
Narrative Inquiry: A Methodology for Studying Lived Experience

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Abstract

The paper briefly outlines the history and development of the methodology of narrative inquiry. It draws attention to the need for careful delineation of terms and assumptions. A Deweyan view of experience is central to narrative inquiry methodology and is used to frame a metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. An illustration from a recent narrative inquiry into curriculum making is used to show what narrative inquirers do. Issues of social significance, purpose and ethics are also outlined.

Introduction

Thomas King, a professor of English at the University of Guelph in Canada, whose father was Cherokee and whose mother was Greek, wrote in his book *The Truth about Stories* that

...once a story is told, it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world. So you have to be careful with the stories that you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories that you are told. (King, 2003, p. 10)

Narrative inquiry is an old practice that may feel new for a variety of reasons. It is a commonplace to note that human beings both live and tell stories about their living. These lived and told stories and talk about those stories are ways we create meaning in our lives as well as ways we enlist each other's help in building our lives and communities. What does feel new is the emergence of narrative methodologies in social science research. With this emergence has come intensified talk about our stories, their function in our lives, and their place in composing our collective affairs.

In 1998, Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber referred to a "narrative revolution" that was made possible by the decline of an exclusively positivist paradigm for social science research (1998, p. 1). Connelly and Clandinin, some years earlier, also commented on this narrative revolution and wrote that, although the idea of narrative inquiry as research methodology is new to the social sciences, it has intellectual roots in the humanities and other fields under the broad heading of narratology (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). As narrative inquirers look back on the rich meanings of the term narrative, there is now, however, a recognition that care must be taken in how we use the terms 'narrative' and 'narrative inquiry'. As we undertake this careful delineation of terms, we realize how interwoven narrative ways of thinking about phenomena are with the ways that narrative methodologies are emerging. For example, we hear Bruner speaking of narrative ways of knowing when he says, "Telling stories is an astonishing thing. We are a species whose main purpose is to tell each other about the expected and the surprises that upset the

expected, and we do that through the stories we tell" (Bruner, 2002, p. 8). While Bruner points us toward narrative as a mode of knowing, Lieblich *et al.* point us toward the need for narrative inquiry as a methodological response to positivist and post positivist paradigms. Connelly and Clandinin link the research methodological turn to ways of thinking about experience. As Connelly and Clandinin point out

It is equally correct to say "inquiry into narrative" as it is "narrative inquiry". By this we mean that narrative is both phenomenon and method. Narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the pattern of inquiry for its study... . Thus, we say that people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2)

The need for both narrative ways of thinking about experience and new narrative methodologies is becoming increasingly apparent. It is this interweaving of narrative views of phenomena and narrative inquiry that marks the emerging field and that draws attention to the need for careful uses and distinctions of terms.

The ways that scholars in many fields have taken this narrative turn both in thinking about phenomena and thinking about research methodologies makes the situation even more complex. Kohler Riessman and Speedy (2006) hint at this complexity when they note

Beginning in the late 1960s and continuing at a hectic pace, the idea of narrative has penetrated almost every discipline and school. No longer the sole province of literary scholarship, narrative study is now cross-disciplinary, not fitting within the boundaries of any single scholarly field. (pp. 426-427)

Further they note that while "narrative inquiry in the human sciences is a 20th century development, the field has 'realist', 'modernist', 'postmodern' and constructionist strands, and scholars disagree on origins and precise definition" (Kohler Riessman & Speedy, 2006, p. 428). What is clear, however, is that there is a narrative turn, a turn that is remarkable in the intensity and enthusiasm with which it has shifted research methodological undertakings. However, this intensity and enthusiasm may cover over the "real differences of opinion on the epistemological, ideological, and ontological commitments of narrative inquirers as well as real differences with those who do not identify as narrative inquirers" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2006, p. 37). These differences require careful attention and discussion if the field of narrative inquiry is to realize its potential for making a contribution to the study of human life.

A narrative view of experience

In a chapter for the *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology*, Clandinin and Rosiek (2006) mapped out some of these differences of opinion. As they conceptualized the field of narrative inquiry they used a metaphor of mapping,

...knowing that all representations are partial and involve trade-offs between distortions and instrumental ends. Our representation of the field of narrative inquiry held one aspect of narrative inquiry constant, and used this as a point of reference from which to examine the internal and external boundaries of this area of scholarship. (p. 37)

Their point of constancy was the observation that narrative inquirers study experience. Connelly and Clandinin (1990, 2006) observed that arguments for the development and use of narrative inquiry are inspired by a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives.

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. 479)

While there are many philosophical treatments of the word 'experience', such as

Aristotle's dualistic metaphysics in which knowledge of particulars and universals were considered separately, to early empiricist atomistic conceptions of experience, Marxist conceptions of experience distorted by ideology, behaviorist notions of stimulus and response, and poststructuralist assertions that state our experience is the product of discursive practices (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2006, p. 38),

the view of experience to which Connelly and Clandinin refer, and which is the cornerstone of this paper, is rooted in John Dewey's (1938) pragmatic philosophy.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) drew on Dewey's two criteria of experience to develop a narrative view of experience. Drawing on Dewey's first criterion, interaction, they wrote, "People are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood only as individuals. They are always in relation, always in a social context." (p. 2). They drew on Dewey's second criterion, continuity, as they wrote,

experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences. Wherever one positions oneself in that continuum - the imagined now, some imagined past, or some imagined future - each point has a past experiential base and leads to an experiential future. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2)

Building on Dewey's theory of experience and taking a narrative turn, they defined narrative inquiry as

...a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieu. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that made up people's lives, both individual and social. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20)

Dewey's view of experience was also the starting point for other researchers' views for the narrative study of human experience. This view allowed for the study of experience that acknowledged the embodiment of the person in the world following the work of philosophers such as Johnson (1987). Narrative inquirers studied the individual's experience in the world, an experience that was storied both in the living and telling and that could be studied by listening, observing, living alongside another, writing and interpreting texts.

Clandinin and Rosiek (2006) built on earlier work by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) as they wrote that while the starting point for narrative inquiry is an individual's experience it is also

an exploration of the social, cultural and institutional narratives within which individual's experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted - but in a way that begins and ends that inquiry in the storied lives of the people involved. Narrative inquirers study an individual's experience in the world and, through the study, seek ways of enriching and transforming that experience for themselves and others. (p. 42)

They argued that "a pragmatic ontology of experience [is] a well-suited theoretical framework for narrative inquiries, [because] narrative inquiry is an approach to research that enacts many if not all of the principles of a Deweyan theory of inquiry" (p. 42).

Narrative inquiry as methodology

As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) worked from a Deweyan theory of experience to conceptualize narrative inquiry, they developed a metaphor of a three dimensional narrative inquiry space, a space that draws upon Dewey's criteria of

continuity and interaction as well as his notion of situation. The three dimensions of the metaphoric narrative inquiry space are: the personal and social (interaction) along one dimension; past, present and future (continuity) along a second dimension; place (situation) along a third dimension. They write,

Using this set of terms, any particular inquiry is defined by this three-dimensional space: studies have temporal dimensions and address temporal matters: they focus on the personal and the social in a balance appropriate to the inquiry: and they occur in specific places or sequences of places. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 54)

As they and other narrative inquirers engage in their inquiries, they work within that space throughout the inquiry. As research puzzles are framed, research fields and participants selected, as field texts are collected, written and composed, and as research texts are written and negotiated, narrative inquirers work within that space with their participants.

The idea of working within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space highlights the relational dimension of narrative inquiry. Narrative inquirers cannot bracket themselves out of the inquiry but rather need to find ways to inquire into participants' experiences, their own experiences as well as the co-constructed experiences developed through the relational inquiry process. This makes clear that, as narrative inquirers, inquirers, too, are part of the metaphoric parade (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). They too live on the landscape and are complicit in the world they study.

Silko (1997) also speaks of landscapes as places that people live within. Silko problematizes the common use of the relationships inherent in the use of the term landscape. She writes,

A portion of territory the eye can comprehend in a single view" does not correctly describe the relationship between the human being and his or her surroundings. This assumes the viewer is somehow outside or separate from the territory she or he surveys. Viewers are as much a part of the landscape as the boulders they stand on. (Silko, 1997, p. 27)

As narrative inquirers engage in inquiry, they realize that they, too, are positioned on this landscape and both shape and are shaped by the landscape.

What do narrative inquirers do?

Narrative inquirers, working within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, can begin their inquiries either with engaging with participants through telling stories or through coming alongside participants in the living out of stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Whether inquirers begin with telling stories or living stories, we enter into the midst of stories. Participants' stories, inquirers' stories, social, cultural and institutional stories, are all ongoing as narrative inquiries begin. Being in the field, that is, engaging with participants, is walking into the midst of stories.

As we enter into narrative inquiry relationships, we begin the ongoing negotiations that are part of engaging in a narrative inquiry. We negotiate relationships, research purposes, transitions, as well as how we are going to be useful in those relationships. These negotiations occur moment by moment, within each encounter, sometimes in ways that we are not awake to. The negotiations also occur in intentional, wide awake ways as we work with our participants throughout the inquiry.

As we live in the field with our participants, whether the field is a classroom, a hospital room or a meeting place where stories are told, we begin to compose field texts. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) noted there are a range of kinds of field texts from photographs, field notes, and conversation transcripts to interview transcripts.

As narrative inquirers work with participants we need to be open to the myriad of imaginative possibilities for composing field texts. However, regardless of the kinds of field texts, it is important to be attentive to situating field texts within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, that is, positioning field texts with attention to the temporal, the personal and social, and place.

As we continue to negotiate our relationships with participants, at some points, we do leave the field to begin to compose research texts. This leaving of the field and a return to the field may occur and reoccur as there is a fluidity and recursiveness as inquirers compose research texts, negotiate them with participants, compose further field texts and recompose research texts. These transitions from field and field texts to authoring research texts are tension-filled. Some tensions are created by the concerns about audiences; others are created by concerns about our participants; still others by issues of form. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) write in detail about these tensions. These tensions emerge and re-emerge as narrative inquirers attend to their experiences of moving from the close relational work with participants to beginning to represent their inquiries for a larger audience.

An illustrative narrative inquiry

In what follows I draw forward an example from a recent narrative inquiry in order to illustrate something of how we engaged in a narrative inquiry into the lives of children and teachers as they composed their lives in the moments of curriculum making. The study is one that researchers, Janice Huber, Shaun Murphy, Marni Pearce, Anne Murray Orr, Vera Caine, Marilyn Huber, Pam Steeves and I have been engaged in over several years in two Canadian multicultural urban schools (Clandinin *et al.*, 2006). What is included here is a partial story, as all stories are partial, and it has been both carefully composed and selected. I include this example to both show something about the living out of the methodology of narrative inquiry as well as to say something about the interwoven lives of teachers and children on school landscapes, landscapes increasingly structured by plotlines focused on achievement testing. In so doing, I show something about narrative inquiry as both methodology for studying people's experiences in school and as the phenomenon being studied.

The story is situated in the context of an urban multicultural school, Ravine Elementary School, where a group of researchers, including me, worked with some children, parents, teachers and school administrators for almost two years. The following story involves the work of Vera Caine and her work alongside Kristi and 14 boys in a year 3 - 4 learning strategies special education class. Vera had a particular interest in visual narrative inquiry (Bach, 1997; Caine, 2002). I begin with an interim research text, a kind of text "situated in the spaces between field texts and final, published research texts" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 133).

As Vera entered the classroom, Kristi was in the midst of a provincially mandated social studies curriculum unit on community. Vera was trying out her ideas about a visual narrative inquiry methodology and wanted to work in a collaborative way with the boys as they composed field texts of their experiences together. Those field texts were photographs and the boys' accounts of those photographs. She gave each child a camera and asked them to take photographs of community in their lives. They took the cameras with them for a couple of weeks. When the children brought their cameras and film back to school, Vera sent the film out to be developed. I had a particular interest in Vera's and the children's visual narrative inquiry and often stopped down to talk with Kristi, Vera, and the children in the classroom when Vera was in the school. As soon as I knew the children's photographs were back from the developers, I stopped down to speak with Kristi and to see the children's photographs. I asked to see Josh's. As Kristi

searched for the photographs she told me she thought Josh had “not understood the task. He must just have taken pictures of the first things he saw.” I understood Kristi’s comment to mean that Josh misunderstood that he was to take photographs of community. Kristi understood community in the way it was outlined in the provincial curriculum guide, that is, as goods and services, as resources, as dependence and interdependence. As Kristi flipped through the photographs we looked at photographs of schools, churches, supermarkets, gas stations, and hospitals. Kristi spoke of how the children who took these photographs understood the photography assignment as well as the concept of community. Josh, she thought, did not.

Kristi located Josh’s photographs and Kristi and I looked at them together. As we flipped through Josh’s photographs, I noticed two in particular. One pictured three small smiling children of Aboriginal heritage on a sofa. I thought the children were two years old and younger; they were sitting in a row in what was clearly a posed picture. The second photograph I noticed was of three guitars carefully positioned leaning against the same sofa. The photograph was carefully composed. Both photographs appeared to me to be striking examples of photography. I felt the sense of aesthetic composition and care that went into each photograph design. Later, after Vera talked with each boy, I asked her what Josh said about the two photographs. Vera said he described the three children on the sofa as his younger sister and her two small cousins. Sometimes his mother’s sister comes over and the three children play together. He spoke of the three guitars as being a community because “one belongs to my dad, one to my uncle, and one is mine, and sometimes we play together.” (Interim research text, November, 2002)

Stories told from the midst

In order to understand this interim research text into Josh’s, Vera’s and Kristi’s experience of curriculum making, it needs to be understood as positioned within a tradition of curriculum studies grounded in John Dewey’s (1938) ideas of experience and Joseph Schwab’s (1970) ideas of curriculum commonplaces. Curriculum commonplaces, teacher, subject matter, milieu, and learner, “are a set of factors or determinants that occur in statements about the aims, content and methods of the curriculum. Taken as a whole they serve to bound the set of statements identified as being curricular” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 84). In the early work in which I was involved (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992), the starting point for our studies was the teacher and the expression of each teacher’s personal practical knowledge in his/her classroom practice. Later we (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) shifted our attention to the professional knowledge landscape in order to attend to the social, cultural and institutional contexts of schools and we attended with our starting points as both teacher and milieu. We worked from

a Deweyan view of the curriculum from a teacher’s vantage point (Clandinin, 1986; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). Dewey’s (1938) notion of ‘situation’ and ‘experience’ enabled us to imagine the teacher not so much as a maker of curriculum but as a part of it and to imagine a place for contexts, culture (Dewey’s notion of interaction), and temporality (both past and future contained in Dewey’s notion ‘continuity’). (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, p. 365)

We suggested that curriculum

might be viewed as an account of teachers’ and children’s lives together in schools and classrooms ... [In this view of curriculum making] the teacher is seen as an integral part of the curricular process ... in which teacher, learners, subject matter and milieu are in dynamic interaction. (1992, p. 392)

At that time, we drew attention to the centrality of lives in the negotiation of curriculum making and wrote of curriculum “as a course of life” (p. 393).

It was not until more recent work, however, that we began to attend more multiperspectively, trying to attend to the interaction of particular children and teachers’ lives within particular *milieux* or contexts. By entering into relationships with particular children and teachers, we wanted to understand curriculum as a course of life as lives were being lived. From within these relationships, we began to understand how curriculum could be seen as a curriculum of lives, teachers’ lives

and children's lives. Thinking in this way, of course, made the composition of life identities, what we understand narratively as stories to live by, central in the process of curriculum making. It is from within this view of curriculum making that the interim research text can be understood.

Returning to the interim research text, we see how Kristi, the teacher, worked from the mandated curriculum subject matter view of community. The mandated view is also the dominant view of community which Kristi (and I) knew. Vera, however, in her work with Josh, created a rupture which allowed Josh to bring his own life experience of community to the classroom curriculum making.

Engaging in narrative inquiry into Josh's experience of curriculum making

We see in Josh's photographs a sense of how his 'stories to live by' of community are ones threaded around plotlines of relationships, extended families and of seeing himself and all people as related. When asked by Vera to work within a space to hear his and the other children's stories of community, Josh whole-heartedly entered that space, setting aside what he had been taught in the mandated curriculum, filling it with stories of his life, stories of his dad, his uncle, his cousins, his younger sister, his aunt, his home, all as expressions of his knowing of community. We see Josh slip backward in time as he brings forward photographs of the three guitars. We see the personal as he tells of his feelings and the social as he describes the guitar playing. We see the place of his home life as he brings his life at home as represented in the photographs to his school. We see, too, Kristi's story of community built over years of teaching the mandated dominant view of what a community is.

Josh's stories of community bumped against Kristi's story and the mandated curriculum. This bumping created a tension as she dismissed his work as either an expression of his not understanding the task or not understanding the concept of community. It was Vera, working alongside the children, who stayed with the visual narrative inquiry and with seeing the possibilities to negotiate a curriculum of lives. She pushed to have the children compose books in which the photographs were mounted and in which they told their stories.

As I continued to be present in the school, I realized that I, too, wanted to continue to stay with the ongoing stories of Josh, Vera, and Kristi. After looking at the photographs and recognizing my own felt tensions that because Josh's photographs fell outside the acceptable outcome for the mandated curriculum they might not be valued, I encouraged Jeannette, the school principal, to become involved. I told Jeannette I saw Josh's photographs as an important embodied expression of his story of community, a story that needed to find a place in the classroom story. Jeannette, the school principal, supported Vera in interrupting the mandated dominant story of community as well as the story of school in which boys in a learning strategies classroom have difficulty expressing themselves in written forms. Without this kind of support, I wonder if Josh's stories to live by, "competing stories" (Clandinin *et al.*, 2006, p. 8) to the mandated curriculum, would have been expressed. I also wonder if without this kind of support, his stories might have been turned into a "conflicting story" (p. 8) and stopped.

What is not in the story as represented in the interim research text was that some weeks later at a school wide open house for children, parents, and visitors, Kristi displayed the children's visual narrative inquiry books of community. It was one of only a few displays of academic work set amidst the carnival type activities. The work was proudly displayed as the work of the boys in the learning strategies

classroom. As I wandered through the carnival, chatting with teachers and parents and members of the research group, three other staff members independently approached me and told me to go and look at the amazing visual narrative inquiry books created by the boys in the learning strategies classroom. In that moment, I realized that the story of who the boys were in the school context had been interrupted, at least for that time.

This short illustration of an interim research text of a moment of curriculum making in which lives are intertwined helps us see something of narrative inquiry. It shows how the field texts (field notes, photographs, and transcripts of conversations) are placed within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space both as they are composed in the living and telling and later as they are placed within the research text created through the inquiry. It shows how the narrative inquirer focuses on the way the relational, temporal, and continuous features of Dewey's ontology of experience are manifested as narrative form, not just in retrospective representations of human experience, but in the lived immediacy of that experience. What becomes clear in this illustration of a narrative inquiry is that narrative inquirers attend to experiences as they are lived out as well as when they are represented in the research texts.

Why listen to stories? Why stories?

The truth about stories is that that's all we are. "I will tell you something about stories," the Laguna storyteller Leslie Silko reminds us, "They aren't just entertainment/Don't be fooled/They are all we have, you see/All we have to fight off/Illness and death. You don't have anything/ If you don't have the stories" (as cited in King, 2003, p. 92).

Jerome Bruner writes that "if you look at how people actually live their lives, they do a lot of things that prevent their seeing the narrative structures that characterize their lives. Mostly, they don't look, don't pause to look" (Bruner, 2002, p. 8). Thinking about Bruner's words in relation with Silko's, I wonder whether we are in the habit of trying to learn ours' and others' stories by attending to our own lives as we live and tell them. Perhaps this is a reason we can give for engaging with others in narrative inquiry, that is, so we can, by slowing down lives, pause and look to see the narrative structures that characterize ours' and others' lives. Narrative inquiry gives us a research methodology for engaging in this study of people's experiences.

King quotes the Nigerian storyteller Ben Okri as saying

In a fractured age, when cynicism is god, here is a possible heresy: we live by stories, we also live in them. One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted – knowingly or unknowingly – in ourselves. We live stories that either give our lives meaning or negate it with meaninglessness. If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives. (King, 2003, p. 153)

All three writers, from diverse contexts, echo my own thoughts about why it is so important to attend to, and narratively inquire into, children's and teacher's stories. In the interim research text written out of the narrative inquiry into the experiences of Josh, Vera and Kristi in curriculum making I see how narrative inquiry allows the possibility for understanding how the personal and social are entwined over time in their lives. Their individual experiences are shaped by the larger social, cultural and institutional narratives within which they live and have lived. Their home and school places in which we catch the moment of curriculum making shape the stories lived and told.

Perhaps in listening and attending to children's stories as they live with teachers in schools we can create conditions that allow children to compose other stories of themselves, to change the stories they live by. Perhaps Josh can begin to re-story who he is and is becoming into plotlines filled with more possibility. Perhaps in listening and attending to teachers' stories, such as Kristi's story of community, we can create conditions that allow us to give them back their stories and perhaps help them see the social, cultural, and institutional stories they work within and that shape them. As Kristi begins to awaken to other stories of community, we might see her begin to re-story her stories to live by. Perhaps we can begin to work together to change those social, cultural and institutional narratives.

King, Silko, Bruner, Okri and others help me think about the why of my work. These wonders about the social significance of narrative inquiries are always important considerations for narrative inquirers. While we may find fascination in stories such as Josh's, we need to do more than this. We must be able to answer the 'so what' and 'who cares' questions that all researchers need to answer in their work. Narrative inquirers, too, must join the conversations in which there can be educative dialogue between research, practice and policy.

So too must narrative inquirers position their work amongst various methodologies. Clandinin and Rosiek (2006) have mapped a methodological landscape of narrative inquiry that suggests borderland spaces with other methodologies. Their map shows how the borderland spaces are created by different epistemological and ontological assumptions of researchers and suggest how narrative inquiry is situated in relation to the methodological landscape. As narrative inquiry develops as a methodology, researchers are beginning to conceptualize what it means to engage in narrative inquiry.

An ethics of narrative inquiry

Ethical concerns permeate narrative inquiry from one's own narrative beginnings through negotiations of relationships to writing and sharing research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Huber & Clandinin, 2002). I return to Thomas King's words to help me think about an ethics of narrative inquiry. With a slight tongue in cheek, King chides us to think about the ethics of living in responsive and responsible ways.

Perhaps we shouldn't be displeased with the 'environmental ethics' we have or the 'business ethics' or the 'political ethics' or any of the myriad of other codes of conduct suggested by our actions. After all, we created them. We've created the stories that allow them to exist and flourish. They didn't come out of nowhere. They didn't arrive from another planet.

Want a different ethic? Tell a different story.

We could tell ourselves stories about community and co-operation. We do that, you know. From time to time. [...] So perhaps I am wrong. Perhaps we do have the kind of ethics we imagine we have. Maybe they're just not steady. Not dependable. Ethics of the moment. Potential ethics. Ethics we can draw on when we feel the need to do so. Ethics that can be wrapped in newspaper and stored in the freezer. Seasonal ethics. Annuals rather than perennials. (King, 2003, pp. 164 – 165)

For those of us wanting to learn to engage in narrative inquiry, we need to imagine ethics as being about negotiation, respect, mutuality and openness to multiple voices. We need to learn how to make these stories of what it means to engage in narrative inquiry dependable and steady. We must do more than fill out required forms for institutional research ethics boards. As Huber and Clandinin (2002) wrote

... we began to see that we needed to be guided by relationships, by the shared narrative unities of our lives alongside children as coresearchers. Engaging with one another narratively shifts us from

questions of responsibility understood in terms of rights and regulations to thinking about living and life, both in and outside classrooms and off school landscapes. (p. 797)

Huber and Clandinin highlight the importance of thinking in responsive and responsible ways about how narrative inquiry can shift the experiences of those with whom we engage.

Perhaps we need to heed King's words as we negotiate these shared narrative unities with participants. King described himself and the Choctaw-Cherokee-Irish writer Louis Owens as "both hopeful pessimists. That is, we wrote knowing that none of the stories we told would change the world. But we wrote in the hope that they would" (King, 2003, p. 92). I, too, write out of passion and a deep hope that engaging in narrative inquiry will help me change the world, at least in some small way, a way that might help schools become more educative places for all children, teachers, families and administrators.

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About the author

D. Jean Clandinin is Professor and Director of the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development at the University of Alberta. She is a former teacher, counselor, and psychologist. She is co-author with Michael Connelly of four books and many chapters and articles. Their book, *Narrative Inquiry*, was published in 2000. She has also authored two other books; the first based on her doctoral research and the second based on research from an experimental teacher education program. Her most recent co-authored book, *Composing Diverse Identities: Narrative Inquiries into the Interwoven Lives of Children and Teachers*, drew on several years of her research with children and teachers in urban schools. She is part of an ongoing inquiry into teacher knowledge and teachers' professional knowledge landscapes. She is past Vice President of Division B of AERA and is the 1993 winner of AERA's Early Career Award. She is the 1999 winner of the Canadian Education Association Whitworth Award for educational research. She was awarded the Division B Lifetime Achievement Award in 2002 from AERA. She is a 2001 winner of the Kaplan Research Achievement Award, the University of Alberta's highest award for research and a 2004 Killam Scholar at the University of Alberta.