


Why Narrative?

 Our starting point for this book is our own inquiry into teaching and teacher knowledge. In the past three decades, we have been positioned in different places and in different story lines on the educational landscape—as teachers, as teacher educators, as university teachers, and as educational researchers. Our questions, our research puzzles, have focused around the broad questions of how individuals teach and learn, of how temporality (placing things in the context of time) connects with change and learning, and of how institutions frame our lives.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we review some of the historical influences that have helped shape our views on our journey to narrative inquiry, beginning with our foremost influence, John Dewey. We discuss contemporary influences—Johnson and Lakoff’s work on embodied metaphors and MacIntyre’s work on narrative unity. We also examine the impact of new forms of inquiry in other fields by reviewing the work of Geertz and Bateson in anthropology, Polkinghorne in psychology, Coles in

psychotherapy, and Czarniawska in organizational theory. We conclude the chapter with a broad working concept of what narrative inquiry is for us.

JOHN DEWEY

Our work is strongly influenced by John Dewey, the preeminent thinker in education. Dewey addressed matters that we saw as central to our work, matters to which we continually return. Our research interests over the years shifted from foregrounding students and student learning; to teachers and teaching; to school landscapes of routines, rhythms, values, and people; to school change and reform. However, as we shifted our focus, foregrounding one matter and letting another slide to the background, Dewey's writings on the nature of experience remained our conceptual, imaginative backdrop.

Experience is a key term in these diverse inquiries. For us, Dewey transforms a commonplace term, experience, in our educators' language into an inquiry term, and gives us a term that permits better understandings of educational life. For Dewey, experience is both personal and social. Both the personal and the social are always present. People are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood only as individuals. They are always in relation, always in a social context. The term *experience* helps us think through such matters as an individual child's learning while also understanding that learning takes place with other children, with a teacher, in a classroom, in a community, and so on.

Furthermore, Dewey held that one criterion of experience is *continuity*, namely, the notion that experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences. Wherever one positions oneself in that continuum—the imagined now, some imagined past, or some imagined future—each point has a past experiential base and leads to an experiential future. This too is key in our thinking about education because as we think about a child's learning, a school, or a particular policy, there is always a history, it is always changing, and it is always going somewhere. Through the constraints and practicalities of inquiry, one or another specific inquiry might appear to focus on one or another aspect within this broad theory of experience. We tried to hold all these matters in mind as we reflected on the educational puzzles and problems in our inquiry lives. We learned to move back and forth between the personal

and the social, simultaneously thinking about the past, present, and future, and to do so in ever-expanding social milieus.

MARK JOHNSON AND ALASDAIR MACINTYRE

In the early 1980s when we were attempting to foreground individual teachers' knowledge, we met Mark Johnson, a philosopher whose work on experiential, embodied metaphors attracted our attention. At that time, we were trying to understand the part that experiential images played in teachers' knowledge and its expression in classroom practice. We had completed a three-year study with two teachers, Stephanie and Aileen. We knew these two teachers, had spent time in their classrooms, in conversations with them, and had written and talked with and about them. Our focus was very much on trying to understand what we called their *personal practical knowledge*. One of our central ways of understanding their knowledge was an inquiry into the nature of their images of teaching. However, as we wrote about the images of Stephanie and Aileen, we were particularly concerned that too much analytic focus on what might be seen as discrete images would lose the holistic sense of an individual person and her experiential knowledge. Our puzzle, at first, seemed one of representation. It was our interest in ways of thinking about experiential knowledge that drew us to the work of Mark Johnson and his collaborator, George Lakoff. Johnson's work with Lakoff on metaphors seemed directly connected to our experiential focus and link—in our minds—to Dewey's work (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980).

With these puzzles in mind, we invited Johnson to spend a day or two with us in Toronto to help us think this matter through. In conversations with Johnson at a local hotel, he challenged us to "say more about how you see knowledge as embodied, embedded in a culture, based on narrative unity" (conversation with authors, February 17, 1983). With these brief words scribbled on a hotel notepad, he introduced Alasdair MacIntyre's work (1981) and the notion of *narrative unity* into our thinking. Narrative unity gave us a way to think in a more detailed and informative way about the general construct of continuity in individuals' lives. Continuity became for us a narrative construction that opened up a floodgate of ideas and possibilities. We turned our attention to other narrative literature and to writers who worked on the links between narrative and life.

We have been pursuing this work under the heading of *narrative inquiry* with a rough sense of narrative as both phenomena under study *and* method of study. We see teaching and teacher knowledge as expressions of embodied individual and social stories, and we think narratively as we enter into research relationships with teachers, create *field texts*, and write storied accounts of educational lives. (Field texts is our term for data collected in the field. This terminology is discussed in Chapter Seven.)

NEW WAYS OF THINKING: THE CONTRIBUTION OF INQUIRY

As we looked back at twenty or so years of work, we had a sense of ourselves in the earlier years as often working at the margins of established inquiry traditions in our field. But now in looking at our field, at educational studies, we are struck by the extent to which narrative inquiry has become part of the discourse. Educational researchers of many different persuasions claim to use narrative, and many who do not use it offer critiques of it.

The same is true in other social science fields. As we look at texts in disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, and psychiatry, we are struck by the fact of similarly reflective pieces on inquiry and on how inquiry and its contribution to knowledge of phenomena in these fields is changing. Clifford Geertz's (1995) *After the Fact*, Mary Catherine Bateson's (1994) *Peripheral Visions*, Norman Denzin's (1997) *Interpretive Ethnography*, Donald Polkinghorne's (1988) *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*, Roy Schafer's (1992) *Retelling a Life*, Robert Coles's (1989) *Call of Stories*, and Barbara Czarniawska's (1997) *Narrating the Organization* are all illustrative.

Though our interest is mainly in the social sciences, something similar seems to be happening in the humanities. For example, consider Donald Spence's (1982) *Narrative Truth and Historical Method*, David Carr's (1986) *Time, Narrative, and History*, and Carolyn Heilbrun's (1988) *Writing a Woman's Life*. These authors also look across their fields to bring in new ways of thinking about changing phenomena and changing inquiry. These relatively recent accounts, some in deliberately historical ways, others more anecdotally and narratively, present a picture of fields in transition with new forms of inquiry coming to the fore. In 1986, Marcus and Fischer wrote (in their title) that this is an "experimental moment" in the life of human science in-

quiry, an idea echoed by Denzin and Lincoln (1994), who name the present time of inquiry “the fifth moment” (p. 11).

It has been instructive for us to read in other social sciences and in the humanities for insights into these changing inquiries and changing phenomena, which resonate with and inform our own narrative inquiries. We set out to read these texts to get a sense of these authors’ accounts of the history of their field of inquiry and what it was that they wished to introduce to their field (if anything) and why.

In the following section, we select certain texts—Geertz and Bateson in anthropology, Polkinghorne in psychology, Coles in psychotherapy, and Czarniawska in organizational theory—and analyze them closely to try to get a picture of what these authors see as happening in their fields. As we do so, we bring forward insights that may inform our narrative inquiries in educational studies.

CLIFFORD GEERTZ, *AFTER THE FACT: TWO COUNTRIES, FOUR DECADES, ONE ANTHROPOLOGIST*

In *After the Fact*, Geertz (1995) reflects on his forty years of anthropological inquiry as he revisits his work in two towns, Pare and Se-frou, in two countries, Indonesia and Morocco. As he conducts this retrospective inquiry, he comments:

The problem is that more has changed, and more disjointedly, than one at first imagines. The two towns of course have altered, in many ways superficially, in a few profoundly. But so, and likewise, has the anthropologist. So has the discipline within which the anthropologist works, the intellectual setting within which that discipline exists, and the moral basis on which it rests. So have the countries in which the two towns are enclosed and the international world in which the two countries are enclosed. So has just about everyone’s sense of what is available from life. . . . When everything changes, the small and immediate to the vast and abstract—the object of study, the world immediately around it, the student, the world immediately around him, and the wider world around them both—there seems to be no place to stand so as to locate just what has altered and how. [pp. 1–2]

What immediately catches our eye in this quote is the tone of instability and *change*. For Geertz, change is the hallmark: not only have

the two towns, countries, and world changed, the researcher has also changed. Not only has the discipline changed, the moral basis of it has also changed. It is not only the discipline and its moral basis but also what Geertz calls its “intellectual setting”—what some might call its perspective, point of view, or substantive structure—that has changed. All of this is complicated for Geertz as researcher, for it is no longer clear to him where he should stand in order to understand the changes taking place. The place of the anthropologist in this changing world, and the changing anthropological study of it, is for Geertz uncertain.

Change—change in the world, change in the inquiry, change in the inquirer, change in the point of view, change in the outcomes—is what Geertz notices upon reflection. It is what he calls “the problem.” With this problem set, what does Geertz offer for inquiry? To begin with, he says: “What we can construct, if we keep notes and survive, are hindsight accounts of the connectedness of things that seem to have happened: pieced-together patternings, after the fact. . . . It calls for showing how particular events and unique occasions, an encounter here, a development there, can be woven together with a variety of facts and a battery of interpretations to produce a sense of how things go, have been going, and are likely to go” (pp. 2–3).

One reading of these two remarks is that Geertz has an ambiguous sense of what is possible and what one ought to do in inquiry. He wants the anthropologist to be a careful observer gathering a variety of field texts in the hopes of offering accounts of connections among things. Even here, instead of saying that these are things that have happened, he writes “that seem to have happened.” Anthropologists work, according to Geertz, “*ad hoc* and *ad interim*, piecing together thousand-year histories with three-week massacres, international conflicts with municipal ecologies. The economics of rice or olives, the politics of ethnicity or religion, the workings of language or war, must, to some extent, be soldered into the final construction. So must geography, trade, art, and technology. The result, inevitably, is unsatisfactory, lumbering, shaky, and badly formed: a grand contraption” (p. 20).

For Geertz, the anthropologist studies things that one is not too sure have happened, establishes connections that might provide links, produces a comprehensive, loosely formed account that, far from having theoretical precision, is “a grand contraption.” For Geertz, whatever it is that anthropologists produce is at best “lumbering, shaky, and badly formed.”

How are these grand contraptions, these anthropological treatises, constructed? It is here that narrative understandings are important. Photographs, prefaces, and appendixes are “quite inadequate” and, says Geertz, “marginalize what is central. What is needed, or anyway must serve, is tableaux, anecdotes, parables, tales: mini-narratives with the narrator in them” (p. 65).

**MARY CATHERINE BATESON,
PERIPHERAL VISIONS:
LEARNING ALONG THE WAY**

Bateson's life as an anthropologist overlaps temporally to a large degree with that of Geertz's, and in *Peripheral Visions* (1994), she takes on a task similar to the one taken on by Geertz. She too writes a reflective overview of her life as an anthropologist. Bateson also comes to narrative as a form of inquiry most appropriate for anthropology, and we read her to gather insights for our work on narrative inquiry in educational studies. Bateson's focus is on *learning*, and she carefully weaves her book around themes of continuity and improvisation. She writes about improvisation as characterizing “more and more lives today, lived in uncertainty, full of the inklings of alternatives. . . . Adaptation comes out of encounters with novelty that may seem chaotic. In trying to adapt, we may need to deviate from cherished values, behaving in ways we have barely glimpsed, seizing on fragmentary clues” (p. 8).

For Bateson, improvisation is a response to uncertainties in life, novelties that may even seem meaningless, inexplicable, “chaotic.” With this sense of life in turmoil, and with improvisation as a necessary response, how is it possible to see continuity as one of her central themes? Continuity is possible for Bateson because learning is a human endeavor. There is no doubt that for Bateson as for Geertz change is one of the characteristics of lives. For Bateson though, change and continuity are brought together by human agency. Improvisation and adaptation to change allow the past to be connected and to have continuity with the future.

This too is a book about change, change that comes from learning. For Bateson, learning is change. Continuity results because people improvise and adapt, that is, they learn.

It is clear that Bateson's world, like Geertz's, is a world of change. But as they build for the reader an idea of what change is, and its

importance to the field of anthropological inquiry, it is clear that they emphasize very different aspects of change. In both Bateson's and Geertz's texts, everything is changing—the phenomena, the discipline, the agent, the methods, and the outcomes. Whereas Geertz emphasizes the changing phenomena, the changing world studied by the anthropologist, Bateson emphasizes the person, participant sometimes, researcher sometimes, always the inseparability of the two. The starting points for the two books highlight their different understandings of change and its role in anthropology. Geertz begins with changes in his anthropological research sites over forty years. He muses about how to describe the changes in those sites. Bateson begins with her daughter in a Persian garden. As she tells a story of how to teach her daughter and how to understand this teaching many years later, she muses about change in her and her daughter's understanding, then and now. Geertz focuses on understanding the changing world; Bateson focuses on understanding how one understands a changing world.

Geertz stays with change as his key term, and he builds his notion of anthropological inquiry and the role of narrative in it on change. Bateson shifts her key term to learning, but she too comes to narrative. She says, "Our species thinks in metaphors and learns through stories" (p. 11). There is a parallel, even an identity, between life as an anthropologist and life generally. For her, anthropological inquiry is meeting difference, adapting, and learning. It is, she says, "a way of being, especially suited to a world of change. A society of many traditions and cultures can be a school of life" (pp. 7–8).

It is narrative that allows Bateson as an anthropologist to learn, narrative that allows all of us to learn. What does she mean by narrative, apart from learning "through stories"? She means much more than do those who simply say that we communicate with one another through stories, that our experiences are recorded and transmitted in story form. To Bateson, it is clear that anthropologists, all of us, lead storied lives on storied landscapes. This perspective on inquiry is a perspective on life, on stories, and their plotlines as everything, the good and the bad, the provocateurs to change. They can "mislead" (p. 83), can change and become "more complicated and ambiguous" (p. 83), and can "have more than one meaning" (p. 11) with no "single true interpretation" (p. 84).

In our exploration of what anthropological inquiry might look like for Bateson, we learn more by her example than by her telling. Her book is vividly narrative in structure and content. It is composed of,

to borrow a phrase from Geertz, a series of mini-narratives with the narrator in them.

Bateson also offers lessons in how to go about the work of anthropological inquiry, inquiry that we may call a form of narrative inquiry. Most important is the attitude of the inquirer toward participants, an attitude that will foster learning. Essentially, anthropologists are participant observers, sometimes, she says, more one than the other. She writes, "Sometimes a dissonance will break through and pull you into intense involvement" (p. 5) and sometimes push you away from a participating stance. Always, for learning to occur, the inquirer in this ambiguous, shifting, participant observation role is meeting difference; allowing difference to challenge assumptions, values, and beliefs; improvising and adapting to the difference; and thereby learning as the narrative anthropologist.

Though the route, at least the conceptual route, to final texts, to what it is the inquirer has in the end to say, is different for Geertz and Bateson, there are again similarities. For Bateson, "Ambiguity is the warp of life, not something to be eliminated" (p. 9). Certainty is not a goal. She writes that the anthropologist, indeed everyone, needs to reject the "rhetoric of merely, the rhetoric that treats as trivial whatever is recognized as a product of interacting human minds" and to "accept ambiguity and allow for learning along the way" (p. 235). For Geertz as well, certainty is not a goal, theoretical precision not possible. For Geertz, the anthropologist creates lumbering, shaky, grand contraptions. For Bateson, what is written, finally, is the inquiring agent's construction: it is an "I" document. It is "I" who writes the constructions because this authorial voice reduces what she calls the "timeless authority: this is so" (pp. 75–76) and the resistance to a "temptation to be categorical" (pp. 75–76). The narrative anthropologist also offers an "I," the "I" that grows out of the ambiguous, shifting participant observation relationships, the "I" who learns by seeing and telling stories along the way, and who writes stories of relationship. There is a temporality and a situatedness to the anthropologist's writing: relationships to the "I" of the inquirer that imply the biases, perspectives, and particular learnings that the inquirer was able to engage in. Thus, though Bateson does not say so in so many words, there is a comprehensive, loosely formed quality, one might imagine, to the anthropologist's final writing. For Geertz, the anthropologist's edifice rests on the tentativeness of connections among events observed and explanations offered. For Bateson, the anthropologist's edifice rests on

the “I” of the agent and all that implies by virtue of the uncertainties of learning.

BARBARA CZARNIAWSKA, NARRATING THE ORGANIZATION: DRAMAS OF INSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY

Barbara Czarniawska, an organizational researcher, reflects on the nature and intensity of institutional transformations visible in the early 1990s. She writes, “Things were bursting out of their labels, and words grew short of events. Frantic attempts at interpretation were multiplying” (1997, p. 1). As a researcher, Czarniawska is at a loss to account for these transformations using existing vocabulary, conceptual apparatuses, and metaphors in organization theory. In the face of her changing organizational world and the need for new metaphors, she turns, in an interdisciplinary search, to the disciplines of anthropology, literary theory, and the institutional school within sociology. Unlike Geertz and Bateson—whose approach is to look to the changing phenomena, to themselves as researchers undergoing change, and to the changing discipline for inspiration—Czarniawska’s strategy is to borrow and mix metaphors from other disciplines. What she borrows is narrative. Narrative is, for Czarniawska, far from being embedded in the nature of the phenomena, as it is with Geertz and Bateson. For Czarniawska, narrative is a heuristic device, a metaphor useful for understanding organizations.

With narrative in hand as a theoretical frame—at least a metaphorical, metalevel frame—Czarniawska applies the frame to the Swedish public sector. Through applying narrative, she creates three stories of public administration management—“A New Budget and Accounting Routine in Big City,” “Tax Reform,” and “The Rehabilitation Program.” With these as story titles, she conducts an analysis of each story using narrative terms such as *tension-producing devices*, *paradoxes*, and *interruptions*. She links these stories to the themes of personnel and communication and to the serials of institutional decentralization, “company-ization,” and computerization. She calls this entire narrative analytic process *ergonography*.

As with Geertz and Bateson, Czarniawska’s researcher changes. However, the change in her researcher is driven by the change in methodology—a narrative inquirer engages differently in her work because she is using a new metaphor. For Geertz and Bateson, the in-

quirer, along with the phenomena, is already changing because she is embedded in the changing phenomena. For Czarniawska, the researcher is a kind of literary critic, far removed from a systems analyst but distinguished from a novelist. A literary critic pays attention to reality, in this case the reality of life in organizations, whereas a novelist might be free of this constraint.

Nevertheless, Czarniawska says, "Organization researchers thus live forever on shaky ground, insofar as they mediate between the 'organizational authors' and the academic theorists. . . . Practitioners and consultants are busy writing texts and authoring works. The researchers' role is to interpret these texts (although this requires the creation of yet another text). They build worlds; we inspect the construction (although this requires the construction of yet another world)" (pp. 203–204).

The changing organizational world that Czarniawska observes, and the changed role of the researcher (now a narrative researcher), lead to "a redefinition of what research produces" (p. 202). Czarniawska frames the issue in terms of fact and fiction. Borrowing from literary theory means that for her there is "no clear difference between fact and fiction" (p. 203). The documents produced by the narrative organizational researcher are part fact, part fiction, in some inseparable way. For instance, in her story of "A New Budget and Accounting Routine in Big City," there is a strong sense of the application of story structure. A scene is set, a problem is introduced, characters are described, tension is introduced to create an unfolding plot, and there is some kind of climax and resolution. There is a different sense of how she sees research outcomes in her work than did Geertz and Bateson, for whom the structures were tentative, subject to change, and loosely formed. For Czarniawska, the work produced has fictional quality, is smoother, has fewer rough edges, and has a cleaner application of narrative structures.

ROBERT COLES, *THE CALL OF STORIES: TEACHING AND THE MORAL IMAGINATION*

Robert Coles's *Call of Stories* (1989) is a book that blends life, teaching, and the practice of psychiatry. Coles says it is an inquiry into students' responses to literature, a study of teaching and learning. Much like Bateson, somewhat like Geertz, and almost not at all like Czarniawska

in their disciplines, the reflection contained in Coles's work unifies psychiatry with life and teaching. Coles learns about life—death, marriage, morality—from his patients and his students. He learns from, and teaches, the same things from literature. Life, teaching, and psychiatry are all interwoven in teaching-learning ways. For our purposes, of course, we keep to our theme by thinking of psychiatry as an inquiry and ask how it is that Coles comes to narrative—a somewhat unidimensional reading of a multidimensional text. Cole's work is richer than is implied by our single question.

Change—the driving force in the reasoning leading Geertz, Bateson, and Czarniawska to narrative—plays no noticeable role in *The Call of Stories*. There is no sense of a changing world nor of once-successful theories and ideas breaking down and needing replacement. In this sense, the temporal, circumstantial quality of the fields of inquiry so evident in our other authors is not an issue for Coles. There is, of course, a persuasive, moral sense that psychiatry “ought” to proceed in harmony with living, a harmony to be contrasted with psychiatry proceeding by the application of psychiatric theories.

Coles comes to narrative through life and through teaching and learning. For him, narrative is not something discovered, as it was for Czarniawska, to be applied metaphorically to his field. Chapter One's opening story is a teaching-learning story that takes place during Coles's psychiatric residency, during which he has two supervisors, Dr. Ludwig and Dr. Binger, whose task it is to help him reflect on the protocols he writes on his work with patients. One supervisor, Dr. Binger, asks for symptoms and the categorization of behavior in terms of syndromes; the other, Dr. Ludwig, encourages Coles to listen. Coles writes, “I was urged to let each patient be a teacher: ‘Hearing themselves teach you, through their narration, the patients will learn the lessons a good instructor learns only when he becomes a willing student, eager to be taught’” (p. 22). Dr. Ludwig taught Coles, “What ought to be interesting . . . is the unfolding of a lived life rather than the confirmation such a chronicle provides for some theory” (p. 22). Coles published his book thirty-three years after his residency and believes that Dr. Ludwig, his narratively oriented supervisor, “was actually arguing for a revolution—that the lower orders be the ones whose every word really *mattered*, whose meaning be upheld as interesting” (p. 22). Thus, although change is not the driving force in the thinking that leads him to narrative, Coles believes that narrative represented a revolutionary change in the practice of psychiatry. Narrative for him is not the outcome of change but the origin of it for his field.

What Coles learned in his psychiatric residency was something he had already been taught by his parents. The book's Introduction describes his parents as story readers. Not only was there reading, but equally important for the idea of narrative as it applies to psychiatry were the family discussions that took place around the stories. His mother and father read to each other, discussed what they read, and discussed with Coles not only *what* they discussed but *why* they discussed it. He recalls his father saying "Your mother and I feel rescued by these books. We read them gratefully. You'll also be grateful one day to the authors" (p. xii). What Dr. Ludwig taught Coles about how to engage in psychiatric inquiry was an expression of what he already had been taught and is, in turn, how he describes his own teaching and his work with patients.

What, in detail, is narrative inquiry for Coles? Like Czarniawska, Coles's idea of narrative comes, terminologically, out of literature. *The Call of Stories* from beginning to end discusses relationships among reader, author, text, patient, and life. Specifically, again referring to Dr. Ludwig, Coles writes, "He urged me to be a good listener in the special way a story requires: note the manner of presentation; the development of plot, character, the addition of new dramatic sequences; the emphasis accorded to one figure or another in the recital; and the degree of enthusiasm, of coherence, the narrator gives to his or her account" (p. 23).

From Coles's reliance on literature in teaching and psychiatric practice, one might reasonably imagine that literary theory was an important resource in his thinking about narrative. However, literary theorists play little evident role in the book. Unlike Czarniawska, who draws heavily on existing literary theory terms, Coles appears to construct his own theoretical structure for narrative. Just as Coles wants all of us to learn from life, he learns about narrative from literature, literature which, for him, appears to have originated in the predilections of his parents and in the literature of medicine, especially that of William Carlos Williams. Coles also learns about narrative from the stories told in his psychiatric work and in his teaching. Student stories, patient stories, and stories from literature are Coles's teachers on narrative. William Carlos Williams, for example, is credited with some of these links, when Coles has Williams say, "We have to pay closest attention to what we say. What patients say tells us to think about what hurts them; and what we say tells us what is happening to us—what we are thinking, and what may be wrong with us. . . . Their story, yours, mine—it's what we all carry with us on this trip we take, and

we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them” (p. 30).

Thus, it is the *intimacy* of the inquirer and the patient that is the key term for Coles: learners and teachers coming together over their texts, psychiatrists and their patients coming together over their texts—not only the patient’s texts but, emphasizes Coles, the psychiatrist’s texts as well. For him, none of this is merely in the interest of narrative method; rather, narrative is life, learning, and fiction. It is no mere metaphor for advancing his field.

What is the outcome, the edifice, of narrative psychiatric inquiry? We are, of course, in somewhat different territory with Coles, compared with our other authors. Coles is writing about the practice of psychiatry as an inquiry, whereas Bateson, Geertz, and Czarniawska offer metalevel texts on inquiry in their fields. Coles is not writing a text on how to be a psychiatric researcher of others doing psychiatric work. Nevertheless, parallels are apparent and are important to our purpose. Furthermore, psychiatrists produce things, their own edifices. Professor Ludwig is, again, given credit for telling us what those outcomes, those psychiatric edifices, should be. Coles writes: “I ought to write brief biographies of the patients rather than come to his office with a list of the patients’ complaints. I also ought to make a list of ‘interesting clinical moments’ in the interviews—remarks that I deem important. To what purpose? He wasn’t specific or conveniently certain in reply; he simply told me that ‘something happened’ when we had encouraged our patient to tell a story or two about her life and ‘we ought to keep going in that direction,’ though he was quick to add, ‘not too vigorously or in too organized a way.’” (p. 14).

Thus, a biographical text is created, which—like the texts proposed by Geertz and Bateson but unlike the texts proposed by Czarniawska—have a tentative best-guess-at-the-moment sense about them. These biographies have the quality Coles found himself describing when he came to his question: How do students respond to literature? Thinking at first that medical students might respond to a text one way and business students in another, he found these to be “naive and somewhat absurd generalizations” (p. 190). Instead, he found “an astonishing range of responsiveness” and that the “decisive matter is how the teacher’s imagination engages with the text—a prelude, naturally, to the students’ engagement” (p. 190). In short, these biographies, written as products, are a kind of starting point—the psychiatrist’s “prelude” to engaging the patient in a reflection, a story, a biography.

DONALD POLKINGHORNE, *NARRATIVE KNOWING AND THE HUMAN SCIENCES*

Polkinghorne begins *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* with his “own unsettled feelings about integrating research and practice” (1988, p. ix). As he reflects on his work as an academic researcher and a practicing psychotherapist, he finds that research in his field is out of touch with practical problems of the field. As a clinician, he is unable to make use of research; as a researcher, he finds that social problems are not amenable to the application of social science research methodology and findings. He notices, for example, that funding agencies, following a period of heavy investment in the human sciences in the Great Society, are now turning away from the research enterprise. It is not that the problems are any fewer. He notes that people are increasingly turning to practitioners in the social sciences—to psychotherapists, to counselors, to organizational consultants. This observation leads him to “look at what could be learned from the practitioners about how research should be done” (p. x).

Polkinghorne comes to narrative directly and quickly. Unlike the other authors discussed, who come to narrative slowly and by degrees in their arguments, Polkinghorne looks to practitioners and asserts that narrative is the basis of their work. He says, “They are concerned with people’s stories: they work with case histories and use narrative explanations to understand why the people they work with behave the way they do” (p. x). Of course, Coles too began with narrative practice as he learned his profession from Professor Ludwig. But unlike Coles, who begins and ends with practice, Polkinghorne turns from practice to theory in an effort to develop a form of narrative research. He underlines “the importance of having research strategies that can work with the narratives people use to understand the human world” (p. xi). In the end, he wants “our research to be considerably more successful and useful” (p. xi). He wants, in effect, to build a theoretical edifice that is consistent with practice.

In building his version of narrative theory, Polkinghorne, much like Czarniawska in the organizational sciences, borrows from other disciplines, specifically, history, literary theory, and certain forms of psychology. Though Polkinghorne discovers narrative in successful practice, the bulk of his writing in *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* is devoted to these three disciplines and to the task of assembling “a narrative theory for the practice of the human disciplines” (p. 125).

One of the interesting possibilities in Polkinghorne's work is that of constructing a theory of narrative or, perhaps, a theory of narrative practice, based on what practitioners do. The outlines of such an inquiry are seen in Coles's book, in which he learns about narrative from his patients' and his students' stories. Likewise, the careful study of the successful narrative practices of practitioners in interaction with their clients would be, one imagines, a productive avenue for building one's ideas about narrative.

For Polkinghorne, narrative inquiry can be of two types—*descriptive* and *explanatory*. By and large, these two forms of inquiry use the same kinds of narrative data, collected by such means as interview and document analysis. In descriptive narrative, the purpose is “to produce an accurate description of the interpretive narrative accounts individuals or groups use to make sequences of events in their lives or organizations meaningful” (pp. 161–162). In explanatory narrative, the interest is to account for the connection between events in a causal sense and to provide the necessary narrative accounts that supply the connections. Though he has specific suggestions along these lines, Polkinghorne believes that narrative research is research “still in its early stages. Because it includes the temporal dimension in its organizational structure, it is very different from the formal organization that puts ‘facts’ into categories” (p. 184).

He stops short of (and gives no examples of) what narrative research texts might look like. We are left to wonder whether narrative research, for Polkinghorne, creates the tentative, shambling, personal documents seen in Bateson's and Geertz's work or whether they might have more the polished literary quality of research documents we imagine are produced in Czarniawska's work.

BRINGING THESE AUTHORS TO NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Each of the five authors brought narrative to their work. In so doing, they offered us, as narrative inquirers, new dimensions to consider.

Geertz, in his retrospective look at anthropology and at his own place in it over forty years, offered a metaphor of a parade, his way of capturing change in the whole over time. Geertz reminded us that it was impossible to look at one event or one time without seeing the event or time nested within the wholeness of his metaphorical parade. He introduced tentativeness into our thinking as narrative inquirers

in at least two ways. The first sense of tentativeness relates to the way in which one is positioned in the parade. We know what we know because of how we are positioned. If we shift our position in the parade, our knowing shifts. The second sense of tentativeness comes about, says Geertz, because as the parade changes, our relative positions change. What we knew at one point in time shifts as the parade moves temporally forward to another point in time.

Bateson also offers us tentativeness, but hers is a tentativeness related to what we as researchers might write about people and events. What we write is always tentative, always open to revision. Bateson, more explicitly than Geertz, offers researchers links to life. In this linking of life and research, she highlights relational aspects. In effect, she offers us the notion that to do good research, one needs to be a good human being.

Like Bateson, Coles offers us as researchers a trust in life, and he encourages us to listen to our teaching, to the stories that we, and those we teach, tell.

Czarniawska and Polkinghorne offer us the possibility of borrowing theories, metaphors, and terms from other disciplines as a way to bridge our research with practice.

Taken together, these authors offer us, as narrative inquirers, the possibility of disciplinary, homegrown, indigenous narrative concepts (Geertz, Bateson, Coles) and adaptations from other disciplines (Czarniawska, Polkinghorne).

WHY THE TURN TO NARRATIVE?

In our Prologue, and as we opened this chapter, we tried to give a sense of what it was about narrative that led us to turn to it in our own work. We might say that if we understand the world narratively, as we do, then it makes sense to study the world narratively. For us, life—as we come to it and as it comes to others—is filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities.

We opened the book by recollecting that we were focused on trying to understand experience. We saw our research problem as trying to think of the continuity and wholeness of an individual's life experience. This research problem in our educational studies eventually brought us to narrative. We then began to reflect on the whole of the social sciences with its concern for human experience. For social

scientists, and consequently for us, experience is a key term. Education and educational studies are a form of experience. For us, narrative is the best way of representing and understanding experience. Experience is what we study, and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it. In effect, narrative thinking is part of the phenomenon of narrative. It might be said that narrative method is a part or aspect of narrative phenomena. Thus, we say, narrative is both the phenomenon and the method of the social sciences.

This was not, however, the reasoning that brought us to narrative. We did not begin with a narrative view of experience. We struggled for years with more intuitive ways of coming to terms with life in classrooms, with life in schools, and with life in other educational landscapes. As with Bateson's participant observation, narrative grew for us into a term for representing what we, and our research participants, saw as healthy, productive, human relationships. Theoretical works like those of MacIntyre's, with his notion of narrative unity, had a cascading effect for us because we could name experience and in the naming, extend research we already had under way.

As we read Geertz, Bateson, Czarniawska, Coles, Polkinghorne, and others, we recognized that much of our own fumbling toward narrative occurs in various ways in other disciplines. Geertz, with his respect for phenomena in all their complexity, gives a sense of having been inexorably pushed toward his narrative version of an *ad hoc* and *ad interim* anthropology. Bateson and Coles, more so than Geertz in *After the Fact*, struggle to build understandings in their disciplines that make sense of life more generally. They too seem to be saying "experience first and narrative because we must." Czarniawska and Polkinghorne have, more than the others, a sense of a methodologist's opportunism. They seem to say that life and narrative are linked because the link seems to work. They too see that narrative brings experience to their fields, but for them it seems more after than before the fact. Czarniawska's organizations, when represented in research texts, are peopled, though we, as readers, are left to wonder how much is life experience and how much is literary construction: How much are people and their places brought forth in the research text? How much are they fictional expressions of literary forms?

Though we thought infrequently of the social science research narrative of which we were a part at the time we began our research, it became important to us as we tried to position our work and the work

of others. It is somehow curious, at least from the point of view of a stance that holds that science and its methods are objective and de-personalized, to reflect on the moral tone not only of our own argument but also of the arguments of the other five authors. None of the five merely describes their version of narrative, but rather they say (or at least strongly imply) that things should be done narratively. In our case, we said the grand social narrative of inquiry of which we were a part was reductive of experience and not (we implied) to be favored. Geertz, Coles, and Bateson argue naturalistically along the line that “this is the way the world is, and therefore this is how it should be thought about.” Our argument seems much like theirs. Experience happens narratively. Narrative inquiry is a form of narrative experience. Therefore, educational experience should be studied narratively. Czarniawska and Polkinghorne seem more utilitarian in their argument, though of the two, Czarniawska is far more so, as she argues for narrative as literary metaphor for organizational science. Polkinghorne’s book is constructed using a similar pattern, although he begins by noting that the public was attracted to psychotherapists who worked narratively, and therefore he believed he could develop a theory of narrative psychology on the basis of what practitioners actually thought and did. However, he does not stay with theory building based on practice and turns instead to importing ideas, as did Czarniawska. Had he continued with his first approach, more of a naturalistic argument might have developed.

As we mentioned earlier, a key term for us is *temporality*. Partially we mean, of course, that an experience is temporal. But we also mean that experiences taken collectively are temporal. We are therefore not only concerned with life as it is experienced in the here and now but also with life as it is experienced on a continuum—people’s lives, institutional lives, lives of things. Just as we found our own lives embedded within a larger narrative of social science inquiry, the people, schools, and educational landscapes we study undergo day-by-day experiences that are contextualized within a longer-term historical narrative. What we may be able to say now about a person or school or some other is given meaning in terms of the larger context, and this meaning will change as time passes. Our social science knowledge is, like the things we study, something “in passing.” Coles, Czarniawska, and Polkinghorne write little about temporality and leave us more with a feeling that what is said and learned from narrative is simply that. Geertz provides the most forceful sense of temporality. Indeed, it is his

key term. Change over time marks Geertz's world, and for him it is this temporal change that is the standout feature of anthropology.

COMING TO RESEARCH NARRATIVELY

In this first chapter, we have tried to highlight why and in what ways some authors in the disciplines of anthropology, psychology, and organizational science came to narrative. We recollected our own story of coming to narrative and tried to answer the question for ourselves: Why narrative?

As a result of such influences as those discussed here and during the past twenty years or so of our work, narrative inquiry has become so integral to our work that we cannot imagine functioning as researchers in any other way. It is that central. Our intention is to come to the "definition" of narrative inquiry slowly in this volume by "showing" rather than "telling" what narrative inquirers do. But for now, here are some characteristics that make up a kind of working concept: narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social. Simply stated, as we wrote in the Prologue: narrative inquiry is stories lived and told.

In the next chapter, we begin our exploration of learning to think narratively. Subsequent chapters examine the narrative process in the field, the complexities of the writing process, and the continuing challenges narrative inquirers face at every step along the way.