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Narrative inquiry: seeking relations as modes of interactions.

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How to cite this manuscript

If you make reference to this version of the manuscript, use the following information:

Kim, J., & Latta, M.M. (2010). Narrative inquiry: Seeking relations as modes of interactions. Retrieved from <http://krex.ksu.edu>

Published Version Information

Citation: Kim, J., & Latta, M.M. (2010). Narrative inquiry: Seeking relations as modes of interactions. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 103(2), 69-71

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Digital Object Identifier (DOI): doi: 10.1080/00220670903323164

Publisher's Link: <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~db=all~content=g925426173>

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Introduction

Narrative Inquiry: Seeking Relations as Modes of Interactions

The formation of this special issue on Narrative Inquiry has involved both of us retracing personal connections of “meaning, substance, content—from what is embedded in the self from the past” (Dewey, 1934, p. 71). We each recall encountering narrative inquiry as an empowering form for our voices as practicing teachers. Form, as a narrative way of knowing, elicited stories of values, beliefs, and feelings, regarding our teaching experiences. These values, beliefs, and feelings intersecting with students, contexts, and subject matter, comprised the “stuff” (Elbaz, 1991) of teaching we negotiated daily in our classrooms. Narrative inquiry attended to how each of us engaged such *stuff* in creating and recreating learning situations alongside our students. Thus, we each found narrative inquiry to provide “an important avenue for conceptualizing” our teaching identities as “curriculum makers” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, p. 386). The more we identified as curriculum makers, the more we attempted to attend to the stuff, the relational complexities that our students, contexts, and subject matter brought to every learning experience. Dewey’s (1938) primary notion of *experience* characterizes this nexus as the relational inseparability of situation and interaction. We know this to entail active structuring of what is encountered on a continuous basis. Dewey (1938) describes how a “moving force” is created, holding a learning approach and direction. He also warns how experience is betrayed as a moving force if the relational complexities are not seen as modes of interaction. The current political context is living testimony to such betrayals, especially with the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, calling for the use of *scientifically based research* as a prescription to improve the

American public educational system. Typically, such prescriptions focus on causes and effects of teaching and learning with little attention to teaching and learning contexts and ensuing relations adapting, building, and changing meanings. In this “deepening chill in the political climate” (Barone, 2007, p. 456) against qualitative research, and narrative research in particular, narrative inquirers need to seriously think about the reasons why we do what we do. This issue is our attempt to contribute to this important task.

Heeding Dewey’s (1938) warning, narrative inquirers insist on the importance of seeing the intercepting and uniting place of situation and interaction as forming the experiential terrain for inquiry. Such seeing entails receptivity, assuming a commitment to finding out about the ensuing interactions, demanding an attentive gaze cognizant of the vital temporality within experience—connecting past, present, and future, portraying people living both in and through a situation. And, the articles in this special issue are rooted in these fundamental assumptions of narrative inquiry. All authors share an important regard for relations as modes for interaction, manifesting “crossings” that invite dwelling that Heidegger (1977), Gadamer (1986), and Risser (1997) insist create a “hold upon nearness” (Gadamer, 1986, p. 113). It is the nearness we sought as classroom teachers, holding the needed time and dwelling space to account for the concrete relational undergoings and doings of teaching/learning, acting on them accordingly. It is the nearness that continues to draw us to given particulars, gaining familiarity and lived meanings held within the relations gathering and ensuing. And, it is the nearness to the present (and the potential held within it) that each article in this special issue so vividly and tangibly positions readers to confront, to engage, and to see otherwise, that

powerfully challenges how very shortsighted the primary aims of education reforms over the last three decades have been.

Educational aims focusing on objectifying specific learning outcomes, compartmentalizing knowledge, and separating pedagogy from content, knowledge from interests, and theory from practice, have dominated educational policies and practices for some time. Contrarily, narrative inquirers have strived to honor teaching and learning as complex and developmental in nature, seeking connections, and demanding continuous engagement in reflection and deliberation. We turn to Dewey's (1938) discussion of the notion of "preparation" in education discourses as being at the crux of concern for some time. Dewey states:

When preparation is made at the controlling end, then the potentialities of the present are sacrificed to a suppositious future. When this happens, the actual preparation for the future is missed or distorted. The ideal of using the present simply to get ready for the future contradicts itself. It omits, and even shuts out, the very conditions by which a person can be prepared for his [sic] future. (p. 49)

There is much in Dewey's thinking about "preparation" that education discourses and practices continue to ignore but narrative inquiry foregrounds with its emphasis on the acts and consequences of relations as modes of interaction. This is not to say that the future is not important, as Dewey claims it "is not an Either-Or affair. The present affects the future anyway" (p. 50). But it is an educator's responsibility to see and create the present circumstances to positively impact the future. Dewey refers to this temporal educative relation as "an ever-present process" (p. 50). The articles in this special issue highlight the lived features and consequences of narrative inquiry as an ever--present

process calling our attention to relations as modes for interaction. Each article illuminates the significances of such attention. The present offers past understandings and holds future possibilities. It is the present that must be seen, encountered, and negotiated continuously as the preparedness integral to fostering potential alive within the present. Respect for the present deepens as the articles in this special issue each follow the given relations as modes of interaction for being in touch with the immediate qualitative aspects within situations, suggesting many modes that narrative inquiry can take, and suggesting many ways narrative inquiry can inform.

Our vision and scope for the special issue on narrative inquiry is to foreground a cross section of ways and shapes narrative inquiry can concretely take, not only as methodology but also as pedagogy and narratology. This issue attempts to address the following questions:

- How is narrative inquiry different from other forms of research?
- What differentiates narrative inquiry from paradigmatic qualitative research?
- How do scholars from varied philosophical and pragmatic perspectives contribute to understandings of narrative inquiry?
- What are theory's roles within narrative inquiry?
- What are the contributions that narrative inquiry makes in educational research?
- In what ways does narrative inquiry serve the interests of educators, students, and communities?

- How can narrative inquiry make a long-term difference in the lives of educators and students?
- What are the varied ways narrative inquiry unfolds as methodology, pedagogy, and narratology and why?
- How do the ethics of process manifest within the conduct of narrative inquiry?

Petra Munro Hendry asks the reader to rethink research beyond current dualisms and invites the reader to an open dialogue across diverse epistemologies. She disputes that “narrative” is a distinct form of inquiry separate from scientific inquiry. Rather, she convincingly argues, all research derives from a narrative tradition. Proposing “narrative” as an “epistemology of doubt” that can be used by all inquirers, Hendry urges readers to consider the role of doubt within the process of narrative inquiry. To doubt can be bold and venturous, with contingencies marking the terrain for inquiry. But, Hendry reminds us that the vulnerable terrain inquirers find themselves traversing necessitates researcher willingness to vigilantly question, to examine their values, beliefs, and assumptions about the nature of teaching and learning with an openness to gaining insights from others alongside gaining concrete practices and language to elucidate, inform, and articulate these connections.

D. Jean Clandinin, M. Shaun Murphy, Janice Huber, and Anne Murray Orr invite readers into their narrative inquiry at the relational intersections of children’s, teachers’, and families’ experiences in school contexts shaped by imposed and predetermined educational accountability measures. The intersections offering modes for these researchers’ interactions confront and explore tensions as propelling the evolving and

involving relationships under negotiation. As researchers find their perceptions challenged, asking them to see beyond routines and habits, they embrace tensions as necessary for growth. So rather than avoiding tensions that disregard and thwart relations as modes of interaction, these authors disclose the importance of dwelling amidst tensions, grappling with them as the productive ground generating new meanings and possibilities for action, and demanding researcher alertness throughout, attentive to the ethics that come with being in relation, within specific situations with others.

Becky Atkinson turns to narrative inquiry as a pedagogical medium to examine how practitioners interpret narrative texts in multiple ways. Connecting reader response theory with narrative inquiry criticism, Atkinson is mindful about approaches to narrative inquiry offering ways in which narrative inquirers might enhance narrative representations of teaching practice. By examining practicing teachers' responses to narrative texts, Atkinson explicates how narrative inquirers engage others purposefully in deep readings of narrative inquiry texts. Her findings help us to rethink and reevaluate the way we construct our narrative work furthering the field of education.

Nona Lyons provides concrete examples of narrative inquiry that can be incorporated into K-16 school curriculum, discussing how teachers and students can engage in narrative inquiry through the concept of suspicion discovered in English drama. She explores Lorna Hutson's (2007) discovery of the invention of suspicion as a way to advance the role of narrative inquiry in classrooms and as a way to help students becoming narrative inquirers. In doing so, she prompts readers to embrace suspicion as productive engagement for all involved.

Elaine Chan brings readers near to an immigrant Chinese student's experience as

the student navigates her identity in a Canadian school. Revealing the conflicting relations across teachers, peers at school, and immigrant parents enables us to gain greater senses of the lived risks and challenges for immigrant youth. The particulars of learners and learning matter if educators attend to the ethical realms of teaching and learning and to the possibility of genuine concerted action for student learning.

Cheryl J. Craig's narrative inquiry navigates many competing relations as modes of interaction, telling an important inside story of school reform in the years leading up to and immediately following the introduction of the No Child Left Behind Act. Five different school sites are documented, focusing on the "bumping up places" where contradictions pull the composite narrative inquiry in many directions. Spending time unpacking the contradictions, clarifying understandings, revealing the lived consequences for teachers, students, learning, school contexts, and the greater communities involved, makes visible the relational complexities at play and the needs to give them voice.

Margaret Macintyre Latta and Jeong-Hee Kim concretely explore narrative inquiry as a medium for educators' professional development. The formative nature of narrative inquiry fittingly fosters attention to teaching/learning contexts and the internal relations entrusting teachers and their students to the work of learning. Educators' capacities to articulate their growing agency for student learning is gained through an individual/collective, invested movement of thinking on the parts of all educators involved.

Tom Barone brings closure to this special issue as he attends to the "crossings" he encounters in his readings of all articles in this issue. These crossings of educational virtues, experiences and vantage points, and epistemologies and purposes, weave in, out, and through his readings, surfacing commonalities and variegations that he suggests

indicate a maturation of the field of narrative inquiry. Barone concludes that such maturation refuses “a tight set of methodological and definitional prescriptions” and reveals that the field of narrative inquiry is very much alive, “still being tilled”, cultivating a stronger field of inquiry that is informed by ever enlarging experiences and perspectives (p. ?) .

In conclusion, we are truly excited about this special issue and its potential contributions to the field of education research in general and narrative inquiry in particular. We are also humbled by this rewarding opportunity and extremely grateful to the *Journal of Educational Research*.

Jeong-Hee Kim & Margaret Macintyre Latta

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Acknowledgments:

The important roles of reviewers made this issue possible. In particular we would like to sincerely thank Margaret Olsen, Tom Barone and Nona Lyons for their feedback on manuscripts during the compilation of this Special Issue.

The willingness and support offered by the *Journal of Educational Research* toward making this issue on narrative inquiry possible is deeply appreciated.