Potentials and Possibilities for Narrative Inquiry

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Consensus Definition of Narrative Research/Narrative Inquiry:

“People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study.”

(Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375)
Narrative Inquirers

- Understand experience as a storied phenomenon.
Storied lives are lived and told on storied landscapes.
Storied landscapes are shaped by social, cultural, institutional, and linguistic landscapes.

Individual’s storied lives are embedded within, are shaped by, and shape, those storied landscapes.
Narrative Inquiry

- Is relational inquiry.
- Is the study of people in relation studying the experiences of people in relation.
Six Key Ideas About Narrative Inquiry
Key Idea 1:

- Two different starting points.
- Narrative inquiry can begin with the telling of stories or with the living within stories.
Key Idea 2:

- As narrative inquirers, our lived and told stories are always in relation to, or with, those of our participants.

- We are part of the phenomenon under study.

- We are part of the storied landscapes.
Key Idea 2:

- A second way in which narrative inquiry is relational inquiry is the co-composition of stories between inquirer and participants.

- As inquirers, our lives become interwoven with the lives of participants.
Key Idea 3:

- Three commonplaces of narrative inquiry:
  - Temporality
  - Sociality
  - Place

- Needs to be a simultaneous exploration of all three commonplaces.
Key Idea 4:

- Narrative inquiry is:
  - Recursive
  - Reflective
  - Reflexive
Key Idea 4:

- Four terms structure process of narrative inquiry:
  - Living
  - Telling
  - Retelling
  - Reliving
Key Idea 4:

- Attend first to living and telling of stories.
- Narratively inquiry into lived and told stories through retelling.
Key Idea 4:

- Retelling with attentiveness to three commonplaces, characters, plotlines, tensions, gaps, silences.
Key Idea 4:

- Our research texts become representations of our retelling.

- Telling stories is not enough; retelling stories is necessary.
Key Idea 5:

- The process of narrative inquiry:
  - Being in the field
  - Composing field texts
  - Composing interim and final research texts
Key Idea 5:

- Narrative beginnings: writing ourselves into the inquiry.
- Reading other research.
- Attentive to ‘So what?’ and ‘Who cares?’
- Three kinds of justification:
  - Personal
  - Practical
  - Social
Key Idea 5:

- Composing research texts:
  - Attentive to participants’ lives
  - Attentive to scholarly audience
Key Idea 6:

- Relational ethics pervade the whole of narrative inquiry.
Revisiting 6 Key Ideas in My Current Research Projects
Study 1: Narrative Inquiries into Co-composing Curriculum in Schools

- Co-researchers: Janice Huber, M. Shaun Murphy, Anne Murray Orr, Jennifer Mitton, Simmee Chung.

- Funded by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
Study 1:

- Phenomenon under study:
  - Understand experiences of teachers, children, families from vantage point of knowledge and knowledge contexts as curriculum is made in classrooms
Study 1:

- Starting point: living stories alongside participants.

- Field texts (data): conversation transcripts, field notes, work samples, children’s photographs and drawings, memory box artifacts.
Study 1:

- Moving from field texts to research texts.
  - Attending to tensions as bumping places between individual’s stories
  - Attending to tensions as bumping places between individual’s stories and landscapes
Study 2: Narrative Inquiries into the Experiences of Early School Leavers

- Co–researchers: Yi Li, Marni Pearce, Pam Steeves, Joy Ruth Mickelson, George Buck, Claire Desrochers, Vera Caine, Sean Lessard, Marion Stewart, Marilyn Huber.

- Funded by: the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research.
Study 2:

- Noticing the phenomenon.
- Reading the research literature.
- Starting point: telling stories.
- Field texts: transcripts of conversations, artifacts, field notes.
Study 2:

- Seeing ourselves as complicit.
- Attending to commonplaces (temporality, sociality, place).
- Variety of representational forms in research texts.
- Practical and social justifications.
Study 3: Narrative Reflective Practice in Medical School

- Co-researchers: Marie Cave, Verna Yiu, Andrew Cave, Alan Thomson.
- Funding: University Hospital.
Study 3:

- Helping medical residents collaboratively narratively inquiry into clinical encounters.
- Field texts: transcripts of group conversations, one-on-one interviews.
- Practical and social justifications.