A Narrative Inquiry Approach for Cultivating and Deepening Shared-Power Partnerships

2019 ESC Conference
Denver, CO
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Workshop Agenda

- Why Narrative Inquiry in Community-engaged scholarship (CES)
- An example research story
- Narrative Inquiry provides a scholarly path into community engagement.
• Provide training, counseling, and consultation for groups, congregations, and communities
• We are faith-based, but not religious

• Our work in Community-Engaged Scholarship (CES) stems from my research and learning in my doctoral program
• We hope to nurture the use Narrative Inquiry (NI) in CES
Community-engaged scholarship (CES) intends to shift power from university centrality to shared power in partnerships between communities and higher education; it is transformative.

Yet, higher education is a social institution that safe-guards power.

Definition of power: Capacity to produce intended results (Himmelman, 2001).
• "Just because you invite me to the table does not mean I get something to eat." (Malcolm X)

• Engagement is an invitation to the table. Shared power means all stakeholders get something to eat. (Himmelman, 2018)

• Our objective at the Overton Institute is to support CES that intends to enact shared power.
Shared Power

• Arthur T. Himmelman (2009)
• “Capacity to produce intended results”
• Four R’s: “Risks, Responsibilities, Resources, and Rewards” (2019)
• Not only service, but justice.
Narrative Inquiry (NI)

• Various methodologists have labeled various approaches as “narrative inquiry”

• Narrative Inquiry per Clandinin & Connelly
  • NI-CC
  • Committed to narrative ways of knowing and being – *Makes the difference!*
  • The methodology allows for shared power

• By taking us outside the traditional expert, hierarchical, patriarchal frame, NI-CC leads us into being human together.
NI-CC Reflects the Tensions in CES

Human experiences are
Storied
Complex

Narrative inquiry seeks understanding, not answers.
There are no “experts” in NI.
Methodology

• Narrative holds 3-D complexities of:
  • Time – past, present, future
  • Space – external and internal relating
  • Place – contexts, environments

• Therefore is not linear, but more like a uni-directional matrix

• Requires out-of-the-box thinking for designing and presenting
Narrative Inquiry Requires a Power Shift

- A narrative understanding of experience SHIFTS the project/research from scholarship “on” to scholarship “with” . . .

- Reciprocity is the central principle of community engagement; but it is difficult to enact with, and within, communities.

- In NI, partners “come alongside” (Clandinin & Connelly) each others’ stories as we live/tell our own stories.

- As we co-create stories as partners; we share our power.
Partners Co-creating Stories

- In Narrative Inquiry, we are all scholars and learners.

- The university partner/researcher is not “studying” or “talking about” the community’s stories.

- Rather, we are living the project/research stories with each other.

- We are co-creating our stories as we live them together.
First: One-Minute Introductions

• Do NOT share your title, position, role

• Name
• Institution/Organization
• Country or Area of US

• Why Narrative Inquiry? Without mentioning your title, position, role! What about you as a PERSON brings you to this workshop? What are YOU curious about NI in CES?
My Story...

• Counseling/CES

• I grew up with one foot in our small-town community and one in the R1 University. I embody CES

• Commitments to shared power and co-creation (reciprocity)

• Selected NI as methodology because its commitments support those of CES

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Narrative Inquiry Research

What we did

What happened

What we learned

What questions were raised
A Research Narrative - Abstract

Land-grant university and a rural community in the deep South.

The research question was simply stated:

What are the partnering experiences?
Demographics of the Study

Established collective impact partnership

Faculty member in the community

Collective impact organizational support
Community Entities
- Business & Industry
- Churches
- County Government
- Healthcare System
- Minority Populations
- Municipalities’ Governments
- Non-Profits
- County School Board
- The Lake

RCAP Executive Committee
- MOU partners from the Community
- Chamber of Commerce
- City
- County
- Higher Education Institutions
- Hospital
- Local Schools
- Chairperson (not affiliated with an MOU partner)

RCAP Issue Work Groups
- Members (representing various entities in the Community)
- Executive Committee Members
- State Government Resources
- Education, Health, Industry, Labor, Tourism, Transportation

University Service & Outreach
- RUAP
- Operations Coordinator
- Allied Professional

University Academics
- Teaching, Research & Outreach Faculty & Staff
- Undergraduate Students
- Graduate Students

Other Higher Education Institutions
- Regional College
- Technical College
- Community College

Note: RCAP – Rural County Allied Partnership; RUAP – Research University Allied Partnership; MOU – Memorandum of Understanding

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First Round of Inquiry with Executive Committee

- Partnership Executive Committee monthly meeting
- Participation was self-selected
Executive Committee Stories

Exploring our experiences in three rounds

Based on the concept of Public Narrative (Ganz, 2009):

“Me” stories

“Us” stories

“Now” stories
Second Round of Inquiry with Interviews

- Seven Partnership members agreed to be interviewed individually.
- Informal session of inquiry between me and the participant.
Co-composed “Interim Field Texts” (C&C)

- Individual stories
- Narrative Profiles
- Narrative Summaries that conveyed the central theme of each of their stories.
- Shared the individual compiled stories and summaries with each individual
Central Themes in Participants’ Stories

- Power shift – authenticity assessed by community

- Perspective shift – opened up the conversation between me and them.

- The final round was designed to open up conversation between them.
• Posters and handouts

• Learning about their own and the others’ partnering experiences.

• I facilitated a conversation between them, sharing my own stories also.

Third Round of Inquiry with the Group

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The Story – Research Inquiry “Conclusions”

- Surprisingly, powerful experience:
  - “When we started with the Executive Committee inquiry, I didn’t know how this would end up, but it turned out that the process was extremely meaningful.”

- Discovered a need for *deepening the Partnership identity*.

- *Power was not shared within the Community. Those who traditionally held power continued to guard it.*

- They suggested the Executive Committee could benefit from the NI experience.
Presenting the Research

• It’s messy!

• Doesn’t present answers; instead, holds questions.

• Meeting the demands of academia can be antithetical to CES.

• Meanwhile, the community participants gained deeper understanding of themselves and each other – the ultimate goal!
Narrative is on-going. Human experiences – are not neat packages tied with bows.

• Co-created among researchers and participants

• The Researcher “enters and leaves” the story at particular points, but the story is continuous – like a river flowing.
Three-minute Stories

• Pair up

• In 3 minutes: What have you heard so far that is new, or surprising, or just doesn’t make sense to you?

• That is, what is your experience (or story) in this workshop so far?
Three Questions to Consider

• Consider how a narrative understanding of human experience opens and cultivates shared power among engagement partners?

• Consider how Narrative Inquiry supports recognizing, cultivating, and sustaining shared power.

• Consider the interrelationship between my story, our story and the story in fostering trust among engagement partners.
Risks, Responsibilities, Resources, Rewards

• How do we “become human” to each other – versus titles, position.

• NI shows where power is shared.

• Power not shared in the community can topple CES.

• The goal of NI is to engage people in sharing power and co-composing their narrative, their experience.
Wrap-Up: “We are not finished, but we must stop now.”

• What do these stories tell us about **cultivating and nurturing partnerships**?

• What do these stories tell us about **power and shared power**?

• *Engagement* is an invitation to the table. *Shared power* means all stakeholders get something to eat.

• How can we use NI-CC as a method to figure out together what’s on the **MENU**?

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Facilitating NI Practice

• If your partnership, unit, staff, community org might benefit, allow us to facilitate a half-day or full-day retreat for your program/project using Narrative Inquiry, or provide consultation for designing and implementing your NI research.

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