachers become machine operators.
2. Teachers are no longer needed or valued – learning has become an individual pursuit of self-optimization guided by AI and digital tools.
3. Teaching and learning are no longer needed or valued – the entire concept of learning has become obsolete, science is frowned upon, required competencies are installed through microchips.



## Social science fiction: teachers as authors of their futures

- Speculative social science fiction provides a methodology that can challenge the main narrative
- Emancipation & participation
- Imagining alternative futures – creating alternative futures





# Stay in touch:

<https://carde.group/research-projects/>

<https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Hanna-Teraes>

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs42438-021-00260-6>

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs42438-020-00164-x>