

# At the Intersections of Narrative Inquiry and Professional Education

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Résumé de l'article

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**SPECIAL INVITED ISSUE:  
NARRATIVE ACROSS DISCIPLINES**

**At the Intersections of Narrative Inquiry and  
Professional Education**

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In this paper, we explore the intersections of narrative inquiry and professional education by making visible four common tensions we experience across the disciplines of education and nursing. The tensions are woven, inseparable, and deeply embedded in complex landscapes of self, others, time, and institutional structures. We highlight the elements of narrative inquiry that reverberate into the ways we understand professional education. In this way, we explore pedagogical spaces shaped by world travelling, calling forth experience, and the significance of relationships as we think *with* experiences lived, told, retold, and relived.

The study of experience through stories is one way to understand how people make sense of their worlds, which are shaped by personal, social, familial, cultural, practice, or institutional narratives (Clandinin, Murphy, & Huber, 2011; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Narrative inquiry is a situated and relational practice, in which stories of experience are understood within a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space of temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is a means of inquiring into experience as it is lived and told through and in stories (Clandinin, 2013). In the living out of our work as professional educators, we work from this particular view of experience and inquiry into experiences. In what follows, we take up tensions we experience in thinking narratively about our research and practices in professional education. These tensions become visible as we engage in narrative inquiries into professional education and as educators situated within the disciplines of education and nursing.

### The Landscape of Narrative Inquiry

We have come to see that “narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). This understanding highlights the importance of attending to the experiences of professional educators and those learning to become professionals through educational programs, as well as through the living of practice. Our definition of narrative inquiry shows the ways narrative inquiry is entwined in both the phenomenon of professional education and research in professional education.

We understand that while stories, or narratives, are of interest in different types of narrative research, one distinguishing feature of narrative inquiry, with its focus on narrative understandings of experience, is the practice of thinking *with* rather than *about* stories (Morris, 2002). Thinking *about* stories involves a separation of story and reader, wherein the reader acts upon story in an analytic and perhaps reductionist fashion. Distilling stories in this way is one means to gain useful and important insights that become knowledge for practice. Thinking *with* stories is a different approach that embeds story and reader in a reciprocal relationship. In this relationship the reader is invited into such questions as, “How do stories act upon me?” and “How do stories operate among other stories as they are lived, told, retold, and relived?”

Entertaining such questions offers access into ways stories make visible experience and shape identities. Experience arises from, as well as composes and recomposes, “stories to live by” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). “Stories to live by” offers a narrative way to think about identity through a conceptualization of identity as experiential, as contextual, as embodied, as always in the making, and as shaped at the nexus of context and knowledge. Stories of who we are, where we came from, and what we do pervade professional education contexts and are, in part, what sustains, shifts, or freezes practice over time. Sometimes these stories move alongside each other in ways that affirm. For example, stories of healthcare developments complement stories of professionalism and technical expertise. At other times, these stories are uncomfortable bedfellows; the tensions between stories of diversity in learners and learning and stories of professional educators as gatekeepers of the professions (Lafrance & Gray, 2004; Vacha-Haase, Davenport, & Kerewsky, 2004) serve as examples.

What is, for us, most noticeable within this landscape is the way that professional education contexts increasingly demand attention to be drawn away from experience, and instead make central curriculum content, indicators and outcomes, and apparently sensible (yet sometimes arbitrary) relationships between objectives, content, and individual and collective outcomes. As practice is shaped in this way, attention to experience as a valuable source of knowledge for practice is subordinated and relegated to anecdote and even interference. For us, as narrative inquirers, this subversion away from experience is problematic because experience is a primary source for understanding.

Narrative inquirers conceptualize experience in particular ways. Drawing upon the philosophical work of Dewey (1938), experience is understood as a narrative phenomenon that is temporal, social, and situated (Clandinin 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Experience always happens somewhere, and places are deeply implicated in how experiences unfold/enfold, and are able to be spoken about (Basso, 1996; Estefan & Roughley, 2013). Experience is also a social phenomenon that involves transactions between internal experiences, such as thoughts and feelings, and social interaction, even when the other in such an interaction is only held “in mind” (Dewey, 1938). Experience is also a temporal phenomenon, in which previous experiences shape the present, which, in turn, influences experiences that are yet to come.

These conceptions of experience are, for us, marked by a deeply relational context and commitment. Enacting this commitment from a position of wonder, rather than a position of already knowing, is a means of inquiry into how we compose knowledge that we need in order to know what to do (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013). With an ontological commitment to experience, we turn to think *with* some of our stories of professional education. We begin with stories that tell how we each came to narrative inquiry. Later, we turn to think with these stories alongside our present experiences as educators in professional education contexts.

### **Vera: At the Kitchen Table**

This morning, as we sat at the kitchen table, Felix, our son, asked me if I could check his hair again for lice. Nitpicking was familiar to me, something I learned early in my practice as a community health nurse. School had just started again in the fall and, as always, it had brought with it the call for us, the community health nurses, to come and check for

lice. One family on a northern reservation was familiar to us through stories told by others about the many complexities they faced. They held a deep distrust of school and health care institutions and experienced significant poverty, isolation, and overcrowding within their current living conditions. These issues reflect some of the inequities experienced by Aboriginal people. My colleague Jennifer and I were asked to connect with the family. We were instructed to “fix” the issue, to provide the standard treatment, and to ensure the children’s speedy return to school. I remember driving the long gravel road to the reserve, wondering who the family was and what questions they might have.

I recall that when we asked for directions to the house, the glances we received from people in response marked us as clearly “not from here.” We arrived at a small house at the edge of the reserve and entered a space that was filled with tensions, tensions about the purpose of our visit and who we were. Too, there were questions about the “real” help we could offer. These initial moments led to a visit several hours long. I cannot recall if there ever was an overt invitation to enter the house, but there was one in which we were asked to enter the kitchen. Entering the kitchen, we were greeted by several children. Jennifer and I looked at each and asked if we could stay; we knew that the conventional and still too often prescribed treatment for lice did not work and that one of the more successful ways involved nitpicking. We were wakeful enough at the time to notice that the mother already knew this. We removed our coats and settled at the kitchen table; we all began the long hours of nitpicking.

Touching Felix’s hair this morning, I could still recollect the feeling of the girls’ soft hair. In those long hours, many spent in silence, there was profound learning for me. In that moment I became part of the living, part of seeing the complex, multilayered stories lived within the family. I can still feel the shifting ground for me as my attention was drawn to the family’s experiences in ways that were profoundly different from the work I did. Perhaps it was the most significant moment in the turn in my practice to narrative inquiry.

When we arrived at the office the next day, we were asked to provide explanations for our lengthy visit. The questions were, perhaps, not new and have increased in more recent years in intensity, but what was new to me was how much the questions unsettled me. In those hours of nitpicking at the kitchen table, I had attended to bodies, contexts, and histories in a way I had not before, not this clearly, not in ways that I would have named. The questions about accountability raised questions

about who I was in relation to practice, but more importantly, questions of who I was in relation to the people around which my practice was centred. The unsettledness that first arose as part of the nitpicking clarified a few things for me. These included that attention to experience mattered to me, that being in relation was significant, and that silence (the kind that accompanied the nitpicking) was profoundly important.

### **Jean: Attending to Life in the Making**

I was a teacher, counsellor, and psychologist in schools for years before I began to think of myself as a researcher. In my practice as an elementary school counsellor, I came alongside many teachers and children as we worked to make more educative spaces for children in classrooms. I did not think of what I was doing as “teacher education,” as I worked hard to make my starting point the children’s lives in their schools and homes. Now, as I inquire into the stories I lived and told, I understand that I was educating teachers as I educated myself, seeing myself more as co-learner rather than as teacher educator.

I remember a young mother who asked to see me. A number of her children attended the school. As we sat in my small-tucked-away-in-the-far-corner-of-the-school office, she told me of her son, Frederick, a son I had not known about even though I thought I knew the children in the family. I remember frowning as I learned he was excluded from our school because he needed a wheelchair for physical mobility. He was picked up each day by a special bus and taken to a special school, miles away. He wanted to come to school with his siblings and they wanted him to come. “Why,” I asked, “Can he not come?” I remember her surprise that I did not know the school policy that excluded him. She replied, “The school does not accept children in wheelchairs.” I do not recall being angry although I realize now I should have felt anger. I knew it mattered that Frederick be allowed to come to our school. With a deep sense of puzzlement and a confidence that such a grievous wrong could be righted, I said, “I will talk to the Grade 5 teachers. When they agree, as I am sure they will, we, the teachers and I, will take his attendance up with the principal. I do not think this is a good school policy, one that pays attention to what is best for children and families.”

In conversations with the two Grade 5 teachers, soon to be Frederick’s teachers, we talked of difference and disability, of life and what made sense in each child’s life, in siblings’ lives, in parents’ lives. In those moments we were all teacher educators, educating each other

about matters of inclusion and exclusion and how spaces were made, or not made, for all children. Together, we agreed to see the principal to share what we knew made sense for Frederick and his family. The principal agreed, the policy was changed, and not too much later, Frederick came to school. Through the multiple meetings, I did not see myself as a teacher educator, as a change agent, as a reformer. I was someone trying to make a more educative place for a child, something I worked at every day in my practice.

It was moments such as this one that reminded me of the importance of attending to experience, of attending to people's lives, to seeing that things could be otherwise. Three years later, I found myself in a doctoral program in curriculum studies at the University of Toronto. My presence there was, as I told the story then, one of needing something to do for a few years. As I read the research literature about teachers, I was overwhelmed by the ways that teachers were constructed, overwhelmed by their lack of voice, by the silence around their experiences, by the lack of acknowledgement that they held knowledge expressed in their classroom practice. When it came time to frame a doctoral study (Clandinin, 1986), I knew I wanted to go to schools, to live alongside teachers, to understand what it meant to say that teachers held experiential knowledge, shaped by their lives, that found expression in classroom practices.

I began what I see as research that mattered to me alongside a teacher and principal in a school, in conversations, in living alongside, all the while being aware that I, too, was part of what I was studying. In these early days, what was most apparent in my study was my commitment to attending to experience, to attending to lives in the making, to attending to the shaping contexts of institutions, of place, of time, and of relationships. Narrative inquiry was not yet named in my work but experience was central to the research phenomenon and methodology. It was not until the late 1980's, when Michael Connelly and I named the work in which we were engaged "narrative inquiry," that we were able to talk more clearly about what we were doing (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

### **Andrew: At My Grandmother's Feet**

In the spring of 1924, my paternal grandmother left England for Canada, Montreal specifically, to go "into service" with a Quebecois family. She kept house and cared for their children for two years before

returning to England to marry my grandfather and have two sons. Gran had to work by necessity, but would have done so anyway; she was an energetic, independent, and headstrong woman. My mother named her “fearsome.”

For some years after her return, my grandmother worked as a nurse for the local general practitioner, Dr. Cleverton, or “Clevvie” as she affectionately referred to him in her stories. As a child, I sat on a stool at her feet next to her paraffin heater and imagined her holding a man down as the doctor lanced his boil, assisting with stitching wounds, reducing dislocated shoulders, and clearing up blood and pus before making the doctor his afternoon tea. She was proud that she had never winced or passed out. I loved the stories—even when they became the only stories she could tell, as Alzheimer’s slowly interfered with her ability to speak of who she was and who she had been.

It was Gran’s stories that first taught me about nurses. They were stories of people with real lives, who worked with and for other people with real lives that extended beyond pains, sprains, and weak hearts and bladders. When I go home, I still see the now elderly children of some of the people Gran talked about in her stories; confidentiality was much less of an issue back then. Gran’s stories first revealed to me the depths contained within wrinkled skin dressed in hand-knitted garments. It has always been the depths that lie beyond the tasks of nursing that have held the greatest fascination for me.

While nursing was not my first career choice, being a nurse always made sense. It connected me to where I came from and it gave me a sense of direction at a time when I did not have one. Ten years after I qualified, I began my doctorate. While preparing my admissions proposal, I attended a conference in Banff, Alberta, and took a workshop that described narrative inquiry. We were immersed in stories and I listened to people talk as I gazed out the window. It was snowing, and I remembered I was in Canada, the first of my family to come here since my grandmother had, exactly 80 years earlier. I remembered her stories in this place and made new connections about how they shaped who I am in the world, how I think about myself, and what matters in my practice. It was in that place, at that time, and with my grandmother in mind that I settled into stories, and found a new home place in Canada and in narrative inquiry.



### **Professional Education**

Today, our research and practice in professional education contexts is shaped by these early experiences. In this paper, we focus upon nursing and education as the professional education contexts for our discussion. The mid to late 20th century saw the transition of nurse education from hospital-based schools of nursing to university faculties of nursing in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. Similarly, teacher education is now substantially located in the university sector in these countries, albeit with national differences. Moving professional programs to universities has conferred benefits and problems for educators and practitioners (Schön, 1983).

Professional education always requires attention to the practice context, and those of us who work in professional education programs know that part of our work is to prepare students for these contexts. Education of students is influenced and regulated by accreditors to ensure appropriate standards of preparation. Appropriate standards are determined by practice needs and emphasize the development of specific knowledge, competencies, and attributes (Jacob & Vanderhoef, 2014). To ensure these regulatory requirements are met, curricula are outcomes-driven and increasingly organized by pressures for competency development and “safe” practice.

Significant emphasis is placed upon pre-licensure or pre-service preparation in university settings. This is, in part, due to enduring concerns for “practice readiness,” which is thought of in relation to safe practices. Professional education contexts are shaped by stories of fitness to practice, and perceptions of universities as removed from practice environments add to concerns about graduates’ fitness and readiness for work environments (Mannix, Wilkes, & Luck, 2009). Professional education is thus storied as preparatory, and educators as being responsible to provide learning situations that will allow the development of, and closely match, the knowledge, skills, and attributes required for practice. The gold-standard for professional education programs becomes, then, an education for the “real” world and, this real world of practice makes little room for education as wondering, encountering the other, as life making, or self-composition and recomposition. Instead, we laud curricula that are context relevant, yet also reduced to what students need to know to “do the job.”

## **Experiencing Tensions in Professional Practice Education**

For those of us who work from and with narrative understandings of experience, there are tensions as we work in professional education contexts. Discussing these tensions opens possibilities for ongoing inquiry into professional education. Continuing to inquire into these tensions shows how they are woven, inseparable, and deeply embedded in complex landscapes of self, others, time, and institutional structures. We turn now to particular tensions that, for us, reveal much about professional education—understood as a narrative undertaking—as a rich and interdependent practice. In what follows, we identify and discuss four tensions in which we show that it is important to recognize who we are, how we practice, and how we engage with others as we think *with* experience.

### **Tensions Related to Reductionist Boundaries between the Personal and Professional**

There is a long-held belief that the personal and professional are separate domains. In health disciplines and schooling, this belief extends to a value that they *should* be separate (Goldblatt, 2009). This belief is further grounded in ethical obligations that are intended to safeguard vulnerable clients or children. One hallmark of a professional practitioner, then, is a clear sense of the boundary between the personal and the professional. Even though the sense of this boundary might be clear, the practice of nursing and teaching involves consideration of self in relation to others in ways that involve ongoing negotiation and renegotiation of boundaries (Fahrenwald et al., 2005). The reductionistic boundary between the personal and the professional is often extended to the need to compose and maintain separate personal and professional identities. The separation of the personal and professional in how identity is understood appears to have developed from an implicit assumption that we are one person when we are in professional contexts and someone else when we are outside of professional contexts.

Because there is a view that there are separate identities, professional educators are to concern themselves only with professional identity making. We are counselled to keep our focus on professional education as if somehow that is distinct from the larger project of education. While we certainly see that situations and contexts do pull forward different aspects of our experiential knowledge to respond to

situations (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988), when we work from narrative understandings we do not see that we are different people in different situations, places, or contexts. As we return to think with Vera's story of nitpicking, we do not see the boundary between Vera as a person and Vera as a professional. Vera's identity is composed in similar ways as she sits at the kitchen table picking nits with the family in the northern reservation or at home as she checks her son's hair. She lives in ways that attend to lives, hers and those she comes alongside. She notes that this is a powerful experience of learning to practice as she engages in practice, and her story shows how her identities are not separated. Thinking with our stories of coming to narrative inquiry, we called forth those experiences that showed something of the ways that experiences shaped who we each were and were becoming. This is, for us, a narrative experience of working *with* stories of self in the midst of pragmatic contexts of professional education. Vera's story of the kitchen table tells of a practice that accounts for more than the need for fewer lice, for clinical assessment, or prescribed treatment. Jean's story of unfitting children and Andrew's account of learning about nursing as a child trouble the construction of learners (be they students or practitioners) as "not knowing." In the stories we tell of how we came to narrative inquiry, we can see that who we are is situated centrally in how we practice; and our experiences, of practice and of who we are, count. Vera often tells stories of her family sitting at the kitchen table, a space where as a family they worked through problems (Clandinin, Steeves, & Caine, 2013). We can see how this knowing was carried forward into Vera's professional practice.

While there are practices in educational contexts that use students' experiences as a starting point, there is a reticence to use students' experiences as the starting point from which meaningful learning for professional practice can occur. While professional educators do, sometimes, ask students for their opinions and impressions of topics under discussion, asking students to tell their stories for the purpose of inquiring into them is something else. They are being asked to open questions of who they are and who they are becoming in their identity making.<sup>1</sup> Shaped by the current boundaries, experience as a source for knowing is only taken up insofar as it can comment upon, illuminate, or

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<sup>1</sup> This practice embeds something of an irony in that much beneficial learning occurs when students participate in learning that is built upon their experiences. As Dewey (1938) reminds us, part of the educational endeavour is to help students to determine how to make education meaningful for them.

moderate a perspective that is already known and established to contain at least some truth. This utilitarian treatment of experience (as a means to a teaching end) contradicts democratic learning (Dewey, 2005).

To prepare learners and teachers in professional practice, programs scaffold learning to help students develop requisite knowledge and skills for practice. While the aim of scaffolded approaches is to teach in ways that facilitate development (Bruner, 1957; Vygotsky, 1978; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976), the nature of the development has been predetermined. Students' experiences serve a learning outcome, rather than being engaged with in ways that make possible learning that is new, unexpected, or challenging. Being open to experience makes it a way to remain wakeful and attentive rather than as a means to a teaching end.

Building on Dewey's notions, we understand educators' and students' lives as always in the making. Trying to practice in ways that are shaped by social and institutional narratives within professional practice takes us in certain directions and, at times, these directions may conflict with where we may want to go (Kleinman, 2006). Jean's story reminds us how this tension can be a generative space; a space in which she was able to attend to Frederick and his family. Her recognition of how teachers were directed to view practice was held in tension with her felt need to make spaces for children and their lives, for the knowledge and stories to live by that they were already composing. Jean's story also reveals the knowledge for practice that arises when teachers talk about their experiences and "educate each other."

The tensions that become visible in Vera, Jean, and Andrew's narrative inquiries into their experiences are important catalysts for thinking differently and for change. They are, however, also subordinated by competing stories of the needs for regulation, for standards, and for mechanisms that ensure safety, accountability, and productivity. Just as body functions, in a general sense, can invite expressions of shame and embarrassment when they contradict the expectations of a civilized society (Howson, 2004), teacher identity and practice that bumps up against *civilized* discourse about how to enact professional education practice risks being concealed and a source of shaming and shame. Thinking with Jean's stories we can see how the underlying stories of school were storied around plotlines of differentiation of abilities. Frederick did not fit certain stories of school. His wheelchair created a space of not fitting; this sense of not fitting relegated him to a space of segregation. When Jean began to attend to this, she realized that the personal and professional boundary is well served when standards for

practice shape what we can talk about, but that it also shapes silences within particular contexts. The absence of Frederick in the classroom was one of these silences. Later, his presence in the classroom shifted the story of school for the teachers, children, families, and others as it made possible a story in which children in wheelchairs could belong and also opened possibilities for more inclusive stories of school.

### **Tensions with Standards-Based Professional Education**

There are significant tensions for professional educators in contexts where standards dictate what needs to be mastered for practice. Tensions also exist in relation to standards that are constructed for curriculum content and teaching and learning practices. In other words, standards dictate what a professional practitioner must know and be able to do, and they dictate what and how they should be taught to do this.

In practice disciplines like teaching and nursing, these standards are constructed and measured by their capacity to influence practice. The trouble with this is that they privilege the *doing* of teaching and nursing. Practice, then, becomes reduced to techniques and techniques are simultaneously elevated to high status within professional practice (Schön, 1983; 1987). Good practitioners become those who have good command of technique, who are efficient, and *competent*. Good educators are those who *produce* these results in their learners.

Nurse educators and teacher educators find themselves in difficult positions amid the landscape of standards-based professional education. Without wishing to deny the public has a right to safe and accountable practice from nurses and teachers, we also contend that the “depths” to which Andrew referred to in his story are lost. The richness of *being* in practice, the connections, and the rewards of building meeting places in which we experience caring transactions takes second place to precision, timeliness, and efficiency.

### **Tensions between Experience and the Professional Discipline**

Experience is often taken up in practice programs as “based on your experiences, what do you think of this idea, phenomenon?” Errant or incorrect experience can then be addressed and corrected as the student takes up an identity as a “professional” nurse or teacher. Experience is not often used to generate practice. Part of the issue goes back to the etymological origins of the word “practice,” where it means “to follow or

employ; to carry on a profession” or “to learn by repeated performance.” Practice in this narrow sense is skills based and prepares practitioners for the performance of tasks. Understanding practice in this way creates tensions with experience, particularly when experience is understood as life making.

Honouring processes of life making also takes account of the ways knowledge is acquired and negotiated in relationships. While some see a danger of abdicating professional responsibilities in the negotiations, we see this as an opportunity to both value ours and others’ experience and the experiential knowledge that is shaped by those experiences. When Vera shares her story of nitpicking with students in classroom or clinical practice sites, she leaves openings in her telling that invite students to lay their experiences alongside hers. Vera remembers the stories of some students, who shared how they have been ashamed of having lice in the past, while others tell stories of how they ostracized others because they had lice. One student from an Indigenous community began to tell stories of institutional racism and of residential school that led to her mistrust of outsiders. She wondered if her family would have let Vera and Jennifer enter their house. As Vera invites students to lay their experiences alongside hers, new possibilities emerge for students who were also in the midst of their own lives, shaped by their own past and present experiences.

### **Tensions of Attending to the “Whole” Life**

We frequently feel tension as we bump against a dominant narrative in professional education, one in which professional education does not involve the personal. Professional identities are already determined by the profession and personal identities lie outside the purview of professional education and, subsequently, practice. This view of a dual identity leads, as we noted in the earlier section, to the need to demarcate the boundaries between the personal and professional. Thinking within a narrative inquiry perspective, we see that the separation of the personal from the professional is not possible, as it does not allow us to account for the wholeness of lives, for the unfolding of lives within contexts.

As Jean attended to Frederick’s mother’s request to have him attend his local neighbourhood school, she worked to understand the lives of Frederick and his family with attentiveness to the wholeness of his life, the wholeness of his mother’s life, and his siblings’ lives. We see this in

another way when we attend to the wholeness of lives within professional education contexts. Recognizing the whole person is undergoing professional education creates difficulties when, as professional educators, whether in nursing, teaching, or another profession, we are cautioned to only attend to what is seen to be professional knowledge. When we understand that who we are as professionals is profoundly shaped by our experiences over time and in multiple relationships and places, notions of boundary become problematic.

As we saw in Andrew's story, it was his recollections of his grandmother in the doctoral workshop that helped him understand how his stories alongside her helped him compose and shift his stories as a nurse and nurse educator to attend to his life making and to what matters in his practice. We cannot create educative situations to work with beginning professionals when we, both beginning professionals and professional educators, assume that only experiences that occurred within the professional context are open to inquiry and discussion. Elsewhere, Clandinin and Connelly (1994) wrote of becoming educated as processes of cultivation, awakening, and transformation. In cultivations in professional education, we are taught what is known in a particular discipline or field of study. We are taught with a starting point in the known, in best practices that are developed in a particular profession. However, Clandinin and Connelly (1994) argued that it is only when we engage in careful narrative inquiry into what we know and how we know that we begin to awaken to other possibilities—possibilities that become alive in transformations that enable us to live differently in the world—in ways that became evident in Jean's and Vera's stories. These ideas about what it means to become educated when we think narratively are ideas rooted in the ideas of Dewey and other pragmatic philosophers. Education that is only about cultivation stops well short of the wholeness of the ongoing, experiential knowing that we see as part of professional education.

Without attending to education in this larger sense, what is lost is the opportunity to engage in inquiries into who we are, and are becoming, because so much of who we are and what we have experienced lives temporally, relationally, and in places outside the professional and professional education contexts. With no spaces to inquire into the wholeness of who we are and are becoming, that is, our stories to live by shaped by and through experiential knowledge, we lose the richness and possibility for the lives of young professionals to be otherwise. We also lose the possibility for the development of counterstories (Lindemann

Nelson, 1995), such as the one the Grade 5 teachers and Jean co-composed with Frederick—counterstories that reshape the knowledge landscapes (Clandinin, Schaefer, & Downey, 2014) of professional practice and subsequently professional education. Counterstories are often grounded in attention to whole lives.

### **Situating Ourselves in the Present Landscape**

As we learned to think narratively within professional education alongside teachers, nurses, and administrators, much was shifted when we “world” travelled (Lugones, 1987) to the worlds of teachers and nurses. In narrative inquiries in which we engage as professional educators, we begin to see that it is less about who is positioned as researcher and researched: collaboration and co-composition become terms to describe what is happening. The relational aspects of narrative inquiry become more and more evident and, as they become more evident, we develop other ways of attending, by creating spaces where what happens between people, in contexts, becomes central to narrative inquiry.

As the relational is more central and more in need of being named in its complexities, other bumping places develop with the dominant narratives of professional education and research in professional education. Questions of ownership, authorship, and representation of practice as well as questions about voice emerge and require thoughtful attention. In this way, narrative inquiry as a relational methodology and practice becomes a means of living and practicing in different professional education contexts. In what follows we highlight three areas where we see possibilities for changed practices as we engage in narrative inquiry in professional education.

### **Turning to Pedagogical Spaces**

Space, in a pedagogical sense, is becoming increasingly difficult to locate in professional education programs. For every practice competency there is a related degree program outcome, which in turn is mapped to course and learning outcomes and specific classroom objectives. The spaces that are made are those related to skill development. While skills development is a necessary part of becoming a professional, it is also worthwhile to cultivate professional development within a more expanded view of education. There is, however, less and less time for this more expanded view. Aspirations to teach and learn in



ways that bring the personal and professional together, that acknowledge and create space for learning from experience, that entertain the value of encountering each other from a position of “not knowing” are now seen as indulgences and even as reckless. Professional practice programs may, ironically, risk producing competent doers unencumbered by the unrealized promise of their education.

We wonder whether part of the answer we seek to the tensions in professional education lies in one of its troubles. Context, often taken up in curricula in ways that focus on “doing practice,” also sensitizes us to what fills it. Contexts contain people, and contexts and action are closely linked (Kintrea, St. Clair, & Houston, 2015). Context is thus not a static entity to be studied, mastered, and *known*; instead, contexts are dynamic places that situate us as always *coming to know* and, as such, contexts necessitate openness and curiosity. As we think about this sense of coming to know others, from a place of curiosity and playfulness, we are reminded by Lugones (1987) that:

Through travelling to other people’s “worlds” we discover that there are “worlds” in which those who are the victims of arrogant perceptions are really subjects, lively beings, resisters, constructors of visions even though in the mainstream construction they are animated only by the arrogant perceiver and are pliable, foldable, file-awayable, classifiable. (p. 18)

Thinking with notions of world travelling in professional education calls us to create pedagogical spaces in which we can not only encounter the other as students, but as people with histories and dreams, who live in specific contexts. While educators are part of creating this pedagogical space, authorship and ownership both within, and of, this space is shared between educators and students. Taking this narrative inquiry view of professional education as a relational, narrative practice opens pedagogical spaces.

The story of “practice readiness” as a desirable outcome of professional education is a further constraint upon pedagogical spaces that might otherwise contain stories of care, engagement, coming to know self and the other, and of the feeling of children’s hair around a kitchen table. In a practice world where stories of teaching and nursing are told against a background of standards and outcomes, students and educators rely on benchmarks and indicators to manage a variety of performance indicators, indicators that are at times accompanied by anxieties. These

anxieties are often related to the need to achieve outcomes that, depending on the context, time, and place, might be impossible to meet. With the focus on outcomes, educators rarely begin to imagine new possibilities of being alongside children, families, or those for whom they provide care. Most often, world-travelling is constrained.

With the rapid change in practice, and the increasing complexity, we argue comes a greater need to rely on personal practical knowledge (Clandinin, 1986; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) that come as a response to knowing who one is and is becoming. We continue to wonder how nurses, teachers, and professional practice educators can story themselves into their practice in fitting ways, when the only fit that matters is whether the student is ready to go to work.

One implication of the shift to competency-based education is that universities are becoming increasingly storied as the place to produce practice-ready professionals (Rolfe, 2013). As much as healthcare agencies participate in narratives of holistic, family-centred care, reductionist conceptions of what constitutes nursing bely a preference for workers who can get the job done rather than a cultivated caring professional invested in world-travelling. We also see this trend in schooling practices, where the push for outcomes makes achievement scores the most important indicator of learning.

When Andrew first contemplated a nursing career, it was with a sense of self-composition, self-development, and making a contribution that extended what his grandmother had done; neither this achievement nor its contribution to the richness of nursing practice and the discipline can be measured. Vera is reminded of her work alongside the family where she was asked to attend to the “issue of lice.” While lice are an obvious issue, attention to the context of the issue is necessary. Vera relied on her personal experiences of the importance of staying alongside others in difficult and complex situations.

It is here that we return to the sites of our experiences of coming to narrative inquiry as examples of how thinking *with* other stories of professional education reveal insights for practice and the teaching and learning that occurs within professional practice contexts. Discerning best practice involves inquiry into the contextual/social, situated, and temporal aspects of experience. When Andrew heard Vera’s story of driving to the reserve and meeting the family there, he wanted to ask more about her experience. What did Vera and her colleague talk about in the car? What was the experience of being “not from here” like? How did it show itself? How did they negotiate being storied as from somewhere else? Andrew

knew that these questions comprise a narrative inquiry space in which possibilities for understanding the nuances of nursing identity and practice are revealed. He is also aware, however, that in a public health lecture preparing students to enact “evidence-based” practice, different questions must be asked and answered. As these other questions begin to fill pedagogical spaces, concerns shift away from identity making, experience, and their relationship to practice towards conventional and limited stories of social determinants of health, treatment compliance, recidivism, and difference.

### **Calling Forth Experience**

Experience is rarely accorded any capacity to mediate what we know with what we do. Instead, we ask theorists and researchers to show us how to practise, and we ask practitioners to act upon these recommendations, at times recognizing their ability to make clinical judgements. Evidence-based practice is often uncritically accepted, although its shortcomings have been pointed out. These shortcomings are the problematic privileging of reductive and experimentally-derived evidence, along with a potential loss of professional and lay perspectives (Broom & Adams, 2011). Evidence-based practice can be exclusionary and normative (Holmes, Murray, & Perron, 2006). As a result, there is an absence of the voices that speak of relationships that make and sustain the practices of nurses and teachers.

As narrative inquirers, we experience tensions with evidence-based practice, as it provides little impetus or reward for turning to experience as a way to inquire into what is happening. There is an underlying message that what we do needs to be based on evidence, and the use of “best” evidence is the reasonable course of action. We need to engage in reasoning, based upon hierarchies of evidence, and are expected to act “reasonably,” but reason is not devoid of context. While context is sometimes considered in best practices, it is the situational context that is meant, not the personal practical knowledge that practitioners or educators bring to the situation. Because current models of evidence reduce context to its knowable features, personal and practice knowledge is subordinated and not adequately represented in nursing or teaching practice knowledge. For Connelly and Clandinin (1988), personal practical knowledge is in “the teacher's past experience, in the teacher's present mind and body, and in the future plans and actions. Personal practical knowledge is found in the teacher's practice. It is, for

any one teacher, a particular way of reconstructing the past and the intentions of the future to deal with the exigencies of a present situation” (p. 25).

Vera was reminded that this notion of evidence-based practice stimulated the questions by her supervisor after the visit: what did they spend time on in the field? Why did they not just give the prescription, tell the mother to nitpick, and then leave? Context from this view was measurable literacy levels and ability and access to have the prescription filled, but not an attentiveness to social circumstances that brought back Vera’s understanding of working through problems at the kitchen table during her childhood and adolescent years.

As much as our questions are about practice, about evidence, and about learning in professional education contexts, our questions are also about voice. We are, perhaps, less interested in the paradigmatic concern of who gets to speak and how much, than in the narrative question of what happens when voice is claimed, when people are able to talk about experience. Jean’s story emphasizes for us the ways that narrative inquiry opens spaces for voices to be used and makes possible an expansion of what is part of the public discourse of schooling. Importantly, it is a relational space characterized by wonder and co-composition rather than a curricular gap waiting to be filled with evidence.

### **The Significance of Relationships and Thinking *with* Stories**

The professional knowledge landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) within which we live and work are shaped by powerful stories of following established practices that have been shown to be the most effective, efficient, and that lead to the best outcomes. Best practices are methods or techniques shown to produce results apparently superior to those achieved in other ways. Best practices become the benchmark for teaching for practice and for practice itself. Yet, best practices do not attend to the complex layers of contexts and the shifting uncertainties that mark professional practice. Professional nursing education would make little room for Andrew’s story of nursing. Returning to Jean’s story with Frederick we see how best practice was to segregate children who did not “fit.” It was by engaging in conversations with Frederick’s mother and with the Grade 5 teachers, and in so doing, of thinking *with* their stories that other possibilities for Frederick’s schooling became more visible. These possibilities reflected the complex, shifting uncertainties of lives in the making.

Best practices are constructed by attending in particular ways to particular stories and ignoring others. Stories of risk and safety, for example, become dominant stories in professional nursing and teacher education. These stories are sustained by attending to behaviour and skill—the pragmatic context—rather than relationships and personal practical knowledge, or the narrative context. The value placed on competence and scope of practice focuses us towards what it is that people can do, and how well (quickly and without error) they can do it. Good nurses and teachers are “competent” doers.

We are troubled by these narrow stories of professional competence. In Vera’s story, a relational narrative practice around the kitchen table transformed practice into a very human encounter. The focus on working towards only dominant understanding of best practices reduces practice to its technical features. What is lost in this view is the broader landscape that situates nursing, teaching, and other professions as contextual and deeply relational practices. Thinking *with* stories is one way to help professional practice educators to sustain thinking narratively about the contexts of time and place and relationships in which we, and those who are learning to be professionals, work. As we think with stories, it becomes important to attend to multiple voices, not firstly because we need to consider ownership of stories and authorship,<sup>2</sup> but because of the ways that multiple voices allow us to understand experiences in professional education more deeply, with more complexity, and with more adequate representations of practice.

### Conclusion

The intersection of narrative inquiry and professional education is shared across disciplines. One of the significant issues is to recognize the tensions unique to each discipline, but also to identify the ones that are shared and to work across disciplines in collaborative ways to address these. Our discussion reveals key tensions for us as narrative inquirers in professional education. We view these tensions as spaces in which complexities and troubles can be surfaced and explored. As we look forward in our teaching and scholarship we also understand these tensions as generative spaces, in which possibilities for thinking about and practising in professional education emerge. As narrative inquiry

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<sup>2</sup> Within the relational ontology of narrative inquiry, we are less concerned with issues of author order as we understand that the texts that we co-compose are shaped within the relational space of the inquiry.

scholars, we ground ourselves in experience. We continue to wonder about how thinking *with* stories of experience calls us to, and makes possible, a more narrative practice in professional education.

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