Thesis as Narrative or “What Is the Inquiry in Narrative Inquiry?”

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ABSTRACT
I present elements of inquiry in a dissertation composed through experiential narrative. My account of the thesis process is interwoven with references to John Dewey’s demonstrations of implicit inquiry in the creation and experience of art. Motivation, methodology, outcomes and literature review take on a narrative character and I show how aesthetic and reflective activities contributed to the inquiry. Conceptually, a “tension-telos dynamic” characterizes the impetus for the work; “resonance” is portrayed as the connecting principle among various narrative components of the thesis, and the function of a “third term” in metaphorical relationships is presented as a structuring principle for these connections. Although my inquiry came about through personal stories, my narratives reached out to social, historical and philosophical contexts to gain a wider significance, academically and personally.

A quest is always an education both as to the character of that which is sought and in self-knowledge.

MacIntyre 1984, 219

NARRATIVE AS INQUIRY
Considering merits of art as merits of inquiry is an issue many graduate students in education and their advisors face today. In our academic culture, we tend to know narrative through experiencing or studying it as art, not as science. Yet it has appeared as a form of research in education, an area of the social sciences (Barone and Eisner 1997). An increasing number of theses are being written as personal narratives. For example, Conle ([1987] 1992, 1993), Beattie (1995), Bell (1991), Li (1991, 1998), and Mullen (1994) understand their work as narrative inquiry created through the writing of personal experiential narratives. As well as thesis candidates, established scholars now feel sufficiently freed up to tell their stories (e.g., Barone 1983). As Geertz (1995, 61) explains, “I, too, have stories to tell, views to unfold, images to impart [ . . . ].”
In 1990, Connelly and Clandinin pointed out multiple connections between other disciplines and the narrative inquiry they were using in research and in teaching graduate students. They cited uses in psychology, history, and ethnographic anthropology, among other fields, that championed narrative modes of representation and narrative research methodologies. But the use of personal experiential narrative in the autobiographical sections of the theses in teacher education cited above is different from all of those uses, even though there may be considerable overlap. The essential difference, I propose, lies in the way the writing or telling of personal experiential narratives in and of itself puts in motion a particular mode of inquiry.

The nature of this inquiry has not yet been well described. Connelly and Clandinin have spoken of the “reconstruction of experience” (à la Dewey) and have described how teachers’ experiential stories can reorganize their personal practical knowledge (1988). But in what way is such a story an inquiry? The question about “the inquiry in narrative inquiry” has not been a major topic of investigation so far. I suspect that candidates doing a narrative thesis are so taken up by the process, enjoying the doing of it, that they are not much interested in characterizing its inquiry quality abstractly. They are more interested in telling what they have learned through the process. They may even view it as therapeutic. It is this reaction that fuels the doubts of critics of narrative work. They dismiss it as therapy which lacks the rigour expected in research. Perhaps educators’ frequent references of the use of narrative in the practice and research of psychology (Sarbin 1986, Schäfer 1981), although very useful, have nevertheless contributed to such misapprehension of narrative inquiry in educational research.

Perhaps even Bruner’s (1996) very helpful conceptualization of narrative structure reinforces for some the links to therapy. He points to “Trouble” as the necessary raison d’être of narrative: “What drives the story, what makes it worth Trouble: some misfit between Agents, Acts, Goals, Settings, and Means [. . .]. What follows is either a restitution of initial legitimacy or a revolutionary change of affairs with a new order of legitimacy” (1996, 94). This view of trouble as the driving engine for story telling I see as very pertinent, but possibly misleading in my understanding of the inquiry that drives personal narrative theses in education.

Yes, there is trouble; there is tension, there is a problem and there is a solution sought. But the solution is not the relief needed by someone who is sick or in need of care. The problem, although it may be connected to some sort of unwellness, is primarily an impetus for inquiry. In that sense, it is more like a subconscious question mark about something that is emotionally as well as intellectually interesting. Our academic tradition has tended to keep emotion and intellect apart. For example, we have tended to disregard emotional dimensions in life-long quests of great inquirers such as Einstein, Heidegger, Galileo, and others. Those inquiries, of course, were not directed toward the self. If they had been, the protagonists might have been called poets or mystics. After Freud, in a secularized society,
self-study with any connection to emotions is likely to be seen as a search for therapy.

In this article, I intend to answer the question about the “inquiry in narrative inquiry” by narrating my own thesis process (1989–1993) and by conceptualizing, from the perspective I now have, the inquiry aspects that were essential to its success. I attempt to highlight the intellectual as well as emotional qualities inherent in narrative inquiry, and I characterize the “Trouble” and restitution of balance as parts of a research dynamic. In exploring a thesis process that is part of a narrative inquiry tradition in teacher education, I portray it as belonging to more than one realm—as being an artistic endeavor as well as an intellectual inquiry. In this I rely on Dewey’s belief that both science and art have aesthetic elements (1934, 120) and that each are also ways of thinking (15). Both are neither all subjective nor all objective, but are ways of relating the “organism,” or “live creature,” to “environment,” to use Dewey’s terms. Underlying questions in the account that follows are general ones: If a dissertation is written as a narrative inquiry into one’s own life, what is the nature of the inquiry that propels it? What makes it a form of research viable for thesis work? How does the inquiry evolve? Are there elements of it that seem to be independent from the specific questions a particular inquirer might have about his or her own life? My personal narrative inquiry was very much like a quest, an artistic and an intellectual one.

NARRATIVE AS QUEST

The quest for knowledge about one’s own life and identity is an ancient one and has motivated work in which self-narratives are not primarily literary pursuits, but fall into a tradition “grounded in the ancient project of self-knowledge” (Verene 1991). These inquiries are philosophical quests relying on the possibility that to “understand something is to discover its origin and to [narratively] recreate its genesis” (Verene 1991, 71). The quest to understand origins was part of the personal narrative inquiry I present. However, it was not a totally introspective pursuit. Its narrative quality included explorations of contexts and social interactions.

Narrative has been a mode of inquiry in studies of contexts and cultural environments (e.g., Geertz 1988). The use of narrative in the dissertation I present below both resembles and differs from the use of narrative in ethnographic case studies or in the production of narrative cases intended for teacher education. In those areas, narrative serves primarily as a mode of representation for inquiries that are defined often quite apart from, and usually prior to, the actual writing of the narrative. In the work I describe, the topic of research only emerged as a result of narrative writing, or telling, and developed as those activities proceeded.1 There is a similar resemblance and difference in relation to certain forms of action research, in which a teacher uses narrative to intentionally investigate a recognized problem in his or her practice. This is the motivation in much of the work
connected to a growing new special interest group (SIG) at the American Educational Research Association concerned with self-study. Much of their work consists of teacher educators’ narrative investigations into their own teaching practices. For them, narrative serves as the method for an already defined inquiry into a problem, whereas I seek to describe it as an inquiry implicit in the writing and telling of personal experiential narratives. It is a quest in MacIntyre’s sense: “[It] is clear that the medieval conception of a quest is not at all that of a search for something already adequately characterized, as miners search for gold or geologists for oil. It is in the course of the quest and only through encountering and coping with the various particular harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which provide any quest with its episodes and incidents that the goal of the quest is finally to be understood” (1984, 219).

I enter difficult terrain, when I aim to describe thesis as narrative. The difficulty arises from the interdependence of content and form, of product and process, of ends and means. This interrelationship exists in any art form (Dewey 1934, 198), but is not generally assumed in educational research. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) describe narrative as both product and process. Writing itself becomes a “method of inquiry that moves through successive stages of self-reflection” (Denzin and Lincoln 1994, 10), moving from initial field texts to research texts, to quasi-public and public texts (Connelly and Clandinin 1994). But what propels the writing through these various stages? Is it simply a questioning into my own life that I arbitrarily choose and that I can take into any direction and give any outcome I decide is best or most suitable to current trends? Is it like writing a novel or poem without constraint to accepted truths? Or, alternatively, is there a reality that is true and can be measured against the contents I present? Is the end already determined and I just serve as a recorder of the steps of discovery? Neither of these conditions describe my inquiry. In a sense I am free to choose, but certain choices will not carry the inquiry very far. In a sense the inquiry is open-ended, but the outcome is not arbitrarily decided by me. Neither, though, is there one truth that I simply have to find and tell about. There is no past that, if discovered, completely determines the results of the inquiry.

MacIntyre is helpful in understanding certain constraints and possibilities. He points to the historical or narrative nature of our lives that asserts itself in any narrative quest, including those in narrative inquiry. In MacIntyre’s view, single actions only become intelligible if they are seen as moments of possible, or actual, histories, and our lives are understood as enacted narratives. As such, we are burdened with a past for which we are accountable—even though it is not all of our own making—and with a future that is both unpredictable as well as foreshadowed by preconceived images of it. The same conditions apply in narrative inquiry. Constraints of the past and foreshadowed futures at each point of the writing suggest particular horizons within which it can proceed. Making choices can therefore not be arbitrary. There is no past that is not in some way carried into the future and “there is no present which is not informed by some [ . . . ]
image of the future which always presents itself in the form of a telos—
[ . . . ] a variety of ends or goals—toward which we are either moving or
failing to move in the present" (1984, 216). In narrative inquiry, the telos
is inexplicit. It is the tacit end-in-view that drives the inquiry. The writing
in personal narrative inquiry is therefore not arbitrary, but develops within
the writing and within the dynamic of the writer’s life. One might compare
it to a quest that presses for acknowledgment through inquiry.

**THESIS AS NARRATIVE**

The doctoral thesis I describe was written some years ago as a narrative
inquiry into multicultural teacher education. I undertook such an inquiry
as a teacher, an immigrant, a woman, and as an initiate into an academic
culture. In all these contexts, to use MacIntyre’s words, I was an actor on
a stage I did not design and I was part of actions that were not of my own
making. Perhaps to safeguard some measure of authorship in a life that was
shaped by many discontinuities, I embarked on a thesis process that was in
part autobiographical. It is this part on which I focus here. It is this part
that most resembles a quest after a still unknown “something”—a telos, or
tacit conceptions of a future, that beckoned and shaped actions and deci-
sions. The quest undertaken as a thesis project was already a tacit quest in
my life. My lived and my academic routes became one road. The lived quest
lent itself to inquiry because its telos was tacit. I did not consciously know
it. MacIntyre describes a quest as “an education both as to the character of
that which is sought and in self-knowledge” (1984, 219).

In what I present below, I describe the educational quality of such a
quest in relation to the content of the stories that emerged and the self-
knowledge gained, as well as the theoretical constructs I developed out of
the narrative activity as such. These gains can be characterized as hinging
on the roles that the past and the future play in narrative inquiry: The past
shaped the inquiry through living tensions and subconscious question marks
that pushed for “lived answers,” and the future beckoned, implicitly offer-
ing those lived resolutions. The resulting process constituted a dynamic
that was created by the narrative activity itself and continued to propel the
inquiry.

In describing this process I proceed on two levels. My task is both prac-
tical and theoretical. I offer a narrative account of a practice, while at the
same time attempting to conceptualize the nature of that practice. This is
a complicated task, because I seem to speak in two voices simultaneously:
the narrator’s voice that presents the case and the theoretical voice that
conceptualizes what is presented. Moreover, my narrator’s voice tells about
something very abstract. I am not presenting the stories that make my
dissertation, but the way they came about and the effects they produced, at
least as far as I can determine this from my present perspective. My two
voices are likely to appeal to two different audiences and may not seem very
compatible. I nevertheless persist in proceeding this way because I believe
that narrative inquirers will benefit from a theoretical understanding of the process they are engaged in; and those who are used to theoretical discourse may benefit from lending an ear to experiential testimony, at the risk of being put off by the underdeveloped argumentative structure of my narrative account. Most of all, I regret that for lack of space I cannot also present narrative material of the thesis itself.

I offer three components of the inquiry: “tensions with a history” and “tacit telos,” as well as the particular “inquiry dynamic” that both of these bring about. All three components depend on underlying structuring processes that I also describe since they acted as a kind of glue holding together various sets of narratives. These components and processes are foreign to traditional thesis construction. Nevertheless I struggle to maintain a connection to more traditional research. In order to suggest that a form of inquiry derived from the arts is related to the requirements of more traditional thesis writing, I use subheadings prompted by what I interpret as phases in traditional thesis work. I refer to them to keep some connection to the latter in a thesis process that evolved very differently. The headings I chose are 1. Phases in the Inquiry; 2. Form and Method of the Inquiry; 3. Outcomes; 4. Practical and Intellectual Usefulness of the Inquiry; and 5. Literature Review in Narrative Inquiry. (My literature review did not come at the beginning of the work. It linked to academic fields in unexpected ways.) These phases and a number of subheadings that describe them contribute a complex set of abstractions that endanger the narrative quality of my overall presentation. I proceed in this manner in order to conceptualize a practical process that will be recognized by those involved in it, but to my knowledge has never been labeled by them.

1. PHASES IN THE INQUIRY

Motivation and Data Generation

Feelings and experience come together in the first step of any thesis work, that is, they come together in the motivation that generates initial involvement with a topic. Traditionally, we expect this motivation to come from the inquirer’s personal interests and expertise and, to a major extent, from the needs of the field, that is, from gaps in a body of knowledge that needs to be completed or expanded. In personal narrative inquiry, the body of knowledge to be explored is the writer’s life. The motivation is therefore likely to come from the writer’s interests, her expertise, as well as the particular lifeworld that is her own. It is true that in narrative theses there is usually also a topic that gets explored through the narrative, for example, incarceration (Mullen 1994), literacy (Bell 1991), or acculturation (Conle 1993). But the topic does not initiate the inquiry; it emerges in its initial stages and often gets modified as the writing proceeds.

I did not start with a literature review. Relevant literature was pulled in more or less continuously as the personal was being explored and partic-
ular issues needed to be better understood. With my advisor’s encouragement, I began with journal writing before chapter writing started. Although I did not know it at the time, by proceeding in this way, I began to generate data. The journals were not necessarily on a potential thesis topic, but were reflections on both personal experience and theoretical readings connected to course papers. I tended to connect the two: journaling about experience called readings to mind, readings of which I made sense through more stories of experience. The process was not aimed, in my mind, to consciously narrow down to a thesis topic. On the contrary, it seemed to take me everywhere! But did it? Looking back—and as I find out now when my students do this kind of writing—I realize that we tend to write about a few issues over and over again, always in a different context. But those few issues were not evident to me at the time of this early thesis work.

Yet I knew whether something was worth writing about or not. How did I know? It seemed right at the level of feeling. There seemed to be an area of study ready and waiting and manifesting itself at that level. When I recently reread Dewey’s *Art as Experience*, I found an apt description of this state of affairs. Dewey sees it as a necessary part of artistic endeavors that artists begin with “an inclusive qualitative whole not yet articulated” (1934, 191). But even at the outset, “the total and massive quality has its uniqueness; even when vague and undefined, it is that which it is and not anything else” (192). In my experience of the writing process, this was unmistakable and Dewey explains why: “Different ideas have their different ‘feels,’ their immediate, qualitative aspects, just as much as anything else” (120).

For Dewey, this method of working is by no means restricted to art, but is a mark of scientific activity. “One who is thinking his way through a complicated problem finds direction because the feeling-qualities of ideas are an intellectual ‘stop and go’. If a thinker had to work out the meaning of each idea discursively, he would be lost” (120). A tacit inquiry process seems to be at work here. Accordingly, in my case, felt ideas seemed to push me onward toward an unspecified goal, fulfilling a yet unspecified purpose. In the initial stages of my work, there must have been some abstract sense of a specific cluster of knowledge, but I did not know—as I wrote my journals and papers—what the attraction was. However, there came a point at which I began to distinguish parts of the cluster.

**“Tensions with a History” and “Tacit Telos”**

At the prethesis stage of my graduate work in the spring of 1988, I engaged with two sets of colleagues in what I might call conversational journals. We did in our conversations what I usually did in writing: We reflected on readings, on ideas and on our lives without a strong preset agenda. In April 1988, we wrote a paper on one of these collaborations (Conle, Louden and Mildon 1988), and I recognized that there was a strong working dynamic, an impetus to work together, and to work at certain issues and ideas together while being pulled along by that sense of an abstract whole, that Dewey describes, but which was not explicit for us while we were working.
Our shared project became a pilot of sorts for me. I listened to over 20 hours of our taped interactions. I suggested to my partners that perhaps the dynamic we felt so strongly was not only based on common interests, but that those interests emerged from certain tensions in our lives. These tensions were personal tensions, different for each of us, emerging from the personal lifelong experiences of each of us and tacitly pushing for particular resolutions, or, one might say, were pulled along toward a “tacit telos.” In my case, my data analysis suggested, the tension had to do with being at a distance from experience, both in the use of language and in relationships with people. The “tacit telos” in my life I described to my two colleagues as “spontaneous interaction and union without loss of self.”

I was able to distinguish three sets of a tension/telos inquiry dynamic, one for each of us. But all three sets were also related in that they reflected common themes and problems not infrequently voiced in our cultural environment. A personal, existential tension/telos drove the inquiry of each one of us, but because the personal was culturally circumscribed, there was a certain commonality that ensured common interests and shaped a shared inquiry dynamic that touched each of us deeply. My two partners agreed with my hypothesis. Based on my analysis of our conversations, I was able to describe the “generic” process of our intellectual explorations as based on what I called “tensions with a history pushing for resolution.” Only 10 years later, a jointly created paper describing this shared inquiry dynamic was finally published (Conle, Louden and Mildon 1998). At that point it had become clear that a Deweyan process had been at work. The feeling-qualities of our ideas had been an intellectual “stop and go” and had tacitly given direction to our inquiry.

The insight gained in 1988 became the introduction to my thesis a couple of years later. It helped me search for a link among certain sets of narratives I later wrote in various sections of my thesis. At the time of our original collaboration, my own potential thesis topic had been vague: “clashing stories” or “alternative narratives,” I sometimes called it; “dialectical inquiry” or “inquiry dynamic,” I said at other times. I knew however that the inquiry was with those felt ideas and that the objects of inquiry would be discovered through experiential narratives. I knew I should begin to write out experiential stories about my own particular interests and the history of those interests. This became my way of generating data for the autobiographical part of my study.

Interest: Tensions and Desire

For Dewey, interest arises through emotions connected to tensions that are the result of a disruption of harmonious relations between the organism and the environment. “Emotion is the conscious sign of a break, actual or impending. The discord is the occasion that induces reflection. Desire for restoration of the union converts mere emotion into interest in objects as conditions of realization of harmony” (1934, 15). As Dewey would see it, although the relationship between the organism and its environment is in
constant flux, there is always a move toward balance, a rhythmic movement toward harmony with the environment. When there is disruption, there is emotional discomfort; there is tension and a desire for resolution of that tension. This natural process in people is not at all a necessarily conscious one. But it has important effects. Newly attained moments of harmony, Dewey thinks, are transitions to a more extensive balance, in nature as well as in people. Something is gained in the process. In fact, Dewey sees this movement as the very essence of evolution in life.

The dialectic between tension and telos, between the emotional discomfort of disruption and the desire for some particular harmony, I now see as the essence of my inquiry process and perhaps as the driving force in any narrative thesis that works with experiential stories. I also believe something new was gained through it (see below, section 3. Outcomes).

In my work I did not explore the disruptions or causes of my “tensions with a history,” since my focus was not psychological. I did use the emotion and the desire for resolution to carry out an inquiry. As Dewey suggested, “We engage in inquiry to restore harmony and relieve the breaks and tensions of disequilibrium” (1934, 15). But “restoration of harmony” was not at all what was on my mind. Instead, I followed my interests, choosing whatever life stories seemed interesting enough to try to reconstruct in detail. I wrote about my experience with language as a German child and as a Canadian immigrant. I told about my ambivalence toward the American soldiers that occupied our house in 1945, who at one moment seemed dangerous and at the next moment gave us candy. I spoke of disparaging attitudes toward the German dialect, with which I had grown up; of attitudes that I had internalized, although my dialect was warm and comfortable language to me. I told of my time in German schools and of the training I received there to think abstractly, a training I brought years later to my immigrant experience and to the learning of English. One amusing illustration was my ability to remember words without knowing their meaning. For example, when I was learning French and English at the same time, I would substitute *moine* for *monk* and *tente* for *tent* without bothering to look either word up in a dictionary. I spoke of my experiences in a Canadian high school where I, apparently the only immigrant, was intellectually successful, but unable to convey to friends who I felt I really was. These experiential stories were both objects and means of inquiry for me. I wrote them down because I wanted to write about them.

Dewey defines interest as “an unconscious but organic bias toward certain aspects and values of the complex and variegated universe in which we live” (1934, 95). Desire, Dewey suggests, “converts mere emotion into interest in objects as conditions of realization of harmony” (15). Those objects, in my thesis, were the contents of my stories. I remember being very emotional about some of the lived stories I constructed. My experiential narratives had contents that were meaningful and important in my life.

As those stories and many others were accumulating, the emotional impact was building up. The motivating tensions became clearer. Gradually
a telos came into view and the possible goal and purpose of my inquiry started to become explicit. By the third chapter, I hazarded my first guess at the telos: I called the potential resolution I was working on “narrativization.” By narrativization I meant adding contexts and feelings, agents and histories, to facts, events, ideas and people. For example, I narrativized the visualization exercises I had done in an applied psychology course. I narrativized the use of cooperative learning strategies in a school board’s implementation program. This new mode of functioning remedied the dryness of language and the abstractness of the world in which I tended to find, or place, myself. The act of narrativization offered a new path in my life while the concept of narrativization was part of my academic road.

The Open-Ended Quest

Writing out stories about personal interests, although it seemed very spontaneous and without direction, was actually anything but arbitrary. Toward the end of the thesis process, I realized that a tacitly felt end-in-view had been guiding my selection of stories all along. A telos had made the process into a quest. Like scientists following hunches, like artists trying to embody a yet undefined vision, I had been on a quest without a defined end-in-view. It is this quest that in my view makes the enterprise educational. It is this quest that gives a research quality to narrative inquiry. It is what drives the data generation.

I realize now that, as a work proceeds, the narrator can try to name a telos that she thinks is driving her work, but that does not mean that she really knows this telos. She may have grabbed a piece of it. For example, early in my work, during my prethesis phase with my two colleagues, after analyzing our many conversations during the six months’ collaboration, I had decided that the telos inherent in my work at the time was “spontaneous interaction and unity without loss of self” (1993, xxxi). This seemed to be a driving impetus in the issues I tended to select for our discussions and in the responses I gave. It was what I enjoyed in the interactions among the three members of our study group. Later, in Chapter 3 of my thesis, I thought that narrativization was an implicit goal I had been pursuing. Only in Chapter 8 did it become clear what the connections seemed to be between the telos identified in 1988, the tensions around language and relationships I had written about in Chapters 1 and 2 in 1990, and the telos of narrativization that I recognized in my third chapter (1991).

As I wrote my chapters, I was not overly concerned that the exact connections between them weren’t yet perfectly clear to me propositionally. I felt a connection and I was confident that attending to my interests and continuing my efforts at storytelling would show me that connection and would clarify it further. Now, as I write this account, with hindsight, I can make the connections quite clearly. I notice how “narrativization” and “spontaneous interaction” with “unity without loss of self” were connected in my case.
For me, the German immigrant to Canada, born during World War II, narrativization brought concrete contexts to a life lived largely through abstractions: the abstract quality of High German for a dialect-speaking child; the abstractness of English learned by the immigrant teenager listening to teachers talk about Shakespeare, Math, Latin, Canadian History, and so on. Also, in the authoritarian culture in which I had been a child, contexts were ignored: Rules seemed to have been made for all and had to be obeyed in all situations. For a German born during World War II, the responsibility of individual agency had never been prominent. It had been one for all and all for one. The meaning of unity came as part of a dubious heritage, usually lacking storylines of responsible agents. It tended to be seen as undifferentiated union, leaving no room for individual agents. I believe that this kind of unity not only brings about, but indeed requires, loss of self. Narrativization, on the other hand, provides agency. As an autobiographical narrator, I had to portray myself as an actor in various plots. It necessarily required a certain sense of responsibility for what happened in a particular narration. The agency in narrativization must have seemed intuitively attractive to me and worthy of a quest.

Now, some time after the completion of the work and in my new context of teacher educator, the inquiry has not completely fizzled, but has taken its place as one of several important tasks I am pursuing in research and with my student teachers. I see narrativization not only as a rhetorical device but as an existential task that potentially counters dysfunctional habits of generalization prevalent in our society and counters as well the context-free assertions in student teachers’ proverbial rush to judgment (Conle 1997a). It is now my task to make this explicit and explore the relevance of narrativization in teacher preparation.

2. FORM AND METHOD OF THE INQUIRY

Narrativization offered a resolution to the “tensions with a history” that had pervaded my life. It was not only a telos, a potential goal, but also served as a means of inquiry at the time. The writing was moving me toward a greater sense of harmony, because through it I came to accept my past at the same time as I understood and began to enact an alternative to a life lived under the constraints of that past. By working on my life in this way, following Dewey, I was simultaneously attending to my life, doing research, and bringing about an aesthetic creation, what he calls aesthetic form. Inquiry, art and lived experience were linked. Form and content were linked.

Surrender and Reflection as Methodology

When I told my stories, I became totally involved in them. But every so often I would stop and say to myself, what is it that I am doing? In Dewey’s terms, there are rhythmic movements of “yielding”—or “surrender”—as
well as “reflection” present in the creation of works of art (1934, 144). Moments of yielding in my work meant writing without distancing, writing down whatever came to mind, creating data, while thinking at as deep and intuitive a level as possible. It meant being one with the subject matter, letting the writing develop the subject matter. But as Dewey states, yielding to the object—in my case to my stories, to the subject matter of my experiences—was interrupted by asking where the writing was leading me and how it was getting me there (174). We become preoccupied, says Dewey, with the formal conditions of the work we are creating (144).

I had recurring moments of these efforts at conceptualizing form throughout my work and I usually incorporated the telling about it into the narratives. Answers came bit by bit, hardly ever seemed complete, and very quickly turned into more narrative data. I find condolence in Dewey’s explanation of this subjective objectivity. He says: “The one who withdraws far enough from the work of art to escape the hypnotic effect of its total qualitative impression will be able to distinguish traits that give the work its power over him but will not likely be able to describe them in general analytical categories” (1934, 145). Very true! Yet those “intervening periods of discrimination” are essential to the value of the aesthetic outcome: “Distinction in product is intimately connected with the process of distinguishing” (145). Artistic endeavors in Dewey’s view continually include intellectual acts of discrimination. In a sense, the artist has to “step out of doing” and become her own audience. But this is not quite correct either, because the reflective discrimination becomes part of the work.

Let me give an example. The section of my thesis I am about to refer to describes an experience where everyday life and intellectual activity came together through experiential narrative inquiry and were then reflected upon, so that I could understand the structure of the processes in which I was involved. I entitled my third chapter (the one concerned with narrativization) *Getting on the road we are on already*. I started it with memories of my life on the East Coast before attending the Ontario Institute of Education to do graduate work. In that place by the Atlantic, my life had been close to nature and close to people, but I had also felt that I was not making any intellectual or social contributions (Conle 1999). I then described the ensuing university experience. On the one hand, I saw it as a kind of disturbance in a rather fulfilling earlier period in my life, a disturbance that immersed me once again in abstractions. On the other hand, the disturbance also seemed to have a positive quality in that it filled what I felt were gaps in my otherwise satisfying existence in that maritime environment. For I loved theoretical writings, especially those with a philosophical bent. This dialectic shaped the existential road I was following.

My academic road, as it led to graduate work in personal narrative, allowed me to intellectually explore the existential one. I wrote about my work at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) and about getting involved in personal narrative. I described various projects and course papers, telling how they were beginning to counter the lived themes
of abstraction, dryness of language, and loss of self. As I kept on telling the OISE stories, the telling became an exploration about what narrative was actually doing for me. The two roads, the academic and the existentially lived one, merged. The stories clarified for me in concrete, lived examples what I meant by my term “narrativization.” I came to know more exactly what was being narrativized.

However, I did not neglect conceptualizations. I began to hypothesize about what I was doing in my story telling. What exactly was the process I was putting myself through? Theoretical material about the form of my work, for example, the “tensions-telos dynamic,” the “surrender and reflection” dialectic, began to emerge. These theoretical insights fulfilled two purposes. They became part of the conceptualizations of the thesis experience. They also became part of my overall life story. They made knowledge available that was a gain in theory as well as in life. (I describe this connection in greater detail below.)

Those are very complex processes, and Dewey insists that as we go through them, we don’t capture the whole process conceptually, even in moments of reflection. Nevertheless, we may notice certain conditions, certain instances of a process that, according to Dewey, can eventually be described. These conceptualizations are “outcomes” of my study. I am not under the illusion however that my current description of them is more than a single, incomplete take on phenomena that exist in space and time and could no doubt be described further from other vantage points, where they would yield other perspectives. Before I attempt a description of these outcomes, I want to emphasize another methodological aspect of my work.

Means and Ends—A Methodological Conundrum

As I suggested earlier, difficulties as well as advantages arise from the interwoven nature of process and product in personal narrative. Methods of narrative inquiry, rather than being externally defined, emerge out of the inquiry activities. They are not as much means to an end as they are part of the ends achieved.

Dewey uses distinctions about means to distinguish between the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic: All the cases in which means and ends are external to one another are non-aesthetic; but in aesthetic work, means and ends coalesce (1934, 198). Of course, there may very well be aesthetic qualities to theoretical work and there are non-aesthetic ways of painting or viewing pictures. But we should be aware that, in the aesthetic, means and ends coalesce. In my thesis process, means and ends did coalesce. For this reason, I cannot separate very clearly descriptions of method versus description of content. I cannot account for process without accounting for product. Below, I attempt some testimony about products or outcomes of my self-study. I perceive them in three areas: at the level of everyday life; at the level of artistic production; and at the level of theoretical reflection.
3. OUTCOMES

Through the reflective moments in the story telling, analysis of a certain kind was ongoing and continually incorporated into the narratives. There was a time toward the end of my inquiry, specifically when I wrote Chapters 9 and 11, when particular structures of the thesis process came into view. I realized what certain connecting principles were among the many stories I had told by then. I spoke of “resonance” (Conle 1996) and of the effect of a “third term” in metaphorical connections. I describe these two processes here because I believe that an awareness of their function in narrative inquiry will help other narrativists reflect and understand their work. In narrating how I came to these conceptualizations, I hope to clarify their meaning.

I do not remember the exact sequence of coming to the insights that follow, but I do remember there was a certain sequence of readings that contributed to them. These were not readings I specifically undertook to analyze my work, but I came across them out of interest or because of particular teaching obligations. In other words, they were part of my life. Certain ideas in these readings, however, became especially significant for me because they responded to questions I was asking myself about what I was doing by all this story telling.5

Resonance

Along with the autobiographical writing I have been describing, my dissertation also consisted of a participant observation study that I carried out with the help of four student teachers in a local school. We told each other stories about what we saw happening there. I played with the notion of “echo” when I thought about the stories that we shared. Three of us wrote a paper on “narrative echoing,” describing how one story was an echoing response to a previous story; or certain parts in a story reflected, or echoed, parts of an earlier story. Then, when looking at a series of my own stories, I came across Northrop Frye’s (1982) notion of resonance and the role metaphor played in it. I began to see the relationship among my own experiential stories as resonance. I saw parts of one story connected to parts of another story through metaphor, not metaphor as a figure of speech, but as a process of understanding (Conle 1993, 1996). This function of metaphor is explained by the German philosopher H.-G. Gadamer (1960 [1975]), who gave an example of such metaphorical understanding: Wings are to a bird what fins are to a fish. The wings are metaphorically connected to fins, the fish to birds. The statement only makes sense if we link images of birds to images of fish. In the same way, I distinguished clusters of images in one story connecting with clusters of images in several other stories. What really mattered was the cluster to cluster relationship, the story to story connection. This connection is not intentionally constructed but rather automatic, one might say. Various parts of each cluster related metaphorically to a corresponding part in the cluster of another
story. But there was no conscious creation of metaphors. The metaphor resided in the doing.

This phenomenon helped me figure out why I was telling the multiple stories I had created so far, since it allowed me to see the metaphorical links among them. Let me give you an example. I continually told many stories. I felt one story led to another. But how? Unlike the arts-based inquiry described by Barone and Eisner (1997, 85), I did not construct my stories to create a particular effect or understanding in the reader. I unashamedly simply tried to represent my own experiences without much concern about audience effect. At one point I looked at a set of these narratives. There was the “dance episode” that I felt was somehow symbolic for all of them: I, the newly immigrated high school student in 1955, was “left over” at a snow ball dance. The fifteen-year-old immigrant was standing by the windows in a large classroom, looking at all her classmates dancing, wishing she were there among them. Then there were my stories of German children in the American occupation zone in 1945: the four-year-old German girl at the end of the war, on the street beside her house, peering through the fence at the American soldiers in her yard; at groups of soldiers who spoke a language she did not understand, who had thrown her and her mother out of the house in the middle of the night to move in themselves, who later took some of the family’s most precious things away, who left the house in a mess when she and her mother were let back in and allowed to stay until the next group arrived. But those soldiers also had chocolate and pineapple preserves which they gave to the children who liked the taste even though they may never have tasted such things before. We hung around the fence to get more. We found these enemy soldiers attractive in their uniforms.

If you compare just two of these stories—the dance story and the occupation story—you can see the metaphorical connections. Scenes in one story correspond metaphorically to the scenes in the other story: the girl by the window—the girl by the fence; the dancing teenagers—the soldiers milling about in the yard; the space between the girl and the dancers—the fence between the girl and the soldiers . . . fins and wings—fish and birds. Resonance. I chose this word to name what I saw as a major structuring principle in narrative research.

The “Third Term”: A Structure Within Resonance

Some months later, in preparation for a course on cross-cultural education I was teaching at the time, I reread Elbow’s Embracing Contraries (1986), and I came across his conception of metaphor that stressed the functions metaphors fulfill for us. Rather than focusing on representational content, or the quality of the imagery, Elbow pointed to the rather hidden functionality of the metaphoric act. When we connect two clusters of images, such as a hawk flying through the air and perhaps a whale or a dolphin using its fins in the water, the comparison fulfills a function in our mind. It might be that we need to think about motion, or we may, as artists, want to evoke
triangular shapes. In either case, the metaphorical activity is functional for us at that moment. Elbow calls this connective function in metaphors their “third term.”

I needed to digest such insights reflectively and practically. I wrote journals about how these various readings linked to my work, that is, to my research activities and my teaching. I also tried to explain Elbow’s idea to my students to help them with their metaphors on teaching. Time went by; more writing and telling of stories. Gadamer’s revival of the forgotten nature of metaphor as a primary tool for understanding rather than as literary device stayed with me. Elbow’s “third term” stayed with me.

One day, I suddenly put all of these notions together, recognizing them as an answer to the question, “How do all my stories connect?” I took this question as asking not for thematic unity of my stories, but for an experiential function expressed through story that would make a thematic unity possible. The emphasis was on research process and function, not on literary structure. I wrote about the “impetus of the third term” as a function in narrative inquiry, using Elbow’s conceptualizations.

Elbow seemed to describe what I was doing when I narrated my wartime and immigrant experiences in Chapters 1, 2, and 3, the only difference being that I was not manipulating images by themselves, but relating stories to one another. How does Elbow find a third term in metaphorical connections made between two items? He claims that if we look for a relationship in a series of metaphorical connections, we may find their relationship at a higher level of abstraction (1986, 25). For example, in Gadamer’s analogy of fish and birds, fins and wings, that relationship might be, more abstractly, movement or a particular, geometric shape. The choice would depend on the function the metaphor-making had for the writer or artist.

If we relate fish and their fins metaphorically to birds and their wings, we are likely doing so for a purpose. The metaphor fulfills a function for us. The function for one painter might be to see the commonality in terms of a triangular shape; for another, it might be the similarity in the two creatures’ movements. In each case, the two-termed metaphor has a third term which is the raison d’être, so to speak, of the metaphor for the metaphor-maker: to depict triangular shape or a type of movement.

In a similar way, I might then ask about my work: What was the function of the resonance among my many stories? What was I doing by telling them? What were they doing for me? Perhaps I could find a specific third term? I needed to look at images, feelings, and ideas in all the stories and I needed to see what the resonance was doing for me, what I was doing through it, what the third term was.

In telling a particular set of narratives, I felt I was somehow telling the same story in different contexts. In many of my stories, I was facing a group of people across a gap—ambivalently. In each case I sensed those others as powerful, as somewhat threatening, but attractive. In a flash I realized, this is it, this is the functional connection among the resonating elements in many of the stories. This is my third term. Distance from people and wishing for union without loss of self. The third term and the tension/telos
dynamic I had sensed earlier coincided. Union with those classmates? With those American soldiers? Without loss of self?

I cherished the insight into what the driving force of my inquiry had been and how a “tacit telos with a history” was represented physically, so to speak, in the “third term” that held together various sets of stories. I wondered if, the hypothesis that such a process might be a common one for other inquirers as well? Understanding these structuring principles helped me understand my stories not just as portrayals of interesting events in my life, but as data on those tensions I had earlier identified in the group activities with my two colleagues. I understood that a particular quest had been taking shape and was represented in many sections of the dissertation, even in those that were not focused on autobiographical material, but dealt with multiculturalism in schools and in teacher education. Distance from people and union at the expense of loss of self were dangers there as well.

As Elbow suggested, the third term had a function, a usefulness in the life of the author of the metaphor, and a function in the narrative inquiry process. Its usefulness in the inquiry seems now clear. But at the time of writing, or even at the end of it, I was not able to completely realize what the lived function of that third term was for me. In what way did the work of creating those metaphorically connected stories do something for me, in what way did the third term have a function in my life?

To be truthful, I have no clear answer yet. I have some suspicions or hunches. Perhaps I am working at coming to terms with a need and penchant for observing from an outsider stance, torn between a wish to stand apart and observe and the desire to be part of the crowd who is perceived to be in the midst of life. I would not be alone in this dilemma, neither in the field of art nor in the field of social science. Many artistic motifs (for example, in Thomas Mann’s short story Tonio Kröger) and many research themes (such as Schutz [1962] and Greene [1973]) attest to the shared nature of such a dilemma. Artists as outsiders and researchers as strangers are common concerns. But knowing this does not lessen the emotionality and poignancy of the dilemma in my own life, nor the inquiry opportunities the third term seems to tacitly furnish in a narrative dissertation.

From another perspective, perhaps the function of putting all those stories together was, for me, to search out a place in collaborative groups for the one who is different, for the “other” among those who live in the consensus of accepted norms: the narrativist in research; the immigrant in mainstream society; the woman in man-made cultures. All of these were issues in my thesis.

It may also be that on a more abstract level I am struggling with the tendency to step away from the concreteness of life and live among the tempting, but potentially deadening, narrow precision of abstract thought. There is the perhaps illusory satisfaction of creating generalizations and of being able to abstract oneself sufficiently from one’s surroundings in order to observe and analyze. An outside-observer stance in academic research can have this quality of abstraction. This is an issue for me now as I write
This article, struggling to find an analytic voice without discarding the narrative voice as the author of my experience.

This dilemma warrants a closer look in the next sections of this article, in which I come to the theme of Seinsvergessenheit, or of life lived in a state of “forgetfulness of being” (Gadamer 1960; Heidegger 1927/1962). The theme for me is significant in life as well as in research (Conle 1999).

Effects in Research, Effects in Life

I need to backtrack to motivating tensions for my inquiry. Besides “distance from people,” I felt an unease about language as a dialect-speaking child pressured to speak High German in school. I also spoke of a “dryness” English has had for me ever since I first learned it in classrooms, from school books and from distant teachers. Many English words carry that barren abstractness with them, even now as I speak and hear them. They lack the experiential contexts my native German has for me.

I spoke of the necessity to live these abstractions and, in addition, that of decontextualized academic language. In them I sensed a “loss of life.” This loss or lack seems akin to the mode of existence that the German philosopher Heidegger called Seinsvergessenheit (1927/1962), a “forgetfulness of being” that he considered prevalent in modern, intellectual, and social life, so much so that we are not aware of it. Intellectually, he suggests, we live Seinsvergessenheit when ideas are merely placed abstractly in front of us (Gadamer 1986, 502); when for the sake of intellectual and technical control, we “think away” the contexts reverberating in ordinary language and make words function merely as signs. There is the danger that relationships to things and people become merely instrumental. We become strangers in our own world. My life in schools, as an immigrant as well as an academic, had been very much marked by such Seinsvergessenheit. But I was not at all aware of this until certain experiences in my thesis process made me aware. A brief account follows (see also Conle 1999).

Before I began the last chapter of my dissertation, I had not written anything for four months. Although I was doing academic work, I was functioning very much “at the surface” only. My work no longer touched me deeply. People reached out to me, but I did not respond, seeing only blandness and academic games. I also resented the constant presence of traffic and noise, the constant vision of an expanding sea of new, desert-like, suburban housing, through which I traveled daily on the transit system. When one is living Seinsvergessenheit as a normal state, one does not recognize it. One may existentially and subconsciously try to counter it, but one is not able to name it or know it intellectually. The account below indicates that I only began to recognize forgetfulness of being as a negative state through the experience of its opposite. The recognition was an experiential gain as well as an intellectual one for me. It was educational. It also made very clear the positive conditions, or even requirements, for doing experiential narrative research. To recount briefly what consists of many pages of personal narrative:
I regained a sense of being during a brief working holiday in Prince Edward Island, my earlier home by the Atlantic. On that visit, I re-encountered a landscape to which I felt greatly connected. I began writing my last chapter there, because I felt a great urgency “to write it all down,” to tell about my walk along the ocean in a landscape that had become my landscape because of the history I shared with it. I wrote to tell about regaining a sense of being in that landscape. It became a story about Seinsvergessenheit in my life, in Western society, and in the philosophical literature. An aesthetic experience in my life, and its continuation through writing, affected the process and content of my work. I understood Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s concept of Seinsvergessenheit in a new, very personal way. I also realized that I could not be a narrative researcher in a state of total Seinsvergessenheit. My experience by the Atlantic taught me what optimum conditions were for my intellectual work. (adapted from Conle 1993)

I recently began to conceptually specify those conditions quite precisely and publish them (Conle 1999). Pulling into my thesis work the concept of Seinsvergessenheit links self-study to wider social concerns. It confirmed a notion I had already begun to explore in my pilot project and in my second chapter, where I explore my cultural history and present a context for some apparently idiosyncratic, personal issues. Seemingly idiosyncratic conditions, it turned out, were not idiosyncratic at all, but were embedded in sociocultural contexts. Forgetfulness of being is a personal danger as much as it is a danger in modern Western society more generally. Living abstractions; living a surface existence permeated by technology, but at a distance from contexts and people; living a life in practical ignorance of our connections to time and place—these were the elements I had intuitively tried to counter in all of my thesis work. They were the elements that my “third term” announced to me. Narrativization was a means and an end in this effort. It made room for contexts, feelings and agency. I could now attempt closure to this part of my work.

Here then we have a resume of my inquiry: Seinsvergessenheit was particularly strong in my life, living the abstractions of academic language in German school, the abstraction of immigrants’ English; living at an ambivalent distance from people. I perhaps existentially countered this mode of living through career decisions and certain interests: I became a teacher of language to immigrants and close relationships and experiential methods became very important; I lived in a co-op house; I walked on the beaches of Prince Edward Island. My academic journey first heightened the tensions and then allowed me, through narrative inquiry, to intellectually get onto the road on which I was traveling already experientially. The existential interest began to drive the inquiry, creating a strong learning dynamic. This dynamic, created out of the dialectic of “tensions with a history” and “tacit telos,” kept the inquiry alive and intensely interesting for the inquirer. The tacit telos of narrativization inherently pushed for resolution of existential tensions; I knew at the level of feeling what was good for me and for the inquiry; I had a sense of what I had to work toward and how I had to go about it. By yielding to my “objects” and by incorporating moments of reflection, I gained insights into what I was doing, how I was doing it, and why I was...
doing it. The insights were intellectual as well as experiential; they countered Seinsvergessenheit and led to an intellectual understanding of it. Narrativization was means and end.

The personal inquiry touched not only personal circumstances but cultural conditions. It is therefore a legitimate question to ask, whether my personal, narrative inquiry was not only useful in my life but is potentially useful in the life of others.

4. PRACTICAL AND INTELLECTUAL USEFULNESS OF THE INQUIRY

Practical educational gains came through my experience with, and recognition of, Seinsvergessenheit: When I now design courses for my students, I want to support a way of teacher education that involves teachers emotionally and experientially, as well as intellectually, taking into account their histories and current environments (Conle et al. 1996, Conle et al. forthcoming). When I engage students in this way, they frequently ask about narrative inquiry in the curriculum of their own students. My answers often were not very satisfactory. This is an area of investigation in which I am immersed at present (Conle forthcoming).

In my daily life, I try to take care of myself and try not to succumb to the strong pressures toward Seinsvergessenheit in our culture, including that of our academic institutions. When I do, I find a way to revitalize my existence by reconnecting and appreciating natural environments and friendships.

Academically, I began to build a line of research and publications that explores and legitimates narrative inquiry. Whenever possible, I present rather unorthodox combinations of theoretical work and personal narrative. My audience has a special role when such research becomes a published text. For it is not only the writer who gets drawn personally into the inquiry. Reading and listening to stories of experience involves the audience in an aesthetic way. If I had filled this article with my thesis stories, reader participation would have been very different from what this article actually allows. As readers, you would have experienced resonance and become involved in change processes that are very different from those in more conventional educational research (Conle 1997b). You would have been able to work at your own “tensions with a history” by allowing my stories to call forth parts of you that are on a quest, on a road of existential inquiry, with its own particular ends-in-view. After such an experience, might you not relate to your field of study differently? The effect of aesthetic work on an audience is primarily experiential. Possibilities for theoretical and practical gains come out of that aesthetic experience. On a very different note, the question of educational gains also calls for testimony of the importance, in narrative inquiry, of a literature review and of a dissertation’s connections and contribution to a body of knowledge.
5. LITERATURE REVIEW IN NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Writers of narrative inquiry theses in teacher education relate to relevant literature in the field in different ways. Some review the literature in their area of investigation, since there is always some interest that guides the content of the autobiographical exploration. For example, Bell (1991) did a self-study in literacy and used her literature review to construct commonplaces in literacy. Similarly, there was the teaching of ESL vocabulary for Conle (1992) and incarceration for Mullen (1994). Of course, there are also the areas of narrative methodology and narratology that could be used in a literature review.

Many narrativist researchers in education continuously weave explorations of the literature into their work as the need arises to understand a particular issue from a wider perspective. This mode is particularly congruent to narrative studies because it allows the exploration of the literature to be integrated into the storylines. I generally proceeded this way in my thesis. However, to the extent that my narrative study was autobiographical, I also wondered what might be an appropriate type of literature review specifically suited to such work. I felt, and still feel, that idiosyncratic explorations into one’s own life should also seek a wider significance. Certainly in my case, I wanted to link the particular, individual lifeworld that I was exploring to the world around me. MacIntyre says, “we are never more (and sometimes less) than the co-authors of our own narratives.” Why? Because we have a history and “the story of [our] lives is always embedded in the story of communities from which [we] derive our identity” (1984, 221). So when we follow his advice and construct our life stories, we do well to consider their relationship with the environments and traditions in which we have grown.

But how do we review our relationship with our culture and traditions? Do we go to the sociological literature? In that case the relationship might get lost. For example, if I had gone to sociological analyses of Germans and Germany, or of academics, or of immigrants, I might not have seen myself in them at all. In order not to abandon my narrative, I felt I needed to construct group narratives in which I could always say “we.”

Here I followed Carr’s caution that in the move from “I” to “we,” that is, in the move from the personal, idiosyncratic to the socially shared, we must avoid scientific objectification of groups (1986, 124) for fear of losing our insider status and becoming merely a good example of someone else’s “truth.” Instead we might begin to create “we-subjects,” comprised of independent individuals who voluntarily recognize themselves as a group in relation to a world (Carr 1986, 148). This process suits a narrative literature review very well. As we-subjects, we constitute a group through a kind of collective reflection, says Carr (149); we act and have common experience because of a story we tell ourselves about what we are experiencing and doing.

The groups to which I felt I belonged were usually not observable in the way I could observe an individual in his or her environment. What stories
do I tell? How do I construct “our” story? How do I methodologically stay anchored in the first person? (Carr 1986, 124). In we-stories, there is also the danger of a possible loss of self in the fusion of a group, in the undifferentiated “we” (Carr 1986, 136). With my German heritage I especially did not want to fall into that trap. I wanted to maintain, or perhaps needed to create, my own agency in any review I might undertake of writings on my social and academic milieu.

I therefore looked for writers and thinkers with whom I could begin such a we-story. As a graduate student, I did not have the opportunity to make this a reciprocal process. I simply adopted them as potential “we-subjects.” I decided to pull in works with which I had personally come into some sort of relationship, some sort of conversation. That experience of relationship was to be the means of retrieval. I chose sections in which I saw my own story reflected.

With regard to the struggles with language, I chose Luther via a book my mother owned and which I often looked at as a child. Luther’s struggles with language in his Bible translation and his contributions as a founder of High German are well known. Similarly, I chose Romantic poets and the Brothers Grimm, who wrote their tales in places where I hiked in my youth. Major figures of German Romanticism often spent time on a still existing estate near where I was born, collecting stories told by the villagers in the area. A descendant of the then owner of the estate still has letters to one of those collectors of oral traditions by the philosopher Fichte who seemed filled with derision about the expressive language used. I also chose the twentieth-century philosopher Heidegger whose struggles with language came to me through his student whose philosophical texts I read eagerly, Hans-Georg Gadamer.

With regard to the tension-telos dynamic, I wanted to see if my inquiry story was a socially shared one. Was such a dynamic also experienced by others? For this section of the review, I chose writers who had an impact on me and whom I had read extensively; writer-friends I called them: Toulmin (1990), Bernstein (1983), Gadamer (1960 and 1986/87) and others. Each of these were key figures in evoking our cultural and academic landscape, each was at the centre of a cluster of writers, having been able to take the pulse of our Western intellectual culture and envisaging alternatives to what exists.

I did not want to speak on their behalf because I could not have my words verified by them to make the review a we-story. I therefore decided to pick narrative materials from their writings, sections in which I could discern signs of a tension-telos dynamic and with which I could enter into conversation and establish a we-relationship. For example, I cited at length Toulmin’s history of Western society during the last several hundred years (1990). He described a history propelled by tensions. He spoke of increasing decontextualization; of the growth of authoritarian, monolithic structures, creating a grand divide between the particular and the universal, between emotions and reason. Rationality became limited to theoretical argument and abstract logic. As this monolith grew, the timbers of its
framework became shaky and tensions mounted and started an inquiry
dynamic that became elaborated by many thinkers in many areas. Toulmin,
in the preface of his book, acknowledges that the dynamic touched him
personally: This book chronicles a change of mind (ix). The scientist and
philosopher became a historian and teller of narratives.

Other writers spoke of feeling compelled to move along certain lines of
inquiry. I cited Richard Bernstein’s report of being pulled along by a line
of inquiry for years until he finally and suddenly realized its focal point, its
telos (1983, xii). I cited Gadamer who saw language at the base of his
inquiries. I chose his autobiographical account (1985) of how he came to
his “philosophical hermeneutics,” the “resolution” he had constructed for
the tensions he felt between scientific methods and aesthetic understand-
ing. Interpretation for him became a resolution of this tension, offering a
way of experiencing the world.

My literature review had the function of throwing a different light on the
personal outcomes of the thesis. It amplified their social context. Of course
the review also became an experience of discovery for me, because even
though I knew the authors had influenced me throughout my graduate
work, that influence was not usually readily available to me for the pur-
poses of recall and citation in the traditional academic manner. Their
knowledge in me had sunk to a tacit level, so that I tended to think “from
them,” in a manner of speaking, rather than citing them at each point of
influence. I had made their knowledge mine; it had become my personal,
practical knowledge (Connelly and Clandinin 1988). The review was a
rediscovery of some of this tacit knowledge that was connecting me to
them, a rediscovery made possible through the telling of stories about me
and my author-friends.

POSTSCRIPT

Just as I did not construct my thesis after a particular model, just as I
worked with the tacit knowledge derived from my past experiences and
from the readings whose specific impact I had “forgotten,” just in this way,
I want my audience not to take my conceptualizations as a suggested meth-
odology for narrative thesis writing. My means should not become some-
one’s ends. No one should plan to work within a specific tension-telos
dynamic. It happens to you if you get, or give yourself, permission to get on
the road intellectually on which you are already traveling existentially. My
naming of parts of the journey may simply help other travelers recognize
theirs. I want to encourage them to not be deterred from a “thesis as
narrative” project and to have confidence in the quality of inquiry that
happens within it.

If we are, as MacIntyre suggests, actors on a stage we did not design and
involved in actions not of our own making, we can perhaps begin to un-
derstand the roles into which we have been drafted, if we proceed narra-
tively. By letting our academic and our existential roads become one road
in a narrative project, a tension-telos dynamic will pull us along toward greater understanding of our actions, our life and our traditions. In this sense, it is never completely subjective, but contributes to an understanding of those traditions.

Given the dangers of current relativistic tendencies, inquiry risks becoming an arbitrary set of procedures motivated by political or economic criteria. By merging theoretical and artistic endeavors that are firmly anchored to experiential phenomena within a personal/social tension-telos impetus, we perhaps stand a good chance to produce work that, at the very least, is personally meaningful. At its best, the personal will be permeated with underlying cultural issues that narrative will clarify, or expose, and thus give the work a wider social significance.

NOTES

1. I worked with an advisor that was at the time just beginning to gather together students who wanted to do autobiographical work and encouraged us to exchange experiences and support each other’s work. Meanwhile he tried to create a theoretical space through publication. In the initial stages I worked very closely with him. He was instrumental in getting me on my own path and making me feel that it was academically legitimate. As I progressed, he allowed me to follow my own sense of what had to be done and did not impose his ideas or any restrictions about how I could proceed. He often did not quite understand what I was doing, nor did I! We were on a path-breaking mission.

2. In 1994, my advisor, Michael Connelly, called such data “field texts.”

3. Once this was done in connection with Professor Michael Connelly’s class and once it became the main component in a course with Professor Ron Silvers, who himself became an active participant in the exercise. It was Ron who first drew my attention to the existence of a particular dynamic that seemed to move our conversations along with great intensity.

4. Along with the self-study component, I began working with four preservice teachers who were second-generation Canadians. We did a participant observation study together in multiethnic classrooms. As we wrote narrative field texts on our experiences in the school, we also linked them to other experiences in our lives, in and out of school. Telling experiential stories was an exciting and satisfying process for all five of us.

5. Questions by my thesis committee members and fellow graduate students also pushed me to account for what I was doing. I always insisted that even if the connections were not yet clear, they would become so at the end.

6. “Tertium comparationis” is the Latin term used in traditional philosophy for the common dimension that links two objects that are being compared.

7. One of the reviewers of this article pointed out that such a process is common practice in evolutionary theory in Biology, where it is called “homology.”

8. See also Polanyi (1958) on how knowledge becomes tacit or subsidiary knowledge.

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