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Narrative Inquiry in Music Education

Troubling Certainty

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Contents

Introduction

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We live in a "congenial moment for stories" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 30), a time in which narrative has taken up a place in the "landscape" of inquiry in the social sciences. This renewed interest in storying and stories as both process and product (as field text and research text) of inquiry may be attributed to various methodological and conceptual "turns," including the linguistic and cultural, that have taken place in the humanities and social sciences over the past decades. The purpose of this book is to explore the "narrative turn" in music education, to examine the uses of narrative inquiry for music education, and to cultivate ground for narrative inquiry to seed and flourish alongside other methodological approaches in music education.

In a discipline whose early research strength was founded on an alignment with the social sciences, particularly the psychometric tradition, one of the key challenges for those embarking on narrative inquiry in music education is to ensure that its use is more than that of a "musical ornament," an elaboration on the established themes of psychometric inquiry, those of measurement and certainty. We suggest that narrative inquiry is more than a "turn" (as noun), "a melodic embellishment that is played around a given note" (Encarta World English Dictionary, 2007, n.p.); it is more than elaboration on a position, the adding of extra notes to make a melody more beautiful or interesting. Rather, we suggest that narrative inquiry in music education may provide a means to "turn" in the active sense, as a verb, "to change direction and follow a different course" (Encarta World English Dictionary, 2007, n.p.); in short, narrative work provides a means to re-conceptualise the ways in which we think about music engagement, music education, and inquiry in music education. Please note our caution – "a" way; as John Dewey reminds us, there are no singular solutions to issues that arise from social phenomena.

Early on in the process of developing this book, we asked ourselves, "What are our intentions?" Margaret's first response was to provide a forum for the work of narrative inquiry contributors (Part II) and for that work to be presented, responded

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to, and contextualised within the larger conversations of music education research (Parts II and III). For Sandy it was primarily to have, in one location, a collection of pieces that demonstrate what narrative inquiry is, does, and can do in music education and examples for ourselves, our colleagues, and those students with whom we work. And underlying both these intentions – ones that focus on making public, of providing space, and of contributing a narrative perspective to conversation and dialogue in music education – rests another intention, to "trouble" certainty.

Whilst the notion of "troubling" suggests a desire to agitate, to disturb, or to disrupt, our use is less antagonistic. Rather, it is to provide alternative accounts of why, when, where, and how people engage in music experience and learning and, in that process, to prompt our readers (music education practitioners and theorists in school, tertiary education, and community settings) to consider other ways of engaging with people in and through music. In doing so, we hope to make a space in the discourse of inquiry in music education, one in which "troubling" may give pause for thought and prompt the community to consider the many ways in which we know and come to know. "Troubling" in this sense becomes a means to prompt "wide awakeness," a concept Maxine Greene (1995) employs to prompt educators to look beyond the familiar, to attend to the tensions that underlie the surface of experience, and to consider the ways in which we may come to understand alternative accounts of the ways in which lives are lived and storied in and through music and education. For Greene, "the teacher open to the mystery, open to the wonder, open to the questions is the one who can light the slow fuse of possibility even for the defeated ones, the bored ones, the deserted ones" (2001, p. 146). In such instances we can begin to see the world through the eyes of others, to experience empathy, and to move towards an understanding of the ways in which worlds are experienced and "othered."

So what is it that narrative inquirers do? And how does what they do trouble certainty? At the simplest levels, narrative inquirers live and work alongside research participants in order to understand the ways in which individuals and communities story a life and live their stories. Why are these stories and storyings important or relevant? Although it might be argued that the only story each of us knows is our own, we seem drawn, in our human experience, to connection with others, and we find connection in and through stories. Amidst the spinning of our individually and socially constructed webs of meaning (Geertz, 1973), we seek places and moments of intersection and reflection that help us understand ourselves and each other. Listening to and for each other's stories seems to serve our human connection-finding and understanding-seeking purposes well. But that is not enough.

Listening to each other's stories to know that we are not alone (if that is what we are doing) may be a necessary (if somewhat selfish) proposition and even a condition of being human, but it is not (yet) inquiry. The "turn" – what makes an account a narrative inquiry rather than a story – is one's willingness not only to look for connection and consonance, but also to recognise that different perspectives, voices, and experiences exist and *can inform.* The moment of disquiet, the instance of unsettling, and the recognition of certainties troubled may be the very times and spaces where insight takes root – the places of fertile ground. As Geertz noted in

the waning days of the last century, wrestling with "competing conceptions of how matters should be arranged and people related to one another" is not an issue

> of 'relativism,' as it is often put by those who wish to insulate their beliefs against the force of difference. *It is a matter of understanding that talking to others implies listening to them, and that in listening to them what one has to say is very unlikely, not at the close of this century, not in the opening of the next, to remain unshaken.* (2000, p. 259, italics added).

Without troubling certainty, we would have only sympathetic vibration, a kind of resonance that, while satisfying in some respects, would be unnatural or, at the very least, artificial. In a state of sympathetic vibration, we would experience agreement only and never deal with any issues – the ultimate rose-coloured-glasses society, at least for those wearing the glasses. And as Eisner (1991) reminds us, consensus is only consensus – agreement, not truth. As narrativists we listen *to* story (as does the ethnographer), we listen *for* story (as does the portraitist), and we listen *in* and *through* story to find meaning, to experience resonance and troubling, and, ultimately, to prompt further consideration of what it might be to be "wide-awake" in and through music.

The text is divided into three sections, each serving to present a different perspective on the uses and purposes of narrative in and for music education. In Part I we explore the origins of narrative research across a range of fields of inquiry including anthropology, historical and literary studies, psychology, sociology, and educational inquiry (Chapter 1). We then unfold our conception of narrative inquiry as resonant work (Chapter 2). We conceive of resonant work as that which is deep, rich, and lasting. We define resonant work as respectful to all those involved, responsible to the public good, rigorous procedurally and in presentation, and resilient in its ability to speak not only of here and now, but also across time and place and to varying constituencies.

Part II, the core of the text, provides seven examples of narrative inquiry studies. Each of these studies, undertaken by early career researchers in the field of music education, is accompanied by a reflective commentary written by an experienced music education scholar. These commentaries provide us with a view, a window into the narrative accounts. They suggest further questions that arise from the inquiry and provide insight into the potential uses of the narrative account for the theory and practice of music education.

It is perhaps no accident that the narrative accounts that feature in this book arise from the work of early career researchers. As Graham Welch remarks in his response to David Cleaver's account of a lived musical life, whilst the world of educational research has a considerable history of taking up methodological innovations, music education has been "relatively slow" to adopt these, "at least in its published journals" (this volume, p. 57). By contrast, in the work of early career researchers, including doctoral students, considerable innovation is often evidenced in both the methodological approaches adopted and adapted and the substantive issues with which these researchers engage. Part II of the text provides an environment in which these innovations may be cultivated in the field of music education, attended to carefully, and considered against the wider landscape of educational inquiry.

Part III of the text brings together the perspectives of two eminent theorists and practitioners from within and beyond the field of music education. Music education philosopher Wayne Bowman brings to the consideration of narrative inquiry an interest in its purposes, its uses, and its potential to "transform" the project of music education. Jean Clandinin, working in the field of educational theory and practice, is concerned with two key issues: the ways in which educators are prepared, and prepared for, the development of "wide awakeness" in their theory and practice, and the ways in which we cultivate such a propensity in the lives of the children, families, and communities with whom we work. Jean and Wayne were asked to respond to the narrative accounts and commentaries presented in Parts I and II and contextualise these within the larger discourses of educational inquiry. In that process, these scholars prompt us to consider the possible narrative futures and, importantly, the future narratives of music education.

We are indebted to many colleagues in music education and in the wider worlds of education, music, and the arts and social sciences who have informed our thinking. We are particularly indebted to those who have given so generously of their time and expertise in the preparation of this book, including the authors and commentators as well as the friends and colleagues who read drafts and challenged us with margin notes and other troublings. To each of you, thank you. Finally, we are grateful to Tammy Jones, the editorial assistant for this project, whose keen eye and unstinting efforts contributed to the final shape of this book.

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Part I

Chapter 1
Narrative Inquiry: From Story to Method

Margaret S. Barrett and Sandra L. Stauffer

"Narrative" is a term that has been pressed into the service of a multitude of ideas and theories. It is viewed variously as "story," as a "mode of knowing" and constructing meaning, and, more recently, as a "method of inquiry." At times it is all of these simultaneously. Perhaps the most enduring description and understanding of narrative is as "story," an account to self and others of people, places, and events and the relationships that hold between these elements. The capacity to speak, and, through that medium, to construct a version of events, is a distinguishing human trait. It is through narratives, both "grand" or "master" and personal, that we have understood and communicated our knowledge and interpretations of our past and our present worlds and are able to speculate about our future. Through this chapter we shall provide a brief overview of the journey from narrative as "story," through its conception as a "mode of knowing," in order to explore the ways in which narrative is being put to use as a "method of inquiry" in educational research.

The roots of narrative go long and deep into the inquiry landscape. Although the emergence of narrative as an inquiry process is a relatively recent phenomenon, its lineage may be traced through the varied disciplines of anthropology; the arts; historical, literary, and cultural studies; psychology; sociology; and more recently, educational inquiry. It is not our intention here to provide a definitive account of the development of narrative inquiry; rather we shall trace some of those pathways in the inquiry landscape along which "narrative" has travelled, with a particular focus on those pathways that have crossed the field of educational research. We shall take up issues specific to music education in Chapter 2, in order to address the uses and purposes of narrative inquiry in music education (there are other accounts, e.g., Barone & Eisner, 2006; Bresler, 2006; Bowman, 2006; Bruner, 1986; Chase, 2005; Clandinin, 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1988).

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. . . Narrative as story . . .

The tradition of storying and story-telling is one that pre-figures the emergence of written language, as evidenced in the revered, and sometimes feared, role of seers and story-tellers in pre-literate cultures. This human capacity to story may be linked to the emergence of conscious thought. A number of scholars have suggested that early humans may not have been "conscious" of being conscious and that they attributed much of their thought processes to the gods (Jaynes, 1976). This is described by Jaynes as an instance of the bicameral mind. In this notion, the mind was divided into two chambers. The gods controlled one chamber, providing ideas, thoughts, and feelings, by "breathing" into the mind. Individuals experienced these "breathings" as "inspirations," as voices or urges. The other chamber of the mind was used for everyday thoughts, for speech, and eventually for other means of expression and forms of representation including writing and music – in short, the means by which the "inspirations" received from the gods might be communicated to others. Planning, volition, and action did not come about through conscious or unconscious thought, but rather through inspirations "told" to individuals in a familiar language by a "voice," which at times might appear with a vision of a friend, authority figure, or god. In Homer's *Iliad*, the characters' actions are an outcome of instructions received from the gods rather than of introspection – an early recorded instance of the bicameral mind. It is suggested that with the appearance of the *Odyssey*, a text which portrays humans initiating and perpetrating deceit rather than acting as agents of the gods, came the possibility of modern consciousness, of introspection and reflection, and of falsification, a phenomenon that relies on the human capacity to create different versions of self and events – in short, to story.

Whilst stories and the process of storying are distinguishing features of the human experience, these phenomena are not necessarily *narrative inquiry*. As Riessman and Speedy caution, "all talk and text is not narrative" (2007, p. 428). They go on to identify other forms of discourse such as "chronicles, reports, arguments, question and answer exchanges" as examples of non-narrative forms (2007, p. 429). Narrative as story is usually understood as "sequential" (Barone, 2001a; Bruner, 1990), featuring plotline/s, character/s, setting/s, and action/s (Bal, 1997) – aspects that are not central to all forms of discourse. Paradoxically, narrative is not all talk and text, nor is it always sequential. The arts provide us with examples of "narratives" that are neither language based nor inherently sequential. For example, whilst historical narrative paintings by exponents of early romanticism draw on Greek and Roman classical literature (as evidenced in the painter David's admonition to his former student Gros, to "*Vite, vite, mon ami, feuilletez votre Plutarque!*" ("Quick, quick, my friend leaf through your Plutarch!") (Brookner, 2000, p. 22)), they rely on media other than language for their sense-making and often seek to challenge the representational form in and with which they work. This is perhaps more evident in the work of contemporary artists, who "rarely tell straightforward narratives employing standard narrative tropes available within their culture, but rather ironize, layer, and otherwise subvert the standard tropes from a position of extreme cultural self-consciousness" (Mateas & Sengers, 2002, p. 10).

Nevertheless, there is a considerable history of the use of narrative as "languaged story" in various scholarly disciplines. Working in the 19th century, for instance, scholars of folklore drew on "story" in their explorations and interpretations of myths and legends (Toelken, 1996). Historians working with oral history methods, as well as textual analysis, have drawn on "narratives" – stories told and recorded – as have literary theorists and sociologists working in the first part of the 20th century.

. . . Narrative as a mode of knowing . . .

In 1984 at an address to the annual meeting of the *American Psychological Association*, Jerome Bruner challenged the psychological community to consider the possibilities of narrative as one of two distinct and distinctive modes of thinking, namely the "paradigmatic" or *logico-scientific* mode and the *narrative* mode. For Bruner, each mode constituted a unique way of construing and constructing reality and of ordering experience. Importantly, neither of these modes was reducible to the other, as each was necessary in the development of human thought and action. Taking up these ideas in later writings, Bruner (1986) presents the narrative mode of meaning-making as one that "looks for particular conditions and is centred around the broader and more inclusive question of the meaning of experience" (p. 11), whilst the paradigmatic mode is characterised as one that is more concerned with establishing universal truth conditions.

Bruner has pursued the notion of "narrative" modes of thinking and explored the ways in which we draw on "narrative" modes of knowing as a learning process (1996a). For Bruner, we construct our understandings of the world "mainly in the form of narrative – stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on" (2003, p. 44). In earlier writings, he points to the power and import of narrative as a meaning-making process, commenting that "our capacity to render experience in terms of narrative is not just child's play, but an instrument for making meaning that dominates much of life in culture – from soliloquies at bedtime to the weighing of testimony in our legal system" (1990, p. 97). Importantly, Bruner suggests that our "sensitivity" to narrative constitutes a major link between our "sense of self and our sense of others in the social world around us" (1986, p. 69) and is the mode through which we "create a version of the world" with which we can live (1996a, p. 39).

Bruner's work in the field of cognitive psychology constitutes one way in which narrative has been conceptualised within scholarship and has led to the establishment of the field of narrative psychology. It is perhaps serendipitous that Bruner's account of the narrative mode of thinking occurred at a time of growing interest in the ways in which narrative might be drawn upon for research and inquiry purposes. As educators and scholars took up the "call of stories" (Coles, 1989) to provide alternative means to explore, interrogate, interpret, and record experience, "it helped that the messenger was Bruner, an enormously powerful scholar with unusual cross-disciplinary knowledge, stature, and impact, who ventured to articulate what narrative could mean to the social sciences at large" (Bresler, 2006, p. 23). Crucially,