Editors' Introduction

Theory and Craft in Narrative Inquiry

Colette Daiute and Cynthia Lightfoot

Yet even those who acknowledge the importance of the broader context wrestle with questions about how to study the complex interactions among changing cultural, historical, and developmental factors. . . . Researchers who are particularly interested in cultural factors in development face the challenge of conceptualizing culture in a way that can be studied empirically. . . . A narrative approach is being recognized as a means of examining the ways in which individuals make sense of their lives within a changing sociohistorical context.

— Phinney (2000, pp. 27–28)

Despite compelling arguments that a narrative approach will advance our understanding of individual development within sociohistorical contexts, the analysis of narratives often seems like a mysterious art to those who are new to narrative inquiry. Narrative analysis assumes a multitude of theoretical forms, unfolds in a variety of specific analytic practices, and is grounded in diverse disciplines. Little wonder that the novice researcher comes away from early encounters feeling too lost in either minutiae or grand theory to transport narrative methods to new projects with confidence.

Nevertheless, social science researchers who have found narrative analyses to be enlightening argue that the theoretical complexity and methodological diversity in narrative modes of inquiry are its major strengths. Narrative analyses tend to be flexible and systematic even as they seek complexity. Where traditional, reductionist approaches see diversity and variation as obscuring underlying processes of interest, and therefore seek to eliminate them, narrative approaches may employ literary tools like metaphors, linguistic devices like pronouns, or cultural conventions like time for insights about diversity within and across participants in their research, and thus create ways to explain phenomena without reducing them. Narrative analysis can be artful and inspired, but narrative researchers rely on more than inspiration to find meaning in their subject matter.

In addition to providing tools with which to examine the complexity inherent to developing systems, narrative approaches offer different ways of conceptualizing cultural/institutional and individual psychological perspectives for developmental research. Narrative psychology and narrative discourse are defined as sites of development as well as sites for examining development, which implicates particular research designs for gathering narratives and as approaches to analyzing them. Researchers who have adopted narrative methods have found them particularly useful for addressing the unmet challenge of integrating culture, person, and change—a challenge that has become especially acute in the last quarter century. Facilitated by advances in medicine, technology, communication, and transportation, the texture of modern life is increasingly defined by weaving together separate generations, life stages, cultures, and social and political ideologies. At the same time, understanding these life systems, in all their complexity and diversity, is essential to such daily affairs as educating our children, caring for our elderly, designing equitable intervention and assessment programs, and formulating policies bent on nurturing the development and well-being of individuals across diverse contexts.

Our overarching aim for this volume is to help researchers and students of research across the social sciences identify and evaluate critically the wealth of rationales, practices, caveats, and values of approaches to narrative inquiry. We are therefore addressing audiences in graduate level courses, undergraduate research seminars, professional research programs, and evaluation projects where readers have some familiarity with the theories, methods, and goals of social science research and are interested to learn about the unique features and potential contributions of narrative inquiry.

In an effort to make explicit the theory-based methods of narrative analysis in the study of human development, we have included contributions

from scholars who have extensive experience in various forms of narrative inquiry, and who together describe a range of major, innovative, and inter-disciplinary approaches designed to advance the study of human develop-ment rather than define it in narrow terms. But while they all report on the successful use of narrative methods, they also offer critical reflections on what they have done and how their approaches relate to those of others. Thus, the authors explain the problems and limits of narrative analysis, as well as the rationales and methods they have found most compelling, with an eye toward improving future inquiry.

We are therefore pleased to present this collection of theory-based case studies of narrative analysis seeking clarity around the issues of educational inequity, gender and racial discrimination, conformity and agency in response to oppressive institutions, context-sensitive concepts of mental health, citizenship, and ideas about development across the life span. All the chapters address the development of identity and knowledge in some way, and across the chapters different ways of conceptualizing social identity and knowledge. Toward these broader research goals, each chapter offers specific methods of narrative inquiry—such as focusing on imagination; the aesthetic project of adolescent development; cultural frameworks for learning; cultural scripts; the nature and role of audience in narrative writing; the multiple stances of narrators as speakers, subjects, and cultural interpreters; and the issue of research data and their relationship to life.

Although each chapter presents narrating as an important cultural activity in a specific cultural context, different definitions of narrative, narrative analysis, and development come readily to the fore in the analytic approaches employed. We have used these differences to organize the chapters into three main sections that we describe as "readings" in order to account for the epis-temological diversity inherent to each. Part I, "Literary Readings," is com-posed of chapters that emphasize the literary characteristics of narratives and development. Part II, "Social-Relational Readings," contains essays that focus on narrating as a dynamic, interactive process. Part III, "Readings Through the Forces of History," completes the volume and includes chapters that are particularly concerned with individuals' relationships to historically emergent and culturally ubiquitous master narratives.

As a further aid to drawing out the major themes and issues that define contemporary narrative inquiry, we begin each section with a description of its contents. In addition to commenting on the unique contributions of each chapter, these descriptions highlight the major theoretical points and the aspects of development addressed, as well as the range of applications for their extension. Embedded in each section, and drawn out in the prefatory remarks, are the authors responses to such questions as "What is narrative

analysis?" "Why do narrative inquiry?" "What is developmental about narrative processes?" "What specific processes are involved in narrative research, at what peril, and with what results?" We address these questions below as an orienting guide to the readings that follow.

What Is Narrative Analysis?

"Narrative analysis" is a place holder for different ways of conceptualizing the storied nature of human development. Narrative may be a metaphor for a life course, a developmental theory, a reference to a totalizing cultural force, and/or the method for interpreting oral or written narrative discourse. Three ways of conceptualizing narrative research are the focus of our discussion, and we use these to organize the contents of this volume.

Narrative analysis is a mode of inquiry based in narrative as a root metaphor, a genre, and discourse. As a metaphor, narrative analysis involves explaining psychological phenomena as meanings that are ordered from some theoretical perspective, like that of a storyteller, and consist of information and comments about the significance of that information. Consistent with this, narrative analysis relies on themes, mostly drawn from literary theory, to explain vicissitudes in the drama of interpreted lives, including time, truth, beauty, character, and conflict. Narratives are also genres, that is, culturally developed ways of organizing experience and knowledge. Feminist and critical psychological researchers have used the concept of narrative as a coherent story line organized implicitly by some dominant force to characterize the values, practices, and controls inherent in groups determining who the heroes are, what life should be like, and what should be heralded or hidden. Narratives are also specific discourse forms, occurring as embodiments of cultural values and personal subjectivities. While these three notions of narrative are not discrete, and researchers do not all use them in the same way, the notions do characterize what we take to be major approaches to narrative analysis.

Drawing on theory from a range of disciplines, the contributors to this volume all view narrating as an active process. Their approaches to narrative inquiry differ, however, as do their definitions of narrative texts. Nevertheless, all consider context in their versions of narrative analysis, and they each offer a different definition to address the specific questions guiding their research and reflection. Narrative is thus always more than words or windows into something else. Narrative discourses are cultural meanings and interpretations that guide perception, thought, interaction, and action.

Narrative discourse organizes life—social relations, interpretations of the past, and plans for the future. The way people tell stories influences how they perceive, remember, and prepare for future events. This meaning of discourse applies to all forms of human communication and symbolization—verbal and nonverbal alike. The view that mental life is comprised of symbols created through the consensus and conflict of social interaction means that sign language, signage, dress, music, and all manner of meaning systems are cultural tools. In this book, we focus on a verbal system, but many of the ideas about the nature of narrative discourse as a social system and the consequences of these ideas for analyzing development can be applied to other symbol systems, including nonverbal communication like dance or photography, although these are not the province of the present work.

The authors whose work appears here are careful to distinguish the materiality of perception, interpretation, and action from the materiality of money, food, and biology, but they explain the basic role of discourse as social relations that create, organize, or limit other material resources. From this perspective, the knives and bullets of war, the hunger of poverty, the privileges of physical health, and the joys of love are not narratives. However, the social relational systems that lead to war, poverty, and well-being occur in discourses and cannot be separated from them. Narrative discourse, like other discourses, is thus of the world not about it. The authors of this volume, one after another, offer their versions of (1) how people make sense of life when telling "what happened," "what happens," or "what will happen," and (2) how the imagining, exaggerating, hiding, performing, joking, and other symbolic activities of narrating support or limit life and its development.

Why Do Narrative Inquiry?

Narrative analysis is a variety of orientations to interpreting varieties of discourse, including narrative texts. Because these varieties are complex and grounded in diverse practices, we describe several approaches as narrative inquiry. Researchers can inquire into subjects of interest by examining narratives, by applying literary tools for understanding, and by integrating diverse types of data with theory-based narratives. The appeal of collecting, eliciting, and creating narratives for research has four major sources.

First, as the chapters in this volume explain or illustrate, *narrative analysis is appealing because its interpretive tools are designed to examine phenomena, issues, and people's lives holistically*. In contrast to survey

methods, for example, which ask participants to give coded or short responses to brief predetermined questions, narrative analysis seeks complex patterns and descriptions of identity, knowledge, and social relations from specific cultural points of view. For this reason, narrative analysts work with natural language; the richness of educational, clinical, and other practices; and the usefulness of narrative research summaries as theories in their own right.

Second, researchers writing for this volume have found that *narrative discourse and metaphor are excellent contexts for examining social histories that influence identity and development.* As a social process, narrating is, in short, a discourse process embodying the people, places, events, motivations, and moralities of life and, as such, narrative in its various forms is ideal for developmental inquiry. For example, Freeman (Chapter 1.4), citing examples from his own life and from his research on experiences of adolescents and artists, takes the broadest view explaining that narrative "data are everywhere." Gergen (Chapter 3.5) reasons that our stories can be more or less flexible and responsive to the particulars of the context in which they are told. Sarbin (Chapter 1.1) understands narratives as expressive behavior, embodied through an imaginative process in social interaction. Other authors employ the language of "genre," "scripts," "counterscripts," "cultural models," and "cultural narratives" to identify the processes by which the details of a life settle into narrative form.

A third source of appeal is that *narrative analysis generates unique insights into the range of multiple, intersecting forces that order and illuminate relations between self and society.* Literary theory makes use of concepts such as plots and subplots (multiple intersecting story lines) and of devices like metaphor (literal and figurative meanings), and narrative theory extends the analysis of complexity in terms of the multiple ways of referencing in narrating. Such referencing is described as (1) "referential" meanings that point to objects, people, events, and other phenomena in the physical world (and linguistic referents to those objects) and (2) "evaluative" meanings that indicate why the story is being told (Labov & Waletzky, 1997). Consistent with this complexity, Lightfoot (Chapter 1.2) refers to "double narrativity" to describe actions outside the narrative, like adolescents' risk-taking and their telling and retelling those experiences to others; Stanley and Billig (Chapter 2.4) and Bamberg (Chapter 2.3) refer to "multiple-positioning"; and Nelson (Chapter 2.1) refers to Bruner's notions of "landscapes of action" and "landscapes of consciousness."

The authors apply understandings of such multiplicity as units of analysis. For example, Stanley and Billig (Chapter 2.4) identify "ideological dilemmas,"

referring to contradictions evolving from goals and anxieties; Nelson (Chapter 2.1) identifies "cultural selves"; and Daiute (Chapter 2.2) refers to "sociobiographical activities" to connote the interaction of cultural and personal motivations as they play out across narrative genres in children's writing about social conflicts in autobiographical and fictional form. Other authors identify concepts to capture intersubjectivity among people as creating meaning together in conversations, as in Bamberg's (Chapter 2.3) analysis of positionality by adolescent boys making sense of masculinity or across time, as in Lightfoot's (Chapter 1.2) analysis of the time-conflict interaction, and as in Stewart and Malley's (Chapter 3.3) integrative concept of generations.

Finally, narrative analysis *permits the incursion of value and evaluation into the research process.* Two major narrative theorists of the late 20th century found that narrative discourse interweaves two phases of meaning when describing past events (Labov & Waletzky, 1997). In one phase, referential language in narratives points to the physical world—as Nelson (Chapter 2.1) points out, citing Bruner, to "landscapes of action," while in the other phase, evaluative language in narratives contains messages from the narrator to the listener or reader that say why the story is being told. The evaluative phase of narrating is a wealth of meaning for narrative researchers.

What Is Developmental About Narrative Processes?

Our theoretical claim, shared by all who contribute to this volume, is that human development is a social process involving individuals, institutions, and cultures and, therefore, requiring multiple levels of analysis. Beyond this common theme, the authors of the chapters in this volume offer different methods with different theory-based units of analysis to address questions about the development of identity, knowledge, citizenship, and equality.

In addition, the authors give different explanations of how narrating plays a role in development. Some see narrating as developmental because it involves an imaginative process. Others emphasize the developmental implications of narrative as a cultural tool or a means of elaborating knowledge. Still others explain that narrating is developmentally relevant because it creates the conditions for the emergence of complexity, such as multiplicity of perspectives, orientations, and even self concepts.

The Imaginary Quality of Narrating Is Developmental

Narrating is developmental because it is a virtual process that simulates and organizes life and any prevailing view about the life course. Narrative structures provide time- and space-ordered frames that simulate life, and these structures can be altered to reflect complexities of memory, such as flashbacks and foreshadowings. Development is a narrative process because it not only charts the journey through life but also embodies life categories of people, events, motivations, and moral judgments. For example, Sarbin (Chapter 1.1) explains that involvement is the "means through which narrative-inspired imaginings can influence belief and action" (p. 6) and, in particular, that "identity change can occur in response to subtle cues arising from embodied actions performed during attenuated role-taking sequences" (p. 6). The creation of virtual and potential characters, events, motivations, and moralities is a process that creates ideal people and points out the errors along the journeys of those who are less than ideal. Developmental scholars have found that personal extension in the narrating process creates possibilities (Bruner, 1990) that engage new ways of thinking (Sarbin, Chapter 1.1) and transform the psychological and physical states promoted by those who make the rules, such as legal and educational institutions, parents, and health workers. The importance of personal extension in narrative is captured in processes called "as if" (Sarbin, Chapter 1.1), "precounts" (Nelson, Chapter 2.1), and "fantastic" (Lightfoot, Chapter 1.2).

Particularly interesting is the idea across several of these chapters that the fictive and imaginative qualities of narrating are sites of developmental breakthroughs, such as when young people challenge social mores and expectations in their symbolic activities (1) by individual agency in their writing, as explored in the chapters by Daiute, Lee and her colleagues, and Lightfoot and (2) by narrating experiences that mainstream culture tries to suppress or silence, as illustrated in the chapters by Carney, Chandler and his colleagues, and Solis.

As a Cultural Tool, Narrating Is Developmental

Scholars have long equated life with the story of life. Epic poetry imposed order in ancient times. The Bible added moral order. The conflict plot prevalent in some cultures integrates temporal and moral representations, while the spiritual quality of folktales in many cultures, and character-rich moral tales in others, are frameworks for how people perceive and evaluate their lives.

Narrative is a cultural tool in several senses. Narratives are cultural forms often referred to as scripts (or dominant discourses, or master narratives)

with embedded values and moralities. Tensions in the practices of cultural and personal narratives provoke the creation of and reflection about individual lives and about the society. It is in these milieu that symbol systems evolve. The culturally relevant symbol systems discussed in this book include genres, event scripts, selves, transcendent scripts, and exclusionary scripts like "illegal" person. These symbol systems are the building blocks of the higher order thinking that organizes identity and knowledge.

The development of the cultural self occurs, according to authors of this volume, interactively, as Vygotsky (1978) describes, in collaboration with those already familiar with the way to do and know things in the culture. Nelson (Chapter 2.1) describes collaborative co-construction with parents, self, and others. She explains how the cultural forms of narrating precede the functional uses, as children's development grows in complexity from repeating the routines and cultural mores of everyday life in their families to forming a native cultural self to eventually becoming individuals whose experiences expand beyond the home culture.

Lee, Rosenfeld, Mendenhall, Rivers, and Tynes (Chapter 1.3) describe development as a social construction process; in particular, they explore the development of literacy via the cultural scaffolding of African American Vernacular English storytelling skills that express Black culture in literary ways with dramatic and figurative language.

This development of multicultural selves is also the focus of the essay by Daiute (Chapter 2.2), who explains how the values teachers convey in their curricula influence the contents of children's narratives about personal experiences of conflict. Explicit and implicit audiences, Daiute explains, are powerful forces shaping the narratives of children who identify as African American, Latino, or European American, yet the fictional narratives by these children express very different orientations to conflict from one another and from those promoted in the curriculum.

Lightfoot (Chapter 1.2) explains that adolescent identity development is a process that mirrors the development of the human self-concept across history, an interaction of "a temporal force and a fictional element that together conspire to create an increasingly hypothetical and imaginative self, subject to revision and critique" (p. 23).

Developmental processes related to issues of power are the focus in several chapters. For example, Stanley and Billig (Chapter 2.4) propose the theory-based unit of analysis "ideological dilemmas" to account for co-constructed narratives that express tensions between the purported values of cooperation in a university setting and the power relations that operate between faculty and students as these tensions emerge in a research interview.

Several authors describe the developmental transition as an interaction of dominant narratives and counternarratives. Solis (Chapter 3.1) describes the counternarrative about rights in the activities and documents of Tepayac, the community-based organization of Mexicans in New York City. Tepayac's counternarrative describes Mexicans as participants in the cheap labor force serving the U.S. economy, and as paying inhabitants of substandard housing, who draw little on social services other than sending their children to public schools as undocumented—that is, unrecognized citizens—rather than illegal.

Carney (Chapter 3.2) identifies the interaction between what she refers to as transcendant narratives and counterstories as one of status, as interviewers of Holocaust survivors in her study pressed for stories of resilient survival, while the survivors themselves suggested in various ways that they had not recovered from the traumas of the Holocaust. The lack of integration between transcendent and counterstories across the participants (and in the culture) is a status which, Carney argues, inhibits the integration of trauma when such integration should be considered developmental and healthy.

Analyzing their interviews with nine women who were college students shortly before World War II, as well as the women's "round Robin" letters, Stewart and Malley (Chapter 3.3) suggest a developmental process that is consistent with this interaction between grand cultural narratives and the more subjective experiences of the details that transform those totalizing descriptions.

Development Is Multiple and Cyclical, Like the Multiple Voicing in Narrative

Related to the sense that narratives provide multiple, often conflicting, cultural models is the notion that the developmental relevance of narrative is to be found in the way that it enables the emergence of complexity. Bamberg (Chapter 2.3) explains that the narrator is involved in creating and maintaining several subject positions across texts as a "subject constantly seeking to legitimate itself, situated in language practices and interactively accomplished, where 'world- and person-making take place simultaneously'" (p. 137). Likewise, Freeman (Chapter 1.4) describes a process he calls "rewriting the self"—a process of narrating a new and perhaps "more adequate" view of who one is as one refashions narratives about one's life.

In her analysis of adolescents' fictional texts, Lightfoot (Chapter 1.2) draws upon Bakhtin's (1986) distinction between two different forms of

discourse—one authoritative, one innerly persuasive—to describe how fiction writing constitutes a process through which individuals liberate themselves from the constraints of authority and tradition and reconstruct who they understand themselves to be. Stewart and Malley (Chapter 3.3) likewise explore how young women who lived on the margins of the World War II era fashioned a sense of themselves in relation to but, importantly, distinct from the dominant cultural narrative.

Narrative Skills Require Development

Of course, narrating is also a process that requires the development of various specific culturally defined discourse skills. The authors of this volume link the development of narrative linguistic skills to the development of self-concept and culture-concept. For this reason, we use the term "discourse" to refer to the integration of the cultural, psychosocial, and linguistic strategies involved in narrating. Nelson (Chapter 2.1), for example, focuses primarily on the development of linguistic aspects of narrating by reviewing the case study of Emily, whose crib talk has now inspired several generations of narrative theorists.

Sarbin (Chapter 1.1) offers a developmental sequence of imagining that links language, cognition, and emotion across three phases, involving the ability to imitate the language of an older speaker in the culture, then to imitate an absent model, followed by muted but vividly involved role-taking. These imitations are, according to narrative theorists, wordplay that is meaningful in its creation of culturally meaningful persons and events.

What Specific Processes Are Involved in Narrative Research, at What Peril, and With What Results?

In addition to providing traditional accounts of research projects undertaken in a narrative mode, that is, explaining how the narrative process itself plays a role in constructing psychological phenomena, the authors share their reflections on the *process* of their research—how they negotiate the methodological path between subject and researcher. The authors discuss problems that arise from critical applications of narrative analysis, as well as strategies for dealing with those problems. Critical narrative inquiry involves data analysis processes that build questioning about the analysis into the research design. Such a critical approach, for example, posits multiple units of analysis, ethical questions about the assumption of narrative

coherence, and the application of diverse theoretical perspectives to explain narrative discourse analyses. From such a critical perspective, narrative analysis, because it is inherently reflective, implicates an ethical dimension that is typically absent from or unexamined in standard social science research. In contrast to more traditional methodologies, narrative analysis is a mode of inquiry that attempts to integrate theory and ethics throughout the data analysis process. The results of narrative analyses are thus a set of perspectives to answer research questions and represent the central topics of an inquiry.

Overall, this volume argues for the importance of theory to guide the reading of research narratives and the narrative reading of all manner of data. The volume also illustrates ways of using narrative analysis to consider how complex cultural, interpersonal, and aesthetic factors shape individual lives.

References

Bakhtin, J. J. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Bruner, J. S. (1990). *Acts of meaning*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Labov, W., & Waletzky, J. (1997). Narrative analysis: Oral versions of personal experience. *Journal of Narrative and Life History, 7*(1–4), 3, 38.

Phinney, J. S. (2000). Identity formation across cultures: The interaction of personal, societal, and historical change. *Human Development, 43,* 27–31.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.