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### The Role of Narrative in Communicating Science

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## Abstract

This theoretical paper attempts to make the case for the use of narrative (i.e., fictional written text) in science education as a way of making science meaningful, relevant and accessible to the public. Grounded in literature pointing to the value of narrative in supporting learning and the need to explore new modes of communicating science, this paper explores the use of narrative in science education. More specifically, in this paper we explore the question: *What is narrative and what are its necessary components that may be of value to science education?* In answering this question we propose a view of narrative and its necessary components, which permits narrative a role in science education, and, is in fact, the main contribution of this paper. Also, a range of narrative text examples are offered in the paper to make the case for a representation of fictional narrative in science. In order to address questions connected with the use of narrative in science education, a research agenda based on perspectives on narrative implications for learning, is framed.

## The Role of Narrative in Communicating Science

## Introduction

Reform documents in contemporary science education criticize the way science has been portrayed and taught in schools (AAAS, 1993; NRC, 2000). Lemke (1990) commenting [on](#) the way in which science is portrayed in the curriculum, noted that:

In teaching the content of the science curriculum, and the values that often go with it, science education, sometimes unwittingly, also perpetuates a certain harmful *mystique of science*. That mystique tends to make science seem dogmatic, authoritarian, impersonal, and even inhuman to many students. It also portrays science as being much more difficult than it is, and scientists as being geniuses that students cannot identify with. It alienates students from science (p. xi).

This picture of science, mysterious and opaque, estranges students because it is disconnected from their everyday experiences. It portrays science as a set of objective truths and absolute realities to be approached – abstracted, disembodied and decontextualized. In short, it presents science as dogma – a body of uncontroversial, unquestioned and unequivocal knowledge (Claxton, 1991). In this picture, students are positioned outside the theories; they are like spectators, looking in, while theory is presented as a map drawn by experts to depict ‘what is there’ (Middleton, 1995).

Much of this alienation can be attributed to the ‘foreign’ nature of the language that constitutes science itself. A major feature of such genres is the excision of the personal. [Meyer \(1998\) argues that within the science learning context are situated constructions of meaning that are dependent upon the surrounding discourse, however, there are a number of obstacles to scientific discourse such as “its formal nature, the vernacular is unheard of, and comfortable patois has no place” \(p. 467\)](#) As Halliday and Martin’s (1993) functionalist analysis of scientific language has shown, the language, grammar and genres of science have evolved to provide effective and efficient communication within the scientific community. Not surprisingly, acquiring this discourse [of science](#) requires a long and arduous apprenticeship.

Montgomery (1996), discussing the [discourse](#) of science, noted that the use of “technical language sets up a barrier between those who can speak and understand

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3 and those who cannot” (p. 7), which causes exclusion and makes science inaccessible  
4 to the public. As [he](#) commented, “the language of science is the tongue of foreigners,  
5 equally exotic whether spoken in the narrative hut of the laboratory or the villages and  
6 cliff-dwellings of the professional meeting” (p. 9). The technical nature of the  
7 language of science ([i.e., use of scientific vocabulary, definitions, terms, theories](#)) not  
8 only makes it hard to understand scientific concepts but it also reflects specific  
9 messages about its nature and, in particular, that science is for the experts - the  
10 scientists, as only they are the ones that can understand this language.

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18 Another problem confronting science is that its discourse is cumulative. As  
19 Tallis (1995) argues:

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21 The reader of a scientific paper is entering a conversation that has  
22 been going on for over 2000 years. Each step in science builds on  
23 the last - as E. M. Forster pointed out, science progresses in a  
24 fundamental sense, which art does not - so its discourse inescapably  
25 deviates increasingly from that of everyday life, except inasmuch as  
26 it feeds back into and changes everyday discourse.

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32 Moreover, science deviates [from the discourse of everyday life](#) in that its language  
33 increasingly becomes multi-semiotic. The graphs, symbols and diagrams of the  
34 modern scientific paper do not merely serve an additional supplementary illustration;  
35 rather they are an integral to its communicative function. [As a result](#), an expanding  
36 industry of knowledge intermediaries or science communicators has developed to  
37 provide ‘translations’ between the discourse of science and the language of the [public](#).

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42 For those who [view](#) science education as a pre-professional training for the  
43 would-be scientist, the language of science is not problematic. School science deals  
44 in the foundations of science whose content has remained largely unchanged, [and](#)  
45 [textbooks present science and its membership as a formal objective guild \(Meyer,](#)  
46 [1998\)](#). However, the gulf between school science and contemporary science is a  
47 source of student disaffection; typified by the following comment:

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53 The blast furnace, so when are you going to use a blast furnace? I mean,  
54 why do you need to know about it? You’re not going to come across it  
55 ever. I mean look at the technology today, we’ve gone onto cloning, I  
56 mean it’s a bit away off from the blast furnace now, so why do you need  
57 to know it? (Author, 2001, p. 449).

Moreover, the gulf between school science and contemporary science becomes evident within the context of socioscientific issues, such as, the use of genetically manipulated organisms (GMO) in agriculture, the mad cow disease, the global climate change and others. Decisions in this arena are too often reliant on subjective and emotional criteria rather than the subject of informed debate<sup>1</sup>. Enabling young people to make informed decisions does not require an education that will turn them all into scientists, but it does mean providing them with a broad understanding of the major scientific explanations, how scientific knowledge is generated and validated, its limitations, some consideration of its social implications and a deeper understanding of the nature of risk and its assessment. Just as the study of English literature aims to develop a critical appreciation of what are the significant elements of good writing, we argue that the aim of science education should be to develop students' understanding of the intellectual and creative achievements of the scientific endeavour, their knowledge and skills needed to engage in public debate, and the ability to evaluate critically media reports of science (Author, 1998). In order to achieve these goals and communicate the ideas of science and its achievements, we believe it becomes necessary to explore new modes of communicating science.

#### Forms of scientific text

A review of the literature indicates four main forms of text used to communicate science: expository text, argumentative text, narrative, and a mixture of narrative and expository text. The most common is the traditional form of expository text found in many textbooks. Its major features, although not a necessary feature of expository text in general, are that it is univocal, non-dialectic and its major focus is either descriptive or explanatory. Such texts commonly deploy the genres, language and grammar of science and are difficult to read (Author, 2001). Expository text itself consists of a mixture of types. There is, for instance, expository text, which provides a causal mechanism for how a rainbow is produced or how inherited

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<sup>1</sup> A good example is the recent controversy surrounding the use of the triple vaccine for Measles, Mumps and Rubella (the MMR vaccine). Because of one paper published in 1999 suggesting that there *might* be a correlation between this vaccine and autism, a significant number of parents have declined to have their children vaccinated. The numbers taking this decision are now large enough to risk a new epidemic of any one of these diseases. Moreover, the author of the original paper has now retracted it indicating that the evidence on which the claim was based is now flawed.

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characteristics are transmitted from one generation to the next. There is also expository text that simply presents a description of the scientific picture of the bones of the body or the parts of the flower.

Less familiar within science education is the second [form of text](#) – argumentative text. A study done by Penney, Norris, Phillips and Clark (2003) analysing the textual characteristics of junior high school science textbooks and comparing them to media reports of science showed that there was no [argumentative text](#) in the textbooks. In fact, the results of this study indicated that junior high school science textbooks expose students to large amounts of expository text instead.

Argumentative texts are texts that fundamentally take a dialectical approach seeking to make the case that a given claim is true reasoning forward from the premise to the conclusion. The [conclusion, however, can be debated](#), and consequently such arguments are often hedged with a metadiscourse of meaning associated with words like ‘may’, ‘could’ or ‘possibly’. The third type of text is narrative text, which is used to form ‘narratives of science’ and ‘narratives of nature’. [In the narratives of science, scientists develop a claim, which is supported by a series of data. In contrast, popularising articles present ‘narratives of nature’ in which plants or animals are the subjects and their activities are presented in a story-form, and not in a claim-data form.](#)

The fourth type of text is narrative text in which expository text is embedded. Such text is commonly used by popularisers of science [for the purpose of stimulating the interest and holding the attention](#) of the reader. One such exemplar is Chapter 5 of the book [The Blind Watchmaker](#), by Richard Dawkins, an evolutionary biologist. This chapter begins with the memorable quotation “It is raining DNA outside”. Dawkin goes on to describe a willow tree that is shedding fluffy seeds far and wide across the landscape. The paragraph ends: “It is raining instructions out there; it's raining programs; it's raining tree-growing, fluff-spreading algorithms. That's not a metaphor, it is the plain truth. It couldn't be any plainer if it were raining floppy disks”. [This kind of written text – narrative – is most common in everyday discourse and lies at the heart of the account of this paper.](#)

#### Common Discourse as Narrative

Of the four forms of scientific text, most common in everyday discourse, is

## Narrative in Science

narrative, not expository. Our lives are told and represented through narratives; history is of itself a narrative, albeit contested and with plural accounts; literature is the embodiment of narrative with its classic genres of romance, irony, tragedy and comedy; others contend that economics is enriched by the narrativist perspective, as our law and the social sciences. This would suggest, as White (1981) argues:

That far from being one code amongst many that a culture may utilize for endowing experience with meaning, narrative is a metacode, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of shared reality can be transmitted (p. 1).

Stories are used every day as a way of making sense of and communicating events in the world. Movies, books, televisions and everyday conversations are filled with the telling of stories (Shank & Berman, 2002). Stories are essentially a sub-set of the narrative genre and describe a series of actions and experiences made by a number of real or imaginary characters (Ricoeur, 1981). According to Shank and Berman (2002), a story is, “a structured, coherent retelling of an experience or a fictional account of an experience...and that in some sense, all stories can be considered didactic in nature, in that they are intended to teach or convey something to the listener” (p. 288). Likewise, in a book aptly entitled *Teaching as Storytelling*, Egan (1986) makes the case that stories form a natural vehicle and means of educating students not only about their cultural and historical roots but also *about* the scientific descriptions of ‘reality’.

Stories then are a vehicle through which experiences and events are communicated amongst people. Researchers have contended that stories have *the potential to influence* people’s understandings and beliefs, and essentially, *promote* a societal and cultural change (Brock, *Shank & Berman, 2002*; Strange & Green, 2002). Brock et al., (2002) argued that the impact of stories on people’s beliefs and behaviours is enormous, citing the impact of the best-selling books like *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. As they stated, “it is very hard to make the case that any rhetorical presentation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had an impact that was even remotely comparable to that of the fictional narrative” (p. 3). According to Schank and Berman (2002), “for communication, memory and learning purposes, stories are likely to be richer, more compelling, and more memorable than the abstracted points we ultimately intend to convey or learn when we converse with others” (p. 293).



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5 A legitimate question becomes one of whether and how can stories, [as in](#)  
6 [fiction text](#), be used in science education. Put otherwise, how can the complex  
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8 grammar of science reliant on distinctive genres and a highly nominalised vocabulary  
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10 adopt any of the features of the narrative – a highly interpretive account with its  
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12 actors, agents, scene and motives? White (1981) has argued that narratives could be  
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14 the solution to the problem of translating *knowing* into *telling* – “the problem of  
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16 fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning that are  
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18 generally human rather than culture-specific” (p. 1). More fundamentally, given that  
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20 the community of practice inhabited by scientists is, for the average person, akin to a  
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22 foreign culture, White points to a crucial role for narrative when he argues that:

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24 We may not be able to fully comprehend specific thought patterns of  
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26 another culture, but we have relatively less difficulty *understanding*  
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28 a story coming from another culture, however exotic that culture  
29  
30 may appear to us (p. 1).

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32 [In agreement with the above idea, Gough \(1993\) argues that science fiction texts](#)  
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34 [should be integral to both science and environmental education and that narrative](#)  
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36 [strategies of fiction may be more appropriate for representing science than the](#)  
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38 [expository textual practices that have dominated science and environmental education](#)  
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40 [to date. It is through literary fiction, he states, that the problems of human](#)  
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42 [interrelationships with environments become intelligible.](#)

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44 It is such arguments that have led us to ask what would it mean to [use](#)  
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46 [narrative in science education](#). Hence, in this paper, we explore the potential role that  
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48 narrative might have not only to communicate scientific ideas but also to generate  
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50 knowledge and understanding of the ideas and concepts. That is, to explore “the  
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52 value of the narrative in communicating ideas and in making ideas coherent,  
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54 memorable and meaningful” (Author, 1998). In short, [we aim to make the claim that](#)  
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56 narrative, potentially offers a communicative tool, which has long been neglected by  
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58 science educators and is worthy of further re-examination.

### 59 60 What is Narrative?

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62 Bruner (1986) differentiated between two distinct ways that humans order  
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64 experience. He called the first one *paradigmatic*, which refers to organizing thought

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3 that is logico-scientific, which is based on reasons. The second way that humans  
4 order experience, according to Bruner, is *narrative* and deals with the creation of  
5 stories. As he described, narrative is used to refer to: a) a way of sculpting and  
6 structuring information through expressions of different media into readily understood  
7 forms that guide learners' comprehension; and b) a cognitive mode that learners use  
8 to make sense out of information or experience. Narrative then becomes part of how  
9 people understand the world they live in and they serve as a way of communicating  
10 that understanding to others. The corollary of the status of narrative is, as Graesser,  
11 Olde and Klettke (2002) have argued, that it has a privileged status among various  
12 types of discourse:  
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21 The situations and episodes in narrative have a close correspondence  
22 to everyday experiences, so the comprehension mechanisms are much  
23 more natural than those recruited during the comprehension of other  
24 discourse genres such as argumentation, expository text, and logical  
25 reasoning (p. 229).  
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30 Although narrative is as old as Aesop, in contemporary culture it is expressed through  
31 a growing diversity of different media such as books, plays, films and can be  
32 experienced in different ways. Moreover, because of narrative's dominance as a form  
33 of communication it has been examined throughout the years in a number of different  
34 disciplines such as education, sociology, philosophy, history, fiction, film and others.  
35 For instance, Chatman (1978) in her book Story and Discourse, defined narrative and  
36 described the ways in which it can be actualized:  
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42 Narrative is basically a kind of text organization, and that  
43 organization, that schema, needs to be actualized: in written words, as  
44 in stories and novels; in spoken words combined with the movement  
45 of actors imitating characters against sets which imitate places, as in  
46 plays and films; in drawings; in comic strips; in dance movements, as  
47 in narrative ballet and in mime; and even in music (pp. 117-118).  
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53 However, this paper is concerned with narratives realisation in text, as in stories. In  
54 this form, three authors in particular, (i.e., Chatman, 1978; Toolan, 2001; Norris,  
55 Guilbert, Smith, Hakimelahi & Phillips, 2005) have conducted an extensive functional  
56 analysis, which is relevant to our interest on the constituents of narrative and their  
57 function. A summary of the major features of their analysis is presented in Table 1.  
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5 For Chatman (1978) there are three necessary components of a narrative: a) a  
6 story, described as chain of events; b) the existents that are the characters or items of  
7 setting; and c) a discourse, which refers to the means by which the content is  
8 communicated. In contrast, Norris et al., (2005) in a significant meta-analysis of  
9 narrative present a view of narrative whose concern is the past and whose purpose is  
10 to help us better understand the natural world. According to Norris et al., (2005)  
11 narratives include eight elements: events, a narrator, narrative appetite, a time,  
12 structure, agency, purpose, and a reader. Norris et al., (2005) [view](#) all of these  
13 elements as essential components of any narrative and [suggest that](#) the absence of  
14 certain elements such as a narrator, distinguishes a chronicle from a narrative.  
15 Significantly, their definition of agency restricts it solely to human beings or moral  
16 agents – an interpretation which would preclude the use of narrative in science.

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18 For Toolan (2001), “narrative is a perceived sequence of non-randomly  
19 connected events, typically involving, as the experiencing agonist, humans or quasi-  
20 humans, or other sentient beings, from whose experience we humans can learn” (p. 8).  
21 Whilst Toolan shares many of the elements of Norris et al., (2005), his definition is  
22 restricted to five elements although their definitions are essentially the same.  
23 Chatman’s (1978) description of the elements of narrative is again somewhat similar.  
24 An important distinction from the other two is that Chatman’s notion of agency  
25 recognises that it is possible for ‘things’ to cause events or be affected by events;  
26 things that need not be solely human. Chatman, too, draws a distinction between the  
27 author, the person who devised the story, and the person who narrates the story.  
28 Whilst this difference is subtle it recognises that stories are [used to](#) communicate  
29 events and that telling the stories of others is one means of knowledge transmission.  
30 Table 1 summarizes the three views about the main features of narrative.

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32 An examination of the main features of Table 1 demonstrates that while there  
33 is an agreement amongst the three points of view in some features [such as](#) events,  
34 times, and agency there is disagreement about others. Nevertheless, despite the  
35 obvious differences in the three definitions there exists some similarity. All three  
36 definitions state that narratives should include the following components: events,  
37 time, a narrator and agency. Moreover, with respect to the role of the agency all three  
38 definitions are in agreement stating that it is actors who cause and experience events.  
39 There are, however, differences in how each author defines these components. For  
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## Narrative in Science

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4 | example, all three [authors](#) state that narratives are made of connected events but only  
5 Norris et al., (2005) argue that these events need to be in chronological order. More  
6 fundamentally, there is disagreement on the nature of the agency. Norris et al., (2005)  
7 argued that the actors must be human beings or other moral agents; Toolan (2001)  
8 referred to the agents as humans, or quasi-humans, or other sentient beings, and  
9 Chatman (1978) stated that agents could be material objects. Our view, for reasons  
10 that will be exemplified subsequently, is that agents can be objects from the material  
11 world in that entities affect one another – a region of high air pressure produces stable  
12 air and high temperatures, light is dispersed by a raindrop to produce a rainbow etc.  
13 In this sense, we would concur with Ogborn et al., (1996) who argue that scientific  
14 explanations are analogous to ‘stories’ in that they invent a cast of protagonists which  
15 enact a sequence of events which have consequences or purposes.  
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25       Likewise, whilst Norris et al., (2005) agree with Toolan (2001) on the  
26 existence of a narrator, the way [the](#) narrator’s role is described differs. In particular,  
27 Norris et al., (2005) argue that the narrator is the agent who determines the purpose of  
28 the story and the sequence of events. Chatman’s (1978) position contradicts this view  
29 as she makes a distinction between narrated narratives and non-narrated narratives,  
30 suggesting that the existence of a narrator is not a necessary component of the  
31 narrative. Rather, Chatman (1978) makes a distinction between the author, the one  
32 who devised the story, and the narrator who relates the story, an action that Norris et  
33 al., (2005) attribute to the narrator as one and the same. Another difference between  
34 the three definitions concerns the purpose that narratives serve. Neither Chatman nor  
35 Toolan suggest that narrative should have a purpose. Norris et al., (2005) though,  
36 argued that the purpose of narratives is to help people understand the natural world.  
37 Whilst this is undoubtedly the primary use of narrative in science providing a forensic  
38 analysis not only of what we know but how we know, we will argue that one of the  
39 other function of narrative is epideictic providing a celebration of the wonder and awe  
40 of the scientific account of the material world.  
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53       As for the structure of narratives, Chatman’s (1978) definition does not point  
54 to any specific requirement, while Norris et al., (2005) state that narratives typically  
55 start with imbalances and end in success or failure. Of these two, Toolan’s (2001)  
56 definition is more in agreement with Norris et al., (2005) and states that narratives are  
57 expected to go somewhere with some sort of resolution or conclusion provided.  
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61 | Toolan (2001), however, does not make any reference to as how narratives should

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3 begin. Norris et al., (2005) introduce a novel but related element here – the notion of  
4 narrative appetite – that is the ability of the text to create a desire to know what will  
5 happen and which is a feature that neither Toolan (2001) nor Chatman (1978) make  
6 any reference to in their definitions. Our view is that whilst the creation of narrative  
7 appetite is an important component to engaging the reader – a literary effect [that is](#)  
8 [used](#) as a means of engagement, it is not an essential component.

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14 Finally, Norris et al., (2005) explicitly introduce the requirement for the reader  
15 to interpret the text as a narrative as another component of narrative. Chatman (1978)  
16 also makes a reference to the audience responding with an interpretation, though not  
17 necessarily a ‘narrativised’ one. Toolan (2001), however, has no such requirement.

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21 From this analysis, two questions emerge for us. First, what are the necessary  
22 components, if any, of narrative that may be of value to science education? And,  
23 second, are some [components](#) of greater importance than others? Our view of the  
24 necessary components of narrative draws on our meta-analysis of these authors’ work  
25 and is presented in Table 2. Such a view, we argue, would permit narrative a role in  
26 science – one whose implications will be discussed later. In what follows, we draw  
27 on a range of examples to make the case for this representation of narrative [in science](#).

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33 First, we would argue that the purpose of narratives is not just to help us  
34 understand the human world, as Norris et al., (2005) state, but also to understand the  
35 natural world. For if there is any value to [use narrative in science](#) it must [include](#)  
36 [gaining](#) an understanding of not only the human and social world but also the natural  
37 world, which is populated with non-human agents. At its core, science is about  
38 developing causal explanations of the material world – what is causing global  
39 warming, why do people get AIDS, what causes a rainbow and many more. Causes  
40 are commonly modelled on the action or agency of one object on another.  
41 Canonically, this is associated with a person but is commonly projected onto objects  
42 endowing them with agency. Agency, however, should not be reduced to simple  
43 causation in order to distinguish physical behaviours brought out by scientific laws,  
44 and the effects of human behaviours for which we hold them morally responsible - the  
45 key and necessary feature of agency is intentionality. Agency is then inherent to all  
46 causal action and not just to human agents. [Correlation](#) explanations, in contrast, lack  
47 agency. Why is the red sky the shepherd’s delight? Why does the light go out when  
48 the door slams? Without a mechanism there can be no agency making it impossible to  
49 construct a temporal history, which is an essential part of the causal *and narrative*

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3 explanation. This is not to say that all explanations are narratives or vice versa.  
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5 Rather, [we suggest that](#) the distinguishing feature between narrative and expository  
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7 text is the presence or absence of a narrator. All that is required is that the presence of  
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9 a narrator can be inferred. Here, Norris et al.'s (2005) make a significant point about  
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11 the interpretive role of the reader, who, must first recognise that a text is a narrative,  
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13 at least implicitly.

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15 So far we focused our attention on defining what narrative is and identifying  
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17 its essential constituents. Another important aspect of this work is exploring what the  
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19 literature suggests about the role and effect of narrative on people's retention on  
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21 ideas. The next section of this paper is devoted to describing the findings of empirical  
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23 research on the use of narrative in education and its effects on learning.

#### 24 25 [Uses and](#) Effects of Narrative

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27 Several philosophers, educators and researchers have pointed to the value of  
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29 the use of narratives in learning and understanding the world in which we live (Coles,  
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31 1989; Author, 1998; Taylor, 1982; Thorndyke, 1977; William, 2000). In particular,  
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33 William (2000) stated that narrative text (i.e., fiction) is easier to comprehend and  
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35 remember than expository text (i.e., factual and informational material). According to  
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37 Taylor (1982), expository texts are usually "organized according to a hierarchical  
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39 pattern of main ideas and supporting details" while narrative texts are usually  
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41 "organized according to a sequential pattern of events that follows the conventions of  
42  
43 a story grammar" (p. 323). Ogborn et al., (1996) [argued that](#):

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45 Stories are easy to remember because one part readily evokes the next  
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47 and the need for resolution, which the narrative structure sets up,  
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49 involves us as hearers and readers, willy-nilly. But at the deeper level  
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51 we can think of the story as a knowledge carrier (p. 66).

52  
53 [Gough \(1993\) suggested that the significance of stories \(i.e., fictional narratives\) for](#)  
54  
55 [science and environmental education is associated both with their \*content\* but also](#)  
56  
57 [with their \*form\*. given than literary fictions models the narrative strategies that](#)  
58  
59 [humans use in order to make sense of the world.](#)

60  
61 [A few](#) studies compared the effects of [narrative on learning, and](#) provide  
62  
63 evidence to support the argument that narrative structures enhance retention and  
64  
65 comprehension (e.g., Englert & Hiebert, 1984; Taylor, 1982; Thorndyke, 1977).

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3 Englert and Hiebert's (1984) study investigated the effects of four types of expository  
4 text on the comprehension performance of children and third and sixth grades of three  
5 ability levels. As the researchers described, the four text structures that were used in  
6 their study were: *description* (specifies an object's, person's, animal's or event's  
7 characteristics and attributes), *enumeration* (a series of facts, details), *sequence* (a  
8 series of events related to a process is presented in chronological order) and  
9 *comparison/contrast* (two or more events, objects, individuals are compared  
10 according to their likeness and differences on one or more attributes). The findings of  
11 this study revealed that the sequence and enumeration were the most salient to  
12 children while description and comparison/contrast were the most difficult text  
13 structures for both third and sixth grade children to understand. As the researchers  
14 explained, it is possible that enumeration (i.e., listing of points) constituted a powerful  
15 text structure because the process of recognizing details was like filling in slots in  
16 memory. Sequence, on the contrary, may have constituted a powerful text structure  
17 because of the children's familiarity with time-based structures in stories (Englert &  
18 Hiebert, 1984). The findings of this study support the argument that [the structure of](#)  
19 [stories](#) can enhance children's comprehension performance. Support [for](#) this argument  
20 [also](#) has been provided by other studies related to science that have produced similar  
21 results (e.g., Maria & Johnson, 1989).

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A research study carried out by Maria and Johnson (1989) examined the effect of different types of texts on seventh and fifth graders' learning related to the scientific reasons for seasonal change. Expository and *soft expository text* – a 'hybrid of narrative and expository text' (p. 329) – were used for the purpose of this study. As the authors reported, three tests were used in this study: a vocabulary multiple choice test was used as one pre-test of prior knowledge about the topic of seasonal change, a misconception multiple choice test, given as a pre-test, immediate post-test and delayed post-test and an application tests, which was given as an immediate and delayed post-test. The results of this study indicated that the subjects had understood the scientific explanation of seasonal change better with the soft expository text, which included narrative, than the expository text.

[A study within the context of science education was carried out by Negrete \(2003\) in order to determine the efficacy of a collection of short stories with scientific](#)

## Narrative in Science

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content as means for communicating scientific ideas. Specifically, this study explored the question of how efficient are narrative texts compared with factual ones in communicating science and by which of these two written expressions does the information obtained stay longer in the memory. The participants of this study were a group of 40 undergraduate students that were divided into two sub-groups: one reading short stories with scientific themes written by famous writers (Primo Levi and Anatoly Dnieprov) and the other lists of scientific facts coming from the stories. Quantitative and qualitative data analysis showed that narrative information was retained for lengthier periods than factual information in long-term memory. Moreover, the analysis of the performance of the narrative group showed that individuals were more likely to remember scientific information when that was central to the development of the story. Also worthwhile noting is that the individuals in the narrative group quoted verbatim literary phrases, analogies, metaphors and irony when retelling a story, which according to the researcher, suggests that people retain information when this is presented in an attractive way to them.

In agreement with the above, Norris, Guilbert, Smith, Hakimelahi and Philips (2005) state that the value of proposals to use narrative in science “rests on the existence of a *narrative effect* that enhances memory, interest, and understanding” (p. 356). Solomon (2002) suggested the use of historical stories about science for the purpose of increasing student motivation and enjoyment and also for facilitating ethical discussion (cf., Norris et al., 2005). Meyer (2008) used storytelling as a way into the students’ personal experiences with particular phenomena and the sharing of stories as a way to “trespass within science discourse”, and which was effective in engaging female students (p. 467)

Conle (2003) explored various narrative practices in the classroom and highlighted the different forms of engagement that those practices prompt. An example of such narrative practice is the experiential teaching stories in teacher preparation described through an activity where the researcher (instructor) started the class by having the student listen to a song about the ongoing war in Ireland, and then asked them to share personal stories about the realities of war. As the researcher described, something wonderful happened to the students who began sharing painful stories and which could be related to the anguish in the song. In discussing the impact of narrative on this activity, the researcher stated that the act of telling, was



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3 particularly important because the students tried to tell and write all they remember  
4 and during this act they are likely to remember or discover incidents not held in mind  
5 at the outset of the telling, which might even change the story or prompt a new  
6 understanding of it. Another example of narrative practice, as described by Conle  
7 (2003) is journal writing, as she prompted a preservice teacher to create a story she  
8 constructed from events in her life and which lead her to a particular understanding  
9 about her life, her choice of career and was important for her professionally.

10  
11 Such narrative practices, Conle (2003) argues have the potential to produce  
12 five outcomes: a) advances in understanding (e.g., productive meaning making as the  
13 result of narrative encounters); b) increased interpretive competence (e.g., competence  
14 in finding multiple interpretations of a particular phenomenon or event); c) richer  
15 practice repertoires (e.g., narrative repertoires that become part of one's personal  
16 practical knowledge); d) changes in life (e.g., autobiographical narratives cause  
17 changes in personal lives), and, e) visions gained (e.g., moral modeling agendas).

18  
19 In the next section we explore the idea of using one such narrative practice –  
20 the use of fictional text - narratives - for the purpose of communicating explanations  
21 in science through some examples of narrative text and we then discuss the  
22 implications of this proposition for theory, practice, and research.

### Narrative Explanations

23  
24 Our interest in the role of narratives to provide scientific explanations is built  
25 upon suggestions of the recent reform report by the American National Academy of  
26 Education's committee on science education (Duschl, Schweingruber & Shouse,  
27 2006) calling for improvement in K-8 science, reform recommendations proposed by  
28 the National Science Education Standards (National Research Council, 1996) and the  
29 Beyond 2000 (Author, 1998) reform document, that suggest an emphasis on the use of  
30 evidence and explanation, scientific knowledge development and the discourse of  
31 science.

32  
33 Explanations and explanation processes have been examined by linguists,  
34 philosophers, historians, psychologists, sociologists, and science educators. The focus  
35 has been wide ranging and includes ideological, historical, educational, psychological  
36 and epistemological perspectives. The foundation for discussions on scientific  
37 explanation has been Hempel and Oppenheim's (1948) Deductive-Nomological  
38 model for scientific explanations. According to this model, there are four conditions  
39 of adequacy of scientific explanations: a) the explanations must be a valid deductive  
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argument: b) the explanans must essentially contain at least one general law; c) the explanans must have empirical content; and, d) the sentences constituting the explanans must be true (Hempel, 1966, p. 51). Cartwright (1983) discussed how explanations are used to explain how the world works:

This picture of how nature operates to produce the subtle and complicated effects we see around us is reflected in the explanations that we give: we explain complex phenomena by reducing them to their more simple components (p. 58).

Bechtel and Richardson (1993) referring to the construction of explanations stated that when we explain “we shift down from the system to its parts in order to explain how the system does what it does” (p. 231). What would it mean then to use narrative to explain how ‘systems’ work in science?

Ogborn et al., (1996) suggested that scientific explanations have an underlying structure analogous to that of a ‘story’, as there is a world of protagonists that have powers of action. Explanations, they suggest, can be thought of as:

...stories in which actors play out their roles, and we can think of the actors (the entities) as the things which the student has to learn about. An explanation of (say) motion as produced by gravity fits the same form as one about insulin controlling sugar level in the blood (p. 47).

These protagonists of the story, as they explained, enact a sequence of events, which has an outcome, the phenomenon to be explained telling us how something or other comes about. What follows are some examples of pieces of narrative text that provide explanations.

The following piece of popular science offers an explanation of the origin of the elements.

But if all these examples of our cosmic connectedness fail to impress you, hold up your hand. You are looking at stardust made flesh. The iron in your blood, the calcium in your bones, the oxygen that fills your lungs each time you take a breath—all were baked in the fiery ovens deep within stars and blown into space when those stars grew old and perished. Every one of us was, quite literally, made in heaven (Chown, 1998,p.62).

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5 | [This piece of popular science states that all](#) of the atoms in our blood [are the result of](#)  
6 | [a](#) violent reaction in the interior of old stars. As simplistic as [the narrative](#) may be it  
7  
8  
9 has a set of imagined entities – stardust, flesh, iron, oxygen and the hot interiors of  
10  
11 stars. The latter acts (by some unexplained means) on the atoms in stars to produce  
12  
13 stardust, which in turn becomes flesh. There are events, structure, agency and its  
14  
15 purpose is to explain the origin of the elements. More fundamentally, the  
16  
17 personalised tone endows it with a sense of a narrator providing an essential  
18  
19 constitutive element of a narrative.

20  
21 To exemplify these characteristics we have chosen selected extracts from two  
22  
23 contrasting pieces of popular science writing and from the classroom. The first of  
24  
25 these is a piece from Primo Levi's book, The Periodic Table, on the Carbon atom.  
26  
27 Levi (1995) begins this chapter by introducing his principal character.

28  
29 Our character lies for hundreds of millions of years, bound to three  
30  
31 atoms of oxygen and one of calcium, in the form of limestone: it  
32  
33 already has a very long cosmic history behind it, but we shall ignore it.

34  
35 At any moment which I, the narrator, decide out of pure caprice to be  
36  
37 the year 1840 - a blow of the pickaxe detached it and sent it on its way  
38  
39 to the lime kiln, plunging it into the world of things that change.

40  
41 This introduction serves a range of functions. First, it introduces the principle actor –  
42  
43 the unknown entity about whom the story is to be told. In making him, her or it an  
44  
45 unknown, the piece serves to generate narrative appetite. Who is this character bound  
46  
47 to three other atoms? What will happen to him, her or it? Second, it locates the  
48  
49 events clearly in the past situated where it is because of a previous chronology, which  
50  
51 will not be explained. [At the same time it](#) signals that a chain of events [will take place](#)  
52  
53 by referring to an imminent event [that is about to occur](#). This piece also serves the  
54  
55 dual function of laying down a structure for the work flagging to the reader that this is  
56  
57 the beginning of a tale to be told providing the vital literary clue that what follows is  
58  
59 essentially a narrative. Finally, the piece introduces a narrator who is the raconteur of  
60  
61 the events that are to follow. Such is the ingenuity of this introductory paragraph that  
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63 the only component missing of our required components is a sense of purpose –  
64  
65 omitted essentially to sustain a sense of mystery and intrigue necessary to generate  
66  
67 narrative appetite.

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5 Primo Levi's purpose is never explicit but most would concur that it is  
6 essentially to tell the story of the carbon cycle narrating how this atom is first  
7 transformed into carbon dioxide, then caught by the wind, breathed in by a falcon and  
8 then brushing against a leaf, penetrating its inner structure, adhering to a large and  
9 complicated molecule is finally separated from its oxygen to become part of a  
10 molecule of glucose. His major focus, however, is to generate a sense of wonder at  
11 the chemical process that is photosynthesis – a process that he never actually names.  
12 As a chemist, where most chemical reactions have to be initiated either by heating or  
13 pressurising the constituents or both, his tale emphasises the fact that all this happens  
14 at the temperature and pressure of the atmosphere, and gratis. This wonder is  
15 sustained by pointing to the other feature rarely mentioned in standard expository  
16 texts that:

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27 Carbon dioxide...which constitutes the raw material of life....is not  
28 one of the principal components of the air but rather a ridiculous  
29 remnant, thirty times less abundant than argon. The air contains  
30 0.03 percent; if Italy was air, the only Italians fit to build life would  
31 be, for example, the fifteen thousand inhabitants of Milazzo in the  
32 province of Messina.  
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37 Undoubtedly, Levi here uses analogy to great effect. But, more fundamentally, his  
38 tale has a very distinct purpose. On one level it is a description of the carbon cycle.  
39  
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41 At another level the text serves as a generator of a sense of awe and wonder of the  
42 achievements of the natural world, its complexity and the interrelatedness of the  
43 events on which we humans are fundamentally dependent. Thus, with its multiple  
44 purposes, this text clearly contains all of the constituents of a narrative text  
45 instantiating that it is possible to communicate scientific ideas in this form.  
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49 Others use narrative constituents to similar effect. Thus, Dawkins (1986)  
50 begins his account of the Blind Watchmaker with the following piece to generate  
51 narrative appetite.  
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53

54  
55 It is raining DNA outside. On the bank of the Oxford canal at the  
56 bottom of my garden is a large willow tree, and it is pumping downy  
57 seeds into the air. There is no consistent air movement, and the  
58 seeds are drifting outwards in all directions from the tree. Up and  
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3 down the canal, as far as my binoculars can reach, the water is white  
4 with floating cottony flecks, and we can be sure that they have  
5 carpeted the ground to much the same radius in other directions too.  
6  
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8  
9 The opening sentence is fundamentally oxymoronic – DNA not being something  
10 which normally rains.  
11

12 Russell Stannard (1993) likewise, in his book Here I am, written for children,  
13 uses such effects in the battle between Phusis, the heroic defender of the Earth, and  
14 the Head Exterminator whose task is to dispose of the Earth.  
15  
16

17 'Ah, but do you know how many basic elements they're made up  
18 from?'

19 He [the Head Exterminator] shook his head.  
20

21 'Ninety-two,' she said.  
22

23 'Ninety-two?' he repeated. I don't believe it. You're saying you start  
24 off with just ninety-two different kinds of thing - *elements* did you  
25 call them? And from ninety-two, you make hundreds of thousands  
26 of different ... ?  
27  
28

29 'That's right.'  
30

31 'No kidding? Most universes have vast, vast numbers of basic  
32 building blocks. A real headache trying to keep track of them all.  
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35 But you say. . . 'The Judge shook his head. He found this very hard  
36 to swallow.  
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39  
40 Such contradictions between the observations of the senses and the underlying sense  
41 are a common literary device used by many popularisers of science. Marshall Fox,  
42 for instance, reporting the discovery of electric light highlights the contradiction  
43 between the fragility of the source and the magnitude of the effect.  
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46 Edison's electric light, incredible as it may appear, is produced from a  
47 little piece of paper - a tiny strip of paper that a breath would blow  
48 away. Through this little strip is passed an electric current, and the  
49 result is a bright, beautiful light, like the mellow sunset of an Italian  
50 autumn.  
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53 Likewise, Natalie Angier (1995) one of the leading American popularisers of science  
54 highlights the contradiction between the outward appearance of animal behaviour and  
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4 its actual reality in her book The Beauty of the Beastly:

5 Ah Romance. Can any sight be as sweet as a pair of mallard ducks  
6 gliding gracefully across a pond, male by female, seemingly  
7 inseparable? Or, better yet, two trumpeter swans, the legendary  
8 symbols of eternal love, each ivory neck one half of a single heart,  
9 souls of a feather staying coupled together for life? Coupled for life  
10 - with just a bit of adultery, cuckoldry, and gang rape on the side.

11 Alas for sentiment and the greeting card industry, it turns out that,  
12 in the animal kingdom, there is almost no such thing as monogamy.  
13 As a wealth of recent findings makes as clear as a crocodile tear,  
14 even creatures long assumed to have faithful tendencies and to need  
15 a strong pair bond to rear their young in fact are perfidious brutes.

16 Such effects are undoubtedly effective at generating narrative appetite and would  
17 seem to be an essential requirement of any text that seeks to engage and hold its  
18 reader. However, there is an important distinction between many of these texts and  
19 [the first example of narrative text that we described earlier \(i.e., Periodic Table\)](#).

20 Such texts mix narrative and expository text using the narrative text to sustain the  
21 reader's engagement. Thus, Dawkins (1985) continues his introduction in the Blind  
22 Watchmaker with the following piece of explanation:

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...so why did I say that it was raining DNA rather than cellulose?  
The answer is that it is the DNA that matters. The cellulose fluff,  
although more bulky, is just a parachute, to be discarded. The  
whole performance, cotton wool, catkins, tree and all, is in aid of  
one thing and one thing only, the spreading of DNA around the  
countryside. Not just any DNA, but DNA whose coded characters  
spell out specific instructions for building willow trees that will shed  
a new generation of downy seeds. Those fluffy specks are, literally,  
spreading instructions for making themselves. They are there  
because their ancestors succeeded in doing the same. It is raining  
instructions out there; it's raining programs-it's raining tree-growing,  
fluff-spreading, algorithms. That is not a metaphor, it is the plain  
truth. It couldn't be any plainer if it were raining floppy disks.

The fundamental problem with Dawkin's writing here is that there is no causal

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3 explanation. Without this, there can be no sense of agency, no history and no  
4 narrative structure. In short, it is a descriptive text containing many, albeit striking,  
5 metaphors, which multiply describe a single process but provide no causal  
6 explanations. Likewise, Angier continues her opening narrative piece with a  
7 descriptive element that contains no causal explanations.  
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12 Biologists traditionally believed, for example, that up to 94 percent  
13 of bird species were monogamous, with one mother and one father  
14 sharing the burden of raising their chicks. Now, using genetic  
15 techniques to determine the paternity of offspring, biologists find  
16 that, on average, 30 percent or more of the baby birds in any nest  
17 were sired by someone other than the resident male. Indeed, the  
18 great challenge these days is to identify a bird species not prone to  
19 such evident philandering.  
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26 Later in the piece, she returns to the narrative using an embedded narrative as an  
27 exemplar of her point.  
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30 Come the spring breeding season, the [chickadee] flock breaks up  
31 into pairs, with each pair defending a territorial niche and breeding  
32 in it. On occasion, however, a female chickadee mated to a low-  
33 ranking male will leave the nest and sneak into the territory of a  
34 higher-ranking male nearby. That cheating chickadee ends up with  
35 the best of both worlds: a stable mate at home to help rear the  
36 young, and the chance to bestow on at least one or two of her  
37 offspring the superior genes of a dominant male.  
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44 These pieces offer only a few examples of narratives that are used to communicate  
45 various ideas of science. The fact that teachers commonly use [written](#) narrative as a  
46 form of exemplifying science concepts is vividly demonstrated by the work of  
47 Ogborn et al., (1996) that examines explanation in the science classroom. Here, for  
48 instance, the teacher uses a simple narrative to convey the idea that sound can travel  
49 through solids:  
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55 Now then I used to have terrible problems using a phone box  
56 because I worked up in Scotland in a little village...where the  
57 Glenfiddich whisky comes from – so it was a bit nice. And when I  
58 used to phone home there used to be a great big clock tower in the  
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3 middle of the village and throughout the summer they would have a  
4 piper standing next to the telephone boxes playing the bagpipes so  
5 you can imagine what that was like when you were trying to phone  
6 home (p. 67).  
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10 Such a narrative contains all our essential seven elements including a clear,  
11 underlying purpose. More importantly, here the narrative works providing a causal  
12 explanation for why it was difficult to hear – the sound of the bagpipes can travel  
13 through glass and drown out the sound from the telephone. Ogborn et al., (1996)  
14 provide many other examples of how teachers commonly deploy narrative as a means  
15 of embedding science concepts suggesting that oral narratives are a vital element of  
16 teachers' pedagogic arsenal. [Such pedagogical functions of narrative are explored in](#)  
17 [the next section.](#)  
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#### 24 [Pedagogical Function of Narrative](#)

25 [In this section we explore the pedagogical function of narrative as we](#)  
26 [recognize that there is pedagogical purpose in teaching science with the use of stories](#)  
27 [but, also, in engaging students in narrative construction. In essence, we examine the](#)  
28 [potential for a narrative-based pedagogy where narrative plays a central role in the](#)  
29 [learning process and has implications for the interplay among content, learners and](#)  
30 [teachers. A narrative-based pedagogy is in conjunction with ideas drawn from the](#)  
31 [second-generation cognitive science, as discussed by Klein \(2006\), which considers](#)  
32 [knowledge as perceptually based, fuzzy, and contextual while language is thought to](#)  
33 [be largely metaphorical and narrative. Klein \(2006\) points to a gap between the](#)  
34 [denotative nature of science text and the expressive nature of human cognitive](#)  
35 [representation representations and poses the question of how people can learn to read](#)  
36 [and write stories. The gap between everyday narrative speech and scientific](#)  
37 [explanation and argumentation, he argues, is mediated by science literacy education](#)  
38 [through the use of various activities that combine talk and writing \(i.e., informal](#)  
39 [writing, speech-like texts, narrative-argument blends etc\).](#)  
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53 [In agreement with these ideas, Mott, Callaway, Zettlemyer, Lee and Lester](#)  
54 [\(1996\) argue that narrative could well form the basic for entire curricula and propose](#)  
55 [the design of narrative-centred learning environments that would enable learners to](#)  
56 [participate in the following activities: a\) \*con-construction\*: participate in the](#)  
57 [construction of narratives; b\) \*exploration\*: engage in exploration of the narrative such](#)  
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as examining the characters in relation to their actions; and c) reflection: engage in post-hoc analysis activities through reflecting on narratives subject matter. Through such activities and within the context of narrative-centred learning environments, as the authors suggest, constructivist learning is promoted.

A related classroom example comes out of Gilbert, Hipkins and Cooper's (2005) work, who described the use of narrative materials to support science learning in New Zealand's *kura kaupapa Maori* schools (i.e., Maori worldview schools) or put differently, the use of stories as a way of making science more "inclusive" for students who find science inaccessible and alien. These schools were first established in New Zealand in the early 1980s initially funded by families and communities and later on by the Government also, to address the problem of the low proportion of Maori children being able to speak Maori and that these children were over-represented in negative schooling statistics. In an attempt to address the issue of Maori language teaching resources, the researchers developed the *Totika* (i.e., "right" in English) resources, which are stories containing origin traditions and historical knowledge as well as messages about accepted social behaviour, morals, values, and/or explanations of natural phenomena. The researchers describe various such stories and also pointed to limitations of those (i.e., children's finding it hard to imagine themselves in the stories, stories not being scientific enough etc) to conclude that narrative has a place in science education and could be used as a bridge between narrative thinking the logico-scientific mode of thinking. However, as the researchers suggest, there is a need to come up with "science stories that involve real people (with real feelings and motivations) solving real problems, in ways ordinary people can empathise with" (p. 13).

Narrative can be a useful tool not only in the hands of teachers but also for students as well as means to communicating their understandings of science. Bostrom (2006) examined teachers' and students' narratives in making school chemistry more meaningful to students. Data consisted of interviews with six experienced chemistry teachers and eleven students. Analyses of data illustrated that teachers used narratives from their own lived experience as well as from other people's lives in order to make chemistry more meaningful and also the students used narratives or stories connected to their own lived experience. These narratives were often used as personal anecdotes, but included historical stories of science, and also units of work that were based on

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narrative, such as the class that traced the amount of greenhouse gas emission involved in each stage of manufacture of a chocolate bar. Moreover, as the researcher asserted, the content of narrative analyses showed that narrative made chemistry in class pluralistic in allowing the lived experiences of both teachers and students to interact with the scientific facts, which suggests a role of narrative as an educational method.

Another pedagogical approach to the use of narratives by students takes place within the context of narrative virtual environments or various models of ICTs which enable children to be story constructors and storytellers within the context of collaborative multimedia environments (Mott, Callaway, Zettlemyer, Lee & Lester, 1999; Mott & Lester, 2006). Mott and Lester (2006) described the virtual world of CRYSTAL ISLAND, an inquiry-based learning environment for middle school students:

CRYSTAL ISLAND features a science mystery set on a recently discovered volcanic island where a research station has been established to study the unique flora and fauna. The user plays the protagonist attempting to discover the origins of an unidentified infectious disease at the research station. The story opens by introducing her to the island and the members of the research team for which her father serves as the lead scientist. As members of the research team fall ill, it is her task to discover the cause of the outbreak. She is free to explore the world and interact with other characters while forming questions, generating hypotheses, collecting data, and testing her hypotheses. Through the course of her adventure she must gather enough evidence to correctly choose among candidate diagnoses including botulism, cholera, giardiasis, paralytic shellfish poisoning, salmonellosis, and tick paralysis as well as identify the source of the disease (p. 7)

It is clear that such examples of narrative construction by students support their engagement in hypothesis building and testing through data collection and analysis for the purpose of constructing scientific explanations.

As these classroom examples suggest narrative in teaching and learning can take various forms such as storytelling, role-playing, autobiographical writing, simulations, etc and can take place in a variety of learning environments. To address questions associated with these various uses and forms of narrative in science and the potential of a narrative-based pedagogy we discuss implications for theory and

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3 practice to conclude with proposed research directions.  
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#### 5 Implications for Theory, Practice and Research

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7 The proposition to use narrative in science is not offered without the  
8 recognition that the use of narrative in school science would require major  
9 transformations in pedagogy, curriculum design, teacher education, and teacher  
10 practices.  
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12  
13 In terms of curriculum design, the above notions call for curricula that  
14 acknowledge the centrality of narrative in science. This suggests the need for  
15 identifying existing narratives that communicate scientific ideas and developing  
16 narratives for specific subjects to be used in the classroom either at the beginning of a  
17 lesson to stimulate student interest, either in conjunction with an inquiry investigation  
18 or at the end of a lesson as an extension, depending on the subject and goals of the  
19 lesson.  
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22 Equally important with the design of such curricula, we suggest, is supporting  
23 teachers develop ‘participatory’ relationships with the materials that enables effective  
24 modification, learning and use (Schwarz, Davis, Kanter & Smith, 2006). In essence,  
25 we argue that it is imperative that teachers develop specific pedagogical content  
26 knowledge that would enable them to approach the narrative-based curriculum  
27 materials flexibly and make adaptations to them in order to fit in with their local  
28 classroom contexts and instructional objectives.  
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31 Moving beyond the implications of the proposition to use narrative in science  
32 for theory and curriculum, we argue that this proposition also has implications for  
33 teacher education and teacher practices. The main implications of this proposition  
34 point towards the need for teacher preparation programs to provide prospective  
35 teachers with opportunities to learn science through narratives. Put otherwise, we  
36 suggest that narrative texts are incorporated in science methods courses for the  
37 purpose of supporting prospective teachers in developing the Pedagogical Content  
38 Knowledge (PCK) needed to incorporate effectively narrative texts in their own  
39 teaching practices in the future.  
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42 Implications of the proposition of the use of narrative in science for research  
43 are associated with explorations of the role of narrative in communicating science and  
44 the ways in which narrative supports comprehension and facilitates science learning.  
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Hence, we recommend that future research be directed in the area of narrative use in science aiming at identifying existing fictional narratives that could be used in science and examining the effects of narrative on learning.

Identifying existing fiction and non-fiction narratives used to communicate scientific ideas and exploring their characteristics is an important line of research because these could be used to illustrate the ways in which narratives are structured, organized, and used in certain learning environments. Drawing upon such resources, new ones could be developed exemplifying a wider variety of scientific concepts and used in a wider variety of settings. In addition to identifying existing narratives that could be used in science, it might also be useful to explore the idea of students constructing their own oral or written narratives as way of engaging with and making meaning of natural phenomena and communicating scientific ideas as described in other studies (e.g., Conle, 2003; Meyer's 1998).

Moreover, we argue that there is a need for further large-scale studies that will investigate the ways in which narratives support learning within the context of science. Questions to be answered are ones associated with the impact of narratives on people's understanding of science concepts. Critical questions to be answered are the following: Does the use of narrative lead to an improved retention of the ideas in science? Does the use of narrative lead to an improved conceptual understanding of either or both the concepts of science and the nature of science? Equally important, we argue, is to identify which specific elements of narratives people recall the most and what impact those have on their understandings we suggest that qualitative in-depth studies are done to answer questions such as: What specific information do people recall from reading narrative text and which narrative component is associated with that specific information?

#### Concluding Remarks

In this paper we attempted to make the case for the use of narratives, as in fiction text, in communicating science as a way of making it meaningful, relevant and accessible to the public. We built our case on Montgomery's (1996) view that the language of science "makes us feel excluded from a certain grown-up world of truth and truth telling" (p. 2) and we drew upon Bruner's (1986) argument that narrative is

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central in how people understand the world they live in and serves as a means to communicate personal understanding to others. We do not claim that the use of [fictional](#) narrative in science is *the* solution to all science education's problems, [or the best way of representing scientific information](#); rather we suggest that narrative is used as [one](#) approach to communicating [science and representing specific scientific ideas](#).

[An issue of concern](#) is what kind of science is communicated through narratives as casual accounts or popularisation of knowledge, that are part of the content of science. A crucial question then arises: Is there a danger of portraying an oversimplified picture of science through narratives? Gould (1992) in the Prologue to his collection of articles *Bully for Brontosaurus*, discussed:

Popularising science is held in such disregard in professional scientific circles that forays into the genre may damage the research careers of budding young scientists. The criticism from the scientific community directed at popularising practices are that they are 'simplifications', 'adulterisations' and focus on the 'whiz bang'. (p. 11)

However, according to Gould ([cf.](#), Fuller, 1998), even though criticisms hold true for some popular texts, "accessible science can be reclaimed as an honourable intellectual tradition" and that "any conceptual complexity can be conveyed in ordinary English" (p. 37). The issue then becomes one of how to translate the conceptual complexity of scientific information into 'everyday' language without minimizing its value. Montgomery (1996) suggests that we should "somehow discover or forge a stable plane between scientific and non-scientific speech" (p. 52). Discovering this stable plane between scientific and non-scientific speech and between expository and narrative text, we argue, ought to be the goal and direction of research concerned with [the use of narrative in](#) science. Future steps of our work will explore this 'stable plane' as we hope that this paper will provide the basis for intellectual conversations amongst [theorists](#), educators, [and researchers](#) about the potential of narrative in communicating science.

## Narrative in Science

Table 1

*Three views about the main features of narrative*

Narrative element	Norris et al., (2005)	Chatman (1978)	Toolan (2001)
Purpose	Help us understand the natural world		
Events	Events involve a unified subject, are connected to one another, and they are in chronological order	A chain of events that make up a story. The events of a story are traditionally said to constitute an array called 'plot' - 'arrangement of incidents'	A perceived sequence of non-randomly connected events
Structure	Narratives typically start with imbalances and end in success or failure  Narratives are structured around the sequence of plot events and the sequence in which the events are related.		They usually go somewhere, and are expected to go somewhere, with some sort of development and even a resolution or conclusion provided  A degree of artificial fabrication or constructedness not usually apparent in spontaneous conversations. Sequence, emphasis and pace are usually planned.
Time	Narratives concern the past	Independent dual times: story time (past) and discourse time (order of events might be different)	Narratives concern the past
Agency	Actors cause and experience events, they involve <i>human beings</i> or other moral agents	Account for events and recognize the existence of <i>things</i> causing or being affected by those events.	Typically involving, as the experiencing agonist, humans or quasi-humans, or other <i>sentient beings</i>
Author		Author is the one who devised the story	
Narrator	The agent relating a narrative, determines the purpose of the story and the sequence of the events	The narrator may be overt- a real character or an intrusive outside party. Narrator should mean only the someone – person or presence- actually telling the story to an audience, no matter how minimally evokes his voice- * There are non-narrated narratives, which means, that the	They have to have a teller, and that teller, no matter how back-grounded or invisible, is always important

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		existence of a narrator is not a necessary component of the narrative
Reader	The reader must interpret the text as a narrative	The audience must respond with an interpretation: they cannot avoid participating in the transaction
Narrative Appetite	The reader must want to know what will happen	
Discourse		The means by which the story is communicated

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Table 2

*Necessary components of a narrative*

Narrative Component	Description of component
Purpose	To help us understand the natural and human world. In the case of the natural world, narratives help the reader to invent new entities, concepts and some picture of the scientist's vision of the material world.
Events	A chain or sequence of events that are connected to each other
Structure	An identifiable structure (beginning, middle, end) where events are related temporally
Time	Narratives concern the past
Agency	Actors or entities cause and experience events. Actors may either be human or material entities who act on each other.
Narrator	The teller who is either a real character or alternatively, a sense of a narrator.
Reader	The reader must interpret or recognise the text as a narrative



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## Narrative in Science

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