The Place of Story in the Study of Teaching and Teacher Education

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Educational Researcher, Vol. 22, No. 1, pp. 5-12, 18

Stories have the power to direct and change our lives.
Nel Noddings (1991, p. 157)

None of us are to be found in sets of tasks or lists of attributes; we can be known only in the unfolding of our unique stories within the context of everyday events.
Vivian Gussin Paley (1990, p. xii)

With increasing frequency over the past several years we, as members of a community of investigator-practitioners, have been telling stories about teaching and teacher education rather than simply reporting correlation coefficients or generating lists of findings. This trend has been upsetting to some who mourn the loss of quantitative precision and, they would argue, scientific rigor. For many of us, however, these stories capture, more than scores or mathematical formulae ever can, the richness and indeterminacy of our experiences as teachers and the complexity of our understandings of what teaching is and how others can be prepared to engage in this profession.

It is not altogether surprising, then, that this attraction to stories has evolved into an explicit attempt to use the literatures on “story” or “narrative” to define both the method and the object of inquiry in teaching and teacher education. Story has become, in other words, more than simply a rhetorical device for expressing sentiments about teachers or candidates for the teaching profession. It is now, rather, a central focus for conducting research in the field.

We are certainly not alone in giving formal attention to story. This term, like others from linguistics and literary theory (e.g., discourse, text, deconstruction), has caught on with considerable enthusiasm throughout the intellectual world and is beginning to appear in widely different contexts. In psychology, for example, Bruner (1985) speaks of a narrative mode of thought, and Sarbin (1986) proposes story as a “root metaphor” for the study of human conduct. Within education, scholars such as Cole and Knowles (1992); Clandinin and Connelly (1992); Elbaz (1991); Grossman (1987); Gudmundsdottir (1991); Hollingsworth (in press); and Richert (1990) have recently made story a central element in their analyses of teachers’ knowledge. As Mitchell (1981) noted as early as 1981, “The study of narrative is no longer the province of literary specialists or folklorists . . . but has now become a positive source of insight for all branches of human and natural science” (p. ix).

Anyone with even a passing familiarity with the literatures on story soon realizes, however, that these are quite turbulent intellectual waters and quickly abandons the expectation of safe passage toward the resolution, once and for all, of the many puzzles and dilemmas we face in advancing our knowledge of teaching. Much needs to be learned about the nature of story and its value to our common enterprise, and about the wide range of purposes, approaches, and claims made by those who have adopted story as a central analytical framework. What does story capture and what does it leave out? How does this notion fit within the emerging sense of the nature of teaching and what it means to educate teachers? These and many other critical questions need to be faced if story is to become more than a loose metaphor for everything from a paradigm or worldview to a technique for bringing home a point in a lecture on a Thursday afternoon.

Given both the excitement story has generated and the many issues this movement has brought to the fore, it seems appropriate to provide an analysis of the place of story in the study of teaching and teacher education. My overall purpose here is to begin the process of clarifying the arguments, mapping the intellectual terrain, and casting light on the major issues we need to consider in incorporating story into our research activities. I have no illusions that this discussion is the final word on these topics. My intent, rather, is to advance in some measure our understanding of where story takes us in research in teaching and teacher education.

My remarks are divided into four segments. First, I attempt to survey the various conceptions of the term “story” with the intention of clarifying both the meaning and the appeal of the term. Second, I extend the analysis to explore one of the central themes emerging in this area, namely, story as a mode of knowing. This topic enables me to connect story with thinking and to single out some of the specific uses of story as a central element in research on teaching and teacher education. The analysis also leads into a consideration of the political context of story and the issues of gender, power, ownership, and voice that are captured in compelling ways by a narrative framework and that are defining major intellectual tensions in our field. Third, I examine the contributions of story to our understanding of case, both as case studies (that is as the form in which we construe our data for analysis) and as cases for educating teachers. Finally, I conclude with an attempt to assess some of the overall consequences of introducing story into our conceptual and analytical corridors.

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What Is Story?

The analysis begins, then, with a basic question: What is a story? Some guidance in answering this question can be gained from a brief and, needless to say, cautious excursion into literary studies (see, for example, Culler, 1981; Leitch, 1986; Martin, 1986; Miller, 1990; Mitchell, 1981; Scholes, 1982). Here we find that a story is a "telling or recounting of a string of events" (Scholes, 1982, p. 59) that has at least three basic elements: (a) a situation involving some predicament, conflict, or struggle; (b) an animate protagonist who engages in the situation for a purpose; and (c) a sequence with implied causality (i.e., a plot) during which the predicament is resolved in some fashion.

Scholes (1981) places particular emphasis on time, sequence, and continuity of subject matter in defining narrative:

A narration is the symbolic presentation of a sequence of events connected by subject matter and related by time. Without temporal relation we have only a list. Without continuity of subject matter we have another kind of list. A telephone directory is a list, but we can give it a strong push in the direction of narrative by adding the word "begat" between the first and second entries and the words "who begat" after each successive entry until the end. (p. 205)

This example of transforming a telephone book into a narrative reveals another feature of narratives: They refer to events that have already occurred outside of themselves. Moreover, they have an implicit or explicit observer or witness who tells or recounts the events and, in the case of fictional narratives, often has access to the consciousness of the characters (see Martin, 1986).

Scholes (1981, 1982) also argues that a story is a special kind of narrative. He notes:

Any set of events that can be sequenced and related can also be narrated: stages in the growth of a plant, the progress of a disease, the painting of a picture, the building of a stone. (1981, p. 205)

But a story "is a narrative with a certain very specific syntactic shape (beginning-middle-end or situation-transformation-situation) and with a subject matter which allows for or encourages the projection of human values upon this material" (1981, p. 206). There is in story, in other words, a personification and a patterning of events around a theme or figure of significance to a particular culture (see Miller, 1990).

Scholes (1982) elaborates this definition from the perspective of the reader. A story is a text that elicits, guides, and rewards "narrativity" (p. 60), that is, the active construction of a story from the information provided. Central to this constructive process is temporality and causality. That is, "when we recognize a work as a story, we regard it as having a temporal sequentiality based on cause and effect" (1982, p. 63). In constructing stories, regardless of how convoluted and obscure they may be in particular instances, authors attempt to convey their intentions by selecting incidents and details, arranging time and sequence, and employing a variety of codes and conventions that exist in a culture. And, as both Iser (1976) and Culler (1981) have lucidly explained, readers, in turn, seek coherence and causal connections among these incidents and conventions as they construct for themselves, often retrospectively, the meaning or theme of the story. In Martin's (1986) words, "in order to understand what is happening in a story, we must connect the events, and do so by assuming the existence of general laws that interrelate them" (p. 188). The elements of a story, in other words, are implicitly significant to a reader, that is, they are assumed to exist in the story for a reason that has to do with the story's thematic structure.

Stories consist, then, of events, characters, and settings arranged in a temporal sequence implying both causality and significance. Texts of this form are obviously ancient, but until quite recently were never seen as relevant to the types of exposition considered ideal in educational research. This picture changed dramatically, however, with the interpretive shift in modern approaches to inquiry and the recognition that story represented, in Martin's (1986) words, a "mode of explanation necessary for an understanding of life" (p. 7). Stories became a way, in other words, of capturing the complexity, specificity, and interconnectedness of the phenomenon with which we deal and, thus, redressed the deficiencies of the traditional atomistic and positivistic approaches in which teaching was decomposed into discrete variables and indicators of effectiveness. And, as Gertrude Himmelfarb (1987) recently said of historical scholarship, "What was once at the center of the profession is now at the periphery" (p. 4).

Story as a Mode of Knowing

The special attractiveness of story in contemporary research on teaching and teacher education is grounded in the notion that story represents a way of knowing and thinking that is particularly suited to explicating the issues with which we deal. In the next section of this article, then, I will briefly examine the nature of story knowledge and claims concerning the centrality of story in thinking.

Story Knowledge

At one level, story is a mode of knowing that captures in a special fashion the richness and the nuances of meaning in human affairs. We come to understand sorrow or love or joy or indecision in particularly rich ways through the characters and incidents we become familiar with in novels or plays. This richness and nuance cannot be expressed in definitions, statements of fact, or abstract propositions. It can only be demonstrated or evoked through story.

From this perspective, story is a distinctive mode of explanation characterized by an intrinsic multiplicity of meanings. As Martin (1986) notes, "narratives, no matter how peppered with generalizations, always provide more information or food for thought than they have digested" (p. 187). The knowledge represented in story cannot, therefore, be reduced to abstract rules, logical propositions, or the covering laws of scientific explanation. Indeed, stories seem to resist such singular interpretations and, thus, cannot be subsumed into what Bruner (1985) called paradigmatic knowledge. To elaborate an example Bruner used, paradigmatic or scientific explanation requires consistency and noncontradiction. Story, on the other hand, accommodates ambiguity and dilemma as central figures or themes.

Mitchell (1981) observes that story is "a mode of knowledge emerging from action" (p. x). In similar terms, Bruner (1985) states that "narrative is concerned with the explanation of human intentions in the context of action" (p. 100). Because action in situations is subject to a multiplicity of in-
The centrality of story in teachers' knowledge is underscored further by the recent efforts to see story as a natural and common mode of thinking (see, e.g., Britton & Pellegrini, 1990; Bruner, 1986; Sarbin, 1986). From this perspective it is claimed we live storied lives (Bruner, 1986), that "human beings think, perceive, imagine, and make moral choices according to narrative structures" (Sarbin, 1986, p. 8). Thus, Elbaz (1991) argues:

Story is the very stuff of teaching, the landscape within which we live as teachers and researchers, and within which the work of teachers can be seen as making sense. This is not merely a claim about the aesthetic or emotional sense of fit of the notion of story with our intuitive understanding of teaching, but an epistemological claim that teachers' knowledge in its own terms is ordered by story and can best be understood in this way. (p. 3)

The stories we live by are not, of course, purely private inventions. We build them from the information provided by experience and from the inventory of stories or "pre-packaged expectations and ways of interpreting" (Chafe, 1990, p. 80) supplied by our culture.

As noted earlier, stories are especially useful devices for dealing with situation, conflict or obstacle, motive, and causality. In creating stories, we are able, therefore, to impose order and coherence on the stream of experience and work out the meaning of incidents and events in the real world (see Gergen & Gergen, 1986; Sarbin, 1986). "Narrative structures," in other words, "provide a format into which experienced events can be cast in the attempt to make them comprehensible, memorable, and shareable" (Olson, 1990, pp. 100-101). As Robinson and Hawpe (1986) note:

Stories are a means for interpreting or reinterpreting events by constructing a causal pattern which integrates that which is known about an event as well as that which is conjectural but relevant to an interpretation. In this respect narrative thinking resembles other acts of comprehension and problem solving currently studied by cognitive psychologists. (p. 112)

From this perspective, then, the mind is constantly engaged in a process of building models of the causal structure of events, in creating the world "according to its own mix of cultural and individual expectations" (Chafe, 1990, p. 81). Story is at the center of this constructive process. To understand thinking, then, it is necessary to find the story that structures an individual's model or theory of events.

Teachers' Storied Knowledge

This conception of the centrality of story to the organization of knowledge and the processes of comprehension and thinking has given rise to several exciting avenues of research in teaching and teacher education. In my own work on teachers' well-remembered events (Carter, in press), I have attempted to capture the interpretive structures novice teachers use to organize their growing knowledge of teaching. A well-remembered event is an incident or episode that a student observes in a school situation and considers, for his or her own reasons, especially salient or memorable. It is, in other words, a short story from a novice's stream of experience.

The idea of well-remembered events derives from two basic premises. The first is that teaching in schools is experienced as complex social events and that the acquisition of expertise in teaching is, in essence, the acquisition of event-structured knowledge (see Carter, 1990; Carter & Doyle, 1987; Carter & Gonzalez, 1990). Expert teachers, in other words, have a rich store of situated or storied knowledge of curriculum content, classroom social processes, academic tasks, and students' understandings and intentions. Novices, who lack this situated knowledge, often struggle to make sense of classroom events, and in this struggle, their knowledge is shaped in fundamental ways, that is, their stories are formed. A focus on events, therefore, is likely to capture a fundamental process going on as novices learn to teach.

The second premise is that knowledge is organized into explanatory frameworks and, in turn, serves as an interpretive lens in comprehending one's experience (see Carter, 1992; Confrey, 1990). Thus, by recording what events are storied by novices, especially over time, it should be possible to gain insights into what they know, how their knowledge is organized, and how their knowledge changes with additional experiences of watching and doing teaching. In a similar fashion, Miriam Ben-Peretz (1991) has studied the significant stories retired teachers tell of their teaching.

In a more explicit use of the concept of story, Gudmundsdottir (1991) argues that the curriculum knowledge of experienced teachers is organized in narrative structures, that is, that teachers use story as a frame for organizing and integrating their content knowledge. The curriculum "story line," or what Putnam (1987) calls a curriculum script, imposes meaning on the vast array of ideas and facts contained in the subject matter, infuses the subject matter with pedagogical interpretations, connects it to classroom events, and integrates separate lessons over time. Through story, then, teachers transform knowledge of content into a form that plays itself out in the time and space of classrooms.

Teachers' Stories

The work on well-remembered events and the narrative structures of teachers' curriculum knowledge underscores the interpretive and inventive processes involved in teaching. But perhaps the most vigorous line of work in our field today is that focused on teachers' personal stories (see Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Elbaz, 1983; Schubert & Ayers, 1992; Witherell & Noddings, 1991). In this work, the focus often ranges beyond the immediately technical issues of curriculum and classroom lessons to encompass teachers' biographies. Thus, teaching events are framed within a context of a teacher's life history. As a result, the central themes are often moral and philosophical, having more to do with feelings, purposes, images, aspirations, and personal meanings than with teaching method or curriculum structures.

Teachers' Storied Knowledge

This conception of the centrality of story to the organization of knowledge and the processes of comprehension and
in isolation from personal experience or biography. It is teaching, some would argue, "up close" rather than "out there." This interest in teachers' stories is closely linked to the emphases on reflection in action (Russell & Munby, 1991), teachers' practical arguments (Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, & Lloyd, 1991), and teachers as researchers (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990).

It is important to note, however, that the teachers' stories referred to in this tradition are, for the most part, stories told to researchers or for research purposes rather than stories teachers spontaneously tell each other. Gudmundsdottir (1991) has called special attention to the importance of the latter type of teachers' stories, which have been largely neglected. Gudmundsdottir's idea, in other words, moves us closer to the folklorists' ways of viewing stories, where stories are told, "not to strangers," as Barbara Morgan's (1992) words, but told spontaneously to listeners more likely to hear them as confidants and as a part of everyday coincidence. This seems an area ripe for careful research.

One of the leading research programs in the tradition of teachers' stories is that of Connelly and Clandinin (1985) on teachers' personal, practical knowledge. These investigators work closely with teachers to achieve, through observation, conversation, and mutual construction, an understanding of how teachers know their practice. Central to this approach is the notion of narrative unities which underscores the coherence and continuity of an individual's experience. Connelly and Clandinin argue that, from the perspective of schooling, a teaching act is a "narrative-in-action," that is, an "expression of biography and history . . . in a particular situation" (1985, p.184). Thus, for an individual teacher, theory and practice are integrated through her or his narrative unity of experience.

Connelly and Clandinin emphasize that teachers know teaching experientially through ""images, rituals, habits, cycles, routines, and rhythms"" (1985, p. 195) that are embedded within the narrative unity of their experience. Similarly, Elbaz (1991) notes that teachers' knowledge is non-linear, holistic, imbued with personal meaning, and largely tacit. This knowing stands in sharp contrast to the conceptual frameworks exemplified in the formal academic disciplines, that is, the paradigmatic mode of knowing.

Teachers' Voice

This opposition between personal and academic modes of knowing in teaching calls attention to a central theme in the literatures on teachers' stories, namely, voice. As Elbaz notes, this term "is always used against the background of a previous silence, and it is a political usage as well as an epistemological one" (p. 10).

At one level, the issue of voice centers on the extent to which the languages of research on teaching, with their emphasis on general propositions, allow for the authentic expression of teachers' experiences and concerns. At a second level, the issue is one of discourse and power, that is, the extent to which the languages of researchers not only deny teachers the right to speak for and about teaching but also form part of a larger network of power that functions for the remote control of teaching practice by policymakers and administrators (see Doyle, 1992).

Because teaching is largely work done by women, the issue of the use of language for the remote control of teachers by a largely male population of researchers and administrators has been taken up by feminist scholars (see, e.g., Grumet, 1988). Story has played a central role in this discussion in two ways. First, narrative is seen as an especially appropriate form of women's knowing and expression (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Helle, 1991). Second, story is used as a frame to undercut the dominant mode of discourse on teaching. In this approach, the paradigmatic mode of knowing is shown to conform essentially to a narrative structure (see, e.g., Gergen & Gergen, 1986, and Nelson, Megill, & McCloskey, 1987, on the rhetoric of scholarship). A scientific theory, in other words, is seen to be merely another story. Thus, the special claims to objectivity and authority made by users of the paradigmatic mode of knowing are declared unfounded. Such analyses are intended, in Stanley Fish's (1990) words, to "unmask male hegemonic structures and expose as rhetorical the rational posturing of the legal and political systems" (p. 220). At the same time, they elevate story and those who own these stories to a special place in the epistemological hierarchy.

A Crisis in the Field

For many of us, these arguments about the personal, storied nature of teaching and about voice, gender, and power in our professional lives ring very true. We can readily point to instances in which we have felt excluded by researchers' language or powerless in the face of administrative decrees and evaluation instruments presumably bolstered by scientific evidence. And we have experienced the indignities of gender bias and presumptions. We feel these issues deeply, and opening them to public scrutiny, especially through the literature in our field, is a cause for celebration.

At the same time, we must recognize that this line of argument creates a very serious crisis for our community. One can easily imagine that the analysis summarized here, if pushed ever so slightly forward, leads directly to a rejection of all generalizations about teaching as distortions of teachers' real stories and as complicity with the power elite, who would make teachers subservient. From this perspective, only the teacher owns her or his story and its meaning. As researchers and teacher educators, we can only serve by getting this message across to the larger society and, perhaps, by helping teachers to come to know their own stories. Seen in this light, much of the activity in which we engage as scholars in teaching becomes illegitimate if not actually harmful.

Despite my strong sympathy for these arguments and support for attention to teachers' voice in our work, I cannot ignore at least two essential flaws in this case. First, an extreme emphasis on a teacher's personal meaning implies that such stories are of significance only to the writer. This may be true of diaries, but stories exist within a community in which readers make something of them. Second, an extreme view of teachers' voice endows their stories with an authenticity that is simply unwarranted. As Elbaz (1991) notes, teachers are not privileged authors who somehow have direct access to truth and the power to tell the whole story. Stories, including those told by teachers, are constructions that give a meaning to events and convey a particular sense of experience. They are not videotapes of either reality, thought, or motivation. Thus, we cannot escape the problems of veracity and fallibility in our work by making special claims for teachers' constructions of their practice.

From this perspective, teachers' stories are stories told
about teaching in the first person. Although such stories may be especially relevant to many of our purposes, they embody the same codes and conventions as other stories of teachers and are subject to the same problems of interpretation and meaning. Again, we cannot escape the basic problems of knowledge in our field by elevating teachers’ stories to a privileged status.

**Story as Case: Telling Stories With and About Teachers**

In raising questions about the special status of teachers’ stories, I do not wish to underestimate the extent to which the recent work on story represents a very serious challenge to conventional analytical practice in our field. To examine this issue further, I will turn to the use of stories as cases. In this discussion, I have two activities in mind: (a) case studies, or the use of cases as data for the analysis of teaching, and (b) case methods, or the use of cases as instruments for teacher education. My intention in this discussion is to examine how a conception of story might inform the work that many now do, namely, tell stories with and about teachers to advance knowledge in the field and tell stories to novices as a means of educating them for the profession.

**Case Studies as Interpretations**

From the perspective of story, many of the cases we construct about teachers and teaching are simply not very good. This assessment is especially true with respect to characterization. While this seems to be changing ever so slightly, there are few truly memorable teachers among the corpus of stories told about teachers by researchers. One of the most common characterizations is a woman teacher who is kind and sweet and noble in her intentions, who tries very hard but simply does not, for example, convert to something like constructivist teaching, cooperative learning, or a particular view of mathematics instruction. These teachers are often compared to someone who, because of his or her contact with some research-sponsored training or staff development, has come to see the light and, thus, performs better on standardized achievement scores. But for the most part, I would argue that our teachers are still stick figures and, in some cases, are even given numbers or letters rather than names. This weak characterization and even weaker plot structuring occurs because stories about teachers are often told in the service of or on the way to more dominant paradigmatic interests, such as discovering the ever-elusive “effective practice.”

The deficient teacher is a common figure in stories about teachers. In many of our stories, in other words, teachers turn out looking bad, that is, as deficient in some basic knowledge or human capability that would enable them to be effective at what they do or able to make the necessary change toward enlightened practice.

Stories which share this theme are told as if they are true and complete, the whole story. We are led to believe, in other words, that “this is the case.” But stories exist within a social context and are motivated, that is, are told for a purpose. As Smith (1981) notes, “no narrative version can be independent of a particular teller and occasion of telling and, therefore, ... we may assume that every narrative version has been constructed in accord with some set of purposes or interests” (p. 215).

This analysis calls attention to audience issues in story. Stories convey meaning because they rest on social conventions—scripts, stereotypes, assumptions, symbols, maxims, beliefs, and typicalities—to evoke responses in the reader (see Culler, 1981; Martin, 1986). In oral traditions of storytelling, an audience effect is very clear and immediate, and it accounts for variations across contexts in which a story is told (see Bauman, 1977; Turner, 1981). But similar effects, although less explicit, can be seen in written stories. And this argument is not limited to the stories researchers tell about teachers. Teachers’ stories, many of which are told to researchers, are subject to the same conventions.

In the policy domain, as well as within the general field of research on teaching, images of teachers’ deficiencies are plentiful. In constructing stories of teaching, such images and beliefs form the presuppositions and shared symbols or codes of a discourse community. It is often difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain, therefore, whether the story told is a reflection of what is the case or a product of what Culler (1981) calls “the demands of narrative coherence” (p. 174). Given the common patterns and characterizations in many of the cases we have developed in our field, we must begin to ask what our stories are told in the service of. Do we tell them to validate our research claims and theories? To meet the cultural demands for a good story in our group?

It may be that for the most part, we, as researchers, fail to see ourselves as storytellers or to notice the rhetorical devices we use. In most of our stories, for instance, the narrator is invisible, which, in common with realistic fiction, has the effect, as Martin (1986) notes, of “giving readers the impression that no subjective judgment or identifiable person has shaped the story being told” (p. 74). But every story has a narrator, that is, a character within the story, separate from the author, who tells the string of events, and one cannot escape this effect by pretending it is not there. Indeed, one of the central issues in the literature on teachers’ voice can be construed as a question of narrator distance from the main characters in stories told about teachers. In most conventional stories told about teachers, the narrator, however invisible, assumes a superior, more knowing attitude toward the characters. It is the narrator who has access to the relevant literatures, who frames the study, who provides the interpretations, and who modulates the teachers’ voice. In this context, one can readily understand the motivations behind the emphasis on teachers telling their own stories.

This analysis of audience and narrator effects calls vivid attention to the interpretive processes that go into the very construction of the stories we tell. We are, in the very act of story making, deciding what to tell and what to leave out and imposing structure and meaning on events. And, as Hayden White (1981) argues with respect to historical narratives, the coherence stories achieve reflects the “moralizing impulse” (p. 22) of the teller. A story, in other words, is a theory of something. What we tell and how we tell it is a revelation of what we believe.

From this perspective, stories are not merely raw data from which to construct interpretations but products of a fundamentally interpretive process that is shaped by the moralistic impulses of the author and by narrative forces or requirements. And these interpretive elements operate regardless of who the author is.

Such a perspective certainly underscores the centrality of interpretation in the study of teaching while, at the same time, it calls into question any pretensions to a special ob-
moving from cases to generalizations

Related closely to the issue of interpretation in the construction of story is the question of moving from cases to general statements about teaching. When statistics reigned supreme, this problem was addressed by reference to sampling and, for the brave, generalizability theory. But, to use Doyle’s (1990, p. 14) phrase, how does one generate knowledge that is “lifted up from but not stripped of its particulars” when dealing with story? This is a crucial issue because, for many of us, the framing of generalizations is what systematic inquiry is all about.

The work on story makes the issue of generalizing especially problematic for at least two reasons. First, as I noted at the beginning of this article, stories, by their very nature, resist singular or paradigmatic interpretation. Indeed, Bruner (1985) argues that ultimately you really cannot cross the line between narrative and paradigmatic modes of knowing. Second, as the previous discussion of interpretive processes in story construction suggests, the relationship between story and reality is, at best, troublesome. As Alastair Reid (1992) observes, “The fictions we make are ways of ordering and dominating the disorders of reality... The reality is another matter altogether” (p. 60). As a result, our conventional thinking about the grounding of generalizations in empirical facts is seriously threatened. Generalizations from story are at best precarious.

These are compelling and sobering arguments that serve to warn us of the perils of rushing to highly abstract generalizations about teaching effectiveness from cases. They do not, however, preclude the careful framing of patterns with respect to certain themes. Generalizations of this latter form are not laws to which we must somehow conform to be effective but explanatory propositions with which we can make sense of the dilemmas and problematics of teaching. I would cite Koulnin and Gump’s (1974) notion of the program of action in classroom activities as an instance of a formulation that serves this latter purpose. To be useful, such propositions can never stray far from the particulars of classroom practice and often need to be accompanied by stories to clarify their meaning and application. Moreover, they are always subject to reformulation in the face of new stories.

Case Methods or Telling Stories to Novices

This last point concerning the meaning of general propositions leads directly into a consideration of a second use of cases to teach teachers, especially at the preservice level. An emphasis on what Sykes and Bird (1992) have called “the case idea” has certainly flourished in recent years with the publication of casebooks, the convening of case conferences, and the publication of numerous articles on the merits of case methods in teacher education.

The case idea is certainly consistent with the emphasis on the storied nature of teachers’ knowledge and on the power of stories to represent action and event structures. It would seem instructive, therefore, to examine how an analysis of story might inform our efforts to develop a case literature and case methods in teacher education.

When story is viewed as curriculum, one of the first issues to emerge is what stories do we want to tell? And this question cannot be answered on criteria intrinsic to story itself. Reference must be made, rather, to a more general principle or broader argument with respect to what knowledge is of most worth. Thus, we immediately find ourselves surrounded once again by the problems of interpretation and generalization discussed previously in relation to case studies. But now the generalizations we just saw as problematic have become essential to the answering of curriculum questions.

Within the field of literary studies, the problem of which stories to tell is usually discussed in reference to the issue of the “canon.” Guillory (1990) observes that “canon” descended from a Greek word meaning reed or rod for measurement and came to mean rule or law by which texts were selected, usually because of their orthodoxy, for inclusion in the Bible. He also notes that the major social institution of canon formation in literature, that is, the canonization of particular texts, was the school. The school, charged with the responsibility of disseminating literacy, served its interests by discovering and preserving the best texts as models that then became the classics or standards against which literacy is judged. In the end, value, interpretation, and privilege were and are institutionalized to serve curricular and pedagogical purposes, and controversies arise concerning inclusion or exclusion from canonical status.

It would seem that we face similar problems of orthodoxy or canonization in selecting the stories we tell to novices. Whatever stories we select convey a particular conception of teaching. The issues, therefore, are not simply technical or pedagogical. We must come to terms with what we hope to teach through cases. Unfortunately, most case discussions are directed to the consideration of individual cases rather than to the corpus of cases that might constitute a curriculum for teacher education.

As we pursue these curricular issues, it is important to remember that stories, because of their multiplicity of meanings and resistance to interpretation, teach in ambiguous ways. Indeed, this feature is both the strength and the weakness of story as a teaching event. Stories convey the multiplicity of ways actions and situations intertwine and thus accurately represent the complex demands of teaching. At the same time, they can confuse and frustrate novices, who lack the situated frames within which such stories are interpretable at all, who often presuppose that one learns best from clear and direct statements that are true, and who normally have well-developed conceptions of what it means to teach, conceptions that may or may not match the view represented in a particular story. We have a great deal to learn about the interpretive space within which story can become teacher-education pedagogy.

Conclusion

My purpose in this article was to sketch, from the vantage point of educational research, a perspective on story and how it can inform the work we in teaching and teacher education do. It was an attempt, that is, to examine the avenues that have been opened between our field and the
work on story and provide some direction for understanding where those avenues might take us.

I come away from this experience convinced that the analysis of story is of central importance to our field as a framework for reorienting our conventional analytical practices and for attacking many of the basic issues of interpretation, meaning, and power we face. And, as we have already seen, it has given rise to many exciting projects of interest to a broad range of our community.

To embrace story as a central element in the study of teaching and teacher education, we must realize that we are entering unfamiliar and often quite turbulent waters and that, for most of us, there is a great deal of basic mapping work to be done. We must also recognize the necessity of reformulating our relationship as a research community to the worlds of public policy and school governance that have relied in the past on our findings to validate their decisions. We simply may not be able to make the promises we have made to policymakers. We may need to continue to challenge the tradition of truth claims that largely ignored context, character, contradiction, and complexity. We may have to run against the winds of the sometimes warped ways of text, character, contradiction, and complexity. We may have to dignify stories of women’s work so that we will not degrade what they do. For so long, as Schiebinger (1989, p. 271) notes, these “issues of gender, like women themselves, have been held at bay—treated un-systematically outside the academy and little understood from within it.” It is time to transform both science and society so that power and privilege no longer follow gender lines.

I believe that many, this will not be a difficult task, for we have in our literature the contributions of thousands of men and women who do careful and caring work about teachers, classrooms, and children. But for some, it will take more than a whisper to wake the weary souls who are tired of the telling of stories already. And for those of us telling stories in our work, we will not serve the community well if we sanctify story-telling work and build an epistemology on it to the point that we simply substitute one paradigmatic domination for another without challenging domination itself. We must, then, become much more self-conscious than we have been in the past about the issues involved in narrative and story, such as interpretation, authenticity, normative value, and what our purposes are for telling stories in the first place.

Time will tell us of the tenacity of Nel Noddings’ claim which prefaces this article—that “stories have the power to direct and change our lives.” And we will be able at some point to ask of our story: Have we authored our work in such a way that lives have changed for the better, most importantly, the lives of children who are crowded in school and classroom corridors, and together with their teachers, are hard at the work of creating their own very important educational stories?

Note

A version of this article was presented as the Division K Vice-Presidential Address at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, April 1992.

References


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ACT Summer Internship Program

The ACT Summer Internship Program is offered annually to outstanding graduate students interested in careers in testing and measurement. Sponsored by American College Testing (ACT), the 1993 program will run from June 7 through July 30 at ACT's national headquarters in Iowa City, Iowa.

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principles like justice and equality and freedom and commitment to human rights since, without these, we cannot even argue for the decency of welcoming. Only if more and more persons incarnate such principles, we might say, and choose to live by them and engage in dialogue in accord with them, are we likely to bring about a democratic pluralism and not fly apart in violence and disorder. Unable to provide an objective ground for such hopes and claims, all we can do is speak with others as eloquently and passionately as we can about justice and caring and love and trust. Like Richard Rorty and those he calls pragmatists, we can only articulate our desire for as much intersubjective agreement as possible, ‘the desire to extend the reference of ‘us’ as far as we can’ (1991, p. 23). But, as we do so, we have to remain aware of the distinctive members of the plurality, appearing before one another with their own perspectives on the common, their own stories entering the culture’s story, altering it as it moves through time. We want our classrooms to be just and caring, full of various conceptions of the good. We want them to be articulate, with the dialogue involving as many persons as possible, opening to one another, opening to the world. And we want them to be concerned for one another, as we learn to be concerned for them. We want them to achieve friendships among one another, as each one moves to a heightened sense of craft and wide-awareness, to a renewed consciousness of worth and possibility.

With voices in mind and the need for visibility, I want to end with a call for human solidarity by Muriel Rukeyser, who—like many of us—wanted to “widen the lens and see/ standing over the land myths of identity, new signals, pro-

This power, yes, the unexplored power of pluralism, and the wonder of an expanding community.

References


References


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