CHAPTER 2

Methodology: Framing the Inquiry

Somi Lee

Abstract This chapter introduces narrative inquiry as methodological approach and ethical practice. Narrative inquiry attends to experience through temporality, sociality, and place, valuing complexity and multiple perspectives. Curatorial gestures of caregiving, migration, inclusion, and peer support guided the editorial process and chapter arrangement. Form functions as thought, making collaborative writing, layered accounts, dialogic exchanges, poetic fragments, and creative nonfiction legitimate modes of inquiry. Doctoral students appear as authors whose stories stand as findings in themselves, situated and relational. The chapter positions narrative inquiry as method and way of living, emphasizing attentiveness, reciprocity, and preservation of voice.

Keywords Narrative inquiry • Curatorial gestures • Temporality, sociality, and place • Form as thought • Collaborative writing • Relational ethics

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How the Work Was Curated

I curated this book to reflect a structure that moves from framing to narration, from context to lived experience. The structure supports both the ideas that informed the project and the voices that shaped it. I began with Chaps. 1 and 2 to lay the groundwork. As outlined in Chap. 1, the conceptual frames of caregiving, migration, financial strain, and identity informed the overall design of this volume. This chapter extends that discussion by showing how those frames operated methodologically in the editorial process.

Chapter 1 begins by showing how doctoral education is often described through milestones and institutional metrics, while also pointing to everyday lives shaped by caregiving, migration, and fragile belonging. The chapter raises questions about what diversity means in higher education, recognizing the value of institutional commitments but also the limits that come from reducing people to categories. To open another way of thinking, it turns to Halberstam's (2011) low theory, which gives attention to contradiction, failure, and emotional complexity beyond academic norms. Stories of students raising children, managing visa restrictions, or moving through programs without recognition illustrate how diversity grows out of daily conditions. The chapter also looks at common misconceptions about doctoral students, explains how contributors were invited, and reflects on my editorial position and approach to storytelling as inquiry.

Chapter 2 outlines the methodology. It begins with the Disneyland proposal story and shows how a small interruption spread, drew debate, and entered new contexts as people retold it. Narrative inquiry explains experience through time, sociality, and place, and shows how stories keep moving and bring emotions and relations with them. The chapter stresses complexity and openness and introduces forms of storying such as dialogue, layered accounts, poetic pieces, and creative nonfiction that contributors use to tell their lives. It also takes up the ethical work of keeping voices intact and positions doctoral students as authors whose stories stand on their own. The use of voice shifts across the book: Chap. 1 speaks with a stronger "I," while Chap. 2 and the student narratives place more weight on the contributors' voices, reflecting the different purposes each section serves.

From Chap. 3 onward, the book shifts toward the student narratives. These chapters are grouped into four parts. Each part opens with a short introductory essay that offers background context and points to existing

literature relevant to the focus. These sections are not meant to frame or define the narratives. Instead, they provide a moment to pause and consider the wider conditions that shape the lives of doctoral students. For example, Part II addresses caregiving and family life. Before the narratives begin, I introduce current concerns around parenting in academia, the invisibility of care work, and how these issues surface in doctoral education. Each part includes two or three narratives written by doctoral students. The writing varies in tone and form, shaped by each contributor's way of thinking, remembering, and making sense.

Part II, *Family, Mothering, and Graduate Life*, features stories of doctoral students whose lives move with family responsibilities, where caregiving and daily routines run alongside academic work. Part III, *Identity, Belonging, and Cultural Transition*, includes stories that remain in motion, formed through migration, dissonance, and the slow work of learning to speak across unfamiliar codes. Part IV, *When Inclusion Fails Quietly*, gathers stories that engage with gender identity, institutional language, and broken trust, offering perspectives on how exclusion is felt in the everyday. Part V, *What Keeps Us Here: Academic Kinships*, presents stories that reflect how staying becomes possible through ongoing support, intellectual companionship, and moments of recognition that emerge through writing, conversation, and correspondence. After the 10 narratives, the following 2 chapters in Part VI take the form of commentary written by faculty members. These are not evaluations or reviews. They are responses written in conversation with the stories. I close the book with a conclusion chapter that gathers what has been shared, reflects on the process, and considers what it might mean to see doctoral life through narrative terms.

How Contributors Were Invited and Positioned

The contributors to this volume are doctoral students, candidates, and recent graduates who came to the project through various paths. The invitation to contribute circulated informally, through conversations, word of mouth, faculty networks, and open calls. Specifically, during the winter of 2024, I shared a call for chapters via school-wide emails, social media, and community channels. Some heard about it through peers, others through faculty or while attending a campus art exhibition. The proposals came from those who felt drawn to the invitation. By the end of 2024, graduate students submitted their proposals, and 10 were invited to contribute to this book. They spoke as researchers, educators, and community

members. After their narratives were complete, I invited two faculty members to read and respond. These responses were open and conversational. They were offered without a framework for critique, evaluation, or instruction. Instead, they added another layer to the ongoing conversation by offering recognition, affirmation, or new questions.

My Positionality

I began this book not as a supervisor or a researcher studying doctoral students, but as someone who shares many of their experiences. I live within the university. I teach, mentor, learn, and write in the same spaces physically and/or conceptually that these stories come from. I know what it feels like to move through graduate school while questioning whether I belong, whether I am being heard, or whether I am allowed to slow down. Their stories were already being lived. I did not ask them to write about anything specific. I invited them to write if they wanted space to reflect, to speak, or simply to pause and remember.

My role has been editorial. I arranged the narratives, supported their coherence, and presented them as a collective work, leaving interpretation to the contributors themselves. I hold that position as I curate and accompany these stories, acknowledging their perspectives and engaging in dialogue where possible to honor them. Storytelling here is a practice of attention, a way of holding space, and sometimes a way of holding on. This is both research and practice, a way of reconsidering what it means to inquire and to recognize stories as a form of thinking.

Curatorial Gestures as Method

Curatorial gestures in this book function as a method. They are acts of attention and care that shape how research evolves. Curation here means listening to stories, arranging them in relation to one another, and letting them speak across differences. This understanding builds on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) idea that inquiry happens through relationship and from within experience. Arranging stories becomes a way of exploring proximity, continuity, and resonance.

Caregiving, migration, inclusion, and peer support guided this process as orientations that structured how I read, edited, and placed each narrative. They shaped how stories were grouped, how voices entered into conversation with one another, and how difference could exist alongside

connection. The caregiving gesture informed a commitment to tenderness in handling student writing. The migration gesture foregrounded linguistic crossings and the movement of thought across borders. The inclusion gesture asked who becomes visible in academic texts and who remains unspoken. The peer support gesture grounded collaboration as both a research condition and a shared practice of making. Each gesture became a mode of inquiry that understood relation itself as method (Caine et al., 2013; Frank, 2005; Gale & Wyatt, 2017).

Curatorial gestures establish presence by staying with stories rather than moving past them. This approach preserves the depth of lived experience, responding to Barone and Eisner's (2011) call for research that honors ambiguity, tension, and aesthetic integrity. Curating becomes both a way of thinking and a way of knowing (Bishop, 2006; O'Neill, 2012). Editorial judgment turns into relational judgment. Reading itself becomes a method. The ethical commitments of narrative inquiry may include attentiveness, reciprocity, and respect for unfinished experience, extending into curatorial practice (Huber et al., 2013; Kim, 2015). Through these gestures, this book treats curation as methodological ground. Selecting, sequencing, and preserving voices is the research. The method lives in composition and in how relation generates form.

Narrative Inquiry as Method and Ethos

Narrative inquiry follows stories as they move through time, relation, and place. Meaning shifts when experiences are retold and reinterpreted, and these movements of retelling and reinterpretation form the ground of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Ntinda (2018), an educational researcher who examined narrative inquiry in studies of lived experience, described narrative research as a family of approaches centered on the stories people use to understand and describe their lives. Sharing stories provides an entry into thinking about narrative inquiry.

In narrative inquiry, such circulation can be understood through the dimensions of *temporality, sociality, and place* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). *Temporality* draws attention to how the meaning of an event extends across time, moving from the immediate interruption into later retellings and comparisons. *Sociality* addresses the emotions, relationships, and judgments that shaped how audiences positioned themselves as they engaged with the story. *Place* refers to both the physical and symbolic significance of the setting. These dimensions show how a single incident

becomes part of an ongoing process of living, retelling, and meaning making. Narrative inquiry, thus, is about recounting stories themselves and attending to how they continue to live across dimensions.

Complexity characterizes narrative inquiry. Mertova and Webster (2019), who developed *critical event narrative analysis* to study higher education, noted that one "significant aspect of narrative inquiry is the issue of complexity, which is closely interconnected with the issue of human centeredness" (p. 20). As complexity increases, they argued, narrative inquiry must draw on multiple theories of learning. That is why engaging with narrative inquiry often requires methodological breadth and theoretical openness. Since experiences are expressed and remembered through stories that shift across time and context, approaches must remain open to multiple perspectives. This orientation gives narrative inquiry a distinctive place within qualitative research suggesting a difference from other qualitative approaches.

While many qualitative traditions emphasize thematic extraction and transferability (Charmaz, 2006; Drisko, 2025), narrative inquiry pays attention to experience as people go through events, speak of them, and keep revisiting them in their stories.

> This complexity (the unfinished, ongoing, and multi-situated nature of stories), in part, is shaped by understanding that all of the stories are always in the midst (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Another complexity that emerges when thinking narratively about pedagogy is that doing so (engaging with stories as ongoing, lived, and educative) entails the asking of hard questions about what is educative in the composing of lives.
>
> (Huber et al., 2013, p. 228)

This way of thinking deepens the sense of complexity that narrative inquiry takes as central, valuing proximity, listening, and relation over analytic distance (Caine et al., 2013). Narrative inquiry works both as methodology and as a way of living (Huber et al., 2013). This book approaches stories as emergent, partial, and relational, with contributors (doctoral students and faculty) writing from moments that move through relationships within specific environments. Attention to temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) provides the grounding for how stories are approached in this volume. The chapters that follow illustrate how doctoral lives are experienced within institutional expectations, personal

histories, and particular environments. The next section turns to form, where variations in how stories are told become part of the inquiry.

Form as Thought: Variations in Storying

Clandinin and Connelly (2000), whose work laid the foundation for narrative inquiry in education and qualitative research, emphasized that form is central to the practice of narrative inquiry. They stated, "questions of form for a narrative inquirer are with us from the outset of an inquiry" (p. 165) and as researchers move through the work they live and share stories with participants, return to earlier accounts, adjust how they are expressed, and share them again in renewed ways. For them, this ongoing process of experimenting with "audience, voice, and signature are interwoven with the search for a structure that serves both the field texts and the purposes of the research" (p. 166) reflects a complex negotiation between form and function. Accordingly, narrative inquiry recognizes the interplay between story structure and substance as central to qualitative research.

In line with this view, this book approaches each account as a story, whose meaning emerges through its form, structure, and the distinct sensibility of each narrative inquirer. Each narrative engages language, temporality, and relational context as key elements in how the narrative takes form (Clandinin, 2013; Riessman, 2008; Rogers & Caine, 2025). In this regard, writing itself is an act of experimenting with forms, entering the work as a mode of inquiry. Some contributors explored their stories independently with constant reshaping of the forms, while some contributors experimented with different forms along with their co-authors to write collaboratively. Some scholars view it as a generative practice that carries its own methodological weight.

> It is writing collaboratively that we wish to focus upon, and specifically the potential, the 'wonder' (Stengers, 2011), of collaborative writing, not as the commonly viewed task of 'writing up' research findings, but as a method of inquiry in its own right.
>
> (Gale & Wyatt, 2017. p. 355)

Within the volume, collaborative writing functions as the curating of doctoral stories. The narratives operate as the method of inquiry. Each account shows how doctoral students, as narrative inquirers, work with diverse

forms of storytelling. Approaches emerge from the conditions of individual lives, from the questions pursued, and from the relationships sustained through writing. The following forms illustrate the diverse ways contributors engage with narrative inquiry: *layered accounts* (Ronai, 1995; Yan & Poole, 2024), which combine multiple registers such as personal, theoretical, visual, and poetic, holding tension, contradiction, and ambiguity in view; *dialogic exchanges* (Bakhtin, 1981/2010; Frank, 2005) and *braided narratives* (Bancroft, 2018; Miller et al., 2025), which bring voices into relation through recorded or reimagined conversations; *poetic fragments* (Clarke, 2019; Prendergast, 2009), which distill experience into concentrated form; and *creative nonfiction* (Alexander-Urquhart et al., 2025; Barone, 2008; Bignold, 2011), which draws on symbolic, metaphorical, and composite storytelling to gesture toward truth through imaginative form. These forms reflect how contributors think, remember, and feel through academic life.

Treating form as thought means that a particular way of telling is crucial for preserving the integrity of the stories' representations. The contributors in this volume write with attention to how form shapes meaning. Their choices reflect how they navigate experience, relationships, and inquiry through storytelling. These decisions are not only aesthetic but ethical. In the next section, we turn to the ethical dimensions of narrative inquiry, where questions of representation, responsibility, and relational accountability come to the fore.

Ethics of Narrative Inquiry

A central ethical concern in narrative inquiry involves how interpretation, editing, and framing bring the risk of misplacing a story's intention or presence (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). When stories are too heavily mediated, their relational and situated nature becomes fragmented, severing them from the temporal, social, and emotional contexts in which they were lived (Kim, 2015). As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) powerfully claimed,

> We became increasingly uncomfortable with research texts in which the richness of people's experiences was reduced to themes, categories, or variables. We worried that such representations removed people from their stories and disconnected the data from the context in which lives were lived. (p. 41)

This concern is echoed by Mertova and Webster (2019), who warned:

> Just as narrative is seductive in its contribution to understanding, so is there an opportunity for misuse. This aspect is argued strongly by theories pointing to concealed or distorted messages and perspectives in text. In addressing the controversies, Hauerwas and Burren (1989) argue that practical wisdom (i.e. narrative) cannot claim to be a science, because it must deal with particular courses of action (rather than empirically reproducible data). Therefore, subjectivity treated with appropriate care and respect is acceptable and does not belittle the integrity of the approach. (p. 18)

Recognition of methodological discomforts serves as a reminder to withhold judgment and remain with the story as it subsists. Narrative inquiry invites a way of engaging with stories that emphasizes ethical attentiveness. It encourages presence, reciprocity, and shared authorship, offering an alternative to approaches that treat stories as data to be extracted (Caine et al., 2013; Ellis, 2007; Etherington, 2007). The approach of narrative inquiry begins by attending to the form and expressive conditions that shape each narrative before interpretation (Caine et al., 2013; Pillow, 2003), thereby allowing researchers to remain close to the texture of lived experience.

Meaning remains situated within the flow of lived experience, eluding abstraction into thematic categories (Burch, 1990). Narrative inquiry makes space for ambiguity, contradiction, and emotional nuance (Barone & Eisner, 2011; Somers, 1994), allowing stories to remain open rather than driven toward resolution or predetermined meaning (Ellis, 2007; Richardson, 2003). I respond to such ethical concerns. Doctoral students were invited to write their own narratives as full authors, not as data points. I suggested a narrative form based on their stories, modes of thinking, and relationships with academic life. They then accepted the proposal or proposed alternative forms to craft an approach that reflected their individual perspectives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ellis, 2007; Ronai, 1995). Each chapter is a narrative inquiry, collectively forming narrative inquiries that emerge through diverse contexts and authorial choices rather than a single methodological frame. The chapters are presented in their original voices, with structural decisions left intact to preserve their internal logic and expressive force (Prendergast, 2009). My editorial stance emphasized preservation, encouraging the authors as narrative inquirers to express themselves as freely and authentically as possible, without imposing

interpretive constraints (Frank, 2010; Holman Jones et al., 2016; Prendergast, 2009).

Within the ethical and curatorial framework described above, the stories emerge as findings unto themselves. I avoided thematizing the narratives for analytical purposes, grouping chapters around themes as a curatorial gesture. The groupings do not impose categories or extract meaning from the stories but provide a frame that supports the reader's movement through the volume. Each story remains intact and situated, with its own voice.

A Note on Terminology

Throughout this book, I refer to the individuals who contributed their writing using different terms depending on context. The collective term *doctoral students* is used to reflect their shared engagement with doctoral life, though their formal statuses vary. Some are currently enrolled PhD students, others are doctoral candidates, and a few have recently completed their degrees and secured tenure-track academic positions. I note this here to clarify that *doctoral students* is used broadly to refer to those navigating doctoral education, rather than as a formal credential category. In each chapter, their specific positions are indicated alongside their names and institutional affiliations.

I use *contributors* or *authors* when referencing their participation in a chapter. When focusing on their reflective and creative engagement with lived experience, I refer to them as *narrative inquirers* (those who approach storytelling as a mode of inquiry). These terms are used purposefully and interchangeably to reflect the multiple dimensions of their involvement as scholars, writers, and meaning-makers.

Conclusion: Living the Method

Chapter 2 establishes narrative inquiry as method and ethos. The chapter defines inquiry through relation, time, and place, and frames curation as research practice. Curatorial gestures of caregiving, migration, inclusion, and peer support guide reading, editing, and placement of chapters. Form carries thought, so writing becomes inquiry. Dialogues, layered accounts, poetic fragments, braided narratives, and creative nonfiction serve as legitimate methodological choices. Ethical care anchors the work through

attentiveness, reciprocity, and preservation of voice. Each chapter stands as a narrative inquiry authored by the contributor, with editorial decisions oriented to coherence and respect for internal logic. Stories function as findings, situated within lived conditions and held in relation to one another. The volume invites readers to stay close to experience, to listen before interpreting, and to move through sequences that cultivate proximity and presence. The methodological ground is clear: Relation generates form, composition generates knowledge, and curation organizes encounter. Parts II through VI now follow with narrative accounts and faculty responses that extend this commitment, showing how doctoral life becomes legible through careful storytelling and shared authorship.

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