

Imagine: Creating Spaces for Teachers' Voices

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In the essay, *Creating Spaces for Teachers' Voices*, Clandinin challenges researchers to begin to include teacher's stories in journals and calls them to "move to more collaborative agendas with teachers in curriculum, teacher education, school reform, and educational research" (p. 61). To meet this challenge, educators must begin to compose new views of practice through collaborative relationships between theory and practice, researcher, and researched. These changes will enrich our understandings of teaching, teacher preparation, and research. In this short response to her essay, I invite you to imagine the possibilities with me.

Imagine a curriculum which is collaboratively constructed within a classroom community. In this curriculum, knowledge is not an entity to be transmitted, but becomes "meaning which connects with and extends the learner's experiences and achieves common understandings" (Friesen, 1991-92, p.7) Within this classroom learners are not exclusively the younger, less mature members of the community. Learning becomes an expectation for all participants: teachers, students, professors, student teachers, administrators, family, and so forth. Angela's journal entry is illustrative of her need to engage in this learning as she seeks to "connect" with her students. As a teacher I seek to collaboratively create this engagement in my classroom. In it I have experienced the richness of understanding which expands beyond the formal aspects of curricula to include the resonance of the narrative of each member of the community as we work and learn together.

In the book *Caring*, Noddings (1984) describes the intertwining of curricula and narrative as ultimately resulting in multiple and potentially meaningful contacts with subject matter. She notes that achieving this blend must include an "emphasis on biography and the meaning of the subject in individual lives" (p. 191). Angela's questions about her disconnectedness with her students encapsulates this curiosity and desire to understand as she seeks to know and be known as a way of enriching her understanding of practice. Hers is an important voice in teaching, offering possibilities to create new curricula in teacher preparation programs. By seeking connections between narratives within a

classroom community, Angela begins to have a language which captures the seriousness with which the moral endeavor of teaching is held.

Imagine research which hears and makes spaces for these stories. Teaching narratives abound in staffrooms, in graduate and undergraduate coffee rooms. These narratives are a way of questioning and expressing practice. Imagine these narratives told and written, held as a valuable language of practice, crucial to reflection about the lived world of practice with the capacity to affect change. Imagine the voices, the richness of experiences and understanding as the "invitational quality" (Clandinin, p. 60) of narrative offers common understandings and challenges us to form new questions. Dan's story illustrates this invitation and challenge. Dan took exception to my constant refocusing of his journal entries which were intended to suit my research purposes. Finally, in desperation, he wrote "No more questions" (Black, 1991, p. 7). The response of my colleagues to this story has been intense. Friesen's story of Mimoshi, a student in her class struggling to make sense of a new language, culture, and school system, evokes a similar intensity of understanding. Mimoshi's connections to his Japanese culture through stories provided the bridge necessary for his voice to find a place in his classroom community (Friesen, 1991-92, p. 8). There are many Dans and Mimoshis in our classrooms. Teachers need to tell the stories of these students, as together they struggle for meaning in our classrooms.

When I imagine a view of teachers having knowledge which can be examined narratively, the term *empowerment* surpasses hollow promise. Empowerment then becomes a fullness of space to hear teachers' voices as we struggle to find a language to express our practice. My stories capture these struggles. Narratives told without smoothing, containing the bumps and grittiness which are part of my classroom, provide glimpses of practice previously unheard. By making spaces for teaching stories, researchers and teachers begin to fashion a reflective dialogue about practice.

Imagine researcher and researched as intertwined, neither possessing more knowledge, but together beginning a mutual journey of understanding. When researcher and researched are so engaged, practice and theory are seen in totality, voices are heard, and new narratives are formed. Research questions which are collaboratively constructed form a new narrative of our understanding of teaching. In this collaboration boundaries between the learnings of the researchers are blurred, interchangeable, connected. Researcher and researched become engaged in a dialogue which can be described as "a spiral web comprising experiences and discourses that together, as they encounter and interact, constitute a meaningful whole" (Black & Beck, p. 137). Without the power imbalances which have served to silence teaching voices in traditional research, this process is dynamic. In research collaboration, the interactive nature of the research relationship regenerates the work in an ongoing process,

serving to further expand understanding (Black & Beck, p. 137). The collaborative research stance necessary to hear voices previously unheard requires time and commitment. Imagine the richness of the resulting research on future teaching practice when these narratives have spaces in educational journals.

Imagine that new teacher and researcher. The voices of teachers must expect to be heard, expect to be part of the research process, expect connected teaching within the context of the learning community. Imagine the possibilities when we expect spaces for teachers' stories in educational journals. The challenge awaits. Imagine the wealth of knowledge which will unfold for those who rise to meet this challenge.

References

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