

Problematizing Complexities and Pedagogy in Teacher Education Programs: Enacting Knowledge in a Narrative Inquiry Teacher Education Discourse Community

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Abstract

This article describes how a cross-Canada cohort of teacher educators identified the benefits of participating in a *narrative inquiry teacher education discourse community*. The community enables conscious dialogue regarding the legitimacy of teacher knowledge, identification of personal and professional issues within educational contexts, and connections between local issues and global trends. Three themes are explored: (1) development of a non-hierarchical community, (2) unravelling of complexities in light of external pressures, and (3) personal ethical responses to current challenges. Teacher educator knowledge is deepened by providing a relational venue to attend to educational reform and programmatic complexity by grounding practices in collaborative experience.

Keywords: discourse community, teacher knowledge community, trustworthy spaces, pedagogical practices, collaborative experience, narrative inquiry

Résumé

Cet article décrit en quels termes une cohorte pancanadienne de professeurs de pédagogie décrit les avantages de participer à une *communauté discursive axée sur la formation à l'enseignement par l'analyse narrative*. La communauté permet un dialogue profond sur la légitimité des connaissances des enseignants, sur l'identification de problèmes professionnels et personnels dans des contextes pédagogiques et sur les liens entre les enjeux locaux et les tendances mondiales. Trois thèmes sont explorés : (1) le développement d'une communauté non hiérarchique, (2) le décryptage de questions complexes à la lumière de pressions extérieures et (3) les réponses éthiques personnelle aux défis actuels. Les connaissances des responsables de la formation à l'enseignement s'approfondissent grâce à l'accès à un espace relationnel où on peut s'attaquer aux réformes pédagogiques et à la complexité des programmes en fondant les pratiques sur des expériences collaboratives.

Mots-clés : communauté discursive, communauté axée sur les connaissances des enseignants, espaces dignes de confiance, pratiques pédagogiques, expérience collaborative, analyse narrative

Introduction

As teacher educators cope in an increasingly complex world, in a rapidly shifting society, in an information age of new pressures, and in a climate of accountability, the question of how to make teacher education better is a complex one. The question requires in-depth and long-term deliberation that represents diverse voices from the field. This article reports on the creation of a cross-Canada *narrative inquiry teacher education discourse community*, in which members have been continuously engaged since the inception of the community five years ago. The purpose of our work is grounded in how we attend to and problematize complexities in regard to various external pressures. Our approach to these complexities play out in three ways: (1) individually, (2) as a faculty within our specific contexts, and (3) as a profession, and collectively as a teacher education community. As we think about teacher education, various areas provide focus for our discourse community: enabling conscious dialogue regarding the legitimacy of teacher knowledge, identification of personal and professional issues within education contexts, and recognition of connections between local issues and global trends. Three questions over the years have continued to guide our narrative inquiry teacher education discourse community: How is knowledge building supported in community? How can we do teacher education better? What do we learn from one another as we talk about our differing responses to events precipitated by external pressures across institutions? Our inquiry illustrates that teacher educator knowledge is deepened and refined within a cross-Canada knowledge community that provides an open and relational venue through which to attend to educational reform and programmatic complexity by grounding practices in collaborative experience.

Canadian literature in the field of teacher education and across some, but not all, provinces makes visible current issues relating to theory-practice integration (Falkenberg, Goodnough, & MacDonald, 2014; Goodnough, Falkenberg, & MacDonald, 2016), teacher education policy (Grimmett, 2009; Walker & von Bergmann, 2013), teacher certification and governance (Grimmett, Young, & Lessard, 2012; Young & Boyd, 2010), and innovations in teacher education (Beck & Kosnik, 2006). In Canada, education is primarily a provincial responsibility. However, over the years there has been a national policy shift in governance across Canada that is characterized by both professionalization and deregulation issues (Grimmett, 2009; Grimmett, Young, & Lessard, 2012). Many teacher education institutions in Canada are restructuring programs (i.e., extended

two-year teacher education programs in Ontario) while coping with an oversupply, underemployment, and high attrition rates of teachers. In our era of globalization, as well as with recent movements toward nationalism across the globe, the need for an extrapolation of trends, curriculum development, and public interest in the teaching profession is important in order to protect and preserve teacher education identity and professionalism. While there is some research on cross-provincial examination and evaluation of various programs (Falkenberg et al., 2014), as well as contextual literature on policy trends across Canada (Young & Boyd, 2010), there is little cross-provincial research in the field that attends specifically to teacher educator professional, identity, and knowledge experiences during a time of large-scale reform in our nation. Our research illuminates the lived experiences of five tenured teacher educators, across three provinces in Canada, whose teacher education programs differ from province to province but whose experiences resonate with a “new set of collaborative relationships that can draw effectively on the strengths of the profession and the university” (Young & Boyd, 2010, p. 16).

In this article, we report on our narrative inquiry teacher education discourse community from the time it was conceived in 2011, up to and including analysis in 2016. We provide the context of the formation of this discourse community, including the limitations and technology stumbles along the way that interfered with the process of discourse across provinces. We then present and illustrate our theoretical framework, derived from our foundational knowledge and respective work using narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and its interconnected relation to teacher education and curriculum making, and with dialogue as a focal intersection. This co-constructed theory frames the rest of the article in regard to how we have presented and reported on our research, for the purpose of illustrating our cross-provincial critical discourse on the state of teacher education reform in Canada. It may be interpreted as one “case” for many readers; however, we, as a collective community, representing multiple teacher education programs, envision our work as the beginning of a national teacher education program of study. In Orland-Barak and Craig’s (2014) words, we imagine that in such a national study “pedagogies would be specifically named by teacher educators...and in their home settings would be presented from an insider point of view” (p. 1). In this manner, our discourse community represents a cross-provincial Canadian perspective, reflecting an integrative model of travelling pedagogies (Craig & Orland-Barak, 2014), through which promising pedagogies have the potential to “travel” to other locales if their conditions of enactment

are locally grounded, deliberated, and elaborated. As a teacher education discourse community, we present our pedagogy as an inquiry.

We ask three recurring questions: How is knowledge building supported in community? How can we do teacher education better? What do we learn from each other as we talk about our differing responses to events precipitated by external pressures across institutions? We analyze our data using narrative inquiry methodology, and we present three themes that describe the results of our participation thus far in our narrative inquiry teacher education discourse community: non-hierarchical discourse builds trust; unraveling complexities enables the problematizing of pressures; and, personal ethical responses fuel pedagogical practices. We attend to these themes through our theoretical framework, with our dialogic knowledge building as the focal pedagogical inquiry approach interwoven by all three concepts: narrative inquiry, curriculum making, and teacher education.

Context

We established the narrative inquiry teacher education discourse community in 2011, when Darlene Ciuffetelli Parker and Debbie Pushor launched their published and co-edited book at a selected symposium of the Narrative Research Special Interest Group at the American Education Research Association in New Orleans. The book, entitled *Narrative Inquiries into Curriculum Making in Teacher Education* (Kitchen, Ciuffetelli Parker, & Pushor, 2011), was suggested as a focal point to begin an international discourse community by revered narrative inquiry scholar Michael Connelly. Connelly wrote that “this book could be a start for making a narrative inquiry education discourse community” and further suggested that the book be “a centerpiece for a discourse community” (Connelly, 2011, p. xiii), since it offered multiple narrative perspectives of teacher education practices and programs by multiple teacher educators across the globe. Darlene and Debbie enacted a discourse community during the symposium by inviting the audience members into the conversation. Ciuffetelli Parker and Pushor (2014) wrote a reflection on that earlier process, which occurred at the book launch:

We have at times lived against the grain to understand fully the storied experiences amongst us all, the landscape from where we came, the stories we live by, our respective identities. We also echoed one another’s experiences along the way...

Through this shared experience we came to better understand the context we live, the reverberations of our narratives, the call of our stories, and the many options to explore in curriculum making in teacher education... [Our writing contributions] call us to attend to what knowledge—and whose knowledge—counts, and why, as we make a curriculum of lives in teacher education. We can think of curriculum reform in a new way: as a curriculum re-formed, curriculum always in the process of being formed and reformed as it is made and remade by particular people in particular relationships and places at particular points of time... (p. 186)

Soon afterward, some funding was secured to create an online international community, which began in the fall of 2011. However, the online community was less successful with its attendance to mutual dialogue than occurred in face-to-face community settings, and it soon was realized that both were necessary to build dialogic knowledge. We were “awakened to a number of complexities in relation to the establishment of an online discourse and what must precede the opportunity to engage in deep discourse” (Ciuffetelli Parker & Pushor, 2014, p. 190). By intentionally creating a community, we discovered that there is greater possibility for richer and deeper dialogue than would occur in other formal settings (Schwier & Balbar, 2002). So began our richer reflection on the process of the creation and sustainability of the narrative inquiry teacher education discourse community.

We first focused our attention on building a safe community using Schwier and Balbar’s (2002) framework and elements of community building for online collaboration and dialogue. It was during this phase, between 2011 and 2013, that Darlene and Debbie delved deeply into reflecting on why the online international site was not “moving smoothly” as anticipated. Helping to propel the discourse group from an international online network to a Canadian national online and face-to-face community was a chapter written by Ciuffetelli Parker and Pushor (2013). Schwier and Balbar’s (2002) work, and the long-established work of other theorists on the topics of dialogue, narrative inquiry, wakefulness, and teacher education knowledge (Bohm, Factor, & Garrett, 1991; Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, 2006; Craig, 2009; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2010), grounded the current success of the narrative inquiry teacher education discourse community. We present theoretical insights in the section that follows to illustrate

how theory—and how we conceptualize our own theories of practice—guides our thinking and overarching question: How can we do teacher education better?

Theoretical Insights

Three concepts underpin the membership and methodology of our narrative inquiry teacher education discourse community: narrative inquiry, curriculum making, and teacher education. We view these as three dimensional in nature, as one affects the other and as they are all interrelated. We see the interrelatedness as a curriculum-making theory, described as follows and illustrated in Figure 1, below.

Narrative Inquiry

Clandinin and Connelly's (1996, 2000) and Connelly and Clandinin's (1988, 2006) seminal works in narrative inquiry methodology led and foregrounded further the importance of John Dewey's (1938) theory of experience in education as a means through which educators develop personal, practical knowledge of students and their work in teaching by storying their experiences of teacher and teacher education practices. Narrative inquiry, as a research methodology for understanding experience as lived and as expressed through personal, professional, and knowledgeable stories of practice, is a fundamental means to inquire deeply into complexities and pedagogies of teacher education programs and teacher education knowledge. Continued scholarship in the area of narrative inquiry is central to the discourse of teacher education in Canada. This is evident in the writings of Clandinin, Lessard, and Caine (2012), Clandinin, Schaefer, and Downey (2014), and Clandinin, Long, Schaefer, Downey, Steeves, Pinnegar et al. (2015). This scholarly work in narrative inquiry is important now, more than ever, when teacher education programs are undergoing reforms nationwide. There is a danger in such reforms:

The prevalent, politically charged conception of knowledge for teaching is that of a codified script detailing what teachers must know and do. In that technical rationalist view, knowledge is a possession dictated, controlled, and tested by others. In stark contrast to this publically understood view stands...a narrative

understanding of teacher knowledge based on meaning constructed over time [and through lived experiences]. (Craig, 2011, p. 22)

Our narrative inquiry teacher education discourse community offers combined teacher educator knowledge of pedagogy and programming across three provinces in Canada—Ontario, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia—paying attention to the lived experiential knowledge base of each member rather than a “codified script” that describes “must dos and don’ts” of curriculum content and criteria. In this era of teacher education reform, a lived narrative, rather than a reductionist representation of experience, is important as it is an example and a demonstration of reform-in-action.

Curriculum Making

It stands to reason that, if curriculum continues to be seen in a technical rationalist view, it often gets and remains understood and taken up as a mandated course of study to be taught and learned, and nothing else. In contrast, our narrative inquiry teacher education discourse community takes up Connelly and Clandinin’s (1988) notion of curriculum as “one’s life course of action” (p. 1) and Dewey’s (1938) belief that curriculum is not just a course, but a course of life in process, ever evolving and ever learning alongside others, situations, and new experiences. In this manner, and as a group with prior experience as narrative inquirers, we believe unreservedly that curriculum is made alongside students and that curriculum is made through the intertwining of the teacher educator’s life course of action with his/her students’ life courses of action. Teacher education curriculum can thus be understood as a *curriculum of lives*; that is, the life of the curriculum is made up of the experiences of several individuals living in relation to one another (Downey & Clandinin, 2010; Huber & Clandinin, 2005) who are affirming, co-constructing, and expanding their teacher knowledge through carefully planned and scaffolded experiences (Ciuffetelli Parker & Pushor, 2014). In our discourse community, then, we too are living curriculum alongside one another, and therefore our *curriculum of lives* co-constructs and expands how we problematize complexities and reshape pedagogy via our intertwined lived curriculum in our narrative inquiry teacher education discourse community.

Teacher Education

Exceptional teacher education programs are those that guide students to confront deep-seated assumptions, beliefs, and stereotypes about the world in order to learn about the experiences of different people in our diverse 21st century world (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Examples of teacher education methods and strategies to address such critical social justice components in our society today are methods such as self-reflection, autobiographical writing, and writing that interrogates the personal, practical, and professional experiences of students in teacher education programs. We can say, then, that a narrative approach to teacher education is consistent with goal-oriented practices in teacher education (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Thus, our narrative inquiry teacher education discourse community interrogates our own personal, practical, lived experiences alongside our students as we problematize the complexities of our programs and how we view pedagogy in the current climate and educational conditions in Canada, and beyond. We are in relation, in discourse, and in community as we unravel the tensions in our teacher education programs, committed to discussing enhancements to teacher education nationally, via narrative storied practices of curriculum making in teacher education.

Bringing together the conceptualizations of narrative inquiry, curriculum making, and teacher education, our purpose as a narrative inquiry teacher education discourse community is to be “wakeful” (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2010), attending to one another’s authentic, nuanced, and rich narrative accounts of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) as teacher educators during a critical and problematic moment in time in the existing teacher education landscape. Craig (2011) warns the field that we need now more than ever to attend to “the absence of research attention paid to how prospective teachers are prepared as curriculum makers in teacher education settings and how this nurturing could productively continue throughout the sweep of their careers” (p. 34).

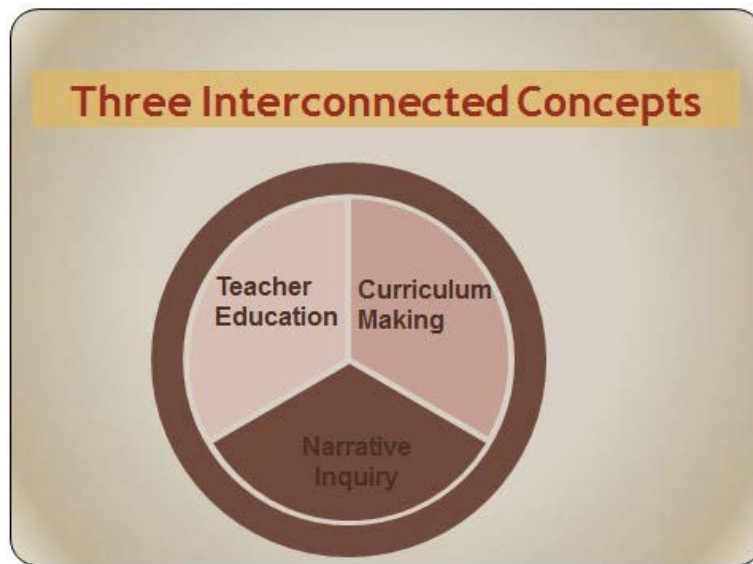


Figure 1. Three interconnected concepts of the narrative inquiry teacher education discourse community are three dimensional in nature

Dialogue and Dialogic Knowledge as a Pedagogical Inquiry Approach

In the case of our narrative inquiry teacher education discourse community, dialogue is critical to community building and dialogic knowledge building. Listening is a key factor in our community and, as Bohm, Factor, and Garrett (1991) suggest, it is an opportunity for a group of people to participate in a critical process that allows for thought, reflection, deeper meaning, and communication where there is no hierarchy and no place for the control of any member or a particular right solution. As Ciuffetelli Parker (2008) suggests of dialogue, “The underlying success [is] that the dialogue of all members of the group [is] respected” (n.p.). In this sense, we take up the notion of, and are inspired by, theorists who have come before us who believe in authentic knowledge communities.

Following Bohm et al.’s (1991) notion of dialogue, we are attuned to German researcher Weigand’s (2008, 2010) body of scholarship on dialogue in action. She uses the Italian phrase *un gioco misto*, which translates as the art of dialogue that builds community as a “mixed game,” where the interplay (*gioco*/game) of dialogue is seen as *misto* (combined, tossed, gathered together). We use our notion from Weigand’s work and interpret a combined communal interplay of dialogue as a way to define within our

community the dilemmas and complexities that are processed and conceptualized as narrative discourse. Our narrative inquiry and dialogic knowledge building is a pedagogical approach, and as Weigand (2010) writes, her dialogic principle is based on reciprocal action and can be seen in our view as pedagogy in action:

This is precisely what human beings normally do... They inevitably reflect upon and take a position regarding what has been said. Dialogue is therefore constituted by the interactive purpose of *coming to an understanding* which is based on the sequence of action and reaction. (p. 80)

Craig and Olson (2002) theorize that an authentic knowledge community is a “safe storytelling place where educators narrate the rawness of their experiences, negotiate meaning, and authorize their own and others’ interpretations of situations” (p. 116). Like Weigand’s work, the seminal works of Craig’s (1995, 2009) authentic knowledge communities and Olson’s (1995) notion of narrative authority give testament to narrative as negotiated, as it is “made manifest in relationships with others...[narrative] authority [arises] from experiences...as each person shapes his or her own knowledge and is shaped by the knowledge of others” (Olson & Craig, 2001, p. 670). Our knowledge and pedagogical approach to dialogue continues to take shape in this manner, with other narrative theorists who have written about the process of knowledge building as relational.

Conle’s (1996) work on narrative resonance, much like Weigand’s interplay of communication, takes into consideration “dynamic, complex, [and] metaphorical relations” (p. 313). In Conle’s work, she relays the metaphorical notion of reverberations and the sound of echoes, where one person’s dialogic rhythm brings forth ideas, new insights, and revealed and reformed knowledge construction, which intersect with another member’s dialogic rhythm, and so the pattern continues.

What we have learned, in studying the theorists named above and incorporating their principles into our own reflections of dialogue as communal, relational, and reciprocal, is that *dialogic knowledge building* has become the focal point and centrepiece of our own discourse group. Our pedagogical approach to dialogic knowledge building lies at the centre of our three interconnected concepts of teacher education, curriculum making, and narrative inquiry (see Figure 2).

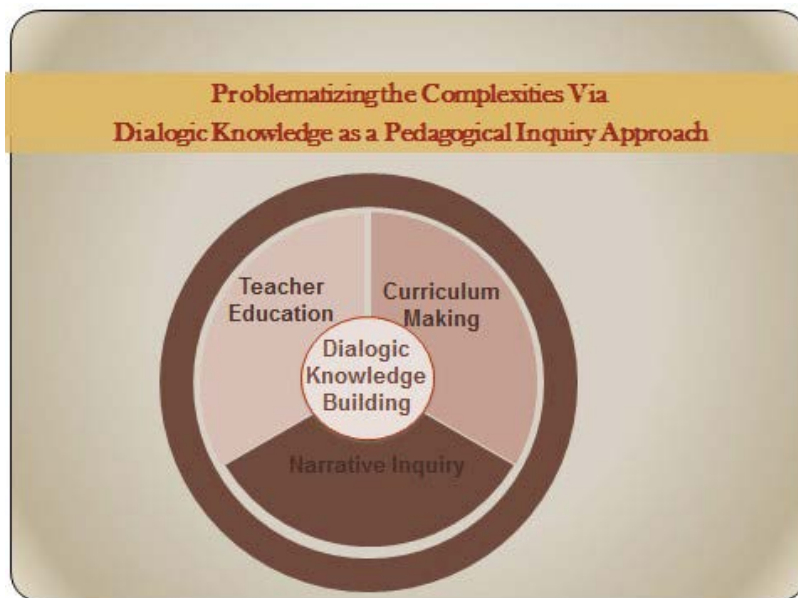


Figure 2. Dialogic knowledge building is the focal pedagogical inquiry approach that is interwoven by all three concepts to problematize complexities in order to enact knowledge

As scholars, we have drawn on our methodological work in narrative inquiry (Connelly, 2011; Craig, 2011) to form a collective narrative group. As time passed, we came to realize that our combined communal interplay is most effective in face-to-face interactions, in safe comfortable places, and without time restraints, especially when we organize our discourse community as day-long think tanks or collaborative meetings. We continue to share core beliefs on programmatic issues with the openness needed for a dialogic approach to teacher education (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007) and, in particular, within the safety of a knowledge community (Craig, 2009). This article demonstrates the effects of the narrative inquiry teacher education discourse community over the last two years.

Methods

Plans for our community dialogue began in 2012 with the work of Ciuffetelli Parker and Pushor (2014), who developed a website and invited the three other authors, as well as other teacher educators, to join an online narrative inquiry discourse community. In their

2014 book chapter, they describe how response to the online community invitation was minimal. Reflecting on the process, Darlene and Debbie determined that having more face-to-face interaction was important for building relationships and trust. In the months leading up to the 2014 annual conference of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) at Brock University, Darlene and Debbie invited Shelley, Jennifer, and Anne to attend a gathering on May 26, 2014, at the home of Shelley to talk informally, begin to develop our social network, and engage in dialogue about the wonders, challenges, and tensions in each of our teacher education contexts across Canada. This gathering resulted in significant relationship building and a recorded and transcribed conversation, in which we talked at length about some of the events taking place at each of our institutions in relation to teacher education programs, our responses to these, our questions and concerns about them, as well as common threads across provinces and institutions. We met again on June 2, 2015, during the annual conference of CSSE at the University of Ottawa, sharing a meal and building community while delving into issues in teacher education both at our own institutions and at a national level. This conversation was also recorded and transcribed. In the year between the 2014 and 2015 gatherings, we used email and Skype calls as a means to keep in touch, to plan for a 2015 conference presentation at CSSE, and for writing this article. After the 2015 conference presentation, which was well attended and garnered interest from several conference attendees, we decided to develop a presentation for the 2016 CSSE conference at the University of Calgary and to finish our article for submission to a journal for publication. During the 2015–16 academic year, we again used email and Skype to continue our talks and keep our community moving ahead. The writing projects in which we were engaged gave us a focus, while our continually developing relationships helped our sense of community grow among us.

Three Questions that Guide Our Thinking

Three questions provide a focus for our face-to-face and online discussions. They are:

1. How is knowledge building supported in community?
2. How can we do teacher education better?
3. What do we learn from one another as we talk about our differing responses to events precipitated by external pressures across institutions?

These questions remind us of the purpose of our narrative inquiry teacher education discourse community as we consider the tensions and wonders arising from each of our contexts in an era of teacher reform across Canada and beyond.

The Authors'/Narrative Inquiry Teacher Education Discourse Community Participants

Relationships have been foundational to developing our narrative inquiry teacher education discourse community. Although all participants are teacher educators and knew each other slightly, some more than others, we had not come together as a group before May, 2014, when we met at the home of Shelley. Over the two years from spring 2014 to spring 2016, we came to know one another better, and developed our discourse community based upon this deeper knowing. Darlene, Shelley, and our research assistant from Brock University in Ontario provide perspectives from that province; Debbie from the University of Saskatchewan brought another Canadian lens to our community; Jennifer and Anne from St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia contribute their perceptions from another part of Canada. Larger and smaller universities are represented in our discourse community, as is a variety of subject-area expertise, ranging from literacy and music to parent knowledge, to working with children, youth, and families living in poverty.

Data Sources and Data Analysis

Data sources used in the writing of this paper include field texts drawn from notes on interpretations, reflections, and conceptual findings during online communications and in-person meetings. As described above, our two face-to-face conversations on May 26, 2014, and June 2, 2015, were recorded and transcribed and serve as further data for our analyses.

The process of data analysis involved inductively analyzing field text as we read and re-read the data (Merriam, 2009). Each author noted themes she saw emerging across transcripts and other field texts. After discussing these initial themes, we narrowed their number, as we did not have enough data on some of these initial themes to support their inclusion in our findings. During our analysis process, we began to think about moments

of narrative resonance (Conle, 1996) as a way for us to think about how our stories overlapped, reverberated, and were interwoven. We also began to pay attention to areas where our stories did not align, where they intersected or bumped up against one another. Importantly, we drew upon the notion of “relational reverberations” (Craig & Huber, 2007, p. 263) as we began to think about how our stories impacted one another. In our analysis, we also attended to the aspect of truth-telling, and how we might project ourselves, as participants, into the future. The work of Craig and Huber (2007) helped us to think more clearly about these complexities:

Because of the relational reverberations that shape our narrative inquiries and who we are becoming as narrative inquirers, we frequently are able to work our way through challenges by not drawing on field texts that might create present or future trouble for participants or ourselves or be potentially litigious. (p. 272)

While carrying these notions of resonance, truth-telling, and relational reverberations forward, we determined there were three themes for which evidence recurred repeatedly. These themes will be described in the following section.

Findings: Issues Affecting Teacher Educators Across Differing Contexts. Within the storied conversation of our group, the importance of context soon became evident, taking us quickly into ways of knowing that were “both personally authored and socially shared” (Barak, Gidron, & Turniansky, 2010, p. 278). The knowledge landscape we have begun to map in our discourse community building has focused on three interrelated themes connected with current issues in teacher education: (1) non-hierarchical discourse builds trust; (2) in unravelling complexities, we are able to problematize pressures; and (3) personal ethical responses fuel pedagogical practices, within the constraints of our institutions and outside contexts.

Non-Hierarchical Discourse Builds Trust

During the second gathering of our narrative discourse community in Ottawa on June 2, 2015, Anne noted the growth in the sense of community she felt over time:

I am just so struck by the impact of just hanging in over time and just the difference between, you know, in year one when we signed on to the online website,

and year two when we got together at Shelley's great place and how that made such a difference... Like, okay, now I can imagine this discourse community... and then this year it's coming up to a whole other level of feeling like this is a community. (Anne, June 2, 2015)

Anne found that relationships within the discourse community were developing, enabling her to feel a sense of safety to take risks and share burning issues within the group. Anne's comment reflects Weigand's (2008, 2010) conception of dialogue in action, or *un gioco misto*. The pedagogical approach of dialogic knowledge building in our discourse community over time resulted in the progression toward an authentic knowledge community (Craig & Olson, 2002). Approaching this community building from a narrative approach reminded us of the importance of time as a crucial element embedded in the process.

Shelley, who joined the Ottawa conversation by Skype, took notes while we talked that day. Based upon Anne's conversation, Shelley jotted some key phrases from the ensuing discussion. She took photos of her notes (Figure 3), which highlighted the importance of the following concepts:

- Hanging in over time
- Emotional turning points
- Bravery
- Trust
- Creating a safe space
- Paying attention to response
- Responding to external pressures

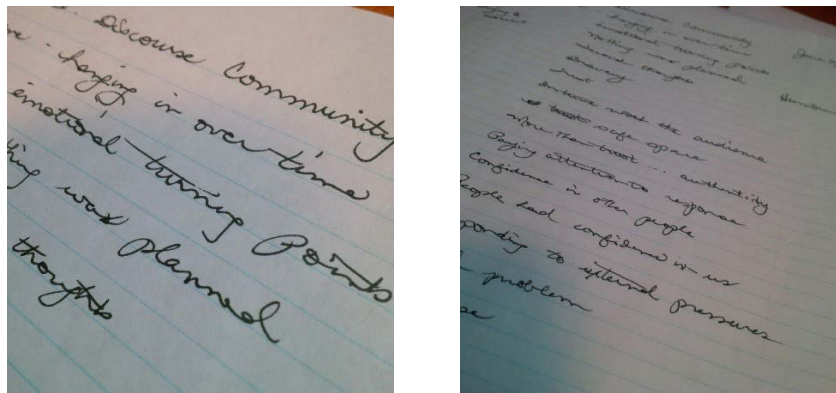


Figure 3. Shelley's notes during June 2, 2015 conversation, in which she joined via Skype

After the 2015 Ottawa conversation, Shelley continued to think about the conversation and several months later wrote the following field text, using the metaphor of a plant in her kitchen window (Figure 4) to consider the evolution of the narrative inquiry discourse community.



Figure 4. Shelley's plant

As I think about “the notion of hanging on to narrative inquiry, I am reminded that what brought us together was *narrative inquiry* as the roots of our foundation. I was drawn to think, metaphorically, about our relationship to narrative inquiry

theory and method, as I look at the plant that Deb and Darlene brought to me the day I hosted the get-together in May 2014. I think of you all each time I water it, and I am sharing an image of the plant with you today that I took this morning near the kitchen window, on November 17, 2015. The interesting thing with watching a plant grow is that you do not really know how it is going to grow or in which direction it will grow. Yet you hope that by caring for it, it will grow! I find it fascinating that part of the plant is growing upward. To me, this represents the roots of our narrative thinking. This is an aspect of our community that we all share. Yet there is this unpredictable, almost asymmetrical portion of the plant that is growing out sideways in various shapes. Both of the plants are growing from the same roots, yet they are growing independently. The unpredictable portion of the plant represents, to me, each of us in the community, growing in different ways, allowing our vulnerability to be present and be shaped alongside the roots. What has helped us to hang in with the discourse community is the notion of hanging on to narrative inquiry while bringing our own experiences, vulnerabilities, fears, and others ways of thinking into the community. (Field text, Shelley, November 17, 2015)

Shelley's description of the growth of our community, unpredictable and unique like her plant, reflects the power of the non-hierarchical approach of this group, honouring the development of a *curriculum of lives* (Huber & Clandinin, 2005) in which we are engaged. Shelley's use of the plant metaphor might be understood as an example of Conle's (1996) narrative resonance, with Anne's words about the growth of the discourse community over time reverberating within Shelley as she then built upon and extended this idea, added her own insights and constructed further knowledge in relation to and resonant with Anne's thoughts. The *curriculum of lives* approach we endeavour to enact helps us begin to problematize complexities and reshape pedagogies via our intertwined lived curriculum, as the following sections explain.

Unravelling Complexities to Problematize Pressures

So, as a collective, our little group here...that bigger question is, "How is it informing teacher education? How do we make it better?"... I think by unravelling

the complexities, [we] might come up with some more complexities, but we might come up with some answers. (Debbie, May 26, 2014)

Teacher educators are often situated in precarious positions in relation to pressures imposed from above and outside of their teacher education contexts, with changing political and social priorities creating new policies that greatly affect teacher education programs across Canada and beyond. Teacher educators must work with and respond to the changes brought about by such reform policies, and in our discourse community we found considerations about our responses to be a source of much deliberation and concern. For example, Debbie, the speaker of the opening quote in this section, is an experienced teacher educator and researcher with knowledge of the differences informing our teacher education programs. In that moment, Debbie asked the group to consider how the differences of our programs, and their associated complexities, might enable us to better understand the kinds of challenges each of us were experiencing in small to large teacher education programs.

We draw upon Noddings's (2009) description of the difference between accountability and responsibility to begin to illustrate what we have observed about our varied responses to such external pressures. Noddings describes accountability as causing "us to answer to authorities for what we have accomplished or failed to accomplish; it points upward in the chain of power" (p. 17). In contrast to accountability, "responsibility points downward in the power chain; it asks us to respond to the legitimate needs of those placed in our care" (p. 17), in this case, teacher candidates and graduate students. We are drawn to the vital need for responsible action in support of our students, as this section will describe. However, it became evident in our group that imagining responses to external pressures that enable us to live between accountability and responsibility is a source of tension. Being able to share expressions of felt tensions in each of our university and provincial contexts, to "narrate the rawness of [our] experiences, negotiate meaning, and authorize...interpretations of situations" (Craig & Olson, 2002, p. 116) through dialogue with one another, enabled each of us to gain a sense of narrative authority (Olson, 1995).

A vivid example of an external pressure articulated by Darlene was a dramatic change that was about to take place in the teacher education model for Ontario in 2014. All pre-service teacher education programs were being changed from one-year to two-year after-degree programs, and some programs were being closed. This decision,

mandated by the government, had huge implications for teacher educators in Ontario, yet Darlene noted that, at times, it was easy to feel on the margins of change:

I feel like I don't have knowledge now of what's coming up the pipeline. My programmatic issue is: How do I fit in now to this new program without having had any sort of input?... I'm reconciling not knowing what the enhanced program will look like and how [my] course will now look like, or be like, or be valued... So, that's a programmatic issue for me right now... What student from high school would want to spend six years becoming a teacher in the landscape of teaching that we have right now in [Ontario]?... In [Ontario], there are no jobs to be had at all. (Darlene, May 26, 2014)

Darlene indicated that she found it challenging to have input into how this policy directive would be enacted, and what the resulting changes in her program would entail. Additionally, she noted she had concerns that students would be discouraged from entering the teaching profession with the extra year of study to be added. Her sense of responsibility to students can be seen in this comment, as Darlene wondered about the impact of the policy change on potential teacher candidates. Darlene described a sense of a lack of agency and frustration, emanating from the level of top-down governmental decision-making that leaves little room for all faculty in university programs to be involved, as well as from the university's enactment of the change to the two-year program. As this example shows, our narrative inquiry teacher education discourse community found that teacher educator knowledge can feel devalued when policy changes are made. These kinds of concerns were present in our conversations and something that we noted as shaping our lives in different provinces. For example, Jennifer, a teacher educator located in another part of Canada (Nova Scotia), explained that in response to the challenges they were experiencing, particularly the possibility of top-down provincial reforms, she felt the effects of working in a province with a dwindling population:

And again, I think my faculty supports me, but they can only do so much...we work so hard to keep the numbers up in our program because we have a dwindling population problem in our province, not just universities, right across the province. People are leaving and that's an external pressure...and it's unnerving... [Rural] places are becoming ghost towns... (Jennifer, June 2, 2015)

Jennifer's description of the invisible work associated with the need to recruit candidates in innovative ways brought to light for the discourse community another way of seeing how teacher educators might respond to change. In this instance, we note that Jennifer does not seem to be waiting for others to do something about this situation; rather, she emphasizes the importance of faculty members collaborating in ways that sustain programming. The stance of both authors in this example represents a narrative view of our positioning as teacher educators, one that moves us to draw upon our personal, practical lived experiences not only to problematize issues facing teacher education but also to shape response to such issues. A benefit of being part of a discourse community is the possibility of drawing upon the personal, practical lived experiences of others in that community as well, through dialogic knowledge building, in order to strengthen our responses, as the next section describes.

Personal Ethical Responses Fuel Pedagogical Practices

Given that our narrative inquiry teacher education discourse community is composed of five teacher educators working in different provinces and teacher education programs, the diversity of our voices and experiences, as informed by the contextual constraints in which we are respectively located, enabled us to view one another's working conditions with alternative viewpoints. Our conversations were shaped by a dialogic approach to teacher education (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007), in which we attempted to understand the complexities of each other's professional context, particularly the challenges, emerging trends, and nature of our teacher education programs. Inquiring into how our teacher educator knowledge (Kitchen et al., 2011; Craig, 2011) was being shaped by what we were living enabled us to ask questions about how we pedagogically respond to such instances (Ciuffetelli Parker & Pushor, 2014):

Like one of the things that I think would be really cool to do, though, is instead of us focusing [on] content, I've always thought it would be really exciting to have a cohort of teacher candidates come to university and we're responsible for them from day one to convocation, so that we work as a team... You really get to know your students, you—you learn who they are, what they bring as knowledge, what their hopes and dreams are, and then you would teach them courses, you would be out in the schools with them, right? (Pushor, May 26, 2014)

Debbie's description of a collaborative approach when working with teacher candidates brought to light for our discourse community another way of seeing how teacher educators might disrupt typical programming and respond to change. In this instance, we note that Debbie does not seem to be waiting for others to acknowledge her teacher knowledge or that of her colleagues; rather, she emphasizes the importance of making explicit to others how teacher candidates might benefit from a relational approach as embedded within the construct of a teacher education program (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Noddings, 2009).

While we noted the challenge of external pressures, members of our discourse community also described how the support of colleagues enabled both their teaching and research to grow. Peppered throughout our conversation were instances where individuals described moments of informal learning with colleagues. We found these moments to be helpful and, in some cases, to provide turning points for the development of our teacher educator knowledge (Conle, 1996). For example, new colleagues in tenure-track positions who are developing research and teaching agendas benefit from the encouragement and knowledge of more experienced teacher educators:

It's sort of been a passion of mine to understand teacher candidates' experiences with music, both formally and informally... So, based upon this self-study group I was telling you about [with several other faculty members], this is one of the things I was working at in my teaching. I started to work toward...[using visual narratives to help teacher candidates understand how their embodied music experiences shape teacher identity]. I was telling [the group] what I was doing in my course and they were like, "Maybe you should think about getting ethics approval and maybe you could have this as...a research piece?" I was like, "Ohhh?" My mind wasn't even there; I wasn't thinking about it as a research project, but it evolved into this whole thing, which became much bigger. (Shelley, May 26, 2014)

Shelley's comments illustrate how her participation in a self-study group at the university where she had accepted a tenure-track position was pivotal in her decision making around her evolving research agenda. The context of Shelley's position, where the supportive self-study group invited her to join them, was significant in shaping her teacher educator knowledge. Although we did not talk about it that day, each of us is aware of the

importance of such spaces in our lives as teacher educators. We are aware of how important it is to find/create safe places to come together to create knowledge communities (Craig, 2009) where we can work with others who invite us to narrate our experiences, make sense of what was lived, and begin to identify our evolving pedagogies and inquiries that may emerge alongside our teaching. For example, we note Darlene's description of her efforts to involve student participants as active collaborators in her research study:

I'm [working] in a new school setting [and] I have student participants, students [who act] as action researchers. I want them to give us the answers. What are their narratives around [poverty and mental health]? What is their sense of social justice?... I want it to be a school that gives answers about [what] we are looking at...we want to talk about [poverty] and how it affects curriculum. (Darlene, June 2, 2015)

Darlene is now one year into this process and she has found that inviting participants as action researchers seems to have positively informed their own sense of empowerment, particularly in the ways she has observed students beginning their own personal narratives using multimodal practices (Ciuffetelli Parker, 2016). Darlene's story, as shared with the discourse community, highlights the ways teacher educator knowledge is not only shaped by the university contexts in which we live and work, but, as well, by the positive impact it may have upon schools.

Results: Re-Searching Complexities in Our Narrative Discourse Community

In presenting our work as a narrative inquiry teacher education discourse community at academic conferences, we have been asked if what continues to hold us together as a community is our continued research interests. This question is not a surprising one in that it gets to the heart of what is centrally foregrounded in academic life—research intensity and research productivity. Our answer to this question, though, is both a yes and a no. Research is definitely at the heart of our conversation, but it is research in the sense of re-searching—reflecting on the experiences of our academic lives that truly matter to us—that keep us doing what we do, that keep us engaged in work that is rich to us

and rich for our students. Rather than a focus on pushing research agendas forward, measuring numbers of publications and presentations, or seeking awards or recognition, often common destination points for a research journey, our focus is on the journey itself—on our meaning-making, on our developing teacher knowledge, and on having a safe place to be vulnerable and honest about the joys and tensions we experience as teacher educators in academia.

What Seems to Matter

With interest, we note the importance that outlining the theoretical underpinnings informing the discourse community at the outset of our engagement has had for us, particularly the emphasis that we placed upon narrative inquiry, curriculum making, and teacher education. Having a shared understanding of what theoretically was informing our thinking was a critical step in bringing together a community of like-minded individuals. We knew as we came together that we spoke the same language, had read the work of many of the same theorists, and that we would have the opportunity to build our dialogue out of common conceptualizations.

We soon learned, though, that sharing this common theoretical foundation was not enough in and of itself. Our initial efforts to establish our narrative inquiry teacher education discourse community online were not met with success. It was only when we gathered face-to-face in an intimate setting, which was both private and relational, that we began to build the trust necessary to be honest and vulnerable with one another. It was in this environment that we developed a space, so rare in academia with its pressures around promotion and tenure, where we could authentically and openly explore the individual and collective tensions we felt in our work as teacher educators.

What became significant to all of us in these explorations was that we moved beyond naming and unpacking our tensions to imagining new possibilities for our work within the complexities of each of our specific university contexts and, further, as a teacher education community more globally. Our emphasis on dialogue as a pedagogical inquiry approach to inform our teacher knowledge construction enabled us to examine *our reactions* to internal and external pressures in order *to act* in ways aligned with our understanding of ourselves as curriculum makers in teacher education and *to enact*

programmatic decisions in personal and ethical ways within the constraints of our institutions and broader educational landscapes.

It is definite that, for all of us, our teacher educator knowledge has deepened and been refined within our narrative inquiry teacher education discourse community. As we noted earlier, we are drawn to the vital need for “responsible” action in support of our students in the face of many forms of accountability, and we are more apt to enact such responsibility having had the opportunity to imagine and rehearse these responsible actions in the intellectually freeing and safe space of our discourse community. We have found that we are better able to attend to educational reform and programmatic complexity when we ground our individual practices in collaborative experience.

What Continues to Excite Us

For each of us, as individual members of the narrative inquiry teacher education discourse community, we have found value in a space in which we are free to express ourselves honestly and openly without fear of consequence, judgement, or competition for resources, rewards, or recognition. Away from the hierarchy, bureaucratic processes, and formal structures associated with university governance, we sit together, each with stories of experience to tell, tensions to explore, and, as the dialogue unfolds, with a growing sense of narrative authority as we see or construct possibilities that hold value for our—or others’—teacher education contexts. In the novel *The Mapmaker’s War*, a character, speaking of his village, states, “We wish to live in a place where each person feels valued and loved. Whatever gifts each has are respected and brought to bear” (Domingue, 2013, p. 112). That gifts are respected and brought to bear is the intention of our discourse community—that our professional teacher education knowledge is shared and received as valid and valuable, that when laid alongside the knowledge of others it is deepened and enriched, that our courage and conviction to construct a curriculum of lives with our students is renewed and reinforced.

With trust and safety established, we have found value in a space in which pedagogies truly have the potential to travel to other locales (Craig & Orland-Barack, 2014). When we engage in dialogue to unravel a complexity in a specific teacher education context, we learn from individual and shared knowledge and we are able to talk through the conditions of enactment that will enable a pedagogical approach being used in one

locale to be grounded and contextualized successfully in another. As we look to the future of our narrative inquiry teacher education discourse community, we are intrigued by the possibility of a national teacher education research study in which teacher educators from an increased number of provinces are brought into the discourse. Given the breadth and diversity of the country, the uniqueness of each province's context and thus educational system, and an overarching national agenda to address social and human in/equities, it is a critical time to build knowledge, to learn from one another and across boundaries, and to explore collaboratively the challenges and pressures facing teacher educators everywhere.

Closing Thoughts

We have a responsibility as teacher educators to speak up on current issues such as accountability agendas, which take our focus off of critical teacher education discourse that is working to attend to social inequities, contexts of poverty, and the marginalization of individuals on school landscapes. As members of the narrative inquiry teacher education discourse community, what provides us with hope and possibility for the future is our ability to generate knowledge and the courage to enact that knowledge with concern and passion in the work we do. What we have learned, as we have co-constructed a curriculum of lives as teacher educators in a discourse community and as teacher educators with teachers and teacher candidates within our particular contexts, is that we create an opportunity to further develop and extend our narrative authority in ways that are both valuable and valued by those whose lives we touch.

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