

3-2012

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Recommended Citation

Chan, E. Y. (2012). The Transforming Power of Narrative in Teacher Education. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 37(3). <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2012v37n3.4>

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The Transforming Power of Narrative in Teacher Education

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Abstract: The focus of this study is to examine pre-service teachers' experiences of learning through narrative inquiry that gives insight into how teachers' development and knowledge construction can be improved. The article begins by inquiring into the learning culture in the Hong Kong context and explaining how the examination system affects knowledge construction. Then it discusses the use of narrative curricula to promote students' thinking and self-reflection. A case, explored through a teacher educator's interpretations of experience, is presented to demonstrate how narrative inquiry is able to change the learning habits of pre-service teachers and what it can do to transform them into active learners. This article argues that narrative inquiry method with its constructivist stance, offering opportunities for students to make sense from their past experiences can facilitate change and learning.

Introduction

Hong Kong students are generally regarded as passive learners (Watkins & Biggs, 1996). According to Morris (2003), the curriculum, as experienced by most students in Hong Kong schools, is taught “by transmission” and “[emphasizes] memory over understanding and reproduction over application to real problems” (pp. 51-52). As a teacher educator, I have learned that one of the key elements to success in teacher education is to make learning a site for inquiry. I argue that an inquiry environment, offering opportunities for students to think deeply into the questions they ask, can facilitate change and learning. Since most of the pre-service teachers I teach have experienced an examination-driven curriculum with rote learning and memorization as the primary learning approaches, they seldom ask and think in a critical way. An inquiry environment with the goal of encouraging reflection by pre-service teachers can enable them to become self-directed and active learners. It is through the inquiry process that they learn to be active agents in their own learning and transform what is to be

learned through the screen of their own experience and existing understandings. This learning orientation differs from the traditional mode of learning, and it gives rise to substantial change and personal transformation that enables pre-service teachers to become active learners who construct and reconstruct knowledge for their future practices. I have begun to adopt narrative inquiry in my teaching and research. Using this experience I demonstrate what narrative inquiry is, and what it can do in teacher education. The puzzles that intrigue me about this new pedagogy are:

*How narrative inquiry is able to change the learning habits of pre-service teachers?; and
What an inquiry environment can do to develop pre-service teachers as active learners?*

The student teachers I teach are in Human Development, a compulsory class for first-year preservice students in the early childhood education (ECE) program. The class is composed of about 30 students, all women who are 18 or 19 years of age. Based on my records, all the students have recently graduated from a Hong Kong secondary school or high school. Under the long term effect of didactic mode of teaching and learning, they tend to be passive in learning. Their passive mode of learning can be seen in the following narrative from my journal:

“Can anyone give a brief review in this lecture?” There is a long silence. Then, I smile and say, “Can anyone tell the most valuable learning for you in this lecture? Just tell what you think and there is no absolute answer.” Still, I get no answer. I continue, “Do you have any questions or uncertainty?” The only response is their reluctance to looking at me. Most of them lower their head, looking at the text-book and seem to searching answers from the lines. I guess what question I should ask next!

This classroom interaction occurs frequently. I become worried since they seldom ask questions nor think in a critical way. In the eyes of Mok (2005), “Hong Kong students are in general shy and introverted.....They believe they are causing trouble for teacher if they ask questions” (p.188). Their learning behaviors lead me to the question of how such a kind of learning culture is shaped and how it affects students learning. I turn now to inquire into the impact of the recent major educational reform on students’ learning.

The Learning Culture in Hong Kong Classrooms

The Hong Kong Education system has long been criticized as examination driven. It is believed that the focus on examination achievement contributes to rote learning and resistance to creative activity (Sweeting, 1990). Eng (2005) revealed in her study that the preparations for exams are enormous with intensive drilling by teachers and private tutors that lead to pressure and stress which would greatly undermine the social well-being of children. Tracing from the educational reforms in the past twenty years, the Target Oriented Curriculum (TOC)

was a major curriculum renewal initiative introduced by the Hong Kong Government between 1990 and 1995 aimed at improving the quality of primary education. The reform was designed to replace the rote learning, memorization, and examination-driven curriculum orientation. Morris et al (1996) point out that this reform had six key elements: (a) the setting of goals to guide all instructions; (b) an all-around approach to teaching, including knowledge, thinking, skills and attitudes; (c) contextualized teaching in the daily context of students; (d) student-centered approach; (e) equal importance on targets and processes; and (f) linking assessment with learning. However, the reform was not as successful as intended. It was reported that “in just two weeks, the signatures of more than 5,100 teachers from 250 schools were received in support of the motion to halt further implementation” (cited in Mok, 2005, p. 196). TOC, the acronym for Target Oriented Curriculum, was used by some teachers as the abbreviation for “Totally Out of Control”, and Targets and Target Related Assessment (TTRA) as “Terrified Teachers Run Away”. Teacher resistance may be due to the inadequate consultation with teacher and insufficient provision of professional development opportunities for teachers. If teachers understand the implications of the reform for children learning, would they have been more receptive to implement the TOC? To what extent the TOC can change the traditional culture of student learning in Hong Kong?

Hong Kong has long traditions of examinations, which also serve as a ladder for upward social mobility. Children starting from primary one are expected to go through at least two examinations yearly. They might become stressful if parents place stronger values on their achievement from examination in academic subjects more than other areas of development. Indeed, their placement and promotion to the next grade are determined by the overall performance of examinations each school year. Children with top results may be grouped and put into the elite class, which are regarded as the cream of the school. For the enrollment in secondary schools, the result of examination to be held in primary 5 and 6 is critical because it dictates whether students are able to get a good banding school. Primary schools in Hong Kong are not formally ranked and labeled with a banding but secondary schools are ranked and identified by a “banding” rating system from bands 1 to 3. A band 1 rating represents the top banding which is achieved through some factors, including students’ examination results, students’ proficiency in using English and the admission rate to the Universities in Hong Kong. It is not surprised why students are drilled by teachers for examinations starting from primary one since they want to obtain good results from the examination in order to get access to the top banding schools.

What is the function of assessment? Referring to the situation of Hong Kong, examination as a mode of assessment has been a screening tool more than a learning process. With the implementation of the recent educational reforms, the “banding” rating system has been reduced from bands 1 to 5 to bands 1 to 3. Although the reduction can minimize the possible number of ratings, it cannot eliminate the rating labels as well as the intense

competition coming from the examination and banding system. As I have mentioned in the previous section, the intention of the Target Oriented Curriculum (TOC) reform is to replace the rote learning, memorization, and examination-driven curriculum orientation. However, its success is bounded by the examination and banding system. My argument is if they still have the same examination and banding system but have added those new goals on top of it then it might be unreasonable to expect change because the way people get into the band and move up the ladder would be the same way. Hong Kong students have long been regarded as robots of examination, and they lack critical thinking and self-reflection in learning. In this connection, what do you expect if a preservice teacher nurtured through an examination-driven curriculum with rote learning and memorization as the primary approaches to teaching and learning? As a teacher educator, what can I do to improve the present situation? Dr. Mok (2005) addressed the concern of helping preservice teachers to learn proactively. Her comments about the learning style of Hong Kong students as passive and not responsive enough that may affect knowledge construction. Below is her comment:

Traditionally, Hong Kong students are taught with a didactic approach. The teacher is the source of information and knowledge. Students listen and follow the instruction of the teacher. Feedback in this tradition carries a negative connotation and is usually in the form of the teacher telling students what they have done wrong ... My students and I were brought up in this tradition. (Mok, 2005, p.185)

In order to change this style of learning and teaching, innovations in teaching approaches are necessary. I have learned that one of the key elements to success in teacher education is to make learning a site for inquiry. Narrative inquiry method with its nature of creating space for critical thinking and self-reflection is my choice for teacher education. After describing theoretical frameworks, I explore the place of narrative in teacher education through the case of Mandy (pseudonym). I met Mandy in the fall of 2009 when she enrolled in the Human Development course. I invited her to participate in the study after the grade submission so as to meet the requirement of the ethical review committee. Of the 30 students in that course, I chose Mandy as a case study because she wrote to me frequently and of her willingness to reflect from the stories we told. Additionally, Mandy wrote in English in all her correspondence and reflective journals that would be helpful for maintaining her original voice when sharing her stories with overseas readers.

Theoretical Frameworks

Narrative Research and Teacher Education

Narrative research is not new and has a long history. The use of life narratives for serious academic study is considered to have begun in psychology by Sigmund Freud (1910/1957, 1911/1958). His usage of life narratives was primarily in applying his psychoanalytic theory to individual lives. Another influential pioneer is Erik Erikson who used the life history to explore how the historical moment influenced lives (Erikson, 1959, 1963, 1975). In his work, he stressed that the individual is “embedded in a social context, and it is through the process of triple bookkeeping, an analysis of biological, psychological, and social dimensions of the individual, might we come to a comprehensive and meaningful understanding of a given person’s identity” (cited in Baddeley & Singer, 2007, p. 177). There is a rapid growth in the understanding and use of life stories and other narrative approaches at mid-20 century. Why did narrative inquiries become popular in the field of psychology? And why did so many of psychologists become so interested in the narrative construction of reality? Indeed, a “narrative turn” took place, with historians leading the way (Lyons, 2007, p. 604). There was a movement started by a cognitive psychologist, Jerome Bruner who acknowledged the importance of personal truth from the subjective point of view. He illustrated in his studies (1986, 1987, 1990, 1991) that personal meaning (and reality) is actually constructed during the making and telling of one’s narratives. It is through stories to tell what we have experienced, and “that stories are our way of organizing, interpreting and creating meaning from our experiences while maintaining a sense of continuity through it all” (Atkinson, 2007, p. 232). In 1984’s meeting of the American Psychological Association, Bruner made a pronouncement that challenged the old positivism, with a startling assertion about narrative. He stressed that the traditional logical-scientific mode of thought and a narrative mode of thought are complementary, and neither one can be replaced by the other. He further claimed that the standards of positivism had dominated the field of social sciences but no longer remained unchallenged since there was not one framework but many. His pronouncement accelerated discussions about narrative which had already begun across many disciplines. Rogers (2007) highly acknowledged Bruner’s contribution in the field of narrative psychology:

[Bruner] provided a crucial framework for the psychological study of autobiographies, stories and life narratives. Narrative modes of knowing, Bruner argued, function as a central form of human thinking. What’s more, they play a key role in the construction of self and identity. These ideas raised an epistemological challenge to the field as a whole, especially in America, where empiricism, experimental studies, and statistics were synonymous with psychology. Bruner gave us permission to explore human lives through

narratives, particularly interviews, and to make such studies part of the discipline of psychology. (p. 100)

In education, Schwab was probably the first educational theorist to call for close attention to the lived experience of children and teachers in classrooms. He put forward his objection to the classic conception of educational research through his early work on the corruption of education by psychology (Schwab, 1958). His concept of “the practical” curriculum is inspired by the idea of Dewey, who “envisioned a dialogic view of curriculum development in which teacher would take part as practitioners fully knowledgeable about their students and about life and work in classroom” (Elbaz-Luwish, 2007, pp. 358-359). Schwab (1978) offered a narrative of discovery and gave insight into why we needed to engage in collaborative inquiries attentive to the teacher perspectives and representative of reality expressed in teachers’ term. Recently, many educators have used life stories and personal narratives as new ways of knowing in teaching and learning (e.g., Clandinin & Connelly, 1999; Witherell & Noddings, 1991; Miller, 2005; Craig, 2006). According to Connelly and Clandinin’s (1994) view, stories or narratives are “the closest we can come to experience” (p. 415), and they call their study of experience narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000/2007; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Carter (1993) also viewed teacher knowledge as being storied in nature and thus storytelling became a natural approach to understand what teachers knew. “Knowledge is rooted in experience and requires a form for its representation” (Eisner, 1988, p. 15). Teachers’ stories are therefore one of the most pervasive forms we can use to represent their experiences.

Narrative Ways of Curriculum Making

Why narrative? Narrative is more than telling and reading stories, and “seemed especially useful to capture the situated complexities of teachers’ work and classroom practice, often messy, uncertain, and unpredictable” (Lyons, 2007, p.614). It is regarded as an approach to teacher education that helps student teachers to construct knowledge for professional practices (Conle, 2000; Phillion, 2005; Author et al, 2009). The idea of using narrative in teacher education is advocated by Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin. For them, narrative is not only the texts we read, but also the medium for reflection on personal practical knowledge and the objects of educational research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000/2007). As Phillion (2005) notes:

A narrative approach to teacher education is based on the idea that we make meaning through reflection. Reflection leads to understanding, which can lead to action; in the case of teachers, reflection and understanding can be transformed into renewed and revitalized practice. (p.6)

As a teacher educator, I have developed a deep interest in the role of narrative inquiry in

teaching and learning. This interest was inspired by Michael Connelly about the transformative power of narrative. As I studied narrative inquiry, I became intrigued by it as I engaged in active reflection on my multiple roles and asking about who I am and why I am. It was through the engagement of writing and telling my autobiographical stories helping me to reconstruct meaning from my past experiences. According to Clandinin and Connelly (1995), the notion of teacher knowledge is related to teachers' personal history (the past) and expressed in the teachers' present classroom practices and their future actions. By examining my storied experiences, and sharing them with Connelly and my research group, I could see my personal philosophy in action, leading me to understand how my views, values, and beliefs were formulated and now direct my actions in teaching. These experiences give me incentives to adopt narrative approach in my teaching and I consider it as a tool to encourage active learning of my students.

I use narrative approach in my undergraduate work with preservice teachers for encouraging proactive learning. Based on the work of Connelly and Clandinin (1988/2004), I have developed two activities that form the basis of the class I teach. Autobiographic sessions and self inquires into stories are the two activities I have developed to support active learning. These activities focus on understanding experience, and reflecting on experience, to create in-depth understanding of self and others. These activities create space for self inquiry that enable participants to become active learners who construct or reconstruct what is to be learned.

Autobiographic sessions: During each session, the presenter should bring an artifact back to the class, and tell stories about its impact on her growth and development. To help students further understand the connection between the past experiences and future actions, their peers are encouraged to ask questions to prompt their thinking. An email feedback to the presenter is requested in response to the told stories. Autobiographic sessions create space for my students to share their autobiographical stories and enhance shared understanding with their peers. Autobiographical stories are written based on the impact of an artifact that they have kept for a long time in their memory box. In the midst of their lives, it is useful to do these explorations as they are directly related to their growth and development. Students in my class are guided by questions such as: Where did you get it or who gave it to you? How long have you kept it? Why is it important to you? How do you relate to its impact on your present and future practices?

Self inquires into stories: Stories written about past experiences can show what student teachers have experienced through childhood and youth. It is useful to make inquires into stories since it can develop understanding about who they are and who they are becoming. Students in my class may begin with a chronicle indicating some events or persons that have great impact on their growth and development. Next, students are advised to write down at least three stories that include detailed information on the following questions: Who were the

characters? What was the setting? When was it? Why is it impressive to you? They are encouraged to share with their peers or the instructor about the significance of it. It is powerful when having fellow students or the instructor respond to them because these dialogues may create connection and resonance that stimulate thinking or reflection.

In the sections that follow, I provide examples of narrative curricula from each phase of data collection, the autobiographic session, and self-inquiries into stories. In each section, I begin with an excerpt of the narrative construction to provide the reader an overview of curricular activities I have employed. This is followed by excerpts from the raw data that illustrate Mandy, the participant's own storytelling in response to the narrative inquiry methods. Finally, I offer some concluding remarks.

Analysis and Discussion

The Autobiographic Session

In the excerpt from the following narrative construction, I meet a group of ECE students from my autobiographic session. I display the school award of "sports girl of the year" that I received at Grade 10 and tell them the impact of sport participations on my development. The stories begin when one of the students asks me why I became a PE teacher.

My sport team coach, Ms. Mak, was my Grade 7 Physical Education teacher. She was young, energetic, responsible and caring. She organized various sports teams, and devoted herself to all training activities including swimming, athletics and basketball. She could be found on the playground each noon hour and after school. Her coaching support and encouragement elicited my keen participation.....

I loved her and she seemed to share a sense of responsibility for my success. Being inspired by her, I determined to follow her career path and pursue PE teaching as my life-long career.

Participating in this autobiographical session, Mandy and I reflected in writing on our own development. It is fascinating to find that my Grade 7 PE teacher had such a great impact on me; her voice and image are so real that they become part of my personal practical knowledge. Connelly & Clandinin (1988) acknowledged the use of biographic and autobiographic method for helping teachers to reflect on their personal practical knowledge. Their notion (1988; 2000) about teacher knowledge echoed that of Elbaz (1983) since teachers' personal history (the past) was considered as records of ongoing actions that were expressed in teachers' classroom practices (present) and future actions. In the following excerpt from an email communication, Mandy resonates my stories with her classroom stories that prompt her to reflect how she has come up with the career choices.

After hearing your demonstration of the narrative inquiry, I have a little thought.

What is my dream? Actually, I wrote in my primary school writing that I would like to be a teacher just like what you did in the past. But my dream has modified and changed for many times. I wanted to be a designer in Secondary three, a kindergarten teacher in Secondary Five while wanted to be a nurse after Secondary School graduation. Finally, I chose my own way. Being a kindergarten teacher seems to be the most favorable and suitable career for me. And now I hope that I will never lose this dream.

People always say that everyone has at least one teacher affecting our thoughts or even attitude towards our future. It seems to be true. I believe that your P.E. teacher influenced you a lot. I can feel what she gave you: confidence, energy. I think that you still have the style of an energetic P.E. teacher. And I am wondering if she had never been your teacher, would you have become a P.E. teacher?

In my own experience, I once had a teacher who taught me Chinese History and edified me in Secondary Seven. He was a new teacher in my last year. But he is a very experienced teacher. Although our class didn't like him at the beginning, he became our good friend later on. He stressed that we should be confident. He always enlightened me and gave me encouragement. In our last lesson, he performed some songs like "prosperous" (前程錦繡) by using his own musical instrument "Er Hu" (二胡). We all cried and refused to say "Goodbye" to him. He really helped me a lot. I am proud of being his student in my last Secondary School memory. Afterwards, I realize that time is not a limitation for building up relationship with others. It is staggering that everyone passes along us can bring us great influence.

Mandy revisits her classroom experiences and resonates with stories of her own teacher when she reflects upon the meaning of the stories that I have told in the autobiographical session. Her narratives reflect the complexity of the struggles she faced when making her career choice. She realized that the plan she has made at different stages of development was not stable but constantly changing. Through retelling and reliving her stories of experience with her teacher, she began to see the influence of others and highlighted the impact of human relationships on shaping one's thoughts and attitude. Yet, it was through the opportunities for storytelling (such as depicted above) that Mandy engaged in reflection (Schon, 1983) and discover resonances (Conle, 1996). She becomes aware of the centrality of lived experience and come to understand the intricate relationships among learning, teaching, and life. In the following excerpt from a conversation, Mandy articulates this awareness:

As an audience, I think that your sharing is remarkable. And it triggers off my past recollection. I will try to learn from your presentation skills in order to make a good narrative inquiry with my classmates. And I think that we all can know more about each other after this interesting activity. Moreover, we can understand ourselves deeply by reviewing our past experience and memory. It is also a useful task for self-evaluation and analysis of own

development. Thus, this helps us to apply different contemporary theories introduced in class into the analysis.

Although Mandy's understanding of narrative inquiry was evident in other sources of data, this conversation clearly depicts how Mandy's reflection resulted in an awareness of her newfound understandings. Mandy indicates that the participating in the autobiographical sessions provided her the opportunities to tell her embedded stories, reflect on her stories, and construct meaning from the stories. This meaning-making event is what Connelly and Clandinin advocate as "narrative inquiry". In this line of thinking, narrative inquiry becomes a pedagogical strategy (Coulter, et.al., 2007). In reflecting on Mandy's narratives, I concur with the claim made by Conle (2005) that "students were able to explore more sensitive issues at greater depth and with greater personal significance through experiential interchange than they were able to discuss in the usual academic fashion" (p. 221). Narrative inquiry as a means of learning offers a constructivist stance is found to be different from the traditional learning method which assumes students are passive knowledge receivers and accumulators. In my recent teaching and research work, the intention of adopting narrative inquiry method is to challenge and change the learning habits of pre-service teachers. Mandy's attempt to make sense from her past experiences has moved her to be a self-directed and active learner. Mandy instead of playing a passive role of simply listen, accept and learn, has demonstrated an active role by providing feedback as well as making sense from her past experiences through inquires. This is what I find that narrative inquiry has a role to play in changing the learning habits of pre-service teachers.

Self inquiries into stories

In the previous section I highlighted Mandy's experiences in reflecting upon the classroom stories to illustrate the meaning that narrative inquiry has for her, whereas in this section I focus on Mandy's experiences during her inquiries into stories. Mandy, as one of the many school children in Hong Kong, has experienced intense competitions in the schooling. In the following excerpt from the self-study report, Mandy describes how the anxiety was created that has impeded her social development.

.....the situation changed and I entered a solitary period in Secondary three. I heard that my mother's friend needed to help her son finding school after Public Examination. I then worried Due to the extreme anxiety about my future, the horrible time then began. I kept on studying hard in the recess time and lunch time without having any break. Despite I was severely ill, I refused to have sick-leave. When I was preparing for the school examination, I cried non-stopped just like those who are bewitched. Finally, I became the only Model Clarian (Model

students of the year) in my form. But I found that I couldn't remember who my classmates were in Secondary three. Similarly, I couldn't tell who my friends were. I became extremely silent girl at the end.....

Participating in this course work, Mandy chronicled those critical events and reflected in writing to help her understand the impact of early experiences on later growth and development. Dewey (1938) reminded us that the ways we develop depend on our experiences in and interaction with our environment. Since the environment is constantly changing, the growth and development of each individual will be unique. Mandy's reflections of her own patterns of learning in the school context were often critical reflections in that she developed an awareness of how her social development was hindered. Mandy highlighted the stress she has experienced when preparing for examinations. Although she was awarded for her diligence, she lost all her friendship due to the over-emphasis on studying in that year and she referred it as "social cessation period" in her chronicle. She continued to explain how she has overcome the difficulties in the following excerpt from her reflective journal.

Luckily, my social development started to progress in Secondary Four. I didn't want to have such horrible life anymore. So I took up different posts in extra-curricular activities..... I needed to discuss about the details of activities with the older Clarians in the committee which was a great chances for me to declare my own self in front of people of different ages. This was a great improvement in my relationship with my older teenagers..... I joined the voluntary group "Free to In" of the Hong Kong Young Women's Christian Association in Secondary 5. ...Through the experience of serving the disadvantaged minority, I have learned to treasure my own life and to thanksgiving.

Year 2005 was the most influencing one in my twenty years life.... I became president of Student Union. Organizing and preparing activities took us a lot of time..... We experienced many happy, sad and disappointed feelings. After all, I learned a lot of experience while gaining the valuable friendship with other exco-members. My best friends always gave me surprise and support. I remember that I felt extremely nervous and stressful at the beginning of the Student Union election. Kitty, played jokes at me and made me laugh happily. Even though I felt sad, I felt exiting because of her entertainment. I was once very depressed that I failed many subjects in the first term of Secondary Six. Kitty only said, "Just cry whenever you want!" She gave me room to cry and warmly gave me a tissue paper. All these actions showed that she cared me.

After the Public Examination in Secondary 7, I still continue to have close connection with my best friends. We went to Japan together as the trip for graduation. Although I didn't get any offer from Universities, I have earned the

friendships from four Secondary (school) classmates. I was studying in Community College with Sharon..... She is just like my elder sister, take care of me. We always hang out. Later, I joined their group..... We became closer friends after the Public Examination.

In this reflective writing, Mandy seems to be working through her multiple identities to define who she is and who she is becoming. She gives herself different identifies by telling a story of a changing context in terms of a series of stages. The story began when she re-positioned herself as a president of the student union. She then conducted an intense self-evaluation that led her to project her future self. This is what Tannen (1989) called “internal evaluation” (p. 138). An increased self-reflection particularly on self-identify is found in the following excerpt.

My friends let me know that I have studied very hard the Public Examination and regret was not needed. Moreover, I learned to deal with harsh feeling as I have faced many difficulties in Secondary six. So I quickly recovered from my failure. At the same time, I have my identity clear without any confusion. I knew that I needed to become a kindergarten teacher. That was the reason why I studied very hard in the Associate Degree. Finally, I succeed. And it corresponding to what Erikson (1963) emphasized that one must establish one’s own definitive sense of direction through a consolidated sense of self-identity. Now, I am enjoying my happy university life.

According to Baddeley and Singer (2007), one of the important themes of the application of narrative methods to the study of identity over the life span is to look for evidence of “autobiographical reasoning” which relies on one’s ability to understand and to produce coherent narratives (p. 178). Mandy’s story sharing demonstrated her ability to chronologically organize events that have occurred from her childhood to adolescence. She is able to step back and draw inferences and lessons from the stories she tells of her lives, as is evidenced in the following excerpt from her reflective journal.

I understand that there are many different factors affecting my social development throughout these twenty years. Some of them are associated with the environment; some of them are related to my family background. Mostly, my social development is affected by people I met. I also sense that different levels of social development can influence the development in other areas such as cognitive and emotional development. After all, although my social development is not stable but constantly changing, I now realize how the factors affecting my own self. So I can aware about the negative factors while trying to enhance those positive factors.

Dewey (1938) viewed experience, education and life as inextricably intertwined. Through meaning making from inquires into stories, Mandy has opportunities to reflect on what she has experienced in her life and tell the meaning that lived experience has for her.

She becomes an active agent in her own learning, transforming what is to be learned through the screen of her own experience. In addition, these inquiries offer therapeutic value that enable Mandy to understand how she has recovered from the failure and it is useful for the construction or reconstruction of her own identity. In this line of thinking, pre-service teachers can construct knowledge by making sense of their lived events that inform their future practices. The knowledge they conceptualize from lived experiences, though different in nature from the “expert knowledge”, is regarded as “personal practical knowledge” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1985, p.190). The knowledge they construct may be criticized as personal and tacit but it is practical since its significance refers to the meaning-making process that can facilitate change and transformation to learning.

Conclusion: A Teacher Educator Reflects

Acting as a teacher researcher in this study has allowed me to participate in a close examination of my own interest about the relationship between narrative inquiry and education. It is through the inquiry of Mandy’s stories that prompt me to question the impact of assessment practices on students’ learning. As Clandinin (2006) suggests:

Narrative inquirers cannot bracket themselves out of the inquiry but rather need to find ways to inquire into the participants’ experiences, their own experiences, as well as the co-constructed experiences developed through the relational inquiry process. This makes clear that as narrative inquirers, inquirers too, are part of the metaphoric parade.....they too live on the landscape and are complicit in the world they study. (p.47)

I realize that selection was once a major function of assessment when provision of education was limited. With the implementation of nine years compulsory education in 1979, the selection purpose of assessment for primary/secondary transition supposed to be faded out. However, children going through the learning process in the 21st Century are still under stress due to the intense competition coming from the examination system. The recent educational reform is designed to deal with the examination-driven curriculum but it failed, otherwise the situation would have been changed. Mandy’s stories allow me to envisage how students develop their passive learning style due to the rote learning, memorization, and examination-driven curriculum, and they remind me to link assessment with learning since assessment can hinder learning if used inappropriately. Mok (2005) stressed that assessment involves more than attempting to measure what students have learned, and it is considered as part of the knowledge building process but not a tool for screening. If we overlook students’ feelings, it may discourage them to think or learn.

There are reasons to believe that the narrative curricular activities I have employed in this study are meaningful and educative. Mandy is not the only one to give me feedback after

my autobiographical session. Some students give feedback during class and some write me emails, and in the meaning-making process they think and reflect more. It is apparent that my stories of experience creating space that prompt students' reflection and resonance. Through students' reflections on my stories and resonance with their own stories, my students construct and revisit their teacher knowledge. In this way, my students become active learners who transform what is to be learned according to their own experience and existing understandings.

In an attempt to change the learning habits of pre-service teachers, I have adopted narrative inquiry in my teaching, and to explore what it can do to develop pre-service teachers as active learners. My study, as an exemplar of narrative curricula, will be meaningful for teachers and teacher educators. Not only do I wish to share my teaching experiences, the results will indicate possible ways to refine my teaching practice and help others organize teacher education in the narrative approach. This corresponds with Dewey's thinking as he "seeks a conception of knowledge grounded in action, where each person is not simply a passive consumer of knowledge but a participant in it – a creator and user of knowledge" (cited in Fenstermacher & Sanger, 1998, p. 468). As teacher education is regarded as a "part of ongoing storying and restorying of students' lives" and "part of ongoing narratives of experience" (Clandinin, 1993, p. 11), it is important that both we, the teacher educators, and our students are acknowledged as knowers of our experiences in teaching and learning to make sense of teacher education.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank Michael Connelly for his insightful feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript.

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