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Foreword

William Randall

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Special Issue: A Narrative Works Monograph. Listening to Stories of Courage and Moral Choice: Creating Conversations about Inclusive Care in our Schools and Communities

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Article abstract

It is difficult to do justice in a page or so to a book whose implications are as far-reaching as those of this one. As someone who has devoted the whole of his scholarly career to the study of stories—of how they are integral to virtually every aspect of our lives (our identities, relationships, emotions, and beliefs)—I heartily commend *Listening to Stories of Courage and Moral Choice* as a testament to the power of narrative to effect positive, transformative change in the world.



SPECIAL ISSUE: A *NARRATIVE WORKS* MONOGRAPH

**LISTENING TO
STORIES OF COURAGE
AND
MORAL CHOICE**

**CREATING CONVERSATIONS ABOUT INCLUSIVE CARE
IN OUR SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES**

*EDITED BY
ADELE BARUCH, ROBERT ATKINSON, AND HOLLY KHIEL*

Foreword

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It is difficult to do justice in a page or so to a book whose implications are as far-reaching as those of this one. As someone who has devoted the whole of his scholarly career to the study of stories—of how they are integral to virtually every aspect of our lives (our identities, relationships, emotions, and beliefs)—I heartily commend *Listening to Stories of Courage and Moral Choice* as a testament to the power of narrative to effect positive, transformative change in the world.

Keywords: narrative, stories, courage, altruism

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Over 30 years of research in such areas as narrative psychology, narrative gerontology, and narrative theology have confirmed what we have known instinctively all along, which is that we are “the story species” (Gold, 2002), possessed of “the literary mind” (Turner, 1996), hard-wired to think, to feel, to act, and interact in terms of stories. And stories always make a difference, whether major or minor, for better or for worse. In other words, narrative per se is not necessarily benign. There are dark, destructive stories circulating at every level of our world—in the domains of politics and religion, to name the most obvious—and in every corner of our lives, including the secret corners of our hearts: stories that can cripple us with guilt or regret, can imprison us in prejudice and hate. As First Nations author, Thomas King (2003), reminds us in his wise little book, *The Truth about Stories*, “you have to be careful with the stories you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories that you are told” (p. 10).

This book is about telling and hearing a certain type of stories: stories of courage in the face of difficult moral choices, stories of situations in which people have demonstrated tremendous strength or resilience, have shown compassion and love, amid the grand dramas of humanity, from the horror of the Holocaust to the tragedy of Katrina. Closer to home, this book is about how such stories can educate us and elevate us to be more courageous, more compassionate, more caring in our relationships with others every day—in our families, our communities, our schools, and our society at large.

Like many works on narrative, this book does not fit neatly into a given academic discipline or professional field. Does it concern education primarily, or education, psychology, theology, or ethics? In truth, it concerns all of these at once, and more. But this lack of specificity scarcely limits its relevance and value. Just the opposite, in fact, which is why I’m so pleased to recommend it.

Compellingly composed, with multiple contributors and thus multiple voices at work, it will be of immediate interest to a range of people entrusted with motivating others: teachers keen to instill in

students an altruistic ethic; clergy committed to inspiring parishioners to face with passion and vision the issues that confront them in the world; counselors wishing to infuse their clients with the drive to develop in fulfilling, life-affirming ways.

Stories can divide us, it is true, but they can connect us as well—across the boundaries of class, race, gender, and generation. They can push us apart or they can pull us together, elevating our spirits and inviting us to a higher level of humanity. Either way, stories affect us, for good or for ill. In *The Truth about Stories*, King devotes each chapter to telling a story that, like it or not, requires the reader to do something with it. “Do with it what you will,” he writes. “Tell it to friends. Turn it into a television movie. Forget it. But don’t say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You’ve heard it now” (p. 29).

Stories of courage and moral choice are of that sort; they have that kind of power. Like few other books, this one will make you aware of that power and inspire you to live your life accordingly.

References

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