

Narrative Approaches

Donna E. Alvermann

University of Georgia

The telling of stories can be a profound form of scholarship moving serious study close to the frontiers of art...

-- Joseph Featherstone (1989, p. 377)

Currently, researchers in the social sciences are engaged in the telling of stories that encompass a range of narrative approaches, including autobiography, autoethnographies, biography, personal narratives, life histories, oral histories, memoirs, and literary journalism. A growing number of these researchers (e.g., Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Richardson, 1997) are writing narratives in ways that combine empirical and aesthetic descriptions of the human condition, thus pushing at "the frontiers of art" to which Featherstone alludes. Still others (e.g., Denzin, 1997; hooks, 1991) are critiquing the notion that one should ever rightfully assume the authority to tell other people's stories. This article begins with a cursory look at the history of narrative inquiry. It then points to a few examples of how researchers are using this form of inquiry to understand their own literate lives and the lives of others whom they study. Finally, the major part of the article focuses on issues that currently define narrative inquiry as a way of knowing and writing, and the implications of these issues for research and practice in literacy education.

Thematically speaking, the issues discussed in this article cluster around what is commonly referred to as the postmodern critique of narrative inquiry. This critique is concerned primarily with three issues: subjectivity, truth claims, and representation. Although the term postmodern is troublesome in some circles, Marcus' s (1994) assessment of the situation is that theorists in the social sciences have absorbed much of postmodernism's preoccupation with these issues without necessarily laying claim to its label. For example, present interest in subjectivity and the turn toward self-critical reflexivity marks a departure from earlier times when it was simply assumed that researchers would strive to maintain a distance between the knower (narrator) and the known (narrated). Similarly, researchers are having to rethink what it means to be concerned about truth claims when aspects of the global are now encompassed by the local-- when "the scientist and the artist are both claiming that in the particular resides the general" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 14). Finally, the current interest in re-presenting others' representations marks a departure from a time when researchers could count on the fact that discovering new truths was valued over gaining critical insights into existing interpretations.

Narrative Inquiry: From Past to Present

What counts as narrative inquiry varies widely across researchers and those who critique their work. Although there are traces of various forms of narrative mixing with philosophy as early as the 18th century (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), narrative inquiry as a method of analysis is thought to have taken hold during the 20th century with the Russian formalists' study of fairy tales and Levi-Strauss's analysis of myths (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994). More recent work, often referred to as the "new narrative research" (Casey, 1995) focuses specifically on people's lives and lived experiences. In this article, the term narrative inquiry refers to a

variety of research practices ranging from those that tell a story of how individuals understand their actions through oral and written accounts of historical episodes (Riessman, 1993) to those that explore certain methodological aspects of storytelling (Richardson, 1997).

Narrative inquiry's recent emphasis on how people understand themselves and their experiences began in the mid-1970s, according to Bruner (1986), when "the social sciences had moved away from their traditional positivist stance towards a more interpretive posture" (p. 8). The move toward a teller's point of view has not been limited to storytelling in the strict linguistic sense of the term. For example, some narratives have neither protagonists nor culminating events, but instead depict snapshots of past events that are linked thematically.

There has been a tendency of late among some education researchers to elevate narrative inquiry, especially that dealing with teachers' thinking and collaborative research, to new heights--to what some would say is a privileged way of knowing. This practice continues to draw criticism from both teacher educators (e.g., Carter, 1993; de la Luna & Kamberelis, 1997) and research methodologists (e.g., Conostas, 1998; Emihovich, 1995). The more general critique of narrative inquiry, however, has focused on issues made increasingly visible by the postmodern turn and its preoccupation with the loss of innocence in academic writing. For example, Richardson (1997) captured the gist of this critique in her questioning of the academy's adherence to outdated canons of writing practices:

We are restrained and limited by the kinds of cultural stories available to us.

Academics are given the "story line" that the "I" should be suppressed in their writing, that they should accept homogenization and adopt the all-knowing, all-powerful voice of the academy. But contemporary philosophical thought raises

problems that exceed and undermine the academic story line. We are always present in our texts, no matter how we try to suppress ourselves. (p. 2)

Understanding Lives and Lived Experience Through Storytelling

We must lay in waiting for ourselves.

Throughout our lives.

Abandoning the pretense that we know.

-- William F. Pinar (1976a, p. viii)

This quotation from Pinar's introduction to a book he co-authored with Madeleine Grumet (Pinar & Grumet, 1976) on curriculum reform aptly illustrates a central need in the stories we tell about ourselves--namely, the need to be vigilant in recovering the forgotten or suppressed memories that are the autobiographical antecedents of our professional lives. Kathryn Au, whose research focuses on how students of diverse backgrounds become literate while maintaining a connection to their cultural identities, recalled the following childhood memory in a chapter she wrote for Neumann and Peterson's (1997) edited volume on the life histories of notable women researchers in education:

Until I was a teenager, I spent all of my summer vacations at the house in Paia [the location of a Hawaiian sugar plantation on which Au's maternal grandfather, Hew Sing Cha, worked as a cook and baker]. After dinner, Grandmother Hew and the adult relatives often 'talked story,' reminiscing and gossiping in a mixture of Hakka and English. My grandmother was a skillful storyteller with an excellent memory, and others in the circle often turned to her with questions. As a child I did not participate in these discussions, but I

developed an appreciation for uses of language and literacy that did not necessarily involve English or a printed text. (Au, 1997, p. 74)

In a later section that dealt with her development as a researcher, Au told of an incident that led her to hypothesize a connection between Hawaiian children's lively interactive styles in reading circle and the talk-story style of communicating that she had observed while seated among her adult relatives in her Grandmother Hew's house. Au wrote:

My attitudes toward schooling and literacy were shaped by the experiences of family members.... As a Chinese American with an interest in my own cultural heritage, I have explored avenues of bringing students to high levels of literacy through forms of classroom instruction respectful of their cultures.

One conclusion to be drawn from my research on talk-story-like reading lessons is that effective instruction may take more than one form. Definitions of effective teaching need to be broad enough to take into account a range of practices beyond those typically seen in mainstream settings. Another conclusion growing from my research is that students of diverse backgrounds can become excellent readers and writers when they receive well-conceived, culturally responsive instruction. (Au, 1997, pp. 87-88)

Choosing a biographical, rather than an autobiographical line of inquiry, Lorri Neilsen (1998) has experimented with performative texts as a narrative approach to understanding how two adolescents (one of them her 15-year-old son) experience literacy in and out of school. As Neilsen describes this approach, performance and role playing are central to what she hopes the reader will take from her study:

Some of this study is reported as stage setting, some as conventional discursive analysis, and some as dialogue and monologue. The play, as it were, is in the reading of the juxtaposed texts. Readers become both participants and audience as these texts weave through one another. As narrator and participant, I become, as does the reader, part of the intertextual dynamics. The players, the texts, the readings, and the contexts are presented in an attempt to create an interplay that is not linear--a text about text that does not adhere to Western rhetorical and narrative conventions. (Nielsen, 1998, p. 5)

The use of narrative inquiry to understand one's own life and the lives of others is but part of the story. Literacy researchers are also exploring a variety of narrative devices that have potential for opening up new ways of making visible to their reading audiences how the choices they make in collecting, analyzing, and representing their data reflect the theoretical frameworks within which they work. For example, Fitzgerald and Noblit (1999) have used a narrative device they describe as a "think scene"--that is, "think how I [the researcher] can show this, not tell it" (p. 175). Showing (rather than merely talking about) their data was Fitzgerald and Noblit's way of conveying to their reading audience what their field notes and videotapes revealed about the two English-language learners, Roberto and Carlos, who were at the center of their study on emergent reading.

As this brief overview suggests, although literacy researchers are grounding their studies within a variety of narrative approaches that put them in touch with issues bearing on subjectivity, truth claims, and representation, the page constraints associated with publishing

their work (mostly chapters or journal length articles) have not permitted an extended discussion of how they dealt with such issues. A more in-depth look is needed.

A Detailed Look at Three Current Issues

Knowledge grounded in stories is suspect in some people's minds. As one critic (Cizek, 1995) observed, "if all knowledge is a personalized construction...then can any interpretivist claims be rejected?" (p. 27). This question of whether or not narrative research is falsifiable is also reflected in Fenstermacher's (1994) question, "How, in the use of stories and narratives, are such problems as self-deception, false claims, and distorted perceptions confronted and resolved?" (p. 218). These questions are central to the current critique of narrative approaches, at least in terms of the issues they raise in relation to subjectivity and the twin problems of legitimation (truth claims) and representation.

Subjectivity and the Reflexive Self

The concern that a distinction be made between what seems apparent to us and what is in fact "reality" has been part of humankind's search for truth and certainty since ancient times. In forging notions of the need to maintain a distance between the knower and what can be known or between one's personal orientations and the scientific project, scholars writing from the empiricist tradition have demonstrated little patience with narrative approaches. Generally, they have tended to regard interactions between researchers and their research participants (or between researchers and narrators in the case of storytelling approaches) as potential sources of distortion and bias (Jansen & Peshkin, 1992). For instance, literary critic Linda Kauffman (1993) has warned that, because in autobiographical work "there is something fatally alluring about personal

testimony" (p. 132), it behooves us to be wary of a rear-view mirror enchantment with ourselves. This allusion to autobiographers' purportedly narcissistic tendencies has been challenged by scholars sympathetic to the idea that "autobiographical reflection is not a symptom of but a solution to contemporary psychosocial problems" (Casey, 1995, p. 217). Sympathetic to this view, Pinar (1988) has argued, "Understanding of self is not narcissism; it is a precondition and concomitant condition to the understanding of others" (p. 150).

Other criticisms involving charges of solipsism and risk of alienation have also been leveled against narrative inquiry. To counter the charge that such inquiry assumes the self is the only thing that can be known and verified, researchers have relied upon a technique they call methodological reflexivity. Perhaps one of the better known illustrations of this technique is Wolf's (1992) A Thrice Told Tale in which the author records the same set of events using three different forms of writing: a narrative (short story), a social science article, and her anthropological field notes. The assumption is that this type of reflexive writing forces one to turn a critical eye to one's own prejudices and distortions (or at least as the self perceives them). In Wolf's case, "The Hot Spell" was written as a piece of fiction in which the narrator revealed her biases and her state of mind (boredom, discomfort, insecurity) during a dramatic unfolding of events that took place while she was doing fieldwork in Taiwan in 1960. Wolf's field notes, which cover the events written about in the short story, and the article she published some 30 years later in American Ethnologist (Wolf, 1990) can be read against and within the short story as a way of locating the author's subjective involvement and the attention she paid it.

A second criticism--the potential for self-revelations to invite alienation--stems from the fact that narrative tellings often diminish the teller, or equally damaging, they turn the teller into a

crafty narrator. In Grumet's (1987) words, "Our stories are the masks through which we can be seen, and with every telling we stop the flood and swirl of thought so someone can get a glimpse of us, and maybe catch us if they can" (p. 322). Acknowledging the politics of personal knowledge and the potentially alienating aspects of the self-story, Grumet has made it a practice to use Pinar's (1976b) method of currere in her work with teachers who examine their own practices through autobiographical writing. This method requires that, instead of a single text, the teachers write three separate accounts of their lives--a triple retelling organized into past experience, present situation, and future images. Grumet uses this approach to autobiographical writing as a way of partially addressing the dangers involved in asking others to reveal themselves in a single telling, for as she has pointed out, if multiple accounts undermine the authority of the teller, they at least protect him or her "from being captured by the reflection provided in a single narrative" (p. 324).

Finally, an ethical concern posed by those who work within narrative as a form of inquiry is the degree to which we should expect our work to enable those who tell us their stories to take actions that will change their own conditions or the conditions of others living in similar circumstances. In Troubling the Angels: Women Living with HIV/AIDS (Lather & Smithies, 1997), the researchers held themselves accountable as the authors of the text for getting the women's stories out to the general public in what was called the "K-Mart" version of the later published work. The women, whose stories Lather and Smithies told, served as the authors' editorial board. In this capacity, the women had final say as to how they would be portrayed and to whom they would speak (e.g., their choice of the general public, not the academic world, as their initial audience). In making the personal lives of these women who were living with

HIV/AIDS part of their scholarship, Lather and Smithies found ways of textually representing the relationship between themselves and the women's selves. For example, they used split pages on which the women's voices were positioned above their own, and they boxed in the women's poems as a way of setting them apart, out of reach of their own authorial control.

In sum, the relationship between the knower and the known is made less obscure and perhaps "safer" when researchers practice reflexivity and take steps to ensure that ethical consideration is given to their participants' needs. However, in the long run, as Haraway (1991) has cogently pointed out, our subjectivities are "always constructed and stitched together imperfectly" (p. 193)--a point which one might argue also suggests that narrative approaches are no more susceptible to problems of self-deception than are other forms of research. Or, as Nespor and Barber (1995) succinctly put it, "No one is detached or `neutral'" (p. 53).

Crisis of Legitimation (Truth Claims)

The belief that "truth and validity claims reflect historically determined values and interests of different groups...[and that] reality is mediated by conceptual schemes (Kant), ideologies (Marx), language games (Wittgenstein), and paradigms (Kuhn)" (Jansen & Peshkin, 1992, p. 688) is part of a tradition that views knowledge as being at least partially dependent on the knower. It is a tradition influenced in post-World War II Europe by existentialist thinking according to Casey (1995) who, in her analysis of the education field's current enthusiasm for narrative research, finds a connection between certain narrative approaches and existentialism's emphasis on the need for individuals to make sense of a senseless world.

But how is one to address the issues surrounding validity in current day discussions of the so-called legitimation crisis? The work of French literary theorist Helene Cixous's interpretation of Archimedes' thoughts on Truth is one starting place:

Archimedes is someone who never believed in the truth of something;

that something was the truth, no.

To believe in the Truth as tension, as movement, yes.

-- Helene Cixous (Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997, p. 5)

Viewing Truth as tension, as movement, seems a good way to characterize contemporary writers' handling of narrative inquiry and truth claims. Although some narrative analysts (see Cortazzi, 1993) assume that the language used by their participants captures the reality of lived experiences, others view language as actually constituting that reality (Denzin, 1997; Gilbert, 1993). Still others (The Personal Narratives Group, cited in Riessman, 1993) believe that people fabricate their stories, not so much with an intent to deceive as with a desire to make their fictions become realities. In describing this phenomenon, Riessman (1993) noted that interpretive narratives require interpretation:

When talking about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused, and get things wrong. Yet they are revealing truths. These truths don't reveal the past "as it actually was," aspiring to a standard of objectivity. They give us instead the truths of our experiences.... Unlike the Truth of the scientific ideal, the truths of personal narratives are neither open to proof nor self-evident. We come to understand them only through interpretation, paying careful attention to the contexts that shape their creation and to the world

views that inform them. Sometimes the truths we see in personal narratives jar us from our complacent security as interpreters "outside" the story and make us aware that our own place in the world plays a part in our interpretation and shapes the meanings we derive from them. (The Personal Narratives Group, cited in Riessman, 1993, p. 22)

The criteria that might be applied in determining a narrative's authority, legitimacy, or trustworthiness (Denzin, 1997; Riessman, 1993) vary with the type of narrative under consideration (e.g., oral, first-person, written, biographical, and so on). Generally, those who work with narrative forms of inquiry agree that valid research is well-grounded and supportable-- it has what Polkinghorne (1988) refers to as verisimilitude, or the appearance of truth.

Transgressive validity (Richardson, 1997), as its name implies, violates what many working within the narrative paradigm would consider "acceptable" social science. In transforming her notes of an oral history of an unwed mother into the poem "Louisa May," Richardson (1997), in her words, transgressed "the normative constraints for social science writing" (p. 167). She crossed the invisible line separating social science from literary craft (Manning, 1987). Although she initially found her work trivialized and vulnerable to dismissal among colleagues in her field (sociology), today Richardson's scholarship is considered an important move in engaging narrative researchers in serious discussions of authorship, authority, validity, and aesthetics (Lenzo, 1995).

One such discussion focuses on Lawrence-Lightfoot's (1997) recounting of a paradox that argues for a very different way of thinking about validity and generalization. She contextualizes this paradox within her own method of inquiry, portraiture, which blends aesthetics and

empiricism while drawing upon features of the narrative, case study, and ethnography. In her words:

Not only is the portraitist interested in developing a narrative that is both convincing and authentic, she is also interested in recording the subtle details of human experience. She wants to capture the specifics, the nuance, the detailed description of a thing, a gesture, a voice, an attitude as a way of illustrating more universal patterns. A persistent irony--recognized and celebrated by novelists, poets, playwrights--is that as one moves closer to the unique characteristics of a person or a place, one discovers the universal.... Eudora Welty (1983) offers a wonderful insight gained from her experience as a storyteller. She says forcefully: 'What discoveries I have made in the process of writing stories, all begin with the particular, never the general.' Clifford Geertz (1973) puts it another way when he refers to the paradoxical experience of theory development, the emergence of concepts from the gathering of specific detail. Geertz (1973) says, 'Small facts are the grist for the social theory mill' (p. 23). The scientist and the artist are both claiming that in the particular resides the general. (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 14)

In summary, in the same way that traditional concerns for validity and generalizability can get in the way of how narrative researchers like to tell their stories, so also can the evolving notions of what ought to constitute truth claims beget angst among the traditionalists (Smith, 1997). In the end, however, it may be the work of individuals such as those whose research has just been described that will prevent the balkanization of education research. For if agreement

can be reached on how to accept and work from one another's stories, it will be due in no small measure to their ability, and ours, to see Truth as tension, and as movement.

Crisis of Representation

Making problematic the assumed link between experience and text has created what is known in anthropology circles as the crisis of representation (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Denzin, 1994). An argument that supports the existence of such a crisis is this: Because we can never suppress ourselves in the texts we write (or read), we in fact create the persons we write about. An example of the dilemma that the crisis of representation poses for researchers can be found in Denzin's (1989) work on the crisis of representation in biographical studies:

When a writer writes a biography, he or she writes him[self] or herself into the life of the subject written about. When the reader reads a biographical text, that text is read through the life of the reader. Hence, writers and readers conspire to create the lives they write and read about. Along the way, the produced text is cluttered by the traces of the life of the 'real' person being written about.... (p. 26)

Questioning the assumed link between a narrative that tells about a real person's life and the text which represents that life (or, as Denzin noted "traces of [that] life") opens the door to exploring two related phenomena: performance and the inadequacy of written texts for depicting lived experience (Eisner, 1997), and the blurring of genres (Geertz, 1980, 1983).

The inadequacy of written texts for depicting lived experience has led some researchers to explore ways of presenting their data through various performance modes. For example, Neilsen (1998) represented a series of in-depth interviews on teenagers' literate experiences as a play;

Paget (1995) offered a dramatic reading of her research on conversations between a doctor and a patient; and Richardson (1993) performed an oral rendition of her data poem, "Louisa May," before a group of her peers at a national meeting of sociologists. By performing their texts, Neilsen, Paget, and Richardson established a different kind of communicative relation with their audiences. Even so, by its very nature, performance relies on language to mediate experience--a point Denzin (1997) makes in drawing from Derrida (1976) to explain why neither the written word nor the performance (that is, no text) is ever final or complete:

[T]here is no clear window into the inner life of a person, for any window is always filtered through the glaze of language, signs, and the process of signification. And language, in both its written and spoken forms, is always inherently unstable, in flux, and made up of the traces of other signs and symbolic statements. Hence, there can never be a clear, unambiguous statement of anything, including an intention or a meaning. (Denzin, 1997, p. 14)

The publication of Geertz's two books, The Interpretation of Cultures (1973) and Local Knowledge (1983), helped to usher in the crisis of representation by introducing the notion of blurred genres. Although the first of these two volumes set the stage for reconceptualizing interpretive research generally, it was the latter, with its chapter on blurred genres, and Pratt's (1986) work on blurring the boundaries between the personal narrative and ethnographic writing that are at the heart of the crisis in representation. This crisis, which dismisses the assumption that narrative approaches directly capture lived experience, argues instead that the texts written by researchers using these approaches create such experience (Denzin, 1997). Just as importantly, the work of Geertz (1983) and Pratt (1986) is recognized for having elevated

storytelling from mere anecdotal writing to its current status as a vehicle in which empirical and aesthetic descriptions of the human condition find articulation.

In a move to extend Pratt's (1986) endorsement of blurring narrative and ethnographic boundaries as a means of circumventing problems associated with texts that separate the researcher from the researched and the literary from the scientific, Richardson (1997) and Eisner (1997) have argued for a style of academic writing that blurs narrative knowing, sociological telling, poetry, and film making. Although both Richardson and Eisner personally research and write in ways that displace (and, at times, erase) boundaries between art and science, both are also fully cognizant of the need to avoid turning this new approach to narrative inquiry into a petrified discourse--one that is no longer open to resistance and rewriting.

In sum, exploring alternative ways of representing ourselves and the people we write about in our research comes at a defining moment in the history of narrative inquiry--when the question of what counts (or should count) as legitimate research has been settled to some degree by what Eisner (1997) described as the long overdue insight that "research [does] not belong to science alone" (p. 5). Although this insight is not recognized as such in all corners of the research world, Eisner's thinking, which is grounded in Geertz's (1983) work on blurred genres, lends credence to the continuing search for better ways of representing lived experience, given the inadequacy of all texts, written and performed, for depicting such experience presently.

Implications

Of interest here are the implications of the issues just raised for research and practice. For instance, what methodological considerations do researchers need to take into account when

using narrative approaches? Who might be an audience for academic writing that purposefully blurs borders separating scholarly writing from the everyday world of practice, and why might this audience be a valuable one to seek?

Research

Regardless of the type of narrative inquiry undertaken, the current critique calls attention to the researcher's presence and why it must be taken into account from the start. Such an accounting involves making decisions about whose stories to tell, which parts of a story to omit when publishing the research, how much of the narrator's voice to include, when to interrupt that voice with the researcher's commentary, and so on. Decisions about the interview process are also made problematic, for as Emihovich (1995) and Scheurich (1995) have noted, this process is complicated by the privileged position of the researcher in relation to the person being interviewed. Arguing from the stance that both the interviewer and the interviewee have multiple intentions and desires (only some of which are consciously known), Scheurich (1995) would have researchers highlight, not hide, the so-called baggage that is brought to the interview process. Acknowledging the impracticality of naming all such baggage, Scheurich opted for "a reasonably comprehensive statement of disciplinary training, epistemological orientation, social positionality, institutional imperatives, and funding sources and requirements" (pp. 249-250). Providing readers with such a statement is to Scheurich's way of thinking, a way of enabling them to make their own evaluations of the research enterprise.

The critique of narrative inquiry also calls attention to the problems inherent in experimenting with written reports that cross boundaries traditionally thought to separate

academic texts from texts that inhabit the more mundane world in which we all live. That there is currently no agreement on what constitutes the legitimacy of narrative texts is part of the larger debate surrounding the notion of truth as both tension and movement. Nowhere is this debate more evident than in our own field. In literacy research, the criteria used in establishing truth claims for narratives are numerous, ranging from those that refuse to endorse any single interpretation of the data to those that seek convergence, if not consensus (Alvermann & Hruby, 2000).

Opening up research agendas in literacy education to include alternative forms of data representation and report writing typically associated with narrative inquiry can increase the variety of questions we ask about reading and writing as processes and about literacy instruction in general. As Eisner (1997) has pointed out, agendas open to new forms of representation potentially hold promise for developing a field's awareness in ways that may lead to new ways of thinking. But with this opening up comes a need to avoid substituting creativity and cleverness for substance. In Eisner's (1997) words, "We need to be our own toughest critics" (p. 9). This advice seems sound if the goal is to experiment with less technical forms of academic writing but not at the expense of methodological rigor.

Practice

To whom do we tell our stories as literacy researchers engaged in narrative inquiry? More often than not, these stories are shared professionally with a relatively small group of like-minded peers. As Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) has reminded us in her introduction to The Art and Science of Portraiture, rarely does the work produced in the academy reach beyond its walls:

Academicians tend to speak to one another in a language that is often opaque and esoteric. Rarely do the analyses and texts we produce invite dialogue with people in the 'real world.' Instead, academic documents--even those that focus on issues of broad public concern--are read by a small audience of people in the same disciplinary field, who often share similar conceptual frameworks and rhetoric.

(pp. 9-10)

This picture of academic writing would seem to be changing, however. A growing number of scholars working within the realm of narrative inquiry have begun to argue forcefully for reaching out to audiences beyond one's academic peer group. For instance, Tierney (1997) has pressed for an openness in narrative writing that will enable others to exercise greater awareness of the debates that rage in the academic community. He also has pushed for dissertation committees to consider experimental fiction as a viable form of doctoral research. Polkinghorne (1997), too, has called for more experimentation with narrative formats, speculating that "by changing their voice to storyteller, researchers will also change the way in which the voices of their 'subjects' or participants can be heard" (p. 3). This change has implications, in turn, for what those outside the academic community "hear" and value or reject in literacy research.

Of considerable importance is the potential for narrative inquiry to renew and regulate our ways of ordering and naming literacy practices at all levels of instruction. This renewal process could conceivably provide a framework through which we might act as we go about our work in search of different story lines for literacy research. Narrative inquiry that is grounded in the everyday world of literacy teaching and learning could provide entry into that world. Stories of how local knowledge of literacy conditions can

help shape policy decisions are few and far between; however, where they do exist (e.g., Quint, 1996), they signal the collapse of boundaries once thought to separate the research community from the world of practice--the knower from the known.

In the wake of this collapse, at least two additional questions have surfaced that have implications for the field of practice. First is the question of whether or not a level of discourse can be found that encourages communication between researchers and practitioners in literacy education. A second question asks what impact narrative research is having on classroom literacy practices. To some degree, the difficulty in answering these questions lies with literacy researchers' partial, as opposed to full, specification of the educational phenomena that they observe. More generally, however, the difficulty seems to stem from the literacy community's disinclination (or inability) to set a collective research agenda (Mosenthal, 1993). In the end, the situation is made even more complex by the current critique of narrative inquiry that challenges the authority of the author-storyteller-researcher.

References

- Alvermann, D. E., & Hruby, G. G. (2000). Mentoring and reporting research: A concern for aesthetics. Reading Research Quarterly, 35, 46-63.
- Au, K. H. (1997). Schooling, literacy, and cultural diversity in research and personal experience. In A. Neumann & P. L. Peterson (Eds.), (1997). Women, research, and autobiography in education (pp. 71-90). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Bruner, J. (1986). Actual minds, possible worlds. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Carter, K. (1993). The place of story in the study of teaching and teacher education. Educational Researcher, 22(1), 5-18.
- Casey, K. (1995). The new narrative research in education. Review of Research in Education, 21, 211-253.
- Cixous, H., & Calle-Gruber, M. (1997). Helene Cixous rootprints: Memory and life writing. London: Routledge.
- Cizek, G. J. (1995). Crunchy granola and the hegemony of the narrative. Educational Researcher, 24(2), 26-28.
- Clifford, J. . & Marcus, G. E. (Eds.). (1986). Writing culture. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Constas, M. A. (1998). The changing nature of educational research and a critique of postmodernism. Educational Researcher, 27(2), 26-33.
- Cortazzi, M. (1993). Narrative analysis. London: Falmer.

de la Luna, L., & Kamberelis, G. (1997). Refracted discourses/disrupted practices: Possibilities and challenges of collaborative action research in classrooms. In C. K. Kinzer, K. A. Hinchman, & D. J. Leu (Eds.), Inquiries in literacy theory and practice (46th Yearbook of the National Reading Conference, pp. 213-228). Chicago, IL: National Reading Conference.

Denzin, N. (1989). Interpretive biography. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Denzin, N. (1994). Evaluating qualitative research in the poststructural moment: The lessons James Joyce teaches us. Qualitative Studies in Education, 7, 295-308.

Denzin, N. (1997). Interpretive ethnography. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Derrida, J. (1976). Of grammatology. (G. C. Spivak, Trans.). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Eisner, E. W. (1997). The promise and perils of alternative forms of data representation. Educational Researcher, 26(6), 4-10.

Emihovich, C. (1995). Distancing passion: Narratives in social science. International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 8, 37-48.

Featherstone, J. (1989). To make the wounded whole. Harvard Educational Review, 59, 367-378.

Fenstermacher, G. D. (1994). Argument: A response to "Pedagogy, virtue, and narrative identity in teaching." Curriculum Inquiry, 24, 215-220.

Fitzgerald, J., & Noblit, G. (1999). About hopes, aspirations, and uncertainty: First-grade English-language learners' emergent reading. Journal of Literacy Research, 31, 133-182.

Geertz, C. (1973). The interpretation of cultures. New York: Basic Books.

Geertz, C. (1980). Blurred genres. American Scholar, 49, 165-179.

Geertz, C. (1983). Local knowledge: Further essays in interpretive anthropology. New York: Basic Books.

Gilbert, P. (1993). Narrative as gendered social practice: In search of different story lines for language research. Linguistics and Education, 5, 211-218.

Grumet, M. (1987). The politics of personal knowledge. Curriculum Inquiry, 17, 319-329.

Haraway, D. J. (1991). Simians, cyborgs, and women. New York: Routledge.

hooks, b. (1991). Narratives of struggle. In P. Mariani (Ed.), Critical fictions: The politics of imaginative writing (pp. 53-61). Seattle, WA: Bay.

Jansen, G., & Peshkin, A. (1992). Subjectivity in qualitative research. In M. D. LeCompte, W. L. Millroy, & J. Preissle (Eds.), The handbook of qualitative research in education (pp. 681-725). New York: Academic Press.

Kauffman, L. S. (1993). The long goodbye: Against personal testimony, or an infant grifter grows up. In G. Greene & C. Kahn (Eds.), Changing subjects: The making of feminist literary criticism (pp. 129-146). London, UK: Routledge.

Lather, P., & Smithies, C. (1997). Troubling the angels: Women living with HIV/AIDS. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (1997). A view of the whole: Origins and purposes. In S. Lawrence-Lightfoot & J. H. Davis, The art and science of portraiture (pp. 1-16). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Lawrence-Lightfoot, S., & Davis, J. H. (1997). The art and science of portraiture. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lenzo, K. (1995). Validity and self-reflexivity meet poststructuralism: Scientific ethos and the transgressive self. Educational Researcher, 24(4), 17-23, 45.

Manning, P. K. (1987). Semiotics and fieldwork. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Manning, P. K., & Cullum-Swan, B. (1994). Narrative, content, and semiotic analysis. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of qualitative research (pp. 463-477). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Marcus, G. E. (1994). What comes (just) after "post"? In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of qualitative research (pp. 563-574). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mosenthal, P. B. (1993). Understanding agenda setting in reading research. In A. P. Sweet & J. I. Anderson (Eds.), Reading research into the year 2000 (pp. 115-128). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Neilsen, L. (1998). Playing for real: Performative texts and adolescent identities. In D. E. Alvermann, K. A. Hinchman, D. W. Moore, S. F. Phelps, & D. R. Waff (Eds.), Reconceptualizing the literacies in adolescents' lives (pp. 3-26). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Nespor, J., & Barber, L. (1995). Audience and the politics of narrative. Qualitative Studies in Education, 8, 49-62.

Neumann, A., & Peterson, P. L. (1997). Learning from our lives: Women, research, and autobiography in education. New York: Teachers College Press.

Paget, M. A. (1995). Performing the text. In J. Van Maanen (Ed.), Representation in ethnography (pp. 222-244). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pinar, W. F. (1976a). Introduction. In W. F. Pinar & M. R. Grumet, Toward a poor curriculum (pp. iii-viii). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

Pinar, W. F. (1976b). The method. In W. F. Pinar & M. R. Grumet, Toward a poor curriculum (pp. 51-65). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

Pinar, W. F. (1988). "Whole, bright, deep with understanding": Issues in qualitative research and autobiographical method. In W. Pinar (Ed.), Contemporary curriculum discourses (pp. 134-153). Scottsdale, AZ: Gorsuch Scarisbrick.

Pinar, W. F., & Grumet, M. R. (1976). Toward a poor curriculum. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1988). Narrative knowing and the human sciences. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1997). Reporting qualitative research as practice. In W. G. Tierney & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), Representation and the text: Re-framing the narrative voice (pp. 3-21). Albany: State University of New York Press.

Pratt, M. L. (1986). Fieldwork in common places. In J. Clifford & G. E. Marcus (Eds.), Writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography (pp. 27-50). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Quint, S. (1996). "'Cause you talkin' about a whole person": A new path for schooling and literacy in troubled times and spaces. Journal of Literacy Research, 28, 310-319.

Richardson, L. (1993). Poetics, dramatics, and transgressive validity: The case of the skipped line. Sociological Quarterly, 35, 695-710.

- Richardson, L. (1997). Fields of play: Constructing an academic life. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Riessman, C. K. (1993). Narrative analysis. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Scheurich, J. J. (1995). A postmodernist critique of research interviewing. International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 8, 239-252.
- Smith, J. K. (1997). The stories educational researchers tell about themselves. Educational Researcher, 26(5), 4-11.
- Tierney, W. G. (1997). Lost in translation: Time and voice in qualitative research. In W. G. Tierney & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), Representation and the text: Re-framing the narrative voice (pp. 23-36). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Welty, E. (1983). One writer's beginnings. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wolf, M. (1990). The woman who didn't become a shaman. American Ethnologist, 17, 419-430.
- Wolf, M. (1992). A thrice-told tale. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.