

Becoming a narrative inquirer in a multicultural landscape

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This is the last of three papers based on a 20-month study of teaching and learning in a diverse classroom in a downtown community school in Toronto, Canada. The purpose of the research was to describe the details of teaching and learning in a multicultural classroom and to document successful strategies in working with immigrant and minority students. The three papers detail the process by which this focus on classroom life led to a critique of the literature and to a new way to think about multicultural teaching and learning which I call narrative multiculturalism. In this paper, I explore the process of becoming a narrative inquirer in a multicultural landscape and the implications of this way of thinking on developing new kinds of understanding.

I relate this experientially oriented work to new ethnographies and other work already finding its way into the field. I explore a narrative multicultural way of thinking in greater depth. I use my own work with a teacher participant to re-imagine multicultural life in schools and classrooms. The study demonstrates the potential contribution of narrative multiculturalism to understanding multicultural life and multicultural teaching and learning.

The place of relationship in narrative inquiry

This is the third paper in a series that discusses multicultural education in an inner city Canadian school from a narrative perspective. I began the journey with an intense concern for issues of multiculturalism and multicultural education and, through long-term participation in one teacher's classroom, moved toward a new way to think about these issues that I have termed narrative multiculturalism. In the first paper (Phillion 2002a), I sketched out broad ideas of narrative multiculturalism and the surprises encountered during the research with my participant, Pam, in Bay Street School.¹ In the second paper (Phillion 2002b), I explored life in Pam's classroom by relating stories of multicultural teaching and learning. I used Schwab's (1978) notion of the eclectic to locate the place of theory in my journey of developing ideas on multiculturalism. In this final paper, I relate stories and share journals and other reflective writing to discuss my relationship with Pam and the impact of that relationship on my ideas

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about multicultural education and multicultural research. I examine how I have come to my ideas on narrative method and briefly relate them to certain 'new' ethnographies and to 'new' ideas on multiculturalism. In this process, I illuminate qualities of narrative multiculturalism.

Narrative multiculturalism is a narrative approach to understanding multicultural teaching and learning. Narrative multiculturalism focuses on understanding derived from a starting point in experience rather than in theory; involves passionate, intensive, up-close participation rather than distanced objectivity; takes place over long periods of time; depends on the development of close relationships with participants often from different cultural, ethnic and language backgrounds; and values the kind of knowledge co-created in these interactions. In this paper, I explore narrative inquiry methods that contribute to the development of a narrative way of thinking, researching and writing about multiculturalism. I discuss the reflective methods that enabled me gradually to understand the role of my beliefs and desires in constructing knowledge in the study, and the effect of the developing relationship with my participant on my inquiry preconceptions.

To examine the relationship with my participant I focus on 'interaction', the personal and social dimensions of a narrative inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (1994, 2000), following Dewey's (1938) notion of interaction, discuss four directions of a narrative inquiry: inward and outward, backward and forward. By *inward* they mean towards internal conditions, feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions. By *outward* they mean towards the existential conditions, that is, the environment. By *backward* and *forward* they refer to temporality, past, present and future. For Clandinin and Connelly (2000: 50), to do narrative inquiry is:

to experience it simultaneously in these four ways and to ask questions pointing each way. Thus . . . one asks questions, collects field notes, derives interpretations, and writes a research text that addresses both personal and social issues by looking inward and outward, and addresses temporal issues by looking not only to the event but to its past and to its future.

In this paper, I turn inward and reflect on who I was as an inquirer, what I desired in my inquiry, how I saw my participant, and how these ideas affected my understanding of the study of multiculturalism. I turn outward and link these feelings to the external conditions of the inquiry—to Pam, her classroom, the school, its community. I take a temporal turn and reflect on Pam and her grades 4/5 classroom over a 20-month period. Following Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) notion that inquiry is bound by place as well as time and interaction, I pay attention to the specifics of the place where my inquiry took place. I move backwards and forwards in time and reflect on relations between time, place, my participant and me. In reflecting, I illuminate the conditions of the study and the qualities that make this a narrative study. I do this from the vantage point of my relationship with Pam. The growth in my ideas on narrative multiculturalism paralleled the growth in my relationship with Pam. This paper is structured to reflect this history, and to reflect the fact that relationships shift and change over time.

To portray the conditions and qualities of my study with Pam in Bay Street School, our shifting, changing relationship, and the impact this relationship had over time on my thinking, I share field texts and research texts. The field texts, in the form of field notes and journals, are raw material of my experiences in the field, and the research texts are various pieces crafted from reflecting on and writing about field texts compiled during different time periods of the research (Clandinin and Connelly 1994, 2000). These field texts and research texts shed light on the beliefs I clung to as I entered the research, and the twists and turns involved in the development of a relationship between Pam and me.

The setting for this exploration was Pam's grades 4/5 classroom in Bay Street School. Bay Street School is located in downtown Toronto, Canada. Canada is a country of many immigrants; about 250 000 enter the country per year (Statistics Canada 1996). Toronto, according to UN reports, is the world's most multicultural city. Bay Street School has been educating refugee, immigrant, English as a second language (ESL), and low socio-economic children for over 125 years (Cochrane 1950). In examining archival documents, I found that the school's changing student population is a micro-version of the changing demographics of Toronto and Canada. Pam, originally from the Caribbean, had been teaching in Bay Street School for over 15 years. Pam's students were from many different parts of the world and mirrored the demographics of the school, the community, the city, and the country. These conditions made Bay Street School and Pam's classroom an ideal place to engage in a narrative inquiry into the practice of multicultural education (Phillion 2002a, b).

Thinking narratively, being in the midst of lives, making meaning of experience in relationship

This paper, indeed the entire three-part series, is my attempt to communicate the profound effect my developing relationship with Pam had on my evolving beliefs about research, teaching and learning, and particularly multiculturalism. These beliefs had been reinforced by my personal experiences, my teaching of immigrant and ESL students, and my work with out-of-country certified teachers. My teaching and research experiences, as well as my reading of the multicultural literature, had set the stage for what I expected of Pam. I did not expect my relationship with Pam to play a key role in the development of my beliefs about what I now conceptualize as narrative multiculturalism. If anything, my reading had led me to be suspicious of relationship—objectivity, distance and triangulation were methodological standbys.

This paper is the story of my struggles in becoming a narrative inquirer in a multicultural landscape. I describe what I have learned about narrative multicultural inquiry and what I have come to see as its fundamental qualities. These qualities are also what I see as narrative inquiry methods. I highlight three essential qualities/methods of a narrative inquiry: *thinking narratively*—seeing experience as fluid rather than as fixed, as contextualized in time, place and sociality (Clandinin and Connelly 2000); *being in the*

midst of lives—seeing research as living in the daily experiences of participants (Phillion 1999); and *making meaning of experience in relationship*—developing understanding in relationship with participants (He and Phillion 2001).

Thinking narratively, the first essential quality/method of narrative inquiry, is hard work. It does not come easily to me, nor to others I have talked to who engage in this kind of inquiry. Educated into a fixed notion of what constitutes knowledge and how it is acquired in research, I found one of my greatest difficulties in learning to think narratively was learning how to deal with theory. The more I learned to pay attention to my relationship with Pam the more I experienced theory as abstract and decontextualized. I gradually had to set theory aside for simply being present to what was happening in the classroom and in my relationship with Pam (Phillion 2002a, b). Reflection through conversations, journals and dreams brought me to an understanding of how bred in the bone my ways of thinking were, how I took them for granted, and did not question them. It may seem ironical that learning about narrative multiculturalism meant in the first instance learning about myself. However, until I understood how my biases (together with theory) could be impediments to understanding classroom life, I could not fully experience Pam's classroom life and, therefore, was limited in what I could understand.

Being in the midst of lives, the second essential quality/method of a narrative inquiry, is intense, can be emotionally draining, and is time-consuming in a way that defies careful planning. During the research, I spent 2–3 days each week in the school, from 3–8 hours on each occasion. I attended meetings and school functions with Pam, observed and participated in her class, shared her joys, sorrows and difficulties, had on-going conversations with her, and wrote volumes of field notes. Throwing myself into the inquiry, into my relationship with Pam, and using every available resource to develop understanding, aided the inquiry. In this process, I have come to believe that life and research are inseparable. They are, in many ways, one and the same.

Making meaning of experience in relationship, the third essential quality/method of a narrative inquiry, is more akin to the uncertain, always in flux, ambiguous meaning one makes of one's own life than to the certainties often associated with rigorous method. As I began to think narratively by being in the midst of Pam's life, it became more difficult to see Pam as a representative of the literature. She became less 'immigrant' teacher, less 'Black' teacher, less 'minority' teacher. Pam became Pam, with her own knowledge derived from years of working with students and years of personal experience. As we began to make meaning within our developing relationship, I began to recognize Pam's personal practical knowledge (Connelly and Clandinin 1988). Pam's personal practical multicultural knowledge demonstrated different qualities from the kinds of multicultural knowledge I was reading about in the literature (Phillion 2002a, b). Co-creating understanding of this kind of knowledge was not a simple task. I could not administer a series of questionnaires; I could not do a series of semi-structured interviews; I could not engage in 'blitzkrieg ethnography' (Rist 1980). This kind of knowledge involved constant going back and

forth, constant listening and observing, and constant reflecting, over long periods of time. Pam's knowledge, bred in her bones, coming from her personal and professional experience, was qualitatively different from what one might expect from the literature. Initially, Pam's knowledge came into collision with my knowledge. Making meaning of this experience of my relationship with Pam is at the heart of how my ideas have developed. Making meaning of inquiry relationships is at the heart of narrative multiculturalism.

In the following section, I step back in time to the beginning stages of my inquiry. I discuss the three qualities of narrative inquiry noted above by examining some of my field texts and research texts.

Beginning the relationship: riding a roller coaster

At the beginning of this inquiry, I experienced a situation that I later described to Pam as a 'roller-coaster ride, like being turned upside down and shaken' (Journal entry, 20 January 1997). In the initial phase of this inquiry, I struggled to understand Pam's practice, to make meaning of her views. I compared what I imagined I would do in the classroom, and how I would interact with students, with what I saw her doing. I thought Pam was severe with her students; she did not encourage me to be with them in their groups, or to talk with them individually. However, towards me, Pam had what I thought of as an 'open door' policy; I was invited to come to her classroom at any time, and was warmly welcomed whenever I did. The contrasts between my feelings about Pam as a teacher and Pam as a person puzzled me. The contrasts between my feelings now, and my feelings then, are explored throughout the remainder of this paper.

As I began to comprehend the possibilities of this particular inquiry, in this particular time and place, I began to question who I was in the inquiry, and to reflect purposefully on where my ideas had come from, and how those ideas were contributing to the tension I was experiencing. For me, the process of becoming a narrative inquirer was not smooth. It was akin to being on a roller coaster—a long, slow, uphill ride, the expanding horizon as the coaster climbs, the exhilaration of moving quickly towards an opening vista, the feeling of euphoria at the peak, whooshing down, and beginning the climb again, accompanied by feelings of nervousness, apprehension and excitement.

There were times I felt stretched between opposing forces while on this roller-coaster ride. The opposing forces created a tension² that became a driving force during the early stages of my inquiry. This tension caused distress, but it propelled me to become deeply involved in trying to understand Pam and to make meaning of the dilemma I was experiencing. I had many conversations with people, particularly my colleagues Ming Fang He and Michael (Mick) Connelly, read everything I could,³ and wrote copious field notes, journals, theoretical memos, reflections and imaginative pieces where I explored the tension.

Although these activities helped, it was the relationship itself, the source of the tension, that was the source of the meaning I was eventually

able to make. By sticking with the relationship, much as one does with a new friend with whom there are jarring moments of discovery, my attitudes softened, my defences crumbled and my heart opened up to Pam and what she stood for in multicultural teaching. This relationship developed through spending long periods of time in the school and engaging in a 'running dialogue' with Pam that began the first moment I set foot in her classroom. It continues to this day. We discussed students, parents, curriculum, teaching, learning and education. Aspects of our personal lives were gradually interwoven into conversations about our professional lives. Hand in hand with beginning to know Pam as a person, I began to know Pam as a teacher. I came to respect deeply her practice and her knowledge. I came to trust Pam and appreciate what she had to offer students, parents, school and community. In this process, Pam was teaching me about becoming a more open, more flexible, more inquiry-oriented researcher. I came to trust narrative inquiry and appreciate how this approach contributed to understanding Pam, life in her class, the school and the community, and multicultural education. Narrative multiculturalism grew, for me, out of this relational process.

The following story, crafted from field notes after my fourth visit to the school, my third classroom visit, illustrates the ups and downs that led me to think of the inquiry as a roller-coaster ride.

Seven minutes of silence

Pam moved from her desk at the back of the room and sat down in what the children call the teacher's chair. The children were gathered cross-legged on the scrap of faded blue carpet. Pam said she was going to read them a poem. The name of the poem was 'A song by the hearth'. She wrote the word 'hearth' on the board in careful cursive script. She asked the students to tell her what the word meant. There were a few puzzled looks and then various children shouted out answers: 'song-writer', 'somebody who makes things', 'a musical instrument', 'somebody who makes musical instruments'. None of the answers was correct. Pam told them, 'Think! I don't want you to just say anything. I want you to use your brains!' They sat there. I looked at the clock. I noticed many children were beginning to fidget. Some shifted their legs. I heard coughing and sighing. No one said a word. I looked at the clock again. I felt the squirming increase. Seven minutes went by with total silence in the classroom.

A little boy suddenly stood up and got a dictionary from a large rack of dictionaries of different sizes and types behind where Pam sat. Pam said, 'Well, Jaumaal, that is good; you are thinking'. Slowly, the rest of the children got up, went to the rack, and took down dictionaries. Individually and in pairs they thumbed through them and discussed various meanings. Some read the meanings aloud, stumbling over the pronunciation of words. Some appeared to have looked up a different word. Many continued to look puzzled.

Pam read the poem. The students listened. She opened the book to the picture and asked the students, 'What is this?', and pointed to the fireplace. The students shouted 'fireplace'. Then she asked, 'What is this?', and pointed to the area in front of the fireplace. Not one of the students

responded with the word ‘hearth’, the word which was written on the board, which they had looked up in the dictionary, and which they had discussed with other students. Eventually one child whispered ‘hearth’ (based on field notes of class observation, 12 December 1996).

The following is a slightly edited journal entry written one day after I wrote the field notes on which the above story is based.

Emerging tensions: I have been with Pam three times now and I feel that there is a discrepancy between the things she believes in, and the way she acts with students, and the things I believe in, and the way I would act with students. This has created tension which is internal with me. I don’t know if the tension I feel is apparent to her.

An example of this happened yesterday. The students had to sit there for 7 minutes as she told them to ‘think about the meaning of “hearth”’. I have never experienced that as a teacher. I calculated that I would last about 30 seconds before I would start giving them some hints about the word. I kept glancing at the clock and my watch. I could not believe how long 1 minute, 2 minutes, 3 minutes felt. Seven minutes was an eternity! I alternated between feeling really worried about doing research with Pam, to feeling this is research and not everybody is going to be the same as me, to worrying about the students, and getting a knot in my stomach.

I had a meeting, if you can call running into Mick’s office and throwing myself in a chair a meeting, about my feelings after the 7 minutes of silence. Mick suggested that I explore my emotions around this issue. I feel strongly for children. I feel strongly for children from other cultures, especially the ones who are struggling with the language. My feeling is that it is important to love the children, and care for them, and learning will come from that.

I also felt a sense of being imprisoned as a researcher/teacher. As a researcher I feel there is a certain way I have to be in the class. I have to fit in with the teacher’s way of doing things, do things as she sees that I should be doing them, and at a pace with which she is comfortable. As a teacher I would be more outgoing with the students, asking them questions about their work, and doing things with them. I would be dropping hints about difficult vocabulary, drawing a hearth on the board! So there is a tension. I hope it is a productive tension, not an unproductive tension (Journal entry, 13 December 1996).

As I later reflected on the story ‘Seven minutes of silence’ and the journal entry ‘Emerging tensions’ from the vantage point of, amongst many things, more time in the school and a strong relationship with Pam, I began to realize that before the inquiry had begun, before I was critical and judgemental, I had thoughts of what it would be like to work with someone, ‘my participant’. I had expectations, hopes, deeply embedded desires and preconceived ideas about the kind of participant I would have, how I would engage in the inquiry, and what I would ‘discover’ in the inquiry. I realize now that I was experiencing a tension between what I had expected and hoped to find and what I was experiencing in Pam’s classroom.

The quest for Ms Multicultural

This tension, particularly experienced in the initial stages of the research, but felt throughout the inquiry, contributed to questioning myself about the expectations I had brought into the inquiry, and prompted me to reflect consciously on where my ideas had originated. I came to realize I was on a quest⁴ for ‘Ms Multicultural’ (Phillion 1999, 2002a). Ms Multicultural is a personification of my interpretation of a sacred story (Crites 1971, Connelly and Clandinin 1990) in the research literature on multicultural education. Ms Multicultural is a distillation of everything there is in that literature affirming the need for more minority teachers. Ms Multicultural uses culturally relevant pedagogy, acts as a role model, empathizes with minority students because she has often undergone similar experiences, validates students’ home cultures and languages, assists minority students to adapt to their new culture, and advocates for immigrant students and parents (Graham 1987, Ladson-Billings 1994, Beynon and Toohey 1995, Su 1996a, b). All students, according to the sacred story, benefit from exposure to teachers like Ms Multicultural, for whom I was on a quest.

Ms Multicultural not only personified the sacred literature story, she also embodied my ideology, my beliefs, and perhaps most importantly, my desires. Ms Multicultural had all the attributes I thought were necessary to teach immigrant students, attributes I also thought I had. Yes, I, too, was Ms Multicultural (except I was not a woman of colour, not an immigrant, and did not speak ESL). My deeply, secretly, desired Ms Multicultural would also possess other attributes—she would be gentle, soft-spoken, speak ESL, and perhaps, be from an Asian country.

By narrating selected portions of my research journey to this point, I hope to have created a sense of how imprisoned I was as a researcher by my own biography and by the theoretical literature that comfortably cohabited with my biography. This insight has consequences for the field; narrative inquiry is as much about learning about and using one’s prisons, one’s unexamined biases and assumptions, one’s unacknowledged desires, as it is about learning about and using one’s strengths.

In the midst of relationship: the out-of-classroom story

Because my work with Pam was designed as a study of classroom life in context, I came into frequent contact with school life outside the classroom. This contact heightened the sense of puzzlement and tension I experienced as Pam related to children in ways that did not seem compatible with Ms Multicultural’s behaviour. Would Ms Multicultural, for instance, have allowed ‘7 minutes of silence’? I did not think so; surely she would have thought, as I did, that ESL students needed hints, pictures, suggestions.

I found support for Ms Multicultural throughout the school. The school prided itself on its willingness to accommodate to the needs of the ESL and minority students. In my understanding, Bay Street School lived a very similar story to the one I had scripted for Ms Multicultural from my experiences and from the literature. I found that my personal story of

multiculturalism moved to the same rhythm as the Bay Street School story. I saw my story ratified everywhere in the school, from art on the walls, to music in the halls, to books in the library; from the diverse teaching and support staff, to international-language programmes, to strong connections to the community. Bay Street School seemed to be an exemplar of all that would, according to the literature, provide a good education for ESL, immigrant and minority children. Where did Pam fit in this idyllic story?

Comfortable with the school story, now doubly confused, I talked with Pam about education. Pam readily shared her views. She thought there was no need for children to take international-language classes, part of the day programme in Bay Street School. Children spoke those languages at home, and they needed to learn English at school. She did not think students should be taught 'culture'. Such teaching, she said, also belonged at home, taught the way the parents wanted it to be taught. My views, and those of the school, on multiculturalism, language maintenance and bilingualism collided with hers. Pam did not espouse the virtues of multiculturalism as I interpreted them, or as the literature dictated them. Rather, she espoused, and practised, something else, some quality that I could not define, initially resisted, and struggled to understand.

Pam was something of an iconoclast, going her own way somewhat independent of the official board policy on multiculturalism, and somewhat independent of the school story of multicultural teaching and learning. Had Pam's views been more widely in evidence in the school, my personal tensions may have evaporated more easily. However, everywhere I looked my assumptions seemed verified, and Pam's views and actions all the more mysterious. In retrospect, I realize I had inklings of this on my first visit to her classroom. The following is a re-creation of an excerpt of Pam's conversation from our first 'running dialogue'. Pam said:

I am not really sure what the school's multicultural philosophy is. I know it is different from mine. I have gone to talk to the principal about this several times. I have many Black children in my class, and there are many in the school. I don't believe in coddling them. I don't believe in pampering them. I don't believe in being namby-pamby with them. The principal has different views on this, you know. I am very, very strict. I have really, really high expectations. I think that to treat them as different, or make special considerations for them, is not the way to relate to the Black children. It doesn't matter that they are Black or whatever they are, they have to do the work (Field notes of first class observation, 4 December 1996).

Pam's story of multiculturalism was viewed as different not only by Pam, but also by some in the school. I heard her colleagues speak of Pam's views on multiculturalism as being 'different', 'interesting', and 'may not be the same as the views of other members of the Caribbean community'. I was told 'this has sometimes caused problems or conflicts in the school', and 'some people had difficulty understanding Pam's practice' (Field notes, 27 November 1996, 16 September 1997).

As I got to know Pam, she told me she was reluctant to speak up on some school policies, such as scheduling international-languages programmes (in her case, mid-morning, i.e. the prime time for teaching),

because she had not been listened to in the past. Pam mainly voiced her concerns in conversations with a small group of colleagues who did listen. Some members of this group shared similar concerns with me, as well as the view that their whispered voices would not be heard in the loud din of the sacred-school story. In my experience, forums for incorporating Pam's and others' dissenting voices in the dialogue on education are not readily available within existing structures in Bay Street School (Fenstermacher 1994). After all, school stories beget secret stories by those who hold different views (Clandinin and Connelly 1996).

In retrospect, I sense how close I came, as a Ms Multicultural researcher, to silencing Pam. In the end, our relationship drove out the press of ideology and the school story and permitted genuine inquiry. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) have long maintained that the study of individuals carries inquiry outcomes not possible in samples, norms and means. Denzin (1997) contended that in individual encounters, our larger cultural/gender/racial assumptions can disintegrate. My experience suggests that what is at stake is not merely the study of an individual, but the reflective study of one's relationship with an individual. This is a critical feature of narrative multiculturalism.

Reflecting on the school story: contentious stories and the beginning of change

In the following, slightly edited, journal entry I tried to make meaning of Pam's story. Pam's story was not a 'contending story', it did not carry much weight in the school (or initially with me). It was a 'contentious story', one that brushed up against and irritated the sacred-school story. In this brushing up, it illuminated the school story more clearly. It also challenged the school story, the school's story of the community, and my story of multicultural education.

Interacting with Pam, being in her classroom, is challenging my beliefs about teaching, learning, and the meaning of multicultural education. Bay Street School's story of multiculturalism and my personal story of multiculturalism are in sympathetic co-existence. The school story of a place that meets the needs of diverse populations reflects my story of good teaching: bring culture to the forefront, make culture the curriculum, let the joys of multiculturalism pervade the atmosphere. Pam's story is in opposition (although I much prefer the notion of her story brushing up against my story) to my story of teaching as much as it is in opposition to the school story. While these contentious stories co-exist on the same landscape, Pam feels that her story is stifled. This may be because it is so much in opposition to the prevailing school story. It may also be because the school story is a strong one and Pam seems to have given up in some ways. I wonder if we were to examine these contentious stories, couldn't we learn about alternative ways of thinking about important issues facing teachers and students today? (Journal entry, 10 April 1997).

Initially, I could not hear Pam's voice through the din of my ideology, the pounding rhythm of the beat to which I was marching. I could not hear

her voice because my story of multicultural education and what is good education for immigrant students was frozen, an artifact, inflexible, unable to grow, change and transform. There was no space for Pam's story of multicultural teaching in my story of multicultural teaching.

However, there was change. My story, supported by the school story, gradually connecting with Pam's story, slowly shifted and took on new shape. I still believe many of the same things with which I started the inquiry. However, my understanding, now called narrative multiculturalism, is very different, very much the product of my relationship with Pam. How did this happen? It was not the result of an inevitable logic nor the consequence of forceful data. I grew, as people do and often marvel at what has happened so subtly. I wrote a text, 'Koto to pan', which helped me grasp the transition and which I hope will have explanatory value for my readers.

'Koto to pan', a piece of dream-like, reflective, imaginative writing, begins to shed light on what I secretly, deeply, desired in my participant. On 15 May 1997, I went to a pan (Caribbean drum music) festival with Pam and her students. It was the first time I had heard pan live and it made a strong impression on me. I wrote field notes after the event, but later felt compelled to express something that had happened because I had been to the festival. In reflecting on the festival, I became aware of my thoughts about 'my participant'. Although I originally wrote this piece 3 weeks after the festival, I have returned to it, reflected on it, and revised it many times. I offer this writing not only to express the conceptual transition at work but also because it helps show how intimately people must examine and know themselves in order to examine and know another. Without this examination, my study could have had all the marks of objectivity, but would have been little more than an expression of my unexplored subjectivity, a subjectivity masked as objectivity. I have come to wonder how much solid, 'objective', research is little more than the projection of an enquirer's biases.

Koto to pan

As you read this text, imagine a darkened stage. Very softly in the background koto (classical Japanese) music is playing.

Faintly in the darkened corner of the stage the silhouette of a woman begins to form, taking shape from wisps of shadow. She emerges in profile, small, with long dark hair. Her silhouette is curved as in a supplicant's position—passive, quiet, pliant. She appears to be Asian. Koto music continues to play. It is becoming stronger and beginning to change slightly. As the strumming of the koto slowly changes, the dim shadowed figure of the woman flows forward. Her silhouette begins to change form and becomes more distinct. She becomes taller, broad-shouldered. It is a fluid process, taking place in rhythm to the music. The stage begins to lighten. We begin to see the facial features of the woman. Slowly her features are changing from Asian to Black. Her long dark hair is becoming shorter and curlier. Her posture is becoming erect, her shoulders are becoming straighter, her legs are becoming longer,

more muscular. The entire stance of the woman is changing as the music is changing tone and tempo. Pan music begins to overlay the koto. She no longer looks like a supplicant. She looks confident, resilient, demanding. The music has changed from koto to pan. One hand on her hip, she stares at the audience. Pan fills the room, louder and louder and louder (Reflective writing, 8 June 1997).

‘Koto to pan’ is a private story, somewhat difficult to acknowledge personally, certainly difficult to tell others. I am not sure why, but it speaks to me in some profound way, perhaps because this piece of writing comes from somewhere deep inside. Insights gained from writing and reflecting on this piece have been hard-won, and often filled with anguish. Dreams and day dreams are seldom revealed in a public forum, they are seldom used as research texts. I experience consternation and embarrassment as I imagine what someone reading this text might think about my relationship with Pam, the women I worked with before in my project with out-of-country certified teachers, and women I work with now. Some might be offended by what might be construed as a racist depiction of women of colour. Some might be shocked at my naïveté. Some might wonder what kind of researcher I am, and what kind of research I am doing. Most might wonder why the piece of writing was included. How I understand audience reception of this reflective writing depends on the level of relationship I imagine I have with it.

As I reflected on ‘Koto to pan’, I saw that I originally wanted a participant who embodied characteristics of other women I worked with from other countries.⁵ I imagined the woman I would work with: the Koto woman I yearned for, someone I was comfortable with, someone who was familiar, perhaps someone from Asia, perhaps someone who spoke English as a second language (ESL), perhaps someone new to the country. Pam was a different character from the one I had yearned for, dreamed of, envisioned. Pam was Black, larger, bolder and more confident, more questioning, more disturbing, more perplexing. Pam had been in Canada for many years, came from an English-speaking country, and had strong opinions on the education of children.

When I began the inquiry, I wanted to study immigrant teachers from a particular vantage point. The starting point of the inquiry grew out of my life experiences—growing up in an immigrant neighbourhood in Montréal, many relocations throughout my life, a commitment to issues of social justice that evolved during the 1960s, teaching English as a foreign language in Japan and parenting my son through 5 years of education there in a language I could not understand, teaching immigrant Asian children in Vancouver, research experiences with immigrant teachers who had recently arrived in Canada, and strong personal and professional relationships with women of diverse backgrounds. These varied starting points shaped my views on who I was and could be, what I was able to see and to hear in the inquiry and, subsequently, who my participant was able to be. Without being fully conscious of this initially, I came to realize that my way of looking at the world, my way of being in the world, circumscribed the horizon of my understanding of multicultural education. Through my developing relationship with Pam, I was thrown into a

reflective state. I became sensitive to the nuances of difference indicated in 'Koto to pan', able to gradually expand my horizon of understanding.

There is much left to be unravelled in 'Koto to pan'. The more I reflected on it the more I came to believe it revealed something of importance about who I was in the inquiry, and how who I was in the inquiry shaped what I wanted to see and could see. The aura of shadowing pervading this dream sequence reflected the sense of mystery, and the darkness reflected the puzzlement I was experiencing. The use of music hinted at my growing realization of the need to be silent and to listen closely to my participant. The transition from koto to pan is significant. The slow, languid, fluid change from koto to pan indicated the need to be sensitive to Pam's unique qualities, mindful of the nature of difference. 'Koto to pan' begins to capture the complex sense of tension I experienced in the initial stages of the inquiry and also points to a significant transition. 'Koto to pan' teaches me about the role of bias in narrative inquiry and of the complex dance of objectivity and subjectivity (Polanyi 1958).

I gradually learned to listen to the tones of Pam's unique music, to hear the beat of a different tune. I gradually came to recognize that respecting diversity could mean respecting marching to a different rhythm. Later, I also acknowledged an intersection between Pam's story, Bay Street School's story, and my story as well. There is an overlap of interest in children; each story puts the welfare of the child at the centre. Pam has a different way of thinking about what is important for children to be learning in the school than the school does. The *school* values the children learning in their heritage-language classes about their culture and their language. *Pam* values the children learning life-long skills of self-reliance, responsibility, and decision making. Pam and the school care about the children; they have different approaches.

Rethinking classroom life

As I reflect on the journal entry, 'emerging tensions', I perceive myself as then engaged in what Schwab (1970) called 'stable inquiry'. I see a person on a quest for something she had decided she wanted to find before the inquiry began, her Holy Grail. My Holy Grail was Ms Multicultural. To become a more fluid narrative inquirer, I had to open up to being present to Pam as a person, to hearing, seeing and understanding her. I had to learn to appreciate what this particular inquiry, in this particular time and place, with this particular participant, had to offer.

As I learned to be a more fluid, accepting, narrative inquirer, I learned to hear '7 minutes of silence' in a new way, as shown in an edited extract from a journal entry 4 months later.

I want to do some thinking about Pam's teaching. A lot of the research literature on Black women educators indicates it is important to have these women in the system because they are educating children for good jobs for the future (Collins 1990, Ladson-Billings 1994). They are not educating them to work in 'doughnut shops' (my term). I wonder what educating to

work in a doughnut shop would look like, and I wonder how it would look different from what Pam does. I have no sense that Pam is educating her students for doughnut shops, although she emphasizes some small rules like lining-up properly, being quiet in lines, that are aspects of what might be doughnut-shop preparation. However, she is not educating them to be unthinking, uncritical. I remember '7 minutes of silence'. In remaining quiet and patient, Pam was leaving the initiative for solving the problem up to the students. She was encouraging them to be independent, to find the meaning themselves.

What seems to be really important in Pam's classroom is that the students are taught that they must recognize what the situation is, then devise a plan for how to begin to talk about the situation. They go from talking about the situation to planning how to deal with the situation. They devise strategies for how to implement decisions they have reached. They practice the various decisions, and see how they play out. They carry them out to the end. I think this is building skills in the students that they can use in the future (Journal entry, 21 April 1997).

This passage is, upon reflection, heartening for me because I appear to be more ready than in the beginning to listen to Pam. It is important in narrative inquiry to always ask why something is done rather than, as Ms Multicultural would have it, judge the action. However, there are hairpin turns in the narrative inquiry roller coaster. Consider the following story. I had come to think that Pam demonstrated patience in dealing with students. I attributed this virtue to her on many occasions. One day Pam and I discussed what I thought of as the 'patience' she had shown in another situation with a student, John. The following text is based on field notes of a conversation that took place one late afternoon. As Pam said:

You think that's patience? No, I don't have patience. I have to grit my teeth and clench my hands in order to get through situations like what happened with John. It was a struggle. It was really hard for John, but he had to learn that he could do it. He had to learn that it wasn't an adult who would be telling him what he had to do, but that he knew what he had to do, and that he could do it. He could read those words. I didn't need to tell him.

Part of the problem was that the last two journal entries that he had to write I read to him because some of the words were difficult. He would have had a problem with them, but not this particular one. He is coming to rely on me when he shouldn't. He should be relying on himself. At this time last year the children (in a class Pam had taught for several years) would be doing what they had to do. If they had any questions they would be asking them. If I was asking them questions, they would be firing out answers. They would be asking for clarification. They would be saying, 'Oops, I made a mistake!' These children are still not getting it (Field notes, 28 May 1997).

One of the things 'patience' teaches me is that rushing to positive judgement can be as misrepresentative of experience as rushing to negative judgement, similar to Ms Multicultural's initial assessment of Pam's teaching. Part of my roller-coaster ride was the twist in my thinking that had a tendency to lead me to look for positive justifications of Pam's teaching. I have come to the view that a researcher-participant relationship

needs to be based, in the first instance, on non-judgemental acceptance. I do not mean to suggest that ‘anything goes’ and the researcher remains mute. In dynamic personal relationships there is acceptance, respect and discourse over differences of opinion. It is one thing to say, ‘That’s wonderful, you are so patient’, and another to say, ‘I think what you did showed amazing patience. Is that how you would see it?’

Long periods of time spent in Pam’s classroom and engaging in ‘running dialogues’ allowed her narrative of teaching and learning to unfold naturally, accompanied by twists and turns and departures from the expected. There were also smooth, even stretches laced throughout; over the course of the inquiry, I had many opportunities to see students in a variety of these smooth situations, such as the one I describe next.

One morning, students in a reading group were faced with not understanding the meaning of ‘co-ordinating author’. One boy, who had been in Pam’s class the year before, turned the page to read the acknowledgments to see if that held a clue. He figured out that a group of people had written the book, but was still unsure of the exact meaning of ‘co-ordinate’. Without instructions from Pam, several students in the group went to the rack of dictionaries and brought them back to the table. They looked up the word and shared definitions. This was followed by an animated discussion of their developing understanding. As a group they brainstormed ways to come to terms with what it meant to ‘co-ordinate’. Pam joined the conversation, but the group spoke to each other, not just to her. They could not come to an understanding that satisfied them, so they decided to contact the co-ordinating author directly. In a telephone conversation the following weekend Pam told me she was thrilled with the students. I, too, experienced the thrill of students taking responsibility for their own learning. The roller-coaster ride had exhilarating moments! (Field notes, 23 September 1997).

I wonder if in the beginning of the inquiry I would have been able to ‘see’ and ‘hear’ the students as I did in the above field notes. I wonder if I would have experienced the thrill of reaching a peak of the roller-coaster ride. To be able to see and hear, I had to recognize Pam as a teacher with something to offer her students. To be able to recognize Pam’s unique qualities I had to move slowly, over time, from objectification and categorization to real-life encounters with her as a person, not as representative of anything. She had to become Pam, not Ms Multicultural. Simply stated, I had been ‘scripting’ Pam into a form of collective identity that placed her in the role of representative of various large categories related to her gender/race/ethnicity, rather than relating to her as an individual. When Pam struggled with this labelling, I initially felt a tension. Later, I thought that this was the space within which learning in the inquiry actually took place (Phillion 2002a, b).

This notion is part of the discourse occurring within multiculturalism today. Multicultural philosophers and others are exploring differences in collective or group identity, and individual identity, and the overlap and tension between them. For example, Taylor (1994) explores these issues from a philosophical non-experiential basis that remains, for me, somewhat abstract. For Taylor, it is primarily a political issue of what is given precedence—the individual or the collective. In another example, Appiah

(1994) brings personal experience closer with a discussion of the impact the large categories of race, gender and sexual orientation, what he terms 'life scripts', have on his understanding of himself and how he can 'be' in the world. Appiah does not want to be tied too tightly to the script of 'Black' and 'homosexual'; nor does Pam want to be tied to 'Black', 'minority-teacher' scripts. Appiah struggles, as I think Pam does, with 'being' those categories, rather than being able to be seen as himself.

It is important to pay attention to this larger discourse while recognizing its limitations. Schwab (1978) noted that people have to go out and experience life in order to understand it. I make this point so frequently and strongly because it underscores the importance of relationships in conducting research and learning about multiculturalism. I made a disciplined effort to unravel the meaning of the learning that occurred from being in relationship with Pam. Nussbaum (1997), Bateson (1994), Delpit (1995) and many others write of the learning occurring in what they term 'cross-cultural' situations. From encounters with other people and other cultures, we can learn that there are multiple ways of viewing the world. Cross-cultural inquiries, Nussbaum (1997: 53) states,

may reveal that what we take to be natural and normal is merely parochial and habitual. . . . Habitual ways may not be the ways designed by nature for all times and persons.

That is something to learn about research and teaching, and something to learn about diversity. For Bateson (1994), cross-cultural encounters develop 'peripheral visions', an ability to relate to others and to use these encounters as a basis for understanding other, often seemingly unrelated, experiences in life.

When I read this literature in philosophy and anthropology, I understand more fully experiences in my study with Pam in her classroom. For me, my relationship with Pam, my relationship with others, is a vital part of becoming a narrative inquirer in a multicultural landscape, and a vital quality of narrative multiculturalism. Narrative multiculturalism is about ways people of different cultures relate to one another, and about establishing relationships with research participants and inquiring into those relationships.

Conclusion

In this final paper, I have focused on 'interaction', the personal and the social dimensions of the inquiry. I narrated selected stories from Pam's classroom that highlighted my development as a narrative inquirer and opened windows onto Pam's practice. I discussed my moral dispositions, feelings, hopes and aesthetic reactions, and Pam's, too, from my perspective. I focused on Pam, the environment of her teaching, and my relationship with her. I discussed how developing experiential ways of understanding encouraged me to have a more open, participatory perspective. I discussed how I began to move from a stable story of inquiry to a more flexible, fluid one that allowed for diversity of opinion, acceptance of

Pam's unique qualities, and a recognition that we did not all have to march in rhythm. In this process, I illuminated three major qualities/methods of narrative multiculturalism: thinking narratively, being in the midst of lives, and making meaning of experience in relationship.

With long periods of time spent in the class, in the school, and in the community, with conversations both casual and professional with Pam, other teachers, administrators, support staff and parents, with reflection and looking at relational ways of understanding, I began to cast a less judgemental, more compassionate, benevolent eye on the inquiry. With this approach, I began to appreciate how privileged I was to be part of the landscape, part of the class, part of the life of my participant and the children. I began to feel I belonged. The sense of belonging I experienced created a sense of attachment to the place⁶ and to the people.

During the course of the inquiry, I attempted to unravel how who I was impacted my learning in the inquiry. I did this by keeping copious field notes, through reflective writing in my journals, by writing classroom stories and by creating imaginative pieces such as 'Koto to pan', in conversations with Pam, and over drafts of research texts I shared with Pam. For me, becoming a narrative inquirer has much to do with reflection and writing. It is also concerned with developing relationships and learning from these relationships. Becoming a narrative inquirer entails developing understanding from every aspect of life.

Over the course of the inquiry, Pam was no longer a subject in a research project, nor an object such as 'my participant', 'immigrant', 'minority teacher', 'Black', 'Ms Multicultural'. Pam became part of my life and developed her own identity, no longer caught up in an abstract social narrative of categories and labels. I was no longer a researcher on a quest (at least not totally), but a researcher trying (and not always succeeding) to be a fluid inquirer with an educational and inquiry narrative that evolved as I encountered new ideas, new situations, and new outlooks on life. As I read my field texts, as I relive my memories, and as I write, I realize that there are multiple ways I could construct a narrative account of learning in the inquiry. This paper is my construction of becoming a narrative inquirer in the multicultural landscape of Bay Street School at a particular moment in time.

A look forward: narrative multiculturalism in the research landscape

This paper, and the two preceding papers (Phillion 2002a, b), focused on experiential ways of understanding multiculturalism. The first paper introduced the term narrative multiculturalism and examined the research landscape. The second paper portrayed details of multicultural classroom life. This final paper focused on understanding researcher/participant relationships which in turn develops understanding of the larger issues in my inquiry—multiculturalism and multicultural education.

This work contributes to a developing discourse on multiculturalism. Some of the writing on multiculturalism and multicultural education has a

strong philosophical base (Greene 1993). Much of the work is concerned theoretically with issues related to, for example, different ethnic and cultural groups, knowledge construction, language from a formalistic perspective using broad social categories (Banks and Banks 1995). Other work has examined the historical and social context of multiculturalism as a movement in education, e.g. Banks's (1996) edited volume of studies exploring the historical roots of multiculturalism, how history and socialization interact in communities, provides an historical, temporal, contextual perspective on multiculturalism.

There are also researchers and educators who are moving in the direction of understanding multicultural experience, as narrative inquirers do, from a more experiential, personal perspective. There are 'new' ethnographers who are coming more directly to grips with the experiences of groups. For example, Soto's (1997) ethnographic study of the loss of a bilingual programme in a school board revealed much about the lives of bilingual families and their children's experiences in schools. Valdés's (1996) research with Mexican-American families and their experiences in a border town opened up new ways to think about the meaning of 'success' in school. Both of these ethnographers lived in the community where they did the research, spoke the language of their participants, and immersed themselves in the lives of their participants. These studies, and others like them, have developed an awareness of multiculturalism that takes into account parents' perspectives of children's experiences in schools, perspectives that sometimes confound previously accepted ideas of education for bilingual, minority, and ESL students.

Teachers writing autobiographically about their practices have examined their own experiences and are contributing to in-depth examinations of what is going on in multicultural classrooms and to improved experiential understandings of multicultural issues. In one of the best known examples of this genre, Paley (1979) portrays the place of race in her kindergarten class and discusses how her own ideas shifted from valuing 'colour blindness' to a recognition and acknowledgement of colour. Solnicki's work (1992), a less well-known example, brings us into life in an urban classroom and the day-to-day struggles faced by teachers. Life-history researchers (Thiessen *et al.* 1996) have looked at the experiences of immigrant teachers in schools. This work has also contributed to an experiential understanding of life in multicultural classrooms.

Other elements of a narrative inquiry—relational, experiential aspects—are vividly present in autobiographical literature written by immigrants of their personal experiences in societies and schools (Kingston 1975, Hoffman 1989); in novels written about the experience of being Black in society and school (Verdelle 1996); in novels/autobiographies exploring language and the meaning it has in our lives (Chamoiseau 1997), and in some experimental work on cross-cultural experiences (Anzaldúa 1987). Greene (1993) has examined the use of literature to understand multicultural experience.

However, until recently very little narrative inquiry has been done in multiculturalism. An exception is the narrative inquiry done by Carger (1996) in her work with a Mexican-American family. Carger takes us right

into the life of a Mexican-American boy, his family, and the daily reality of the boy's experiences in school. By means of Carger's study, readers learn to empathize with Alejandro, not as a representative of a category 'immigrant' or 'ESL' student, but for who he is, a young man struggling to make his way in his new life. In another exception, He's (1998, 2002a, b) cross-cultural narrative work portrays in rich detail the life of three Chinese women teachers and the complexity of their moves between cultures. In He's (1998) study, readers experience the weight of history in the women's lives, and the struggles they experience in trying to understand their place in a new country and in a rapidly changing world. In Carger's and He's studies, intensive amounts of time were spent with participants, and participants became part of the lives of the researcher. In both studies, the experiences of participants and researcher were emphasized, and understandings were developed in on-going dialogue. Carger's and He's narrative studies break down theoretical barriers to humanize and personalize an understanding of issues that are more often than not presented in a distant and abstract form.

Thinking narratively—beginning with people's experiences and their lives rather than with theory, immersing oneself and living in the midst of participant's lives rather than conducting short-term, drop-in (and -out) studies, and developing understanding in relationship with those having the experiences—are essential qualities/methods of a narrative inquiry. For me, narrative inquiry has untapped potential for studying multicultural phenomena and increasing understanding of multiculturalism. Narrative has the potential to represent the nuances of joy, sorrow and hope in lives lived in a multicultural world, and to provide rich, multi-faceted, historical, personal, social and in-place accounts of multicultural life. The term 'narrative multiculturalism' is designed to suggest this potential.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by fellowships and grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Ontario Government.

Notes

1. Names of participants and the school are pseudonyms.
2. Tension in an inquiry can be productive. The origins of 'tension' reveal layers of meaning that are helpful in understanding how it worked in this inquiry. Many meanings are derived from the root word 'tenuis': 'to pretend, to stretch forth, to hold before—as a defense—as a claim', 'intentional, with the mind directed towards it, therefore purposeful' and 'stretched, as on tenterhooks' (Shipley 1955: 353). Various meanings are played out in the paper.

3. I particularly want to thank Rosebud Elijah, of Hofstra University, for suggesting readings during the course of this research. She recommended the right book at the right time—an important aspect of becoming a narrative inquirer. The inquiry is not separate from other life experiences and other relationships.
4. The word ‘quest’ means to go on a search, to hunt for a specific object. It also connotes a mission, as in search of the Holy Grail (Soukhanov 1999: 1472). These meanings capture the complexity of the point I want to make. I was looking for something I had objectified, not a real person. I was in search of my Holy Grail. The *Dictionary of Word Origins* (Shipley 1955: 149) also includes ‘to inquire’, which captures more the sense of what I attempted to do later in my research.
5. I worked in Japan for 6 years, and currently work with women from Asia in different projects and in community work. This reflective piece raises many issues not discussed in the paper. The koto women I know may appear to be as pliant as the woman in the piece, but this may be a cultivated manner, not indicative of the strength that is there as well.
6. ‘Place’ was no longer an abstract part of a social narrative, an object such as ‘inner-city school’, ‘level-one school’ (in terms of funding allotment, indicating high need), ‘low socio-economic school’, or ‘school for problem students’. Place was Bay Street School, a living vibrant place.

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