Narrative Inquiry as a Social Justice Practice

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Introduction

We, a student and two professors, collectively explored the unique nature of our graduate course entitled Narrative Pedagogy as Social Justice. Sumer was a student, while Vera and Janice were co-instructors. In this course, we all experienced personal transformation through relationally engaging in difficult dialogue. We now wonder, how do we create classroom spaces where dialog about difficult topics can begin—a space where students and faculty can engage in inquiry?

Our research focused on this unique graduate course, in which professors and students came together to inquire into difficult issues that we as a class were facing and the ways we relationally created and sustained inquiry over the duration of the course. Through our exploration, we seek to remake the academy by hearing diverse voices and creating classroom counterspaces where untold stories are heard and dialogue begins.

Now, after the course has ended, we seek to characterize and understand more of the lived process of narrative pedagogy as a social justice practice—the heart of our course content. In coauthoring this article, we sat together again at a proverbial table, each bringing her own experiences and inquiring into the dialogue alongside one another.

As we engaged in this reflective inquiry, we attended to ways narrative inquiry guided our pedagogy. Seeking to make visible core narrative inquiry pedagogical processes to contribute to conversations of humanizing the academy by dismantling practices of inequity, we explored five ways this pedagogy interrupts dominant narratives in the academy:

1. Valuing "personal practical knowledge" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) alongside disciplinary content knowledge;

2. Telling and retelling stories of experience in a negotiated process shaped and experienced in a community instead of in isolation;

3. Continuously negotiating relational spaces;

4. Sitting *with*, and thinking narratively *with*, stories, which shapes a dynamic interchange of relational understanding and sharing between professors and students; and

5. Engaging in collective work, for the purposes of humanization within the academy, for both students and professors.

A Field Note

In the following field note, Sumer reflected on one typical day in the course:

> Slowly, students and professors in the circle shared their distant and sometimes more intimate experiences in relation to the connections between racism and sexual exploitation of women, just one of the many difficult topics—not one of us could story ourselves away.
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> I, along with Vera and Janice, sit in a community garden for a course that is part of a Summer Institute on Building Peaceful Communities. As a student I take the lead with two student peers in this term assignment. We have chosen to facilitate an inquiry into the lives of women who are exploited. We chose an opener story, told below, to set the tone and invite all of us to sit at a proverbial table and talk about real issues. I open the discussion with the following story that has stayed with me:
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> I wish we would all wear T-shirts that say "I am a racist" explaining we all have grown up in a nation (United States of America) that has upheld racism to the point of institutionalizing it in economics, politics, education policies, etc. Because it is all around and a part of our culture, we have insipidly in small and unconscious ways "drank the Kool-Aid." It is a part of us; a part some may not like but nevertheless a part of who we are. Perhaps if we admit this, if we admit who we are and where we come from we can begin the work of transformation. I think about these statements now and how my own experiences have contributed or are a part of the exploitation women experience.
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> After sharing this story, I explain that I hope we can find a real dialogue by airing our "dirty T-shirt laundry" and making the telling and thinking narratively with uncomfortable stories a table norm. Looking backward to the beginning of our classroom space, I try to understand why I think it was possible to invite others into the stories and to make visible not only their own biases but also their lived and told stories, their experiences. This class helped me reconsider the possibilities of being alongside others. (notes, July 2015)

Living in this ongoing relational and transformational dialogue is a key practice in narrative inquiry research and pedagogy, which is unusual in higher education (Giroux, 2007). Higher education has been documented as a place for perpetuating stereotypes and cultivating mistrust and disrespect (Yosso, 2006). Dominant narratives of exclusion and

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marginalization are commonly supported through hierarchical power dynamics and hegemonic institutional policies (Charbeneau, 2009).

Given these persistent trends in higher education, we asked questions, both as we lived in the course and as we coauthored this article. Some of our questions included: How do we move from teaching about people who are marginalized into dialogue around our complicity within these dominant ideologies? How do we change our classroom practices to attend to and engage in relationships that disrupt dominant ideologies? Who are we, and who are we becoming, in relation with one another and others through this process?

Theoretical Framework

As noted earlier, our reflective inquiry into our classroom practices is part of ongoing activism to revise higher education (Charbeneau, 2009; Wilson et al., 2012). Bronson (2005) as a possible social space of resistance where dominant practices can be reshaped. Some scholars (Bronson, 2005; hooks, 1994) have seen higher education, and especially graduate education, as places where people need to question, reflect, and dialogue.

Resistance, as hooks (1990) characterized, can be shaped in places where the atmosphere is such that a restoration of wholeness is possible despite the prevailing hailstorm of oppression and dehumanization within the academy. hooks (1994) engaged in social justice pedagogies within the academy by creating homeplaces of resistance. In these homeplaces, she created spaces where telling and living stories reflected her multiple identities alongside the multiple identities of students. These multiple identities included her "academic speech" voice, speech that is emblematic of the "oppressor's language" (p. 146), as well as her "private speech" voice (p. 147).

hooks explained that private speech includes "Black vernacular speech, the intimate sounds and gestures . . . normally saved for family and loved ones" (p. 147). In telling and living these stories from her multiple voices, hooks actively resisted the dominance of accepting only academic speech or dominant performances within the academy. Purposefully using her multiple voices, she called into question dominant discourses of academic legitimacy.

Using her power as a professor, hooks legitimized the importance of private speech. She (1994) described "private speech in public discourse, [as an] intimate intervention . . . [that] enables me to recover all that I am in language" (p. 147). Recounting stories from her multiple identity voices within the academy allowed hooks to remember her identities both personally and alongside others.

For hooks, social justice is enacted by creating "a place in the world where people can engage in one another's differences in a way that is redemptive, full of hope and possibility. Not this 'in order to love you, I must make you something else'" (hooks, 1996, p. 122). In these ways, justice is shaped through acknowledging and inquiring into our complex multiple identities and the distribution of classroom power, privileges, and possibilities.

Storytelling can simultaneously improve relationships and alleviate oppression, both personally and corporately (Koggel, 2014). For the storyteller, the use of his or her multiple voices allows him or her to become more fully known and heard from the intersection of identities the storyteller chooses to share. Storytelling impacts the storyteller and the listeners: "Sharing memory [through storytelling] is fundamental to forming, maintaining, and negotiating relationships with others, which in turn affects the meaning of our own pasts and thus who we become" (Campbell, as cited in Koggel, 2014, p. 496).

We see these understandings of storytelling and equity as connected with the storytelling, retelling, and reliving that Clandinin and Connelly (1998) situated as central to narrative inquiry. *Narrative inquiry* is a relational research methodology that explores storied experience by attending inward, outward, backward, forward, and to place or places (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

In our course, students and instructors were invited to bring their experiences alongside stories shared. By engaging in narrative inquiry as a pedagogical method (Seiki, 2014; Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013) to explore students' and professors' experiences, we gradually shaped a space where we could reflect on our uncomfortable stories and learn *with* each other's stories (Morris, 2002).

Thinking narratively *with* each other's stories shaped openings for relational shifts in understanding ourselves and one another. These moments, gradual and often tension filled, were shaped as each story built on the next and called forth a response. In this way, narrative inquiry as pedagogy served to individually and collectively shift exclusionary and oppressive classroom power dynamics through ongoing dialogue and attentiveness to equity among human beings in their complexities and multiplicities (Charbeneau, 2009; Lugones, 1987). Students and professors cannot be absent in these discussions; our work is to generate opportunities to hear diverse stories that cultivate world traveling and loving perceptions (Lugones, 1987).

As Caine, Steeves, Clandinin, Estefan, Huber, and Murphy (2018) have noted,

> As we dare in narrative inquiry to listen and to think narratively *with* stories (Morris, 2002), which have no end, we begin at the same time to join together, allowing for movement away from dominant narratives and toward openings to imagine otherwise, consequent actions. . . . The wonderment, curiosity, and surprise that comes through this movement enlarges participants' and our awareness of the present but also awareness of future possibilities to engage with and form the communities in which we live. In these ways, the landscape continues to move and is shaped in ways that call forth a more socially just world. (p. 143)

Data

Various reflection-based data sources were collected over the two years in which Sumer was a student in the course, each of which speaks to particular experiences and grounds our inquiry in this article. These sources included classroom field texts, artifacts, personal narratives, and conversations among the three of us. All of the data collected are in narrative form because stories help us to begin to understand and unravel the complexities of human experiences.

Each of the reflection-based data sources, like the one earlier, is included to offer various author perspectives while also illuminating the process of narrative inquiry as a social justice pedagogy in higher education classrooms:

> I [Vera] remember sitting at the table after the class was complete, one of the quiet moments I shared with Janice. Janice and I went back to the times when we were planning the course and how we had imagined it might unfold. For a long time we both had been in conversations about seeing narrative inquiry as a possible pedagogical space. Being alongside students and Janice was important in my work. I recall the world traveling I engaged in alongside my aunt so long ago at our kitchen table, where listening and telling were intimately connected to responsibilities to act. Alongside Janice I wondered in this quiet moment how we will continue to hold each of the students' experiences close to us. (notes, July 2015)

As we continued to think about our experiences, we recalled Dewey (1938), who explained that investigating personal experiences can hold possibilities for enhancing educational practices, since education is founded in experience. Thus narratives of experience can teach us about education. Clandinin and Connelly (1995) revealed that through teachers' narratives, the teachers' conscious and unconscious knowledge was lived out as they navigated their professional knowledge landscapes.

Postsecondary places are also shaped by particular knowledge landscapes (Lessard, Schaefer, Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2015; Young et al., 2010; Young et al., 2012). There is, therefore, much to be understood from the narratives shared and inquired into, both individually and collectively, as students and professors engage in graduate education courses.

Methods

Throughout the cours each person engaged in narrative inquiry processes to make sense of experience. In the unfolding of any narrative inquiry a relational space is shaped by the meeting of participants' and narrative inquirers' lives (Clandinin, 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Attending to this meeting of lives turns attention toward understanding experience, particularly, aspects of continuity, interactions, and situations that are ongoing in each person's experiential continuum (Dewey, 1938).

Drawing on these ideas, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) developed the idea of a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, which draws attention to the temporal nature of experience, toward the interaction of the personal and the social in each person's experience, and toward the place or places where the experiences were lived. This understanding also shapes our reflexive inquiry space in this article. While courses end, the reverberations shaped for each person continue through the ongoing "living, telling, retelling, and reliving" of their lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, 2000).

Co-Making Spaces: A Collection of Living *"With"* Field Texts

Narrative inquiry as a social justice pedagogy is about understanding human practices, ways of composing and living life together. Vera's text in the preceding section speaks to ways that co-making this space in the course requires her to be alongside Janice, Sumer, and each of the participants. This relational dynamic also requires being *with* story in the classroom, further described through our following inquiry, which traces some of the course rhythms, processes, and assignments, such as works in progress, written response/dialogues, being/thinking/living, and whole-class discussions and review.

As we think *with* each field text in relationship, we inquire into each story. We puzzled about many questions as we engaged in this process: What insights into teaching are gained? How does this experience help us make sense of the ways we sit together and relate in a classroom counterspace? How do we create spaces where we can all enter? Where are the spaces in which we can be different, as hooks (1994) would ask?

As we engaged in this inquiry, in coauthoring this article, we navigated between first and third person. This created a relational and analytic tension as voices were lost and positioned in particular ways. We intentionally removed this contraction and shifted between self and other as representative of juxtapositions. The tension of the in-between space between the first person subjective and the third person objective dilemma is representative of the tensions that we are navigating in our academic landscape.

First Day of Class: Opening With Stories

In the upcoming field text, Sumer shares her student perspective. This field text depicts the first day of the class and begins with starting to negotiate the relational space. This is crucial, because the course is only two weeks long and a total of eight sessions. Within the first two classes, Janice and Vera hoped that all of us would begin to trust so that we could enter into our own and one another's storied vulnerability:

> On the first day of class, after sharing the book *The Table Where Rich People Sit*, we sat around a large table. Janice invited each of us to share stories of what brought us to this table. She began by telling stories of her life making, of her early beginnings, of her tensions as a teacher, and of more presently composing her life alongside her young daughter. I relaxed into listening. In listening I was learning what table stories were acceptable. At points in the storytelling I could feel Janice express emotions, it was then I thought this was an unusual class. Janice's risk of sharing her emotions made a shift where cover stories weren't the only academic table norm.
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> Nearing the end, Vera closed out this sharing time by reading from her article with Deborah. Deborah was a research participant [Vera had worked with Debra during an earlier study; see Caine, 2010] whose life was complex. As Vera read the story, we listened and were captivated; tears rolled down my classmates' faces. For me, the words became images in my mind, and I "saw" the people and situations play out as visual scenes. I could see the marks on Deborah's arm. I could see the smiles of Deborah's children as she made them laugh. I connected to Deborah's personal experience of betrayal as racial systemic injustice impacted her and her family over generations. As Vera shared about the tracks of scars on Deborah's arms and the mistreatment in her life, my own tears fell.
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> Somehow through sitting and listening with Vera and Deborah's story, my own stories came forward. Stories I'd tucked away. Yet Deborah's arms kept flashing in my mind, and I kept thinking about the ways each of our bodies carries the testimony of power, privilege, and oppression. Deborah was teaching Vera, and now me, through her embodied story. This new learning birthed new connections. My stories and my family stories became unearthed in the listening alongside Vera. Deborah's teaching about embodiment stretched across time and space and offered me a new perspective. As the story tapped my stories, emotions arose from within. I was not alone. As Vera finished her story, we sat silent together. At a table with mostly strangers, palpable emotions filled our room. (Notes, July 2015)

As Sumer shows, we started the process of entering into stories of experience by first sharing the children's book *The Table Where Rich People Sit* (Baylor & Parnall, 1994), which is a story of a young girl negotiating between the dominant narrative definition of wealth as monetary and her family's relational definition of wealth. The young girl considers these conflicting definitions, discussing them with her family; together they think around their table, each sharing what matters in his or her life making with one another. Through conversations and listening in relationship, the young girl comes to more fully understand her family's definition of wealth.

This story is emblematic of the table discussions within our class because of ways it models storytelling and thinking narratively with our storied experiences, all of which challenges dominant academic structures and values:

> Learning to be at the table storytelling is a relational process and part of the pedagogy. On this first day of the class, Vera and Janice lived the process by telling their own stories. They were defining the

> classroom space as one of story, as one of listening, telling, and retelling.
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> As a student, I [Sumer] initially hesitated in the living of narrative inquiry; I felt unsure about what stories I would share. I felt dominant narrative tensions lurch forward causing me to be reluctant to share personal non-normative identity stories within this higher education classroom, this is not unusual for many minorities. (notes, July 2015)

Sumer makes visible how difficult it is to enter relational spaces in classrooms. With higher education classrooms, stories lived and told are shaped by dominant narratives as the classrooms are contextualized within inequitable power dynamics that support various hierarchies, domination, and patriarchy (Charbeneau, 2009).

Given this context, it is not surprising that limited stories are told. Telling personal stories requires trust—trust to believe that sharing personal stories will be honored and validated as part of academic learning. Trust that professors and students are able to respect stories does not come easily, as many higher education classrooms have proven themselves to be unsafe places, allowing microagressions and appropriation (Charbeneau, 2009; Quaye, 2012).

Yet, the narrative inquiry as social justice class served, at times, to be a counterspace where as yet untold stories could emerge and be told. Sumer, in the preceding excerpt, shows aspects of engaging in a narrative inquiry as social justice pedagogy process as starting with listening and witnessing Vera and Janice share diverse stories. Janice and Vera purposefully risked at the start of class telling, holding, and protecting diverse stories to foster the possibility that everyone could share his or her own experience.

This process of building trust, which began at the table on the first day, came from extensive thought from Vera and Janice and was purposefully cultivated each subsequent day through e-mails, in personal notes, in paper margins, and so on. In their earlier and upcoming narrative reflections, both indicated the depth to which professors must work to co-create with students a relational story space that extends into the small groups and classroom assignments.

It is important to recognize that there are, as Tuck and Yang (2014) have said, "stockpiles of examples of injustice, yet [they] will not make explicit a commitment to social justice" (p. 223). We would argue that it is with depth of engagement with the injustices we name that we can begin to show our commitment both within and outside of educational institutions.

Sumer remembers that this first initiation to the classroom space began with learning to listen to the stories at the table. In her earlier field texts, she described her process of learning which table stories were acceptable. It was here Sumer also began to negotiate tensions between the dominant narrative of "appropriate graduate student" and what Vera and Janice were living and asking. Janice remembered,

> *The Table Where Rich People Sit* always calls forward my memories of the old worn kitchen table around which I grew up. I remember people who gathered there, some who were there briefly, others who stayed longer, and many who awakened me to patterns of leaving and returning. These people are my family, yet this knowing of family and the hard stories often lived and told at this table and broader familial context do not resonate with the "happily ever after" stories that often dominate in schools, universities, and broader social places. It is complex and messy to shape spaces in postsecondary places where hard stories can be told and inquired into as important knowledge. (notes, July 2015)

In graduate school, expressing emotions and engaging in them through our humanity is counter to the cover stories that make for a successful graduate student in a competitive academic environment. Clandinin, Huber, Steeves, and Li (2011) described that "living a story of being a graduate student means participating in scholarly debates and arguments about important theories [and] . . . be[ing] in competition for the highest grades and the sharpest critiques" (p. 36). Juxtaposed to this dominant narrative, however, was a narrative inquiry pedagogy in which Janice opened the class by sharing stories of growing up, of teaching, and of her daughter. She openly wondered about ways it is possible in higher education to tell and think with private speech stories.

Through Janice's telling, students were listening and learning to be socialized in this new space. As students listened to Vera's story, a thread came forward from her storied experience that connected to and pulled on Sumer's experience. Vera shared what Deborah [a previous research participant] had taught her about her scars. Deborah had articulated that each scar was reflective of her life story. The scars had left an indelible physical mark. Deborah's teachings about her scars and the ways we physically embody our stories was a thread that called Sumer to see her own experiences in new ways. As Sumer noted, "in listening to Janice and Vera in this storytelling classroom space, I began to learn to sit with stories" (notes, July 2015).

First Assignment, First Day: Works in Progress 1

Vera wraps up her story, a story that told not only of Deborah's scars but also of Vera's life across geographical borders and her shifting understandings of home. Then Vera asked everyone to begin the first work-in-progress writing in freehand, answering the question, Where did you always want to go but didn't?

Sumer knew this writing would be shared, and since she did not yet know who she would be in her peer works-in-progress group, she decided to begin writing from that unknown place. An excerpt of Sumer's writing follows:

> I dislike this question, it's one of those haunting questions, with the smell of regret on it. It's the kind that pull up sadness lodged in the heart and leads me to tensions within. It's uncomfortable. Starting slowly, I think about the swing ride at the amusement park, it has a central pole and lots of swings around it. As the central pole twists and rotates it flings the swings in the air. A sense of freedom, a sense of joy, a gentle yet exciting ride. I think of the decades that have gone by that I haven't ridden that ride and I wonder where the silly, frivolous fun has gone. (notes, July 2015)

In Sumer's field text, threads of trust and tensions of being unsure in this classroom space were pulled forward into this writing assignment and in choosing peer groups. In her inquiry into this writing, Sumer writes, "I begin with a simple heart story but I do not address the stories that Deborah had pulled at since the classroom has not yet shown to be a trustworthy space free of racial microagressions." Sumer deliberately chose when and what stories to tell and did not feel obligated or rewarded for telling private stories or stories that further stereotyped her community.

In peer group formation, students were asked to find fellow students they would like to partner with to read their works-in-progress writing and share their stories. Students stood up and, after some movement, and some yesses and nos, formed a small group of four, mostly by proximity of sitting distance. Then, as a group, they moved to an adjacent room to meet one another and share their first works in progress in class writings. Janice

joined Sumer's group and explained that she would be there for some time and then move to other groups.

Sumer and another group member were trepedacious about sharing. Then, one group member volunteered and began by reading her writing. Her story came from a deep place; tears came forward as she read. Various reactions emerged as we held her story and shared. Later that evening, Sumer wrote,

> I noticed the ways others responded to her story. I noticed how much I could trust this group of peers. As I started to write a second works-in-progress paper, I was still unsure as to how much to share, but I felt more comfortable, the sharing of stories opened up space. (notes, July 2015)

As Sumer pulled forward threads from the previous class sessions, she was growing slowly "at ease," in Lugones's (1987) sense of world-traveling, and making visible diverse stories. Sumer noted,

> I was seeing the ways my fellow students and professors shared and held stories. This was also visible in my works-in-progress group and in whole-class reading conversations at the table. As my works-in-progress group shared stories regularly, I began to see the consistency and growing ability of my group to deal with the more difficult stories. (notes, July 2015)

Fourth Day: Works in Progress 3, "Artifact: A Photo"

> A small black-and-white photo sits encircled by a pewter frame on top of my nightstand. It's a photo of my [Sumer's] dad at age two being held by my grandpa in the bright sun. In the photo my dad's head is tilted to the side, and he's smirking, his characteristic photo pose even to this day. My reaction to the photo was a mixture of delight and fear. There was joy at seeing his familiar gestures, and our resemblance, yet there was also fear lying in the margins of the photo context. My dad was in prison at age two. He was born there. His crime, like that of his parents, was they were Japanese American. He at age two was a threat to national security along with hundreds of thousands of Japanese Americans during World War II. Unjustly imprisoned . . . I wonder alongside Deborah and Vera about the ways imprisonment left marks on my father's body, my family, and my people. (notes, July 2015)

Significant Aspects Threading This Process

Thinking with these story fragments, we realize that a key element of narrative inquiry as pedagogy is to create classroom relational spaces where diverse stories of experience can be shared when students are ready, thereby dismantling norms of hegemonic hierarchy (Charbeneau, 2009).

This is demonstrated through every aspect of the course, beginning with and staying with experience, encouragement for each person to bring his or her experiences alongside the readings, the ongoing written dialogue that unfolds in the margins of the reading dialogues, the choice of what and how the review of some aspect of social justice work is undertaken and connected with place or places, and the unfolding works-in-progress groups:

> Response lives at the heart of this unfolding process. When I [Janice] respond to stories shared at the table and in written works, I wonder how this thread of ongoing response, thinking in the margins as a kind of written dialogue with each student, will be experienced. This human-to-human interaction interrupts the hierarchical narrative of professor as expert. (notes, July 2015)

In and through all of this, each person becomes a co-teacher and co-learner in a process continuously shaped by thinking narratively with one another's storied experiences. As our inquiry shows, this is a deeply reciprocal, recursive, and reflexive process; often, inward and outward tensions are felt, and at least some of these are gradually expressed in written works or spoken or puzzled over out loud, sometimes in the smaller works-in-progress groups, sometimes at the whole-class table.

Clandinin and Connelly (1994), in the article "Personal Experience Methods," described the power differences between narrative inquiry as research method and narrative inquiry as teaching method. There is a difference in the relationship aspects of the work. In the research process, the researcher and participant tell stories alongside one another, but ultimately the researcher has the "signature" of interpretation in the writing, since the writing will be from the researcher's perspective, telling the ways his or her story bumps up against the participant's story.

Clandinin and Connelly described this as "living on a knife's edge as one struggles to express one's own voice in the midst of inquiry designed to capture the participant's experience and represent their voices" (p. 423). However, in narrative inquiry classroom practice, the power shifts and the student and teacher both take on the role of the researcher; both engage in an ongoing verbal and written dialogue together, sitting *with* stories, expressing, and thinking *with* their stories alongside one another. Each person has personal autonomy in his or her storytelling.

The process of thinking *with*, of sitting *with* each other's stories, is part of the start of change (Morris, 2002). As we each engage in thinking and living narratively with stories, each person experiences what Basso (1996) described as stories having a way of "getting under . . . [our] skin," of "working" on us: "That story is changing you now" (p. 59). In this midst, no one person can position himself or herself as a mere recipient of "knowledge of the other."

Each person is engaged in active participation as each is called upon as a listener to respond from within his or her own experiences, his or her own life. This collective co-making as each person puzzles over his or her becoming, asking hard questions of who he or she is becoming *in relation*, offers hope for new personal, and sometimes even collective, possibilities, possibilities for reconstructing higher education to foster equity and solidarity (Epstein & Oyler, 2008).

Of critical importance in all of this is that narrative inquiry as social justice practice does not position marginalized students as responsible for teaching. We do not expect people who have experienced harm to risk their hearts and lay them open to criticism and or analysis. The power to tell one's stories is solely the individual's:

> I [Vera] remember how the last time I taught this course, students came forward and shared very difficult childhood experiences. Tears flowed, followed by long dialogues written, but also many moments spent in silence—sitting together to absorb the depth of impact. I remember feeling the weight and possibility to shift experiences through being alongside, by creating a space of inquiry, both within and outside of the classroom. (notes, July 2015)

As the course begins and unfolds, we do not ask students to risk telling their sacred stories, their experiences of the heart, or to feel mandated to expose their deep pain in an open platform. The choice of beginnings is always left up to each person. The emphasis is on thinking narratively *with* storied experience (Clandinin, 2013; Morris, 2002).

In shifting power through loving perception and mutual respect, a plethora of stories are lived, told, retold, and relived. In this midst, deep understanding and

humanizing are possible for professor and students. It is in these shifts that we directly counter the dehumanization often so dominant in higher education, and it is in this space that we can face such experiences together.

Engaging in thinking narratively with our storied and restoried experiences of complicity, exclusion, invisibility, resistance, silence, voice, wakefulness, and so on, awakens us to seek to enact new possibilities in higher education, in schools, in other institutions, and in the communities where we are also composing our lives.

Each of us, as described by Greene (1995), is searching for, reaching toward, "what might be" (p. 5). We see this sense of searching, of reaching, as entangled with the "ethically oriented engagement" of which Stone-Mediatore (2007, p. 55) wrote. She argued that the dominant plotlines of "rigor" persist in higher education and encourage detachment, thereby cultivating "an insensitivity to living complex realities" (p. 71).

Seeing the contributions of storytelling as "inseparable from ethical" (p. 72), Stone-Mediatore questioned ways in which these dominant plot lines, particularly their emphasis on objectivity, support "an ethics of indifference in the name of neutrality," whereas "storytelling asserts that responsible knowledge practices demand ethical orientations, in particular sensitivity toward others and mindful participation in our communities" (p. 72). Noting, as have we, the uneasy, risk-filled nature of this kind of pedagogy, she wrote,

> Against those who valorize rhetoric- and emotion-free "objectivity," we must affirm that knowledge of our world is always already in narrative form, that our lives are already bound up with the web of life that we study, and that intellectual rigor, therefore, is achieved not by detached experts but by a community of storytellers who continually rethink our categories and reconsider our projects as we exchange stories with one another and let ourselves be moved by each other's struggles. (p. 73)

It is in this movement, a process lived both internally and externally, that narrative pedagogy as social justice practice holds extraordinary potential. Embodied within this work is the exploration of a resistant community of practice pedagogy that enacts a humanizing educational process that bumps up against dominant structures of class, racial, and linguistic hierarchies.

We seek to directly counter the blatant abuses of power we see. This article shows a continuous effort to nurture classroom counterspaces and to make visible how these spaces, places that call forth both experience and responsibilities, can come into being.

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