

# Understanding **NARRATIVE INQUIRY**

Jeong-Hee Kim





*This book is dedicated to my parents, who taught me to become a better educator; my daughter, Eunje, who taught me to become a better person; and my former research participants, then high school students, Matto, Kevin, and Michelle, who taught me to become a better researcher.*

Praise for *Understanding*

"This is a thorough and  
excellent resource on  
Narrative Inquiry. It is  
already familiar with  
narrative and experiential  
research and justification  
a wide variety of helpful  
and accessible to  
researchers, while its  
methodological interventions

# Understanding Narrative Inquiry

The Crafting and Analysis  
of Stories as Research

"This is an outstanding  
text. The author's  
writing is particularly  
impressive."

— Patricia Leavy, PhD, *University of*

Jeong-Hee Kim masterfully  
explores narrative inquiry. Readers are  
inspired by the richness of the  
text and the author's skill in  
crafting a narrative that is both  
informative and engaging.

— Margaret MacLure

**Jeong-Hee Kim**

*Kansas State University*



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## Praise for *Understanding Narrative Inquiry*

"This is a thorough and inclusive book that can serve as an excellent introduction to narrative forms of qualitative research in the fields of education, medicine, psychology, and legal studies. But *Understanding Narrative Inquiry* may also serve to extend the knowledge of researchers and practitioners in those fields who are already familiar with this rapidly maturing inquiry approach. Extremely well researched and referenced, it deftly addresses sophisticated theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of narrative research, including the rationales and justifications for engaging in both storytelling and the analysis of stories. And it also explores a wide variety of helpful strategies for interviewing, fieldwork, and writing. But just as importantly, it grounds and humanizes its sophisticated scholarship through an inviting, conversational style replete with personal anecdotes, while its many concrete examples of research practice in action further enhances its usefulness. A remarkable achievement."

—Tom Barone, Professor Emeritus, Arizona State University

"This is an outstanding text on narrative inquiry. Kim offers the historical and philosophical context for narrative research, ample methodological instruction, and robust examples, making this a truly comprehensive text. I am particularly impressed with her attention to the different genres of narrative including arts-based and visual-based. This is a must-read for anyone interested in narrative research."

—Patricia Leavy, PhD, independent scholar and author of *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*

"Jeong-Hee Kim masterfully positions readers to enter the storied fabric of human life through the medium of narrative inquiry. Readers across all disciplines and interests will find themselves locating and articulating the textured significances of stories as research. Philosophical/theoretical connections substantively frame and permeate the text with readers importantly gaining context, language, and capacities to design and undertake fitting narrative inquiries. The concrete examples depicting a cross section of genres and the inclusion of a glossary make this comprehensive text an invaluable resource for all interested in crafting and analysis of research through narrative inquiry."

—Margaret Macintyre Latta, Professor and Director, Centre for Mindful Engagement and Graduate Programs, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia Okanagan, Canada

"This text offers novice and practicing scholars of narrative inquiry provocative philosophical and methodological insights. The text is beautifully written and draws on art, music, religion, philosophy, and literature to inform researchers' understandings."

—Mary Louise Gomez, University of Wisconsin–Madison

"The author's use of a conversational tone—as if she is talking directly to her students—while guiding the reader through complex theoretical material is noteworthy, as are the expertly designed 'Questions for Reflection' and the 'Activities' sections at the end of each chapter. This text will be of interest to anyone teaching Qualitative Research Methods looking for ways to engage their graduate students."

—Thalia M. Mulvihill, Ball State University



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# Brief Contents

About the Author	xiii
Preface	xiv
Chapter 1. Locating Narrative Inquiry in the Interdisciplinary Context	1
Chapter 2. Philosophical/Theoretical Underpinnings of Narrative Inquiry	27
Chapter 3. Narrative Research Design: Engaging in Aesthetic Play	83
Chapter 4. Narrative Research Genres: Mediating Stories Into Being	117
Chapter 5. Narrative Data Collection: Excavating Stories	155
Chapter 6. Narrative Data Analysis and Interpretation: "Flirting" With Data	185
Chapter 7. Narrative Coda: Theorizing Narrative Meaning	227
Chapter 8. Critical Issues in Narrative Inquiry: Looking Into a Kaleidoscope	243
Chapter 9. Examples of Narrative Inquiry: Theory Into Practice	269
Chapter 10. Epilogue	299
Glossary	301
References	306
Index	329

# Detailed Contents

About the Author

xiii

Preface

xiv

## Chapter 1. Locating Narrative Inquiry in the Interdisciplinary Context

1

Scientific Research and Qualitative Research in Tandem

3

Narrative Inquiry

5

What Is Narrative?

6

What Is Story?

8

Narrative Inquiry in Different Disciplines

10

Narrative Inquiry in Psychology: "Psychology Is Narrative"

12

Narrative Inquiry in Law: Promoting Counter-Stories

13

Narrative Inquiry in Medicine: Developing Narrative Competence

15

Narrative Inquiry in Education: Exploring

the Lived Experience

18

Some Cautionary Tales About Narrative Inquiry

20

Narrative Inquiry as the Synergy of Interdisciplinarity

21

Learning to Be a Storyteller in the Interdisciplinary Context

23

Conclusion: A Falling Apple

23

## Chapter 2. Philosophical/Theoretical Underpinnings of Narrative Inquiry

27

The Role of Theory

29

Philosophical/Theoretical/Interpretive Paradigm

31

Theory and Narrative Inquiry

32

Critical Theory

35

The Origin of Critical Theory

35

Reproduction in Critical Theory

37

From Reproduction to Resistance in Critical Theory

38

Reconceptualization of Critical Theory and Narrative Inquiry

40

Critical Race Theory

41

History of Critical Race Theory

42

Characteristics of Critical Race Theory

43

Branches of Critical Race Theory

45

The Future of Critical Race Theory

45

Critical Race Theory and Narrative Inquiry

46

Feminist Theory	47
Liberal Feminist Theory	49
Critical Feminist Theory	50
Intersectionality in Feminist Theory	51
Phenomenology	53
Methods of Phenomenological Knowledge	54
Hermeneutical Phenomenology	57
Resurgence of Phenomenology and Narrative Inquiry	58
Poststructuralism/Postmodernism/Deconstruction	59
After Structuralism	59
Nietzschean Influences on Poststructuralism	60
Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995): Rhizomatic Thinking	62
Rhizomatic Thinking and Narrative Inquiry	63
Michel Foucault (1926–1984): An Analysis of Power Relations	64
Foucauldian Approach and Narrative Inquiry	66
Jacques Derrida (1930–2004): Deconstruction for Justice	67
Poststructuralism and Narrative Inquiry	68
Dewey's Theory of Experience	69
Bakhtin's Theory of Novelness	72
Epic Versus Novel	73
Polyphony	74
Chronotope	75
Carnival	76
Conclusion: No Theory Used as a Procrustean Bed	76
 <b>Chapter 3. Narrative Research Design: Engaging in Aesthetic Play</b>	 <b>83</b>
Engaging in Aesthetic Play	84
Standards for Humanities-Oriented Research	88
Learning to Think Narratively	89
Plowing Before Sowing: On Reviewing the Literature	90
Developing "Good" Research Questions	94
Imagining the Researcher-Participant Relationship:	
From "Spy" to "Friend"	97
Ethical Issues in Narrative Inquiry	100
Ethics in Practice or Micro-ethics	101
Narrative Ethics in Practice	103
Developing <i>Phronesis</i> (Ethical Judgment) Through Reflexivity	104
Qualitative Writing or Scientific Writing	106
Imagining Narrative Writing as Aesthetic Play	109
Creation of Virtual Reality/Verisimilitude	109
Fidelity to Told Stories	111



Voice of the Narrative Inquirer	112
Cultivation of Narrative Imagination	113
Conclusion: Where Your Heart Belongs	114
<b>Chapter 4. Narrative Research Genres: Mediating Stories Into Being</b>	<b>117</b>
Narrative Inquirer as a Midwife	118
Narrative Research Genres	120
Autobiographical Narrative Inquiry	121
Autobiography	122
Autoethnography	123
Biographical Narrative Inquiry	125
<i>Bildungsroman</i>	127
Life Story/Life History	131
Oral History	134
Arts-Based Narrative Inquiry	136
The Origin of Genre Blurring	136
Eisner and Barone's Arts-Based Research	138
Literary-Based Narrative Inquiry	139
Creative Nonfiction and Short Story	139
Fiction and Novel	141
Visual-Based Narrative Inquiry	143
Photographic Narrative	143
Photovoice	147
Archival Photographs	148
Digital Storytelling	149
Conclusion: Blurring Genres	151
<b>Chapter 5. Narrative Data Collection Methods: Excavating Stories</b>	<b>155</b>
Narrative Thinking	156
Interview Logistics	157
Informed Consent	158
Confidentiality	158
Sampling and Saturation	160
Trust and Rapport	162
Types of Qualitative Interview	163
Narrative Interviewing	165
Life Story Interview/Biographical Interview	166
Narrative Interview Phases	167
Narrative Interview Questions	169
Two-Sentence Format Technique	170

Fieldwork	171
Gaining Access to the Research Field	172
The Art of Observation—Also Known as Attention	174
Observer's Paradox	175
Artifacts: Cabinets of Curiosities or Cabinets of Wonder	176
Visual Data	178
(Digital) Archival Data	179
Conclusion: Excavating Stories as Data	180
<b>Chapter 6. Narrative Data Analysis and Interpretation: "Flirting" With Data</b>	<b>185</b>
On Flirtation	187
Qualitative Data Analysis	188
Theorizing Narrative Data Analysis and Interpretation	189
Narrative Meaning	190
Narrative Smoothing	191
The Interpretation of Faith and the Interpretation of Suspicion	193
Methods of Narrative Data Analysis	195
Polkinghorne's Analysis of Narratives and Narrative Analysis	195
Mishler's Models of Narrative Analysis	198
Labov's Model	201
Flirting With Polkinghorne, Mishler, and Labov	204
Narrative Analysis in Narrative Genres	206
Analysis in Narrative as Phenomenon and Method:	
Broadening, Burrowing, and Restorying	206
Analysis in Autoethnography	208
Analysis as <i>Bildungsroman</i> : Story of Personal Growth	210
Analysis in Biographical Narrative Inquiry	211
Analysis in Arts-Based Narrative Inquiry	215
Conclusion: Variegations of Narrative Analysis and Interpretation	222
<b>Chapter 7. Narrative Coda: Theorizing Narrative Meaning</b>	<b>227</b>
On Coda	228
Research Signature	230
Answering the Question "So What?"	230
"Desiring" the Audience	231
Avoiding an Epic Closure	234
Theorizing Findings	235
Planting the Seed of Social Justice	237
Becoming a Scheherazade	239
Conclusion: Ongoing Stories	240

<b>Chapter 8. Critical Issues in Narrative Inquiry: Looking Into a Kaleidoscope</b>	<b>243</b>
Looking Into a Kaleidoscope	244
Contradicting Stories: The Rashomon Effect	245
Temptation of "Backyard Research"	246
On Reflexivity	248
Subjectivist, Confessional Reflexivity	249
A Paradox of Reflexivity: Whose Story Is It?	251
Reflexivity as <i>Askēsis</i> : Self as an Object of Care	251
An Example of Reflexive <i>Askēsis</i> Through <i>Currere</i>	253
On Bricolage and Bricoleur	256
Lévi-Strauss's Use of Bricolage and Bricoleur	258
Bricolage in Interdisciplinary Qualitative Research	259
Narrative Inquirer as Bricoleur	260
On "Small" Stories	260
"Living Narratives": The Origin of "Small" Stories	262
Storytelling as Performance	263
Conclusion: Pushing the Boundary of Narrative Inquiry	265
<b>Chapter 9. Examples of Narrative Inquiry: Theory Into Practice</b>	<b>269</b>
Example of Narrative Inquiry as Phenomenon and Method	271
Example of Narrative Inquiry as Oral History	275
Example of Narrative Inquiry as Life Story	279
Example of Narrative Inquiry as Autoethnography	283
Example of Narrative Inquiry as Creative Nonfiction	286
Example of Narrative Inquiry as Fiction	290
Conclusion: Learning to Be a Storyteller	296
<b>Chapter 10. Epilogue</b>	<b>299</b>
 Glossary	 301
References	306
Index	329

# About the Author



**Jeong-Hee Kim** is associate professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Kansas State University. Kim is an experienced narrative inquirer whose research centers on a phenomenological understanding of the stories of school people as a way to inform the areas of curriculum studies and teacher education. She has received two awards—Outstanding Narrative Research Article in 2007 and Outstanding Narrative Theory Article in 2009—from the Narrative Research (Special Interest Group) at the American Educational Research Association (AERA). She has also received the Faculty Excellence in

Research/Creative Activities Award from the College of Education at Kansas State University in 2011. Her recent publications can be found in the *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, and *Educational Philosophy and Theory*. She currently teaches graduate courses on curriculum theory, narrative inquiry, and action research in education.



# Preface

After summer break was over, I went to visit my colleague in her office to chat. Her office was usually rather dark and plain, except for the many interesting books ensconced in wall-long bookshelves. But on this day, it felt unusually bright and welcoming. I assumed she must have added better lighting, and that proved to be the case. She had a new, cozy-looking desk lamp. In the middle of our chat, however, something else caught my attention. Hanging on the wall to my left was a patchwork quilt, which I didn't remember seeing previously. It was a beautiful artwork, about three-and-a-half feet by four feet, in shades of purple. I had to exclaim, "What a beautiful quilt this is!" My colleague brightened with a wide smile and said proudly, "Yes, it's beautiful, isn't it? My aunt made it for my birthday." I don't have any handcraft skills whatsoever, so I was amazed by the fact that my colleague's aunt had made such an incredible thing by hand. So many pieces of cloth in rectangles, triangles, and other shapes and colors were deliberately put together to create a divergent but convergent whole. I asked, "How did she do that?" "Well, it's her hobby. She collects various pieces of clothing that used to be worn by her kids, grandkids, and other family members. She cuts them into different shapes and sews them together in her own design. It is painstaking work that takes hours and hours. I know; it's amazing."

"So, each individual piece holds a personal memory and meaning? And this entire quilt has hidden stories?"

"Pretty much. My aunt said this patchwork quilt has even some pieces of clothing I wore when I was a young child as well as pieces from garments worn by my cousins, nephews, and nieces. So, this quilt is really precious to me." My colleague's right hand was over her heart, seemingly to emphasize the quilt's meaning to her, as we looked into each other's eyes in silence.

I had never viewed a patchwork quilt as a collection of stories. I would have never guessed that each piece of cloth in this superb quilt had a story to tell, and it could evoke fond memories for the people who lived those stories.

I returned to my office and sat in front of my laptop, which has been my close friend for quite some time now. I drank one more sip of coffee that was already cold. I needed to write this Preface by Monday; but I'd been haunted by "writer's block" for the last few days.

Suddenly, my fingers were eager to move on the keyboard. As I typed, inspired by the beautiful quilt I had just seen, I began to understand that this book has become a metaphoric quilt.

I welcome you to the world of my quilt. Each chapter, each section, each paragraph, and even each sentence in this book, has personal meanings and memories in relation to narrative inquiry. I drew upon the work of wonderful scholars, philosophers, and theorists who have shaped my

thinking and the thinking of others. I used my previous writings from my own research and teaching. I shared my personal stories, good and bad, in hopes these will help you tease out your own personal stories. More important, I incorporated my former and current students' stories, which may resonate with you. Many parts of this book convey aspects of myself, my relationship with others, and their relationships with me, all of which have impacted my journey of becoming. I hope reading this book will become part of your journey of becoming as well.

Metaphorically speaking, each narrative inquiry is a quilt made out of pieces of personal and social stories that may be collected from any walk of life. The quilt is a reflection of a part of the world in which we live. Methodologically speaking, narrative inquiry is an interdisciplinary, qualitative research that pursues a narrative way of knowing by exploring the narratives or stories of participants. It includes but is not limited to autobiography, autoethnography, biography, life history, oral history, life story, personal narrative, performance narrative, and arts-based narrative (e.g., poetry, novel, fiction, or creative nonfiction, photographs, visual narrative, and more). It has become an increasingly influential research methodology in humanities and social science research fields such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, philosophy, literature, education, medicine, and law, to name a few. It is easier than ever to find a friend or a colleague who conducts narrative inquiry. Clearly, narrative inquiry is flourishing; it is everywhere (see Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Chase, 2005; Denzin, 2005). With the burgeoning interest in narrative inquiry, there have been a slew of book publications as well as journal articles on narrative inquiry. Noticing this driving trend, a pioneer of narrative Jerome Bruner (2002) asked a rhetorical question, "Do we need another book on narrative?" (p. 1).

Indeed. Do we need another book on narrative? Perhaps.

Susan Chase states that narrative inquiry is still "a field in the making" (2005, p. 651). I concur, and also feel that narrative inquiry should continue to be a field in the making, questioning and (re)defining itself. There are many researchers and graduate students learning to be narrative researchers, who find narrative inquiry rich but complicated, approachable but elusive, and well defined but still perplexing. Courses on narrative inquiry are offered seldom or not at all in many institutions, and instructors of those courses tend not to have extensive training in narrative inquiry, but they are learning on the job, as Josselson and Lieblich (2003) noted. On the surface, we celebrate narrative inquiry's seeming popularity; in reality, however, a lot of us still feel that we are living on academic archipelagos in our own departments, colleges, and universities, as Mishler expressed in an interview with Clandinin and Murphy, "people [narrative inquirers] are still reporting that they feel like outsiders in their department of psychology or sociology or whatever" (Clandinin & Murphy, 2007, p. 641). There is a noticeable gap in academic culture here; hence, there is a need for another book on narrative inquiry—in fact, not just one, but many more, to make narrative inquiry a more rigorous research practice.

Books are often written by experts who claim to have authoritative knowledge about the topic of their books. That is not the case for this book. In a recent TED Talk, Stuart Firestein, biology professor at Columbia University, argued that what drives science is "not knowing," that is, ignorance. Firestein says not knowing or ignorance is about puzzling over difficult questions,

unsettled problems, and further, what remains to be done. Hence, it is this state of ignorance that drives the advancement of science.

Similarly, what drove me to write this book was my own pursuit of not knowing, that is, my own puzzles and quandaries related to narrative inquiry over many years of working and teaching as a narrative inquirer. People ask me what narrative inquiry is and, ironically, I find this simple question difficult to answer because (a) there are so many narrative researchers in different disciplines who have adopted narrative theory and method in different ways; (b) the narrative field is changing and evolving; and (c) narrative inquiry attempts to embrace diversity in methods, avoiding association with only one of the many currently in use. As a narrative inquirer and teacher of a course on narrative inquiry, I had more questions than answers. So, I wanted to explore some of the confounding issues of the why, how, and what of narrative inquiry, and at the same time illuminate the current state of the field of narrative inquiry across disciplines. If you have picked up this book because you don't know much about narrative inquiry and have many questions about it, then, you're in the right place! We can pursue together the unknowns, puzzles, and questions related to narrative inquiry, spurred on by our "ignorance" and not knowing.

Therefore, this book is not a "boilerplate" of what narrative inquiry is, or a "quick guide" to how to conduct narrative inquiry. It is quite comprehensive in nature, intended to expose you to the entire narrative inquiry process, possibly embracing both the breadth and depth of narrative inquiry. There are philosophical, theoretical, and artistic aspects, which may seem at first to have little to do with narrative inquiry, but which are placed strategically to function as "speed bumps" (Weis & Fine, 2000) to help you slow down, pause, and take the time to think and reflect, using your imagination and creativity. Further, I intend this book to provide a "zone" or a major confluence where different narrative "currents" meet, exchange ideas, learn from each other, share questions and curiosities, all of which will eventually lead to enhancing the field of narrative inquiry. Although this book will provide you with hands-on, down-to-earth tactics you can use for your research, I am hoping that it will go beyond that. Ultimately, I want this book to be your inspiration, something that triggers your imagination and creativity, which will take you to a place you have never dreamed of reaching with your research.

As more and more researchers become interested in narrative research, there is a need for us to develop it as a more rigorous research methodology, with firm underpinnings of theoretical, philosophical, social, and practical considerations. This book is an effort to meet such a need. It will address the challenges and questions that are typically brought to the forefront in narrative inquiry courses and introductory/advanced qualitative research methods courses. Therefore, this book is primarily geared toward students and novice researchers who aspire to be quality researchers, and quality narrative researchers in particular. In addition, experienced researchers who have intellectual curiosity about both a theory of narrative and its methodology as a form of inquiry are welcome to join us.

Now I'll give you a brief peek at the inside of the book. Each chapter has the following pedagogical features to help your understanding: It begins with a list of chapter topics, questions to consider, and an introductory narrative, all of which are aimed to orient you to the main ideas of the chapter. Each chapter concludes with reflective questions, activities, and a list of resources

that you can use to deepen your knowledge. Please note that you don't need to read the book from Chapter 1 to the end in a linear fashion. Although the chapters are logically connected to each other, each chapter is independent enough to stand on its own; you can enter any chapter any time depending on the stage of your research. If you have any comments or questions about the book, direct them to me at [jhkim@ksu.edu](mailto:jhkim@ksu.edu). I'm happy to hear your feedback.

## **Chapter 1, Locating Narrative Inquiry in the Interdisciplinary Context**

In this chapter, we first locate qualitative research against the enduring backdrop of Positivism, which leads to the discussion of narrative inquiry along with the concepts of narrative and story. We see how different disciplines have established narrative inquiry in their fields, opening the door for the synergy of interdisciplinarity and responding to criticisms of narrative inquiry. The chapter concludes with a story that will help us to think about what it means to be a narrative inquirer.

## **Chapter 2, Philosophical/Theoretical Underpinnings of Narrative Inquiry**

You will find this chapter much longer than the other chapters. There are many important grand theories, but I could hardly "catch" them all in this limited space. So, I have chosen the theories that I've used for my work and those in which I've had keen interests. The purpose is to introduce you to the theoretical/philosophical underpinnings of narrative inquiry and help you become theorizers and philosophers of narrative inquiry. Because I have seen many students struggle with their interpretive paradigms, I want to provide you with a basis for understanding some of the most important philosophical/theoretical paradigms. It is my hope that you will delve farther into your choice of theory on your own, going beyond the resources provided here. In this chapter, I first discuss the role of theory, and then address macro-level theories that are used as interpretive paradigms and meso-level theories that are used as methodological paradigms. The relationship each theory has with narrative inquiry is also discussed.

## **Chapter 3, Narrative Research Design: Engaging in Aesthetic Play**

This chapter is to help you engage in aesthetic play with your narrative research design. You will learn about the value of interacting with your research ideas playfully and seriously at the same time as you design your research project. After all, designing anything is an aesthetic experience. Research design is not an exception. To be able to design your research, you will need to equip yourself with foundational knowledge about research design. More important, you will need to nourish your imaginative vision with intellectual curiosity, flexibility, openness, and attunement to your research. This chapter is a helpmate that will inspire you to have an aesthetic experience through your research. We discuss basic elements of qualitative research design as well as particular elements of narrative inquiry design.



## Chapter 4, Narrative Research Genres: Mediating Stories Into Being

In continuation of narrative research design, this chapter is to help you explore different narrative research genres or narrative forms you can employ for the kinds of stories you would like to tell. Acting as an imaginary “midwife” who mediates stories into being, you will consider a genre or multiple genres in which your research will be represented, whether it is autobiographical, biographical, or arts-based. This chapter aims to provide you with possible narrative research genres that you can choose from, in conjunction with ways to honor our storytellers’ own dignity and integrity.

## Chapter 5, Narrative Data Collection Methods: Excavating Stories

This chapter takes you to the world of data collection methods that you can use to excavate stories. It not only provides you with down-to-earth logistics and skills that you may be familiar with in collecting qualitative research data but also inspires you with creative ideas to uncover stories that are silently tucked in every corner of human life. This chapter will help you turn your research toolbox to a cabinet of curiosities.

## Chapter 6, Narrative Data Analysis and Interpretation: “Flirting” With Data

In the world of research, *flirting* is not a “bad” word, borrowing the term from the field of psychoanalysis. It asks you to undo your commitment to what you already know. Flirting with your narrative data in the process of analysis and interpretation will allow you to dwell on what is perplexing, rendering surprises and serendipities in relation to your research findings. This chapter introduces you to different methods of narrative data analysis and interpretation. You will learn that sorting and sifting through your data for analysis and interpretation is like undergoing a symbolic rite of passage to your researcher-hood.

## Chapter 7, Narrative Coda: Theorizing Narrative Meaning

Narrative coda is what comes after the story, which contributes to fulfilling the inquiry aspect of narrative research. For example, we may be good at telling a story but not very good at developing the story’s linkage to a broader social context. Hence, this chapter is to help you theorize the meaning of stories, understanding how a story transfigures the commonplace. It offers ways to (un)finalize your research, answering the question of “so what” and learning to become a Scheherazade, who keeps the stories going.

## Chapter 8, Critical Issues in Narrative Inquiry: Looking Into a Kaleidoscope

In this chapter, we will address some critical issues in narrative inquiry that require us to employ an imaginary kaleidoscope through which we embrace unexpected patterns and changes. The metaphor of a kaleidoscope is meant to broaden our ways of thinking and understanding, so that we can push the boundaries of narrative inquiry and become the most thoughtful and ethical researchers we can be.

## Chapter 9, Examples of Narrative Inquiry: Theory Into Practice

This chapter provides you with several narrative inquiry examples to give you an opportunity to see how theories of narrative inquiry outlined in this book can be used in research practice. You can use this opportunity to practice, question, adapt, and create a narrative inquiry format that may best suit the purpose of your narrative research. I provide an excerpted example of each narrative genre, following general information about the article. After each excerpt, a few questions are suggested to help guide a discussion.

## Chapter 10, Epilogue

This chapter is my personal letter to you, which aims to bring you home from our journey together.

## Acknowledgments

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## CHAPTER TOPICS

- Scientific Research and Qualitative Research in Tandem
- Narrative Inquiry
  - *What Is Narrative?*
  - *What Is Story?*
- Narrative Inquiry in Different Disciplines
  - *Narrative Inquiry in Psychology: "Psychology Is Narrative"*
  - *Narrative Inquiry in Law: Promoting Counter-Stories*
  - *Narrative Inquiry in Medicine: Developing Narrative Competence*
  - *Narrative Inquiry in Education: Exploring the Lived Experience*
- Some Cautionary Tales About Narrative Inquiry
- Narrative Inquiry as the Synergy of Interdisciplinarity
- Learning to Be a Storyteller in the Interdisciplinary Context
- Conclusion: A Falling Apple



# CHAPTER 1



## Locating Narrative Inquiry in the Interdisciplinary Context

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Why narrative inquiry?
- What is narrative inquiry?
- What makes narrative inquiry distinct from other qualitative research?
- What makes a narrative inquirer a narrative inquirer?

### INTRODUCTION

I first learned **narrative inquiry** from the course offered by my dissertation advisor and mentor, Tom Barone. I was immediately drawn to narrative inquiry by its approachability, artistic quality, and non-pedantic nature that values stories of laypeople. It seemed to me that narrative inquiry was a perfect hybrid of research and art (literary art in particular) that could satisfy my inclination for literature. It was "highly seductive" (Munro Hendry, 2007, p. 488) indeed! By the end of that semester, I found myself falling in love with narrative inquiry and decided to use it for my dissertation research although I did not have my dissertation topic yet.

It seems that the author has blindly fallen in love with narrative inquiry even before collecting data, and tries to legitimate its usefulness.

This was a critique I received from one of the anonymous reviewers of Spencer Foundation grant proposal draft that drew upon my dissertation research. When I read this harsh review, I felt quite embarrassed, with my face secretly blushing no end. How did the reviewer detect my “blind” love for narrative inquiry? How could the reviewer sound so disdainful of my love for it? How did the reviewer know I was “trying to legitimate its usefulness” even before collecting data? My romance with narrative inquiry encountered such unprecedented embarrassment, but not to the extent that I wanted to run away. In fact, the to-the-point, direct critique ended up being a bitter medicine that provided an opportunity to see my “reality”: an immature understanding of my partner, narrative inquiry. I should have known what Amia Lieblich advised: to be a “good” narrative scholar requires “maturity and experience and sensitivity to people and to one’s self, which takes years to develop” (Clandinin & Murphy, 2007, p. 642). I concur. It takes years to develop the maturity and experience that are required to be a good narrative researcher. I had to work at it. I am still working at it.

My journey to becoming a better narrative inquirer continues. As a self-claimed romanticist, I first started by questioning my romance with narrative inquiry. As Munro Hendry (2007) questioned her relationship to narrative by being suspicious of the power of narrative because she felt she had “gotten stuck” in particular narratives (p. 488), it was now my turn to be deeply engaged in questioning my own relationship to narrative. So, what is narrative inquiry? Do I know “my partner” well enough? What was it about narrative inquiry that was so fascinating to me? Didn’t I secretly think it was an “easy” methodology that concerns “just telling stories” (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007, p. 21)? With a pang of guilty conscience, I had to find ways to elevate my “puppy love” to a mature one to avoid future harsh critiques.

I imagine that some of you are also apprehensive about your “love affair” (or lack thereof) with narrative inquiry. I want you to come along as I dig deeper into narrative inquiry in a quest for what it means to be a narrative inquirer. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to take you to a world of narrative inquiry that is conceptually “demanding and complex,” although “the rewards are potentially great” (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2011, p. 16). We will explore some fundamental issues that will help us know narrative inquiry

better. We will first locate qualitative research against the enduring backdrop of Positivism, which will lead to a discussion about narrative inquiry along with the concepts of narrative and story. And we will see how different disciplines have established narrative inquiry in their fields, opening the door for the synergy of interdisciplinarity and, in the process, responding effectively to criticism. The chapter concludes with a story that will help us to think about what it means to be a narrative inquirer.

## Scientific Research and Qualitative Research in Tandem

In the first half of the nineteenth century when the scientific movement, industrialism, and technological development rose in Western society, Positivism emerged to give an account of the triumphs of science and technology. It was Auguste Comte who first expressed the three principal doctrines of Positivism: first, empirical science is the only source of positive knowledge about the world; second, human pursuits of mysticism, superstition, and metaphysics are pseudo-knowledge and prevent the development of scientific knowledge; and third, scientific knowledge and technical control no longer exclusively belong to natural sciences, but are pervasive in political and moral arenas as well. By the late nineteenth century, this philosophical doctrine of Positivism had become prevalent as a way to apply the achievements of science and technology to the well-being of humankind. Since then, Positivist epistemology had become built into the academy, where scientific and quantitative research has been the main research paradigm (Schön, 1983).

We all know that Positivism is still alive and well in academia. In fact, many U.S. government policy statements allude to the long-term marriage between positivistic knowledge and power that Lyotard (1979/1984) insightfully questioned. The French postmodern philosopher Jean-François Lyotard points out that in the scientific, positivistic age, the current status of scientific knowledge gives way to the prevailing powers more than ever before, revealing that "knowledge and power are simply two sides of the same question: Who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided?" (p. 9). For Lyotard, the question of knowledge and power is a question of government, which then takes the form of grand narrative. Consider, for example, the American government's grand narrative in education, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. It used the phrase *scientifically based research* 111 times (Barone, 2007), calling explicitly for the use of scientific research that involves hard, measurable, and quantifiable data. Further, the National Research Council (2002) published the report *Scientific Research in Education*, calling for evidence-based education research that uses "rigorous, systematic and objective procedures to obtain valid knowledge" (Maxwell, 2004, p. 3). In this positivistic epistemology,

human conditions that are the focus of research are viewed as value-neutral, fixed, stable, predictable, and generalizable enough that those prescribed solutions can be applied universally to every human situation. Such adherence to positivistic thinking demonstrates “good, ol’ boy” thinking, or “déjà vu all over again” (Lather, 2008, p. 362), making us feel that “the art of storytelling is coming to an end” (Benjamin, 1969, p. 83).

Yet in spite of the prevalence of this grand narrative, researchers have become increasingly aware of the flaws and limitations of applying solely scientific knowledge to the understanding of human phenomena fraught with complexity, uncertainty, uniqueness, instability, ambiguity, and value-conflict. Schön (1983) uses a road metaphor to point out how positivistic professionals walk on the “high, hard ground” where rigor or relevance is equivalent to scientifically based research seeking technical solutions. These positivists, according to Schön, tend to be inattentive to uncertain, unique, and unstable phenomena, discarding them as messy and trivial data. On the other hand, there are those who choose the “swampy lowlands” and carefully engage in messy but crucially important problems, focusing on “experience, trial and error, intuition, and muddling through” (p. 43). They resist confining their research to a narrowly defined, scientific experiment that provides quick fixes as they understand that addressing the problems of human concern is like walking in a “swamp.” This metaphor of “walking on the swampy lowlands” (p. 43) is further supported by Dewey (1934/1980) who posits that human beings excel in complexity and minuteness of differentiations because:

There are more opportunities for resistance and tension, more drafts upon experimentation and invention, and therefore more novelty in action, greater range and depth of insight and increase of poignancy in feeling. As an organism increases in complexity, the rhythms of struggle and consummation in its relation to its environment are varied and prolonged. (p. 23)

The limitations of scientific knowledge seem obvious, then; to rely solely on scientific research to understand the complexity of human life seems like asking Siri on my iPhone to cry for me when I get lost on the road. Luckily, the research community has experienced a paradigm shift (Kuhn, 1962) that has given greater recognition to qualitative research as researchers acknowledge that complex human concerns cannot be understood by testable observation, general principles, and standardized knowledge. Conducting qualitative research is like walking in the swamp, not an easy path, but one that explores the complex issues of what it means to be human. A number of scholars now recognize that both scientific research and qualitative research should exist in tandem and be valued without privileging one over the other.

In the first edition of *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, the editors, Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (1994), define qualitative research as:

multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive naturalistic approach to its subject matter . . . qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 2)



Qualitative research informed by different interpretative paradigms uses words rather than numbers in its analyses and focuses on understanding human action through interpretation rather than prediction and control. It does not reduce research results to certainty and measurable objectivity. Rather, it involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to research phenomena, making sense of the meaning that people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In their recent fourth edition of the *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2011), Denzin and Lincoln further situate qualitative research within eight historical moments, which overlap and exist simultaneously in the present:

1. The Traditional (1900–1950)
2. The Modernist or Golden Age (1950–1970)
3. Blurred Genres (1970–1986)
4. The Crisis of Representation (1986–1990)
5. The postmodern, a Period of Experimental and New Ethnographies (1990–1995)
6. Postexperimental Inquiry (1995–2000)
7. The Methodologically Contested Present (2000–2010)
8. The Future (2010– )

For Denzin and Lincoln (2011), the future (which is now) is concerned with moral and critical discourse about democracy, globalization, and justice, confronting the grand narrative associated with evidence-based scientific research. They posit that any definition of qualitative research *must* work within these complex eight historical moments where qualitative research goes through reflexive, complicated developmental processes. Where, then, does narrative inquiry belong in these historical moments? Denzin and Lincoln place it in the fifth moment (1990–1995), sixth moment (1995–2000), and on, as they consider that the postmodern and postexperimental moments “were defined in part by a concern for literary and rhetorical tropes and the narrative turn, a concern for storytelling, for composing ethnographies in new ways” (p. 3).

## Narrative Inquiry

The beginning of the narrative turn, however, was signaled even before the fifth moment, with two issues of the journal *Critical Inquiry* published in 1980 and 1981, which became a book titled *On Narrative* (1981). Thomas Mitchell, editor of *Critical Inquiry*, declared, “The study of narrative is no longer the province of literary specialists or folklorists borrowing their terms from psychology and linguistics but has now become a positive source of insight for all the branches of human and natural science” (p. ix). The book has an interdisciplinary collection

of essays written by important thinkers in literary theory, philosophy, anthropology, psychology, theology, and art history, which indicates just how narrative has become the focal point of research in social, human, and even natural sciences.

As you see, building on the tenets of qualitative research including frameworks, research methods, approaches, and strategies, narrative inquiry has become a field of its own with its distinctive nature and significance (Bruner, 2002; Clandinin, 2007; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Using narrative as a phenomenon to understand multidimensional meanings of society, culture, human actions, and life, it attempts to access participants' life experiences and engage in a process of storytelling (Leavy, 2009). Polkinghorne (1988) believes that working with stories holds significant promise for qualitative researchers because stories are particularly suited as a linguistic form in which human experience can be expressed. Narrative inquiry utilizes interdisciplinary interpretive lenses with theoretically, philosophically diverse approaches and methods, all revolving around the narratives and stories of research participants.

Since narrative and story are the center of gravity around which the apparatus of narrative inquiry revolves, an in-depth look at the concepts of narrative and story seems worthwhile. In general, they are used interchangeably, one acting as a synonym for the other (McQuillan, 2000). However, difficulties in doing narrative research might arise due to different opinions about conceptually subtle delineations of "story," "narrative," "narrative inquiry," "narrative analysis," and so on (Verhesschen, 2003). For instance, we say "storytelling" not "narrative telling," "narrative inquiry" not "story inquiry." Further, "narratology" is an official term for the study of narratives, but I have encountered hardly any literature on "storytology" or "storyology" (the study of stories). How, then, are narrative and story the same and how are they different?<sup>1</sup>

## What Is Narrative?

First of all, etymologically speaking, the word *narrative* is from Latin *narrat-* "related," "told"), *narrare* ("to tell"), or late Latin *narrativus* ("telling a story"), all of which are akin to Latin *gnārus* ("knowing"), derived from the ancient Sanskrit *gnā* ("to know"). Thus, a **narrative** is a form of knowledge that catches the two sides of narrative, telling as well as knowing (McQuillan, 2000). A narrator, then, could mean one who knows and tells. As we noted, the importance of narrative in human life has long been recognized, from Aristotle, known as the first great analyst of narrative (Boyd, 2009), to the contemporary philosophers and theorists. As Benedetto Croce, Italian theorist and philosopher, puts it, "Where there is no narrative, there is no history" (cited in Altman, 2008, p. 1). As such, narrative is one of the few human endeavors that is widely spread as a basic aspect of human life and an essential strategy of human expression.

Genealogically, the most common and oldest form of narrative is known to be myth (*mythos* in Greek means "story"), which is transmitted from one generation to the next. Myth is available in most every culture, and has a sacred ritual function that is used to maintain each culture's origins and heroic ancestors, including Greek, Biblical, Native American, Celtic, Persian, Asian, and Incan, just to name a few. According to Kearney (2002), mythic narrative can be divided into two main branches: *historical* and *fictional*. Historical narrative depicts the reality of past

events or what actually happened, which leads to the genre of biography. Fictional narrative, on the other hand, focuses on the redescription of events in relation to “beauty, goodness or nobility” (p. 9), with rhetorical devices such as metaphor, allegory, or others, used to embellish the events, which leads to literary genres of narrative and is discussed in Chapter 4.

Our understanding of what narrative is has been propelled by the study of narratives, or narratology (a term coined by philosopher and literary theorist Tzvetan Todorov), which addresses narrative theories. Narratology is a sophisticated area of study that is “international and interdisciplinary in its origins, scope, and pursuits and, in many of its achievements, both subtle and rigorous” (Herrnstein Smith, 1981, p. 209). Early narrative theorists such as Todorov, Roland Barthes, and Gérard Genette established narratology, mainly structuralist narratology, following Saussure’s distinction between *la langue* (signifying language system and its principles) and *la parole* (individual utterances produced based on the language system). They privileged the language system or semiotic principles (*la langue*) over the individual narratives (*la parole*). Their main concern was to examine universal structural units that they believed exist independently of individual differences, producing specific narrative texts that can be used as a model for theory building. Thus, they focused on a description of structural analysis of narrative, suggesting that a narrative is a “complex structure that can be analyzed into hierarchical levels . . . of its syntactic, its morphological, or its phonological representation” (Herman, 2005, p. 29).

However, as structuralist linguistics began to be criticized for its deficiencies in the domain of linguistic theory itself, the limitations of structuralist narratology also came to the surface (see Chapter 2 for more details on structuralism and poststructuralism). For example, Fludernik (2005) points out that the problems with this early structuralist narratology lie in the difficult relationship between theory and practice, which begs the critical question, “So what?—What’s the use of all the subcategories for the understanding of texts?” (p. 39). In addition, the studies of narrative, influenced by the rise of poststructuralism and cultural studies, began to diverge into a series of subdisciplines of narrative theory. Moving away from the structuralist account, narrative theory became integrated into other disciplines such as the psychoanalytic narrative approach, feminist narratology, and cultural studies-oriented narrative theory, extending to philosophy, linguistics, cultural studies, education, and even the empirical sciences (Fludernik, 2005).

We are also indebted to philosophy for the importance of narrative. Lyotard (1979/1984) posits the importance of narrative as a way of knowing in his seminal book, *The Postmodern Condition*. He claims that there is a preeminence of narrative in the formulation of traditional knowledge. Taking Plato’s allegory of the cave as an example of “how and why men yearn for narratives and fail to recognize knowledge” (p. 29), he argues positivistic scientific knowledge cannot be formulated without resorting to narrative knowledge. According to Lyotard, traditional, scientific knowledge:

[c]annot know and make known that it is the true knowledge without resorting to the other, narrative, kind of knowledge, which from its point of view is no knowledge at all. Without such recourse it would be in the position of presupposing its own validity and would be stooping to what it condemns: begging the question, proceeding on prejudice. (p. 29)

Thus, for Lyotard, narrative is “the quintessential form of customary knowledge, in more ways than one” (1979/1984, p. 19). Then, it makes sense when Hendry (2010) suggests that all inquiry, scientific or non-scientific, quantitative or qualitative, positivist or interpretive, is narrative because all inquiry involves a meaning-making process and uses narrative for it.

Narrative is everywhere, as “we dream in narrative, day-dream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative” (Hardy, cited in MacIntyre, 2007, p. 211). Barthes (1982) also sums up the ubiquity of narrative in all cultures:

Narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting . . . , cinema, comics, news item, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different even opposing, cultural backgrounds. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself. (pp. 251–252)

I find the statement, “Narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural” to be powerful. It seems that narrative is in a time machine that transcends time and space. Similarly, MacIntyre (2007) believes that human actions are enacted in narratives as we all live out narratives in our lives. Each of us is at the center of constant action all our lives. Hence, narrative is “not the work of poets, dramatists, and novelists reflecting upon events which had no narrative order before one was imposed by the singer or writer; narrative form is neither a disguise nor decoration” (p. 211). What MacIntyre contends is that we are the authors of our lives (Holquist, 2011), which we share with others. MacIntyre emphasizes this social dimension (sharing with others) when he says, “I am part of [others’ stories], as they are part of mine. The narrative of any life is part of an interlocking set of narratives” (p. 218). Because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives that we live out and share, narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others. For MacIntyre, therefore, “the unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest” (p. 219), which is one of the pursuits of narrative inquiry.

## What Is Story?

How, then, do we distinguish narrative from story, or story from narrative? Although these two terms are used interchangeably, as mentioned, many literary theorists agree that a narrative is a recounting of events that are organized in a temporal sequence, and this linear organization of events makes up a story (Abbott, 2002; Cohan & Shires, 1988). Thus a **story** is a detailed organization of narrative events arranged in a (story) structure based on time although the events are not necessarily in chronological order. This is what we mean when we say stories (not narratives) have a beginning, middle, and end, which become, in Ricoeur’s phrase, “models for

the redescription of the world" (cited in Bruner, 1986, p. 7). In this sense, a story has a connotation of a "full" description of lived experience, whereas a narrative has a connotation of a "partial" description of lived experience. Therefore, story is clearly a higher category than narrative as the latter constitutes the former; and they are deeply intertwined. Stories, just like narratives, are always subject to interpretation; that is, stories as we know them begin as interpretations (Kermode, 1981). Narratives constitute stories, and stories rely on narratives.

Robinson and Hawpe (1986) point out that a story straddles the line between uniqueness and universality. It has the particularity of an event because it is told in a contextualized account. It also resembles other stories to varying degrees because it is built upon a generic set of story structure and relationships. The propositions of story are delineated in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1** Propositions of Story

- Stories are everywhere.
- Not only do we tell stories, but stories tell us: If stories are everywhere, we are also in stories.
- The telling of a story is always bound up with power, property, and domination.
- Stories are multiple: There is always more than one story.
- Stories always have something to tell us about stories themselves: They always involve self-reflexive and metafictional dimensions.

(Bennett & Royle, cited in McQuillan, 2000, p. 3)

As we can understand from the propositions of story, telling stories is the primary way we express what we know and who we are. We tell stories about particular people and their unique experiences, and those stories tell us. By way of storytelling, we allow stories to travel from person to person, letting the meaning of story become larger than an individual experience or an individual life. Such storytelling provides inspiration, entertainment, and new frames of reference to both tellers and listeners (Shuman, 2005); this has been pervasive in human history, as seen in the ancient myths, fables, and parables. We human beings are, indeed, a "story-telling animal" (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 216). Storytelling is "active, organic, responsive, reactive; it is here and now (Jackson, 2007, p. 9) and it improves our social cognition and the conceptions of our own lives beyond the here and now (Boyd, 2009; Martin, 1986), reflecting power relationships and domination. Walter Benjamin (1969) offers an insightful view of storytelling<sup>2</sup>:

The storytelling that thrives for a long time in the milieu of work—the rural, the maritime, and the urban—is itself an artisan form of communication, as it were. It does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information of a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus the traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel. (p. 91)

This view of storytelling as an "artisan form of communication," not as reporting, is significant because it justifies the functions of storytelling. Table 1.2 provides five functions of

storytelling that Kearney (2002) discusses extensively drawing upon Aristotle's Poetics: Plot (*mythos*), Re-creation (*mimesis*), Release (*catharsis*), Wisdom (*phronesis*), and Ethics (*ethos*). I find his discussion informative and insightful, as it has many implications for the work we do as narrative inquirers.

**Table 1.2** Functions of Storytelling

1. **Plot (*Mythos*):** *Mythos* is a way of making our lives into life-stories. It gives a specific grammar to this life of action by transposing it into (1) a telling; (2) a fable or fantasy; and (3) a crafted structure. Through these three transpositions, *mythos* becomes *poesis* that has beginning, middle, and end.
2. **Re-creation (*Mimesis*):** *Mimesis* is a pathway to the disclosure of the inherent "universals" of existence that make up human truth. It is not a mere imitation but an active remaking of the real world in light of its potential truths, interweaving past, present, and future.
3. **Release (*Catharsis*):** *Catharsis* has the power to change us by transporting us to other times and places where we can experience things otherwise. It provides the power of empathy vicariously experienced through narrative imagination and ethical sensitivity that helps us to understand what it is like to be in someone else's shoes.
4. **Wisdom (*Phronesis*):** *Phronesis*, a form of practical wisdom, provides knowledge about the world learned from stories. It is prudence that is capable of respecting the particularity of situations as well as the universality of values in human actions.
5. **Ethics (*Ethos*):** *Ethos* is an ethical role of storytelling. Storytelling shares the ethic of a common world with others since the act of storytelling involves the audience.

(Adapted from Kearney, 2002)

## Narrative Inquiry in Different Disciplines

Now that we have some clarifications about narrative, stories, and storytelling that are the center of gravity around which narrative inquiry revolves, I'd like us to look into how narrative inquiry has developed into a rigorous research methodology. We will see how it satisfies the stringent research community, and how it has been established in different disciplines. We are indebted to Jerome Bruner as one of the main contributors who established narrative inquiry as a legitimate form of generating knowledge in social science research. Bruner (1986) postulates that human beings utilize two modes of thought or two ways of knowing in understanding truth and reality: *paradigmatic mode* and *narrative mode*. According to Bruner, the two modes are not reducible to one another although they can be complementary, used as means for convincing each other. However, they differ radically in their procedures for verification: The paradigmatic mode establishes formal and empirical proof by creating well-formed arguments while the narrative mode establishes verisimilitude by creating good stories that are lifelike. Let me elaborate.

The paradigmatic mode of thinking, or scientific thinking, influenced by Positivism (as discussed earlier) is pervasive in quantitative research because it relies on theory, scientific analysis, logic, empirical evidence, and discovery guided by a reasoned hypothesis. It is concerned with general categories and general principles in an effort to fit particular, individual details into a larger pattern and to minimize ambiguity but discern universal truths that can be empirically tested. Its primary goal is to promote certainty by seeking a definite answer, or objective truth, linking the particular to the general and reducing it to rules and generalities that are applicable to and replicable in other situations (Polkinghorne, 1995). Thus, the paradigmatic mode seeks to "transcend the particular by higher and higher reaching for abstraction" (Bruner, 1986, p. 13). The product of this mode is generalizations of rules and principles, which are context-free, value-free, usually abstract, reproducible, and testable only by further formal scientific activity.

The narrative mode of thinking, on the other hand, typically considered less important than the paradigmatic in the academy, uses stories to understand the meaning of human actions and experiences, the changes and challenges of life events, and the differences and complexity of people's actions. It strives to put events into the stories of experience in order to locate the experience in time and place. It incorporates the feelings, goals, perceptions, and values of the people whom we want to understand, and thus also leads to ambiguity and complexity. In so doing, it provides explanatory knowledge of human experiences, which allows the portrayal of rich nuances of meaning in emplotted stories. These nuances and ambiguities cannot be expressed or tolerated in the paradigmatic mode of knowledge with its insistence on definitions, statements of fact, and generalized rules (Polkinghorne, 1995).

The paradigmatic mode is rigid, eliminating ambiguity and uncertainty while the narrative mode is flexible, open to multiple interpretations. The former is concerned with generalities of causes, categories, and principles by focusing on reducing particularities to fit into a larger pattern. The latter is concerned with particularities, analogies, and metaphors that go beyond the facts and rules, and that provide open invitations to different reactions, feelings, and interpretations for the reader (Spence, 1986). The establishment of the narrative mode of knowing as parallel with and complementary to the paradigmatic, scientific mode has legitimized and justified the use of stories in research, hence narrative inquiry as a research methodology.

Van Manen (1990) suggests the significance of using story in human, social science research, further validating narrative inquiry, as shown in Table 1.3.

In the following, we will now look into how various disciplines have pursued narrative inquiry to inform their fields. From many possibilities, I have selected only four areas for discussion: psychology, law, medicine, and education. I hope you will find commonalities among them as well as differences across the disciplines. Most important, I hope you will notice how each discipline has responded to the positivistic view of research, valuing narrative as the core of the human research, which in turn brings all the disciplines together with one commitment: to improve the human condition through narrative.



**Table 1.3** Significance of Using Story in Human and Social Science Research

- Story provides us with *possible human experiences*.
- Story enables us to experience life situations, feelings, emotions, and events *that we would not normally experience*.
- Story allows us to broaden the horizons of our normal existential landscape by creating *possible worlds*.
- Story tends to appeal to us and involve us *in a personal way*.
- Story is an artistic device that lets us turn back to *life as lived*, whether fictional or real.
- Story evokes the quality of vividness in *detailing unique and particular aspects of a life* that could be my life or your life.
- Great stories *transcend the particularity of their plots* and protagonists, etc., which makes them subject to thematic analysis and criticism.

(Adapted from van Manen 1990, p. 70, italics in original)

### Narrative Inquiry in Psychology: "Psychology Is Narrative"

Sarbin (1986) claims that narrative psychology is a viable alternative to the positivist paradigm as it leads to a more profound understanding of the human condition than the scientific examination of the authoritarian, mechanistic perspective that is prevalent in the traditional psychology. In fact, Sarbin proclaims, "psychology is narrative" (p. 8). This shift makes clear that "story making, storytelling and story comprehension are fundamental conceptions for a revived psychology" (p. vii), which reveals the storied nature of human action. Thus, the movement to stress the narrative in psychology and psychoanalysis became pervasive in the early 1980s as leading psychologists such as Schafer (1981), Spence (1982, 1986), and Sarbin (1986) examined the practice of psychoanalysis from a narrativist viewpoint. For example, using a root metaphor, Sarbin (1986) considers the narrative an organizing principle for human action as human beings think, perceive, imagine, and make moral choices based on narrative structures. Sarbin states:

The narrative is a way of organizing episodes, actions, and accounts of actions; it is an achievement that brings together mundane facts and fantastic creations; time and place are incorporated. The narrative allows for the inclusion of actors' reasons for their acts, as well as the causes of happening. (p. 9)

The narrative tradition in psychoanalysis is by some traced to Freud (see Spence, 1982; Schafer, 1981; Steele, 1986). Spence posits that it was Freud who "made us aware of the persuasive power of a coherent narrative" (Spence, 1982, p. 21). Steele (1986) also acknowledges, "Freud is a builder of narratives which he uses to make sense of people's lives" (p. 257). Gergen and Gergen (1986) contend that there are progressive and regressive narratives in the three major developmental theories in psychology: Skinnerian behavior learning theories, Piagetian cognitive learning theory, and Freudian psychoanalytic theory.

They particularly elaborate how Freud's psychoanalytic theory offers two competing narratives, progressive and regressive in character, as it acknowledges that the normal person's social adaptation presents the progressive narrative while disclosing the psychic burden of the past experience (regressive narrative).

Similarly, drawing upon Freud's narrative tradition, Spence (1982) distinguishes narrative truth from historical truth. The former, narrative truth, is what the patient says to the psychoanalyst; and the latter, historical truth is what actually happened, an account of the way things were. Sometimes, narrative truth, is confused with historical truth. Spence, for example, notes, "What is effective for a given patient in a particular hour (the narrative truth of an interpretation) may be mistakenly attributed to its historical foundations" (p. 27). Spence's point is that because narrative truth works so well within the clinical setting heavily influenced by Freud's success with the narrative tradition, psychoanalysts have a tendency to rely on narrative truth without considering historical truth, which might be different from the narrative truth. Thus, psychoanalysts should not rely completely on what a particular patient tells at a particular time and place in order to come to a conclusion. This is why it becomes particularly important to recognize the difference between narrative and historical truth. As we recognize the particular virtues of the narrative truth as well as its limitations, we can be in a better position to build more lasting theories of narrative psychology.

In sum, narrative psychology emphasizes the importance of narrative in psychology that has had an influence on the way the psychologists listen to patients, the way the patients tell their stories, the way psychoanalytic research is conducted, and the way psychologists observe their patients. For example, psychoanalysis (e.g., Schafer, 1981, 1992) not only relies on patients' storytelling but methodologically utilizes dialogue and narrative for clinical purposes. According to Fludernik (2005), such uses of narrative in therapy practice and in the theorization of the therapeutic process are what makes narrative research effective in an interdisciplinary manner, methodologically and theoretically.

## Narrative Inquiry in Law: Promoting Counter-Stories

The relationship between narrative and law is ancient, and narrative has played a crucial role in the legal field for a long time (Winter, 1989). If you take a moment to visualize a court scene, you will picture witnesses and defendants telling stories, while prosecutors, lawyers, and judges produce narratives of legitimation and justification to convince juries. Despite this early, close relationship between narrative and law, it was not until the early 1980s that much interest in narrative in legal scholarship took hold, thus giving rise to conferences and publications on legal narrative. The legal community also became more diverse as it began to admit women and people of color to the field (see Scheppelle, 1989).

Cover (1983) points out that in the normative world we live in, the rules and principles of justice, the formal institutions of the law, are important, and narrative plays an important part in such a world. Cover elaborates:

No set of legal institutions or prescriptions exists apart from the narratives that locate it and give it meaning. . . . Once understood in the context of the narratives that give it meaning, law becomes not merely a system of rules to be observed, but a world in which to live. (p. 4)

For Cover (1983), therefore, narratives are the codes that relate the normative system to our social constructions of reality and to our visions of what the world might be or should be. Hence, a legal story told before a court of law, involves a comparison of what actually happened with what should or should not have happened in relation to precedents (just like Spence's notions of historical vs. narrative truth), which will allow us to envision what the world should be. Thus, appropriate precedents become templates for guiding an attorney in organizing a story of the present case.

In his little book that I cherish, Bruner (2002) talks about how narrative tradition connects the three areas of law, literature, and life. He discusses how literature has found its way into the law field, leading to a new and respectable genre of legal scholarship, Law and Literature. Bruner states that there is an "odd kinship" (p. 61) of literary and legal narratives in that literature looks to the possible, exploiting the semblance of reality, while law looks to the actual record of the past. However, the two share the medium of narrative, "a form that keeps perpetually in play the uneasy alliance between the historically established and the imaginatively possible" (p. 62). Thus, he argues that there is always a question of the dialectic (opposing stories) between the comfort of the familiar past and the allure of the possible, as narratives change to "reflect the spirit of their times" (p. 58). Therefore, narrative is, according to Bruner, "the medium par excellence for depicting, even caricaturing, human plights" (p. 60) and storytelling is "a way to give the law back to the people" (p. 60).

Opposing stories, or counter-stories, are called for by Delgado as "a way to give the law back to the people." Delgado, in his letter to editors of *Michigan Law Review*, makes a convincing case as to why legal scholarship needs to pay attention to narratives. (Later, Delgado founded critical race theory with Derrick Bell, which we shall discuss in Chapter 2.) In the letter, Delgado writes, "We believe that stories, parables, chronicles, and narratives are potent devices for analyzing mindset and ideology—the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared understandings against a background of which legal discourse takes place" (Delgado, 1988, cited in Scheppele, 1989, p. 2075). Delgado's letter led to a special issue on Legal Storytelling for *Michigan Law Review* the following year. In his contribution to the special issue, Delgado (1989) examined the use of stories in exploring the struggle for racial reform and proposed counter-hegemonic storytelling to sensitize the human conscience to prevailing social and legal stories that have been shaped by the dominant group's ideology.

Delgado (1989) believes that counter-stories function to question complacency regarding mainstream ideas and the status quo. That is, they are the means by which groups contest the dominant ideology and the assumptions that support it. As counter-stories are the concrete particulars of the experience of individuals or groups that conventional legal reasoning excludes, they can open new windows into reality, help us construct a new world, and imagine possibilities for life other than the ones we lived. Delgado further suggests that in order

for counter-stories to be effective, they must be or must appear to be “noncoercive,” meaning that counter-stories should:

[i]nvite the reader to suspend judgment, listen for their point or message, and then decide what measure of truth they contain. They are insinuating, not frontal; they offer a respite from the linear, coercive discourse that characterizes much legal writing. (p. 2415)

Although much of narrative inquiry in legal practice takes the form of counter-stories, we should understand that counter-stories are not easily accepted by the law. In fact, Brooks (2005) cautions how the law can be entangled with narrative and may react to it with unease and suspicion, resulting in the neglect of narrative as a legal category. Courts tend to cling to the controlling view that there is only one true version of a story and only one right way to tell it. Such a positivistic view of narrative in the legal system, however, is “possibly an act of repression, an effort to keep the narrativity of the law out of sight” (p. 415). Courts can deny the differences and disagreements that inevitably exist in a pluralistic society. The first step for legal storytellers, then, is to realize that the presence of different, competing versions of a story is itself an important feature of the dispute at hand that courts are being called upon to resolve (Scheppelle, 1989).

In summary, despite the traditional legal court’s challenges to oppositional narrative, or counter-storytelling, narrative inquiry in law has made “an undeniable impact in legal-scholarly debates, if not necessarily in the practice of law” (Brooks, 2005, p. 416). As we have seen, the field of law has become more conscious of its storytelling functions and its procedures more open to challenges to traditional procedures. Hence, “The Narratology in the courtroom? Yes, it is very much needed there” (p. 426).

## Narrative Inquiry in Medicine: Developing Narrative Competence

Medicine has always been a storied enterprise (Peterkin, 2011) and has never been without narrative concerns (Charon, 2006). Hunter (1986, 1989), for example, emphasized the significant role of medical anecdotes and case stories in training physicians by stating, “Medicine is filled with stories. Indeed, among the scientific disciplines, medicine can be characterized by its dependence on narrative” (1986, p. 620). Hunter argued how patients’ stories have an important epistemological function that builds up medical knowledge, directing us to areas needing research attention. She proposed that medicine is a form of casuistry that is essentially case-based knowledge and practice, hence, the “narrative construction of illness is a principal way of knowing” (1989, p. 193).

In recent years, the need to humanize medicine has increasingly been recognized among medical practitioners, and narrative is gaining its momentum in the field of medicine as a result (Bury, 2001; Charon, 2006; Charon & DasGupta, 2011). In the United Kingdom, for example,

narrative-based medicine, in which doctors are asked to write, read, and share texts about their clinical encounters, has gained popularity, offering meaningful approaches to understanding and improving the doctor-patient relationship (Peterkin, 2011). In North America, narrative medicine with a more humanizing philosophy of care has also emerged as an alternative. This practice recognizes the importance of narrative knowledge in working with patients, while incorporating the knowledge and practice of the social and human science field (Charon, 2006). Thus, narrative medicine is an effort to combine the humanities and medicine, and is specifically defined as “medicine practiced with the narrative competence to recognize, absorb, interpret, and be moved by the stories of illness” informed by contemporary narratology (Charon, 2006, p. vii).

Linking medicine with the humanities was popularized by Robert Coles, psychiatrist and professor at Harvard Medical School. His penchant for storytelling as a way to promote understanding, empathy, and moral imagination in the doctor-patient relationship is well evidenced in his autobiographical work, *The Call of Stories* (1989). In it, he probes his own teaching practices in which he used the established literary canon to link medicine and humanities, and urges his medical students to pay attention to their patients’ stories and to find meaning in them.

Narrative medicine also developed with the work of anthropologists in the mid- and late 1980s who began to examine narrative in medicine and its relationship to illness and healing in the context of biomedical care (Mattingly, 2007). Drawing upon narrative theory from multiple disciplines such as sociology, linguistics, literary theory, philosophy, and psychology, narrative medicine focuses on the meaning-making aspects of illness and healing, rendering the “illness narrative” (Kleinman, 1988). Since the early 1980s, Cheryl Mattingly (2007), an anthropologist, has undertaken ethnographic studies of occupational therapists and other health professionals such as physical speech therapists, rehabilitation aides, oncologists, surgeons, nurses, and so on. In her study of occupational therapists, for example, Mattingly (1998a) examined how narrative was an important vehicle for therapy, which allowed therapists to deal with human agency, complex social relationships, emotions, cultural differences, and other matters that challenge the dominant medical discourse.

Similarly, Drummond’s (2012) narrative study in medicine on a resident’s experience with a young dying patient discusses how narrative medicine requires practitioners’ moral judgment. For example, through narratives, the resident Nick and his fellow residents considered the dying patient with drug addiction a victimizer, not an innocent victim. They suspected that the dying patient could be a potential abuser of the medical system, trying to fool the resident into the role of “dealer” (p. 139) who could supply drugs for the patient. Using the embedded narratives in a medical case discussion, Drummond shows how the residents began to play the role of adjudicators of “who deserves care” rather than the role of “deliverers of care” (p. 140). Drummond finds that narratives play a role in not only moving the discussion from clinical reasoning to narrative reasoning, but also to moral reasoning about who deserves (or does not deserve) medical care. Thus, Drummond urges medical researchers to interrupt the dominant narratives in the medical field that call for an objectivity/neutrality and to learn to value practitioners’ moral judgment through narrative.

The field of narrative medicine is currently striving to take into consideration the whole person of a patient as a practical undertaking (Charon, 2006). According to Charon, what is currently missing in the field, however, is an acknowledgment of narrative competence as fundamental skills that need to be required of medical professionals. These narrative competence skills that are lacking include “how to systematically adopt others’ points of view; how to recognize and honor the particular along with the universal; how to identify the meaning of individuals’ words, silences, and behaviors” (p. 10). Charon further notes:

A medicine practiced with narrative competence will more ably recognize patients and diseases, convey knowledge and regard, join humbly with colleagues, and accompany patients and their families through the ordeals of illness. These capacities will lead to more humane, more ethical, and perhaps more effective care. (p. vii)

Therefore, Charon argues that health professionals like doctors, nurses, and social workers need to be equipped with narrative competence for their medical practice. She suggests that narrative competencies could allow them to better serve the sick with carefully thought-out, respectful care attuned to the needs of individual patients. She proposes narrative competence as a basic skill needed by health professionals to fulfill their responsibilities.

In order to equip medical students with such narrative competence, some medical schools and residency training programs have developed humanities-based courses. They aim to help medical students develop empathy, trustworthiness, awareness, and sensitivity toward patients. In so doing, they also explicitly recognize the art of medicine even while upholding the importance of technical knowledge and skills (Reilly, Ring, & Duke, 2005). For example, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University’s School of Medicine in New York, and the Occupational Science Department at the University of Southern California’s School of Medicine, just to name a few, have been working to find ways to train health professionals to approach, elicit, interpret, and act on their patients’ stories, and to use stories to better understand dimensions of human experience as opposed to the persistent fact and number focus of conventional medicine (Charon & DasGupta, 2011). As Mattingly (1998b) argues, narrative medicine or clinical storytelling is becoming one way in which “clinical practice exceeds the bounds of its own ideology” (p. 274).

The most recent reaffirmation of the efforts of these narrative scholars in medicine, health, and bioethics seems to come in the birth of a journal, entitled *Narrative Inquiry in Bioethics*, published by the Johns Hopkins University Press. In its inaugural issue (2011, Volume 1.1), the editors recognize how narratives and personal stories can inform bioethics discourse concerning healthcare, health policy, and health research. They point out that research in this area has been plagued with instances of dehumanizing treatment of patients, not to mention the fact that their needs have been ignored or poorly met. Hence, the goal of this journal is to “rehumanize ethical decision-making” (DuBois, Iltis, & Anderson, 2011, p. v) while promoting empathy and the fair and just treatment of human beings through narrative inquiry.

It is particularly encouraging and enlightening to see that fields like medicine whose research methods traditionally excluded the narrative mode of knowing, heavily relying on the

paradigmatic mode, are paying attention to narratives and personal stories. Research shows that the field of medicine has benefited in many ways from the development of narrative medicine. In brief, narrative medicine, as a way of (re)humanizing the field, helps medical practitioners develop narrative competence, in enabling them to act upon their empathy, trust, and sensitivity.

## Narrative Inquiry in Education: Exploring the Lived Experience

Narrative inquiry is an influential research methodology in education, gaining popularity as the “theory/practice/reflection cycle of inquiry” (Smith, 2008, p. 65). In studying the lived experiences of teachers and students (Casey, 1993; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin et al., 2007; Goodson, 1995), narrative researchers in education have strived to honor teaching and learning as complex and developmental in nature, seeking connections and continuous engagement in reflection and deliberation (Kim & Macintyre Latta, 2010). As teacher education programs put more emphasis on what it means to be a reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983), teachers’ stories of their personal and professional experiences along with stories of young children (e.g., Kohl, 1967; Kozol, 1991; Paley, 1986) have become key devices in understanding the complex nature of a classroom.

It is Connelly and Clandinin (1990) who first used the term *narrative inquiry* in the educational research field in an article published in *Educational Researcher*. With the view that education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories of teachers and learners, Connelly and Clandinin argue that narrative inquiry embodies theoretical ideas about educational experience as lived and told stories. The main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that narrative is a way of organizing human experience, since humans lead storied lives individually and socially. Using Dewey’s theory of experience as the conceptual and imaginative backdrop, Connelly and Clandinin posit that the study of narrative is “the study of the ways humans experience the world” (p. 2). Experience is the starting point and the key term for narrative inquiry. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) later offered a more elaborate definition of narrative inquiry where story is used as a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. They state:

Viewed this way, narrative is the phenomenon studied in inquiry. 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 narrative view of experience as phenomena under study. (p. 477)

Considering the continuity and wholeness of an individual’s life experience as their research problem, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) believe that education and educational studies are a form of experience since “education is a development within, by, and for experience” (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 28), which will be discussed more in depth in Chapter 2.



There has been a series of narrative turns (see Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007) that reaffirms narrative research as a legitimate way of knowing that shapes our conceptions and understandings about the world around us, as we saw in Bruner's work (Bruner, 1986, 1994). These narrative turns in educational research come to challenge traditional paradigmatic epistemological paradigms that view the very nature of knowledge as objective and definite (Munro, 1998), and to problematize the unitary way of knowing (Polkinghorne, 1988). In using narrative, educational researchers intend to interrogate the nature of the dominant curricular stories through which humans have shaped their understandings of education and schooling within the paradigmatic perspective. In so doing, narrative educational researchers purport to bring the lived experiences of teachers and students to the forefront as a way to reshape the views on education (Casey, 1993; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Goodson, 1992; Kim, 2010b; Munro, 1998; Sparkes, 1994). In a true sense, the telling of the story is the construction of a life (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995). This storying is, thus, believed to have the potential for advancing educational research in representing the lived experience of schooling (Goodson, 1995, 2000; Goodson & Gill, 2011).

Narrative inquiry in education is grounded in educational philosophy. For instance, Dunne (2005), a contemporary educational philosopher, emphasizes the importance of stories in education research, drawing upon Aristotle, who long ago suggested that stories can instruct and move us precisely because they reveal universal themes in their depiction of particular cases and characters. From Dunne's perspective, stories are critical in education research because stories in a particular setting are capable of illuminating other settings through their epiphanic power (hence, *catharsis*). Therefore, according to Dunne (2003), research into teaching is best served by narrative modes of inquiry since "to understand a teacher's practice (on her own part or on the part of an observer) is to find an illuminating story (or stories) to tell of what she has been involved in with her students" (p. 367). Thus, education researchers realize that they need to be good storytellers and listeners to make sense of what goes on in schools and engage in dialogues among students, parents, practitioners, researchers, and policy makers. In so doing, they seek to view the lives of others and their own lives as a whole into which the fragmented parts of narratives can be integrated and embodied (MacIntyre & Dunne, 2002).

The popularity of narrative inquiry in education has extended beyond research methodology. Narrative inquiry is now used as a curricular and pedagogical strategy in the field of teacher education (Conle, 2003; Coulter, Michael, & Poynor, 2007); as an intentional reflexive process of teachers interrogating their own teaching and learning (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002); as a medium for professional development for pre-service and in-service teachers (Conle, 2000a); and as an inquiry into the interrelationships between literacy, pedagogy, and multiculturalism (see Clark & Medina, 2000; Grinberg, 2002; Phillion, He, & Connelly, 2005). Through this burgeoning of publications in recent years, narrative inquiry has made a transformative impact in education and contributed to the advancement of education research methods and methodology, curriculum, teaching and learning, and teacher education.

## Some Cautionary Tales About Narrative Inquiry

By juxtaposing narrative inquiry at work in different disciplines (e.g., psychology, law, medicine, and education), we can see the ways thinkers in each discipline have turned to narrative and stories to better inform their fields after realizing the limitations of positivistic inquiry. Although we looked at only four areas here, there are many other disciplines that pursue narrative inquiry, e.g., anthropology, sociology, history, and philosophy, just to name a few. Narrative research is now being used in economics (Rodrik, 2011; Romer & Romer, 2010) and business (Dennings, 2005). Narrative sociology has been developed to understand sociohistorical and sociopolitical realities (Gotham & Staples, 1996). Narrative inquiry in and about organizations was also established in the early 1990s (Boje, 1991; Czarniawska, 1997, 2007).

These disciplines share a deep understanding of the importance of narrative, story, and storytelling, while each discipline has its unique understandings and approaches to narrative inquiry. The commonalities and the variegations of narrative inquiry that we see in different disciplines are harbingers of the “maturation of the field of narrative research, one that refuses a tight set of methodological and definitional prescriptions, but that is still being tilted by members of a community of discourse who sense a certain degree of professional affinity” (Barone, 2010, p. 149).

With this good news, you might feel ready to join me on the journey of narrative inquiry. No, not yet. Before you are comfortably ensconced in your seat, I’d like to point out some cautionary tales that have been issued by established narrative inquirers, so that you don’t “blindly” fall in love with narrative inquiry, as I did. I want to take you back to my journey to become a better narrative inquirer, which I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter.

I shared with you that the beginning of that journey started with the questioning of my romance with narrative inquiry, not in order to discard it but to get to know it better. To do that, I had to be pragmatic, neither too ideal nor too romantic; I had to think about my reality, such as getting a job after graduation. I started posing questions to myself: Would I be able to get a job with my background in narrative methodology, not in quantitative research? Would I be able to publish my narrative work? I started feeling torn to realize that my partner (narrative inquiry) might not be that great after all if it didn’t get me the job I wanted. To make these doubts worse, as I was digging deeper into narrative inquiry, I was encountering some serious concerns and even some warning signs to novice narrative researchers, raised by prominent names. Basically, those concerns from different disciplines—albeit somewhat old but still true today—point to the fact that it could be a risky business for a fledgling researcher to be involved with narrative inquiry, as we live in the age when the positivistic view of world dominates the discourse on research. Sarbin (1986), for example, states:

Some critics are skeptical about the use of the narrative as a model for thought and action as they think storytelling is related to immaturity and playfulness associated with fiction, fantasy, and pretending. But this world view places a high value on positivism, technology, and realism and a low value on imagination. (p. 12)

Casey (1995) also adds:

However much we may be convinced of the compelling nature of narrative, we must move beyond such statements of inevitability to explain the extraordinary self-conscious fascination with story telling that prevails at present. (p. 212)

Munro's (1998) concern is more specific. She posits that the neglect of the inquiry aspect in narrative inquiry would allow narrative research to "romanticize the individual and thus reify notions of a unitary subject/hero" (p. 12), resulting in narrative inquiry being subject to be criticized as a "form of narcissism or navel gazing" (p. 12). Conle (2000b) echoes this concern by pointing out how some narrative researchers are "so taken up by the process, enjoying the doing of it, that they are not much interested in characterizing its inquiry quality abstractly" (p. 190), which causes the doubts of critics of narrative work. Barone (2007) also speaks of "narrative overload" (p. 463), which may result in a pointless and futile cacophony of individual interests. This concern of "narrative overload" reflects the skepticism (even antagonism) that some critics have with regards to narrative inquiry: How can anyone's story be just as worthy as anyone else's? And, how is storytelling research?

Narrative inquiry also confronts methodological challenges due to the difficulty of presenting a complex, layered, and dynamic reality (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007) and the lack of any single widely accepted narrative research method at present (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Moreover, publishing narrative work in refereed journals has not been easy, as acknowledged by narrative researchers (see Conle, 2000b). An influential narrative researcher in psychology, Amia Lieblich, in an interview with Clandinin and Murphy, shares her concern about the political context of narrative inquiry:

I would be very careful in advising people to go only in their narrative or qualitative way. I would make it very clear that with all the richness and the real complexity that one can touch with this matter, there are also many, many risks and dangers involved in pursuing this manner of research. (Clandinin & Murphy, 2007, p. 640)

Elliot Mishler joins Lieblich, saying, "And I know that this, it's not easy, and if you're a young person trying to get promoted or get tenure you're kind of caught in this" (Clandinin & Murphy, 2007, p. 645).

## Narrative Inquiry as the Synergy of Interdisciplinarity

These warnings are real. However, they are not meant to scare you away. Rather, my aim is to help you realize that narrative inquiry is not "the" research methodology, as I once believed it to be. I hope that these cautionary tales will inspire you to work diligently to be a narrative researcher who has enough confidence and competence to avoid pitfalls and respond effectively

to criticisms. One of the reasons why it is important for us to know what is going on in other disciplines in terms of narrative inquiry as sketched earlier is that this information can help us share, borrow, and adapt new ideas from each other. This sharing will cement solidarity in the narrative research community while giving indispensable support to incoming narrative researchers. Each discipline offers its unique approach to narrative inquiry (variegations) while sharing narrative inquiry's commonalities. Adopting and integrating those differences and commonalities into our own work will enrich and enhance our research practice, further developing the synergy of interdisciplinarity in narrative inquiry.

We should use the term **interdisciplinarity** with care, however, because there is an assumption that interdisciplinarity is by nature superficial due to an attempt to know too much or a tendency to not know enough (Friedman, 1998; Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). Each discipline is governed by a general set of rules and categories that guides the pursuit of knowledge (Allen & Kitch, 1998). They don't usually leave room or build capacity for a conversation with other fields. However, isn't it true that human phenomena always overlap numerous disciplines? Therefore, to be able to understand the human experience through narrative inquiry, we cannot solely rely on disciplinary knowledge because "the traditional disciplines have become particularly adept at providing partial knowledge about isolated segments of the cosmos. Such knowledge, of course, is profoundly inadequate when directed toward the solution of ill-defined social, psychological, and educational problems" (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. 71).

Hence, what we as narrative inquirers need to strive for is to have a deep understanding of our own discipline first and find ways to broaden our field by reaching out to other disciplines. The success and productiveness of interdisciplinarity depends on the researcher's rigorous understanding of his/her own disciplinary field (Friedman, 1998). Lyon (1992) contends that interdisciplinarity fundamentally involves "giving up territory" in favor of convergence of diverse fields, which I interpret as a call to avoid becoming territorial in order to be truly interdisciplinary. Friedman (1998) also posits that interdisciplinarity resists the policing effects of disciplinary regulation; it not only promotes a collaborative process where people from different disciplines interact but also encourages an individual researcher to travel away from his/her home discipline. The goal is for the researcher to bring back new knowledge and have it synthesized and integrated into the researcher's home discipline. This integration is what makes interdisciplinarity distinct from multidisciplinary in which scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds collaborate but little integration occurs (Klein, 1990).

While reading about narrative inquiry in different disciplines, you have probably noticed how narrative inquiry becomes the confluence where unlikely fields meet, creating a synergy of interdisciplinarity. One great example was Robert Coles, who trained to be a child psychiatrist in medical school, and later taught a literature course in a medical education program. He called for stories whether the story was from the literature or from the patients.

We are narrative inquirers who come from many different disciplines. We converge into and diverge from narrative inquiry. We understand that narrative inquiry has a deep root in the way we humans think, live, and act, as narrative is a basic meaning-making process. Narrative inquiry begins with a story that maybe quite ordinary and from any walk of life, which requires

us to be interdisciplinary as we examine it. Successful narrative inquirers are interdisciplinarians even while they pursue rigorous standards in their home disciplines.

## Learning to Be a Storyteller in the Interdisciplinary Context

As we learn to be storytellers of the ordinary from all walks of life, I think a small story by Tolstoy may fit here. In his essay "Why Do Men Stupefy Themselves?," first published in Russian in 1890, Leo Tolstoy (1998) talks about how life begins with tiny, unnoticeable changes. He recounts the story of the painter Brüllöf, who was correcting a pupil's work. The pupil, amazed, said, "Here, you only changed it a tiny bit, but it is entirely changed." Brüllöf replied: "Art begins where scarcely begins." About this anecdote, Tolstoy concludes:

This observation is strikingly true, not in relation to art alone, but to all of life. It may be said that a true life begins where "scarcely" begins—where the scarcely perceptible, almost infinitely small, changes take place. The true life is produced . . . where the scarcely differentiated changes occur. (p. 150)

We know that narrative research begins where a true life begins. But we might have not noticed that a true life begins where "scarcely" begins—very tiny little aspects of life that are most important but unnoticeable because of their simplicity and familiarity. We might have overlooked such a story that seemed trivial but in fact might give an important clue to understanding the subject of our study. Narrative inquiry, although it does not deny that great events are important, presumes the importance of the everyday, the ordinary, the quotidian stories that have frequently gone unnoticed. In so doing, narrative inquiry extends our understanding of human phenomena as a way of "honoring the sacredness of our humanity" (Munro Hendry, 2007, p. 496). And honoring the sacredness of our humanity would begin with true life where scarcely begins.

Therefore, upon learning to be a narrative inquirer who pays attention to quotidian stories, we are also learning to be a storyteller. According to Benjamin (1969), the storyteller "has counsel like the sage" (p. 108) who uses his or her life like "the wick of a candle" (p. 108). Hence, the storyteller is the person "who could let the wick of his life be consumed completely by the gentle flame of his story. This is the basis of the incomparable aura about the storyteller" (pp. 108–109). To this beautiful remark, I would like to add that the gentle flame of our story could merge into a collective flame with the flames of others' stories. This collective flame could shine through the dark corners of our lives. This, I think, is the power of narrative research and storytelling.

## Conclusion: A Falling Apple

In this chapter, we looked at how we have come to understand narrative inquiry as it is. The topics included narrative as a way of knowing, understanding the notion of narrative and story,

some concerns regarding narrative inquiry, and narrative inquiry in varied disciplines, for example, psychology, law, medicine, and education, creating the synergy of interdisciplinarity.

Now, before we move on to the next chapter, I want you to take a look at the picture of a sculpture (see Image 1.1).



**Image 1.1** Salvador Dalí, *Homage to Newton* (1985). Signed and numbered cast no. 5/8. Bronze with dark patina.

This sculpture, *Homage to Newton*, is one of the eight original sculptures that the leading figure of Surrealism, Salvador Dalí, produced in 1985. What do you notice? Yes, the open area of Newton's head and torso, and a falling apple courtesy of a thin chain. In the seventeenth century, Sir Isaac Newton (1643–1727), British physicist, mathematician, philosopher, and astronomer (was he an interdisciplinarian or what?) discovered his famous law of gravity when an apple fell on his head. Why would Dalí make Newton's head and torso open? The Salvador Dalí Society explains that the open area of Newton's head and torso was Dalí's way of symbolizing Newton's open-mindedness (open head) and open heartedness (open torso) as two qualities necessary for any great human discovery (<http://www.dali.com/gallery/detail/Sculptures/Singles/Homage+to+Newton+EA>).

In addition to Newton's open head and torso, I think about the symbol of a falling apple as well. For me, the falling apple is a taken-for-granted aspect of life that is most important but

unnoticed because of its simplicity and familiarity, which is what Leo Tolstoy speaks of: "[T]rue life begins where 'scarcely' begins." For Newton, his theory of gravity began where scarcely began, like a falling apple. For narrative inquirers or storytellers, research should begin with the hardly noticed, like a falling apple, or a story of an ordinary person. We narrative inquirers should approach it with an open heart and open mind to be able to understand the meaning of a falling apple. This way, we become the wick of a candle.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What is your story of becoming a narrative inquirer? That is, why are you interested in learning to be a narrative inquirer?
- How are narratives and stories different from each other?
- What are the functions of stories and storytelling?
- How do you think narrative inquiry has enhanced research in your discipline?
- How do you think narrative inquiry is perceived by your committee members?
- What is your understanding of interdisciplinarity?

## ACTIVITIES

1. Find or meet a person who is not in your discipline. Exchange research ideas with each other and see what you can learn from each other.
2. Bring a story (6 to 7 minutes long) that you think is interesting and share it in class. Try to experience what it is like to tell a story and to listen to a story.
3. Share with each other a good storyteller you admire and explain what makes the person a good storyteller.

## NOTES

1. The effort to distinguish the difference between narrative and story is not to pigeonhole one from the other but to understand the subtle nuances between them. The discussions of both narrative and story contribute to the rigor of narrative inquiry.
2. The notion of storytelling as an art leads to storytelling as performance, which is discussed in Chapter 8.