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The Unspoken Questions: A Graphic Tool for Supporting Interviews

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Abstract

Addressing methodological limitations in conducting biographical-narrative interviews, this paper analyses a bespoke graphic tool developed to help mitigate these issues. Building on the pilot study results and aligned with the creative methods framework, the tool, whose layout is inspired by board games, aims to balance participants' autonomy with the need for comprehensive, situated data. The outcomes of its adoption in five further interviews demonstrate its effectiveness in providing a structured yet flexible dynamic that fostered participants' empowerment and offered a greater thematic and temporal data coverage.

Keywords

graphic tool, creative research methods, interview, biographical-narrative research

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1. Introduction

The biographical-narrative research based on professional life stories is conceptually grounded in an intersectional understanding of the personal and the social, the individual and the collective, and the private and the professional within a shared social phenomenon. They are possible through the analysis of singular life stories and prototypical life histories, written from narratives produced collaboratively by storytellers and researchers. The data collection method should aspire to narrative logical organisation, with significant temporal and thematic depth and representativeness, resulting in narratives that, rather than a triple skewed/superficial of events, preserve the subjects' biographical accounts and personal reasoning about the phenomenon, interpreted alongside sociohistorical data (Bolívar & Segovia, 2019; Goodson & Sikes, 2017).

Despite semi-structured data collection methods continue to be the most common tool for primary data source in biographical-narrative research, making the interview the most consumed data collection technique. The potential of this method depends on the interviewer's ability to perform an informed planned improvisation, allowing the maintenance of a natural conversational dynamic while preserving the ethics and fulfilling the aim of the research interview. To do that, the researcher should invest in developing their interviewers' persona and in employing suitable tools to overcome issues that hinder them from conducting the most appropriate and fruitful dialogues (Atkinson, 2012; Ferreira, 2014).

One challenge in capturing life narratives through interviews is the need for strategies that allow for the collection of subjective perspectives on participants' lives while ensuring they have the autonomy to address their experiences in they prefer and feel comfortable with. Thus, the researcher should guarantee the centrality of participants' voices is maintained, avoiding disruption of their narrative flow, while attending to the demand for comprehensive, substantiated data that enable the research questions to be answered (Atkinson, 2012).

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Sensitive to these aspects, we developed the research project *Paradigms of Literature Teaching in Secondary Education: A study based on teachers' life histories*, aimed at producing professional life histories of senior Portuguese secondary education literature teachers, gathering their narratives through interviews, whose baseline methodological design is described in section 2. By conducting the pilot study and analysing its results, we have identified dynamic issues that could have constrained aspects such as data coverage and depth, as addressed in section 3. A literature review detailing solutions to these types of problems in interviewing, presented in section 4, informed the development of a new supporting tool that, grounded in the creative methods framework, adopted a layout inspired by common board games, as explained in section 5. Based on the results of its mobilisation to five new interviews, portrayed in section 6, we aim, in this paper, to assess the potential of this tool to mitigate the identified methodological issues in conducting interviews, as explored in section 7. Our experience using it indicates that it could be adopted to yield promising results for data collection in other research projects, as addressed in section 8.

2. Baseline Interview Design

According to Atkinson (2012), developing life history interviews consists of three stages before the data are ready for analysis: *planning*, *interviewing*, and *transcribing*. In this way, in the first stage, we designed an in-depth, semi-structured interview script to collect the professional life narratives of the participating teachers. To construct it, we unfolded the main objective into specific goals aligned with the five main thematic axes orienting the interview and set possible strategies to achieve them (see Appendix 1).

During the *planning* phase, we also conducted a documentary analysis to map and characterise the curricular development of literature teaching and to identify political and socio-historical factors that may have influenced participants' career trajectories and professional practices (Freitas, 2025; Gomes-Cermin, Jove Godoy and Lopes, in press). The results informed the researchers, enabling themes act as *active listeners*, share common ground with participants, and co-construct meaning, thereby facilitating dialogical interaction (Lillrank, 2012). To help interviewers locate participants' narratives, we added the line of the identified factors to the interview script (see Appendix 1).

After completing the first stage, we conducted the *interviewing* stage in collaboration with participants. We selected them using convenience and snowball sampling, guided by the inclusion criterion of being a senior or retired literature teacher in the Portuguese secondary education system, with a career beginning around the 1970s. Then, we conducted face-to-face interviews at dates and locations convenient to the participant, examining their contributions within an entire ecosystem.

Thus, we proceeded to the *transcribing* stage, followed by the analysis phase. To do this, we conducted a socio-textual analysis (Mercuccio, 2008) to identify and understand empty or filled pauses, speech interruptions, voice overlaps, and intonation fluctuations. Besides, we conducted paradigmatic and narrative analyses (Polkinghorne, 2015) to categorise different aspects of the participants' narratives (see Figure 1), write their individual life stories, and synthesise representative life histories, thereby transcending individual experience to achieve socio-collective resonance.

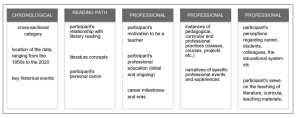


Figure 1. Categorical axes of paradigmatic analysis.

1. Free translation of Paradigmas de Ensino da Literatura no Ensino Secundário: Um Estudo Baseado nas Histórias de Vida de Professores, designed and executed in accordance with national and European ethical standards for social science research, including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (Regulation (EU) 2016/679), Portuguese Law no. 58/2019, and the Code Deontológico dos Psicólogos Portugueses da Ordem dos Psicólogos (OPP, 2016).

3. Pilot Study

The pilot study meets a critical first-step requirement by serving as a quality assessment tool for the interview design developed (Atkinson, 2012). The participant collaborating in this phase was Lúcia[2], a teacher of Portuguese and literature in her late 60s who has been working since the 1980s. Her one-to-one interview lasted approximately 55 minutes and was mediated through a random, mixed approach to the different thematic axes and strategies set in the developed script (see Appendix 1).

After the interview, we transcribed and analysed the recorded audio aiming to evaluate the interview's design. With the conversational analysis, we intended to assess the interviewer's ability to perform her role by managing the co-construction dynamics while keeping the participants' narratives central (Atkinson, 2012; Lillrank, 2012). The paradigmatic and narrative analyses aimed to evaluate the achievement of the research objectives, the narrative comprehension and temporal coverage. The results allowed us to identify aspects for improvement. The following excerpt illustrates the limitations identified:

> **Interviewer:** *How did you decide to become a literature teacher?*
>
> **Lúcia:** *Oh, how did I decide to become a teacher? … Well, I've always liked literature, and I've always enjoyed the idea of being a teacher. My educational path was very eclectic, and I was a relatively good student in many subjects. So when I finished my secondary education, I had two more obvious options for attending university. I could either pursue Germanic studies, which included courses in Portuguese, English, and German, or economics, which was a bit different, but I was also very good at maths. Then, I didn't enroll in either of the courses [laughs]. The Carnation Revolution had occurred in Portugal, and the universities were closed for a long time, leaving us with nothing to do. So, the schools for primary teacher education opened, and I decided to apply. I took the course and really liked it. The school had a very modern educational environment at the time, featuring teachers from France and other foreign countries. So, this was great, and I was a primary school teacher for seven years.*
>
> **Interviewer:** *And what year was that? In what year did you enter teacher training?*
>
> **Lúcia:** *I began my initial teacher training in 1978 and 1977 and finished it in 1979. I worked as an elementary teacher until 1987. During that time, I took a degree in Portuguese studies. That's also where my passion for (…)*
>
> **Interviewer:** *I am did you get this degree at the University of [omitted] or elsewhere?*
>
> **Lúcia:** *Yes, right here at the University of [omitted]. So, I had a bachelor's degree, and then I got my degree. However, […] no permanent jobs were available anywhere school. Do you know what I mean? There couldn't be a position. So, at that point, since I had already studied Portuguese – because I've always loved Portuguese history, literature, and linguistics, because it's all kind of connects, you know? – I was able to find stable employment and went on to work in secondary education. And that's pretty much the whole story.*
>
> **Interviewer:** *Wow, was that!*

3.1. Interruptions and Imbalances

The interactions based on the natural dynamics of conversation (including interruptions, overlapping voices, repetitions, pauses, etc.) and question-and-answer logics are unfailingly created in interviews for co-locating life narratives. The desired dialogical interlocution strengthens the relationship between the actors and increases the likelihood of clarification, expansion, and deepening of the participants' stories (Ferreira, 2014; Lillrank, 2012).

However, in Luis' interview, the persistent intrusion to confirm the timeline of events – as demonstrated twice in the excerpt – is not characterised as this qualified interaction. The task of co-constructing a chronologically organised and socio-historically coherent narrative of Luis' professional life through out the verbal interplay demanded contextualising events in time and establishing the precise sequence of facts, even though they had arisen randomly during the interview.

If, on the one hand, this feature of biographical-narrative research justifies these interviewers' interventions, on the other hand, the constant interruptions regarding this topic hinders the natural flow of the interviewee's narrative, undermining the potential of this methodology to understand the subjects' views on the phenomena under study. Furthermore, the inquisitive tone conferred by this timeline-checking may have led to an imbalance in power dynamics, constraining the collaborative logic of this type of interview.

2. To ensure participant anonymity and uphold research ethics, all names used in this text are pseudonyms.

3.2. Gaps and Indefiniteness

After frequently interrupting to establish the timeline of Luis' narrative in the initial part of the interview, the interviewer seemed to become aware of their interruptions and the possible implications for the narrative's flow. Their perception led to apparent embarrassment and a call to assume their role as power-balance curator (Lillrank, 2012), likely explaining the subsequent decrease in the formulation of questions, even those that would help to fully address the main themes of the interview.

Even though this more passive procedure allowed improving the narrative's fluidity, the change in the interviewer's posture complicated the later task of precisely situating events in time. Besides, due to the decision to focus on verbal contributions as a supportive voice (Lillrank, 2012), this lack of intervention may have contributed to temporal and thematic gaps in the final account of Luis' narrative.

One example is how, in the excerpt transcribed above, Luis quickly jumped from his initial education to the moment he began to work, promptly concluding that it was "pretty much the whole story". This narrative dynamic unfolded throughout the interview, resulting in a greater density of narrative and thus less reflecting to the initial decades of his career, an *average* representation of the final years and a lack of data about the intermediate decades.

It is not possible to definitively determine whether the interviewer's limited intervention was responsible for the uneven representation of eras and themes, which could be explained, for example, by flaws in other interview parameters, by the natural way people remember beginnings and the endings of cycles, or even by the refusal to address these intermediate decades for a variety of possible reasons (Glück & Bluck, 2007). However, these are all assumptions that we could only better assess through an interview design that allows us to address the necessary topics while maintaining the dual dynamics inherent to this method.

4. Literature Overview

The pilot study with Luis exposed a tension between the procedural requirements of biographical-narrative research and the preservation of a collaborative interview environment. By analysing the findings, we identified two primary obstacles. Due to the disruption of interview flow and the power imbalances caused by frequent, inquisitive interruptions to verify chronology. The second is the emergence of thematic gaps and temporal indefiniteness when the interviewer adopted a passive posture.

To mitigate these tensions, we developed a narrative review (Baumeister & Leary, 1997) to identify evidence-based solutions to refine the interview design. To ensure rigorous yet flexible selection of sources, we consulted SciELO, Scopus and Web of Science databases for terms such as "interview", "life history", "life story" and "biographical-narrative" in titles, abstracts, and keywords. The selected studies included those that addressed the methodological appraisal of conducting interviews in qualitative research, focusing on beliefs, experiences, life narratives, opinions, values, perspectives, and identity representation of diverse groups of people. Thus, we conducted a thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) with the selected articles, focusing on describing their nature, the types of limitations addressed in the texts, the strategies used to solve them, and the contributions and limitations they recognised in the process.

The corpus shows the perception that qualitative research relies primarily on traditional data collection methods, which conditions the construction of meaning from verbal linguistic contributions, potentially creating shortcomings depending on the project design. Most studies report concerns about these limitations, mainly due to the specificities of speech production among enrolled participants, such as children and youth, people with disabilities, and people in multicultural and multilingual contexts. Even in research with adults, the corpus demonstrated that the use of a method based exclusively on verbal data production could create barriers and dismantle the scope and depth of the data, particularly with sensitive populations, as people experiencing homelessness, and racial and gender minorities (see Figure 2).

To overcome these issues, the corpus proposes each reviewer beyond the exclusively interviewer's conventional approach (Ferreira, 2014) by combining the traditional interview with creative methods. According to the studies, the diverse framework grounding the blended method enables the mobilisation of tools and activities across different forms of language and materiality, providing means to deepen understanding of participants' contributions and surpass communication barriers (Kanwal et al., 2020). We categorised the combination of interviews and creative methods addressed in the corpus into three axes (see Table 1).

First, we characterised them according to the modality and materiality of the interventions and tools. Most of them were derived from principles of arts-based theories and materialised into four types: visual, musical, and dramatic 'texture' productions; 'drawing' exercises; 'technological' resources, such as websites and software; and 'visual/graphic' resources, commonly formed by icons, images and short messages. According to the corpus, their ease of creation and mobilisation can justify greater representation of visual/graphic-based tools, since they do not depend on the capacity or availability of either researchers or participants to develop or engage with arts or drawing, or to use technological equipment.

Adults	Children and	People with	People experiencing	People in multicultural	Racial & gender
Crilly et al., 2006 Nolemans and Kommers, 2012 Uribe-Martínez et al., 2025	Bagnoli, 2009 Sheldon, 2013	Ajodhia-Andrews and Berman, 2009 Hollomotz, 2018 Kennedy and Brewer, 2014 McLaughlin and Coleman-Fountain, 2019 Mustcke-Williams and Cook, 2024 Piamofino, 2024 Sheridan et al., 2011	Flaherty and Garratt, 2022	Chase et al., 2010 Gundarina, 2021 Neag, 2019	Watson and Kirby, 2024

Figure 2. Narrative analysis's corpus characterised by participants' typology

Secondly, we categorised their roles based on the objectives and processes described for the data collection methods. We identified three ways in which they function: as '*enabling*' tools and interventions, used to allow communication between the interviewers and the interviewees; as '*evoking*' tools or instruments, used to inform and stimulate the interviewers and the interviewees' approach to the subject; and as '*enabling-evoking*' tools and interventions, defined by the use of creative methods both as means and markers to the participants' expression of their contribution.

Lastly, we typified the creative methods according to two types of data produced: the participant's life 'narrative' and self-representations, or the participant's 'perspective' on the subject of the research.

Table 1. Characterisation of Methods

	Modality • materiality	Objectives • processes	Data produced
Ajodhia-Andrews and Berman (2009)	visual/graphic	evoking	perspectives
Bagnoli (2009)	drawing	enabling-evoking	narrative
Brevington and King (2019)	visual/graphic	evoking	narrative
Chase et al. (2010)	visual/graphic	enabling-evoking	narrative
Crilly et al. (2006)	visual/graphic	enabling-evoking	perspectives
Flaherty and Garratt (2022)	visual/graphic	enabling-evoking	narrative
Gundarina (2021)	drawing | visual/graphic	enabling-evoking	perspectives
Hollomotz (2018)	visual/graphic resources	enabling	perspectives
Kennedy and Brewer (2014)	artistic	enabling-evoking	narrative
McLaughlin and Coleman-Fountain (2019)	artistic	enabling-evoking	narrative
Mustcke-Williams and Cook (2024)	artistic	evoking	perspectives
Neag (2019)	visual/graphic	evoking	perspectives
Nolemans and Kommers (2012)	visual/graphic	evoking	perspectives
Piamofino (2024)	artistic	enabling-evoking	narrative
Sheridan et al. (2011)	artistic | drawing	enabling-evoking	narrative
Shotton (2013)	visual/graphic	evoking	perspectives
Uribe-Martínez et al. (2025)	artistic	enabling-evoking	perspectives
Watson and Kirby (2024)	technological	enabling	perspectives

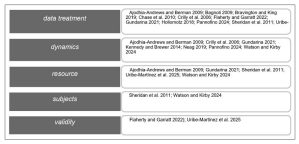


Figure 3. Benefits (B) of creative methods of data collection

Then, based on their practices and results, the authors of the papers listed several benefits (B) (see Figure 3) and acknowledged some limitations (L) (see Figure 4) arising from their interview-creative data collection method.

Reflecting the most prominent objective of facilitating data collection by overcoming various communication barriers, their potential for accessibility, inclusion, and flexible use is one of the aspects most frequently noted, being acknowledged by 12 studies (B1).

In procedural terms, 13 studies (B3) found that the use of creative methods improved the dynamics of data collection, facilitating understanding of processes, increasing engagement rates, and enabling a better distribution of power. In contrast, in 07 of the papers (L2), it is acknowledged that, given the contextual nature of the methods, maintaining homogeneity in levels of involvement and the distribution of power is difficult. Neag (2019) warns of the risk that the creative nature of the methods may confuse participants about the purposes of their contributions, thereby compromising the ethical legitimacy of the collected data.

Also considering operational criteria, Brevington and King (2019) and Flaherty and Garratt (2022) classify the creative methods they used as key for resources-saving, as implementing them required little additional effort (B6). Conversely, other authors (L3) argue that developing and implementing these methods is laborious and conclude that natural constraints on material, space, and time can justify their limited adoption.

A group of 11 papers (B7) appreciates the competency of the adopted methods as eliciting subjects, even those of complex sensibility, and also recognises their potential to maintain focus on the topics of interest. On the other hand (L4), Kennedy et al. (2011) and Watson and Kirby (2024) advise against the possibility of their potential for disturbing participants by evoking trauma-informed and emotional threats.

In light of the potential of the collected data, 10 studies (B8) asserted that data collected through creative methods can expand and enhance the validity of other data sources, while Flaherty and Garratt (2022) and Uribe-Martínez et al. (2025) (L5) argue that the interpretation of data produced through creative methods, based on visual/graphic elements, remains dependent on other sources, namely the participants' verbal explanations. Crilly et al. (2006) and Sheridan et al. (2011) (B2) underscore the effectiveness of creative methods in organising and processing data, thereby aiding their treatment. However, 12 texts (L1) are instructive on the risks of collecting heterogeneous data, given the different methodological configurations adopted to address the diversity of participants and contexts.

Given the nature of their research, some authors (B5) emphasise the benefits of creative approaches to longitudinal data collection. Others discuss their potential to promote empowerment and serve as an educational tool (B4). Nevertheless, Chase et al. (2010) and Gundarina (2021) disagree with the idea that their research methods is a "panacea" to be used to all ensures to "solve" all kinds of limitations in data gathering with special participants.

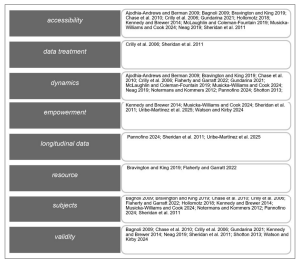


Figure 4. Limitations (L) of creative methods of data collection

5. Developing a New Tool

The weaknesses identified during the pilot interview reflected a power-management tension that made it challenging to construct a representative and detailed narrative (as a product) while ensuring a narrative (as a process) that respects the teller's autonomy and protagonism. Although the literature review's most prominent results explored the capacities of creative methods to address the specificities of participants or the sensitivity of the topic, they also indicate ways in which they can support the mitigation of the issues we faced.

Reflecting on the areas for improvement, the results of the narrative review and the definitions of the interview script, we decided to develop a complementary tool to help *evoke* topics, mediate interactions, and organise chronologically the *narratives* produced in the interviews. We also wished to concentrate interviewees' focus, to provide them with a clearer understanding of what the research encompasses (Brevington & King, 2019; Crilly et al., 2006; Sheridan et al., 2011), and to establish a shared ground between researchers and tellers, thereby stimulating the dialogical process during the interviews (Bagnoli, 2009; Crilly et al., 2006).

Considering that "visual tools [...] point to the less graphic skills it supposedly involves" (Nolemans & Kommers, 2012, p. 606), we developed the new tool to work as a visual/graphic-based elicitation booster (Bagnoli, 2009; Brevington & King, 2019; Crilly et al., 2006; Flaherty & Garratt, 2022; Sheridan et al., 2011), giving it a shape inspired by board games. [3] Because of

3. Namely, those with a sequential play logic, such as the cross-cultural, board game Cacip Ecadik. Movement and Tax Game of 1646.
4. Due to the methodological design of this study, the inspiration to board games is solely focused on aesthetic aspects. The correspondences and game-play characteristics were consciously ignored, as these traits are unnecessary, impossible and potentially harmful for our primary goal of eliciting a deep and coherent narrative flow.

the potential flexibility this feature has to participants, it could ease anxiety, foster reduced atmosphere, and encourage open conversation, potentially leading to more reciprocal and balance interview sessions (Shotton, 2013). Furthermore, it also allows for the display of visual elements responsible for suggesting themes and the order in which the interview should be conducted (Ajodhia-Andrews & Berman, 2009; Chase et al., 2010; Gundarina, 2021; Neag, 2019; Shotton, 2013).

Within this new tool, called *My Teacher's Life*[4] (see Figure 5), we hope to combine oral narrative with other language codes, surpassing "the use of a strictly verbal approach" (Crilly et al., 2006, p. 341) to motivate the production of data to the extent and depth necessary to a more balanced interview. It comprises a printed (A) tabletop board, a printed (B) set of flashcards, a (C) set of wooden pawns and a (D) set of wooden chits.

We designed both the tabletop board and the set of flash cards using the software Inkscape®. The 297 x 420-millimetre area of the printed tabletop board (see Appendix 3) is mainly occupied by a timeline of squares spanning 1965 to 2025, encompassing the time period of the potential participants' professional education and careers. We refrained from adding explicit beginning and ending points, common in commercial board games[5] that aesthetically inspired ours, to avoid constraining the tellers' narratives if they chose to delve further into the past or the future to signify their contributions. Moreover, by opting for these dimensions, we evoked anonymous, even authorship, the narrative flow and structure and, at a deeper level, giving the idea that someone's professional life has a definite start and end.



Figure 5. Bespoke board game set

5. A free translation of *Minha Vida de Professor(a)*.

Its area also includes space for the set of 18 flashcards (see Appendix 4), measuring 80 x 60 millimetres each, whose existence is indicated by black-framed squares on the timeline. They refer to important political and curricular changes that, along with the graphic elements commenting the tabletop, serve as eliciting elements, depicting historical, political, and educational events that the documentary analysis (Pereira, 2023; Jose Godoy and Lopes, in press) indicated as impacting the literature teaching profession. In this way, the events displayed in the script (see Appendix 1) only to the interviewer during the pilot interview are socialised with participants by the tabletop board and flashcards.

Finally, the sets of wooden pawns and chits were collected from commercial board games to help participants mark their path during the narratives and pinpoint events and people they consider meaningful in their career development.

To ensure coherence, we rewrote the script developed for the pilot (see Appendix 2), which, included in this new version on initial explanation of the board game's use in the validation stage and predicted its possible relationship with the topics of the different stages, listing strategies to mobilise its parts during the interview.

6. Conducting New Interviews

Based on the new design for the data collection method, we conducted five interviews with participants[5] identified through the snowball technique, initiated by the pilot interview participant, Lara.

The first participant was Eduarda, a recently retired Portuguese teacher in her late 60s. She and the interviewer sat at opposite ends of the table, with the game board set between them. Eduarda interacted vividly with each of the board game's elements throughout the interview.

The second interview was with Glória. She is a Portuguese, French, and Spanish teacher in her early 70s, enjoying her retirement since 2010. The participant sat in a chair across the interviewer, and the board game was placed on a coffee table next Glória. The participant eventually consulted the timeline on the tabletop board to locate the events she was describing and organise her narrative.

Joaquina was the third participant. She is a Portuguese, Latin, and Greek teacher who is also in her 70s and retired in 2016. The board game was set on the desk between the interviewer and the teller, who also preferred to use it as a temporary reference tool, frequently consulting the timeline to locate the events she referred to. She employed the other elements apparently as self-soothing objects, which likely helped maintain the narrative's low anxiety levels, even though this was not one of its primary objectives.

We conducted the fourth interview with Joana, a Portuguese, French, and Spanish teacher who worked until 2012. The interviewer and interviewee sat around a table with the board game placed on it. The participant mobilised all its elements throughout her narrative, although not consistently.

We interviewed lastly Magnólia, an 80-year-old Portuguese and French teacher who retired in 2005. Both researcher and teller sat around a table, where the board game was once again arranged between them. Magnólia primarily used the board game for its potential as a timeline and consulted the flashcards to boost her memory.

7. Analysing

As previously presented, the limitations we encountered during the pilot study highlighted aspects of the interview design that needed refinement. Thus, we analysed the use of *My Teacher's Life* in those five new interviews to understand to what extent it has helped overcome issues related to. The disruption of narrative flow caused by frequent chronological verifications, and it. The presence of thematic and temporal lacunae and indefiniteness in participants' contributions. To assess its potential impacts, we conducted conversational and thematic content analyses of the interview transcriptions, using the same framework and categorical tree developed during the pilot interview study (see Figure 1).

The primary analysis of the interviews demonstrated that, by making the tool's adoption flexible rather than mandating it, participants developed varying levels of engagement. As described in the previous section, Eduarda, Joaquina, and Joana consistently used most of the components of *My Teacher's Life* in their interviews. Because of that, we class-filed them as 'full-users', as they either adopted the tool for the functions we assigned to them or adapted it to their narrative needs. In the last case, it was important to be attentive to clarify the new meaning that they have attributed to it.

One example is Joana, who repurposed the least favoured parts of the tool, the set of generic indicants, mobilised only by her and Eduarda. She used them to represent events and people who impacted her professional identity, even though she did not consider them part of her professional life, such as the importance of her primary school teacher and her tasks as a volunteer camping coordinator:

5. To ensure participant anonymity and uphold research ethics, all names used in this text are pseudonyms.

> **Joana:** *I don't think we're able to unpick our lives too closely, nor separate the teaching from what we're living from our own lives […] For example, there's an association that organises holiday camps […] I volunteered for a few years as a kitchen hand, though my principle location for a specific week [of the year] was the camp itself […] and I think that things like that, and everything we live through and up being integrated into who we are — be it through imagination or reflection.*

Thus, the freedom to manipulate the tool individualised the participants' narratives, providing deeper insight into the diverse angles through which they interpreted the scope of their professional lives, potentially expanding the thematic reach of the interviews.

Differently, Glória and Magnólia are examples of 'partial-users', as they have adopted or adapted a few elements of *My Teacher's Life* inconsistently as detailed previously. Even in those cases, we have ascertained the influences of the tool in thematically and chronologically enriching the participants' narrative, as evidenced by Magnólia's mobilisation of the flashcards at the moment that the interview seemed to be ending.

> **Interviewer:** *Thank you so much for your help.*
>
> **Magnólia:** *I'm just not sure if I've covered everything you need.*
>
> **Interviewer:** *For my project, the main thing was hearing you talk about your life…*
>
> **Magnólia:** *Oh, how interesting! I didn't end up reading what was on these little cards. May I?*
>
> **Interviewer:** *Of course!*
>
> **Magnólia:** *The COVID pandemic [reading the 2020 s flashcard] … Here it is, the new contractual framework [reading the 1998's flashcard]. It was indeed a bit of a nightmare from time to time! And other cards? It's getting worse and worse! Once, I had to be assessed […]*

The flashcards functioned for Magnólia – as well as for Joana – as a summative instrument, to ensure they had covered everything they intended to. In both interviews, this moment, which initially seemed like a transition phase to wrap up closure, raised new questions and stories, leading the participants to supplement their narratives with accounts more or less related to the information presented.

During the development of *My Teacher's Life*, we also anticipated the presence of a 'non-user' participant who would not engage with any part of the tool throughout the interview. However, by analysing the results, we noticed that, even in these cases, its inherent tangibility can positively impact the conduct of the interview, once the tool assumes the role of a materialised shared script by graphically embodying the interview's objectives and scope. This semiotic trait enables a new level of transparency and interview conduction, once the participants are exposed to a graphic suggestion of what and how to deliver their contributions, thus minimising the lack of information about a specific theme or era.

This suggestive characteristic, however, did not represent the imposition of topics or a temporally unidirectional narrative. The graphic structures of the events and their organisation allowed participants to report flashbacks and flashforwards without losing the backbone of their story or (upsetting) theme or temporal jumps, another issue identified in the pilot interview.

The potential of the tool to *evoke* narratives can be observed not only in the use of the flashcards developed by Magnólia and Joana, but also in the configuration of the flashcards and the ornaments on the tabletop board, as said to participants' narrative development, functioning as evocative elements of memory rather than topics of discussion. The image could be seen in Eduarda's treatment of the flashcards from the 90s (see Appendix 4), which served to contextualise the subject she was already addressing at that point in her narrative, and to evoke others.

> **Eduarda:** *Indeed, this time here was the high point. It's from here, especially in the mid-2000s, that I feel things truly started to unravel. Why? Because here… I remember around… 2008… let me just see this… what was going on? [pauses to check the corresponding iconographic element on the tabletop board] Ah yes, the big crisis … Right, right! And the creation of vocational schools. Because here… I can't be sure, but I think it's right around here… right around this time [reading the three flashcards dedicated to the 90s]: the Teaching Career Statute is introduced, and then also fundamentally affected the schools. That really changed the whole landscape in schools, too.*

It is also perceptible in the way Joaquina uses the red cinnabon adorning the tabletop board to help her contextualise her narrative:

> **Joaquina:** *Then, this happened [pointing to the board, where the 25th of April was marked]. […] I was on my way to teach my classes, and when I got there — I'll point by eye — the Revolution had happened, and they [people from the school] told me, 'Go home! Go home! Get yourself home! So I just went home…*

And it how Glória manages to locate herself in time to contextualise her contributions by using the tabletop board's timeline:

> **Glória:** *I attended [consulting the board] the secondary school just these three years, so… [resuming with the help of the timeline] '93, '94, '95 [browsing once] '96/… I finished in '98/'99. In the following year, I assumed my studies at the French Institute. And then, well, in – I'll have to look here at the board [consulting the board].*

In this way, we can identify in developing and adopting *My Teacher's Life* as a complementary tool two factors contribute to overcoming the challenges associated with the lack of temporal and thematic representation identified in the pilot interview. Besides the aspects presented, the considerable increase in the time tellers spent producing narrative, compared with the 53 minutes of the pilot interview (see Table 2), indicates data-enrichment, driven by the tool's visual-graphic elements, which have catalysed participants' memory narratives.

In addition to the theme and time coverage, another concern we intended to address by developing the *My Teacher's Life* tool was its difficulty we faced in locating in time the events told by Lara. This issue negatively affected his narrative both as a process and a product, due to the interviewer's interruptions to check the dates and the lack of information organised in a way that would better constitute his story.

By observing the quote from Eduarda's interview, we noticed that the visual-graphic elements from the board game created a non-verbal form to date the occasions approached: the dividing of the tabletop board into time and flashcards. This behaviour is represented in the transcription by the number of times Eduarda used the word 'here' while pointing to the 'year' squares. In the integral transcription, this deictic was used 192 times, primarily to signal the temporal context of events in the timeline. Independent of the levels of engagement with the tool, the same term was also typically used by Glória (15 times), Joaquina (87 times), Joana (45 times), and Magnólia (55 times), primarily to refer to a specific date, but also referring to other circumstantial meanings.

For this reason, the collection of narratives through interviews became an (even) more semiotic process. The analysis of contextual elements, such as body language and prosody, has traditionally been recommended to expand the interpretation and analysis of interviews (Ferreira, 2014). However, the *My Teacher's Life* tool established a pragmatic necessity for documenting how participants interacted with its materiality.

To this end, we chose to record information considered crucial for data interpretation and chronological organisation in a paper-grid[6] representing the temporal timeline supposedly covered in the interviews, cross-referencing its analysis with the content accessible via the soundtrack ruling during transcription. The enhancement of the semiotic trait also demanded that the researchers develop, as part of their interviewer persona, the role of 'background-user', aware of the different types of data produced by refers to interaction within the board game, and of ways to mobilise its organisational and informational benefits without imposing its use on the participants.

Even though the accurate recording of information with the adopted tool required additional effort, we recognised its success during the analysis of the interviews. Compared with the pilot interview experience, the thematic and temporal coverage has been expanded, the need for non-meaningful interruptions has decreased considerably, and the chronological organisation of the data has been facilitated.

Table 2. Time Lasting the Interviews.

Interviewee	Duration
Eduarda	≈ 155 minutes
Glória	≈ 140 minutes
Joaquina	≈ 180 minutes
Joana	≈ 130 minutes
Magnólia	≈ 110 minutes

6. We also considered video recording participants' interactions with the tool, but we discarded the option. We were concerned with its potential methodological effects, as it could impact a more intimate tone to the interviews, disrupting the friendly environment and inhibiting the tellers.

All of these improvements have substantiated the construction of an environment to co-construct dynamics, helping also to minimise the power imbalance identified in the pilot interview. The flexible use and rearrangement of the tool's elements suggest that its less-prescribed features enabled significant narrative agency, while indicating its potential to be redesigned and adapted for different research objectives.

8. Concluding Remarks

We developed and adopted the *My Teacher's Life* concerning how it serves as a visual-biographic resource-based complementary tool, specifically designed to evoke autobiographical memories in interviews to construct life narratives. Considering our experience, it has proven effective in addressing the methodological weaknesses identified during the pilot study, such as disturbances during participants' contributions and thematic and temporal gaps.

While developing the tool, we were initially concerned that it could become a form of coercion, inadvertently restricting the participants' narrative autonomy, even if our intentions were the opposite. Fortunately, the interviews evidenced that the tool fostered *empowerment* of the tellers. The flexible way interviewers used the its parts in the five interviews enabled them to reshape, re-classify, and expand its functionality, utilising it as an instrument for method-logically self-ensuring their narrative deliveries.

Due to enhanced and personalised collaboration enabled by it, the interviews were freed from constant interruptions and disturbances, improving their dynamics and facilitating more chronological and localised data. The advances in the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, combined with the evocative potential of visual-graphic elements, also allowed them to engage in more qualified dialogue and to truly co-construct the interview through deeper, more meaningful interactions, resulting in qualified thematic and temporal gaps, which have enriched the resulting narratives.

Even though the various ways interviewers appropriated and managed the tool requires a level of flexibility in the data treatment and analysis processes, it did not compromise the quality or depth of the data produced, or the resultant life stories written from them, mainly because the lack of homogeneity observed deemed less from interviewer engagement levels with the board game than from the inherently localised and individualised nature of life-narrative interviews.

Finally, we consider that the results from its development and adoption, while rooted in a specific study, suggest implications for a more reaching methodological innovation. By leveraging and personalising its aesthetic and logic, researchers can mobilise this tool to evoke and create different types of data in interviews, especially those demanding a large time or a numerous topic coverage. Similarly, its versatility would allow it to be integrated into other traditional qualitative methods, such as focus groups and ethnographic field studies, where the game could serve as a non-intrusive mediator, elicitating themes. It can also be confused with gameplay dynamics to explore the functionality in connecting various topics across different cultural contexts and with diverse participant profiles. This development will be crucial in overcoming limitations, further validating this kind of tool's role as a potent, ethically transparent, and empowering creative tool for qualitative research.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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