

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?

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

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

How we do this

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

METHODOLOGY

DATA COLLECTION

REPORTING

Institutional Ethnography

Social Science Fiction

Document analysis

Interviews

MEBS

Future workshops

Main narrative

Counter narrative

Alternative narrative

A stylized, abstract illustration on the left side of the slide. It features a central figure with a red and purple geometric face, set against a background of yellow and green geometric shapes that resemble a rising sun or a digital landscape. The overall aesthetic is modern and digital.

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.

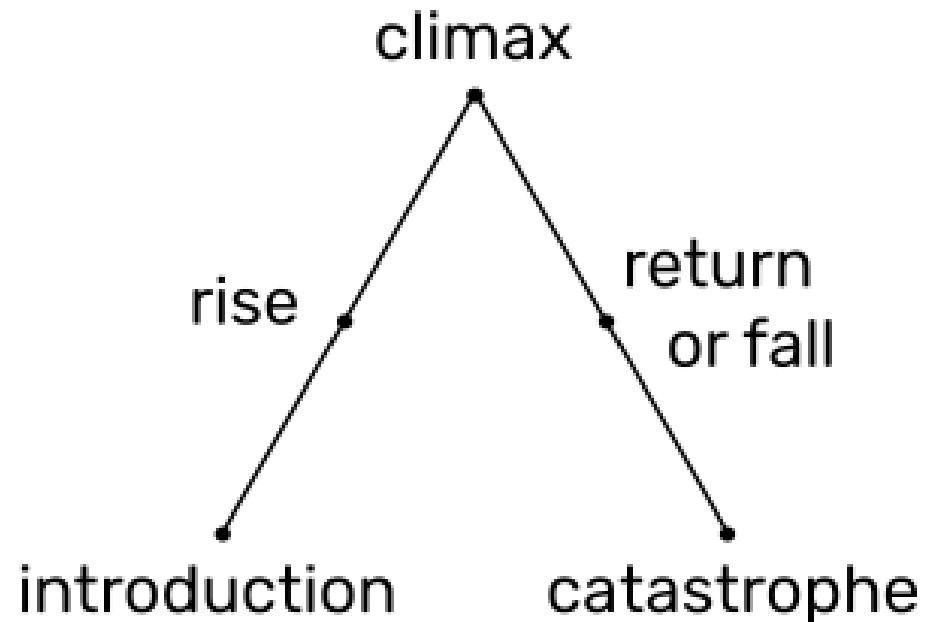


The problematic

- Research focuses on teachers' digital skills, attitudes, or technology acceptance (e.g. Scherer et al. 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





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



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<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>