

Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Vietnamese Children and Mothers Composing Lives in Transition to Canada

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Beginning the journey

My research passion started when my children and I first walked to their new school, after we arrived in Canada. They found no fence at the school and excitedly named it “*the school of no border*”. However, in time, the school turned out to have many visible and invisible borders in their lived and told stories. I started to wonder how I could attend to my children's unhappy experiences to understand who they were and who they were becoming. I also wondered about my stories as a mother desiring to ease their tears and tension; and about sustaining our language, culture, and education traditions. Furthering my thoughts, I wondered about the other Vietnamese newcomer children and mothers like my children and me, and became determined to conduct this narrative inquiry.

Coming to a research puzzle

The process of thinking narratively with stories my children and I have lived and told drew me toward research puzzles about the experiences of children and mothers of Vietnamese ancestry who are also composing lives in transition to Canada. *I wondered about the personal, social, cultural, institutional, political, traditional, linguistic, familial, community, and intergenerational narratives shaping the children and mothers as they compose their lives. I also wondered about the intergenerational narrative reverberations and the new possible intergenerational narrative reverberations of composing lives in transition that shape, and are shaped by, the children and mothers. How might these lived, told, retold, and re-lived stories shape and reshape their familial curriculum-making? How might the children and mothers' familial curriculum-making sustain their ongoing life making as they are composing lives in transition to Canada?*

Lingering with conceptual framework

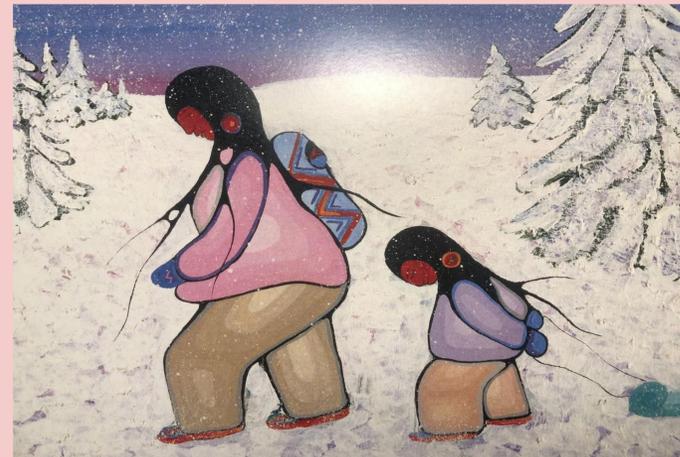
- + Theory of experience (Dewey, 1938)
- + Narrative understanding of lives in transition (Clandinin et al., 2013)
- + Conceptualization of familial curriculum-making (Huber et al., 2011)
- + Intergenerational narrative reverberations (Young, 2005)

Taking Narrative Inquiry as research methodology

- Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20)
- I lived alongside 3 newcomer Vietnamese child-mother co-researcher pairs in 2 years and attended their lived and told stories of composing lives in transition to Canada.
- Data are from transcripts of audio-recorded monthly conversations (2-4 hours) in both Vietnamese and English; field notes; family artifacts, annual & journal entries; drawing & writings in both languages.
- Narrative accounts with each child-mother co-researcher pair and two additional chapters were co-composed and negotiated with each co-researcher pair.

Finding the resonant reverberations

- **Home walks between lands:** home walks as a bridging space between school and home; home walks between the home country and the new country; home walks on living in and with liminality
- **Home walks between languages:** languages in connection with places; languages in connection with playing; languages in connection with social & community contexts
- **Home walks with temporality:** living the present while remembering the past and imagining the future; intergenerational narrative reverberations
- **Home walks within, between, and across families:** multiple cultural and playful co-composers in familial curriculum making; living homeland culture as identity making in the new land



“Winter Walk” by Cecil Youngfox

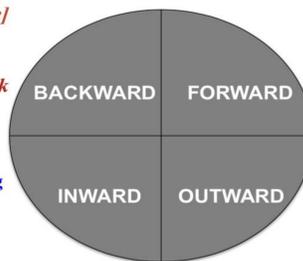
Returning holistically to personal, practical, and social/theoretical justifications

- First, this narrative inquiry honors the living in culturally, ethically relational ways. As I grew awake to the relational cultural ethics that my participants were practicing, I saw culturally ethical relational ways of knowing and being embodied in their practices. My learning of the ethical relationality of narrative inquiry has now expanded to include the deep cultural ethics, which I believe to need more visibility in narrative inquiry, and dream that teachers, researchers, cultural brokers, and social workers will be attentive to and seek to learn the particular cultural ethics shaping the newcomer children and families.
- Second, my participants' stories show me that as a part of their familial curriculum-making, *home walks* have enriched the children's knowledge from what they learned at schools and from intergenerational ways of knowing. I imagine *home walk* as not only a one-way traffic but also a two-way, in which teachers, principals, and policy makers will *walk to the children's homes* both physically and metaphorically to support the children's holistic and long-term development. Additionally, their familial curriculum-making is full of tensions but also hopes for children's future and for contributing their cultural wealth to Canadian education.
- Third, this narrative inquiry emphasizes flourishing, as the children and mothers taught me that flourishing strengthens the meaning of familial curriculum-making and intergenerational narrative reverberations. I also included flourishing to again justify my ways of living and seeing in holistic ways. I came to learn that in their transition to Canada, the children and mothers long to nurture a flourishing life not only for the children but also for the entire families, communities and multispecies in their life-composing.

Closing (for Now) & My Imagining

My learning of:
Pimatisiwin [Cree]
⇒ *Pimosayta*
⇒
ni'wahkomakanak

Teachers, teacher educators, librarians, newcomer agents, cultural brokers, community coordinators to walk to newcomer families' homes, physically and metaphorically



We walk for ourselves, we walk for everyone, always hands in hands.

The spirit of “coming back home” for newcomer children, mothers, & families because our biggest dream has always been flourishing ...

References

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