Review Essay/Essai rendu

Narrative Research from Inside and Outside

Jo-ann Archibald, *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, and Spirit*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008, 176 pp. $29.95 paper (978-0-7748-1402-7), $85.00 hardcover (978-0-7748-1404-0)

Catherine Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*. Sage, 2008, 250 pp. $US 34.95 paper (978-0-7619-2998-7), $US 69.95 paper (978-0-7619-2997-0)

Publication of these two books within a few months of each other is a fortunate coincidence. Each author would, I believe, appreciate the other's work, but their disparate approaches provide a fascinating contrast. Although any such dichotomy simplifies, in these two books we find stories viewed from without (Riessman) and stories experienced from within (Archibald).

Riessman updates, expands, and to some degree reconceptualizes her 1993 Sage book, *Narrative Analysis*, which has probably been the most cited methodological source for narrative research. The new version deserves even greater success than its predecessor. For Riessman as a sociologist, *method* implies some distance between the researcher and those who tell the stories being analyzed. This distance is the topic of considerable reflective concern for Riessman, but it remains as a presupposition.

Archibald is a First Nations educator, currently Associate Dean for Indigenous Education at the University of British Columbia. Her book is directed to educators, but deserves a broader readership. Although Archibald is researching the storytelling of Elders in First Nations communities, she always presents herself as a member of those communities; her research participants are very much *her* Elders. When Archibald tells stories, it is not to analyze them, but rather to use them as resources for getting on with the issues in her own life and the lives of First Nations communities.

The two books suggest a distinction between two kinds of narrative interest. In Riessman's work, narrative offers a means to observe the lives of others. But in this use of narrative, Riessman is anything but a naïve realist. As she writes at the outset, "narratives don't speak for

themselves, offering a window into an 'essential self'" (p. 3), or one might add, a window into an essential social structure. She continues: "When used for research purposes, they require close interpretation — narrative analysis — which can be accomplished in a number of ways depending on the objectives of the investigation" (p. 3). Here, narrative is used instrumentally; the scholar stands outside the narrative and interprets it according to the objectives of her investigation.

In contrast to the interest of narrative-for-investigation, Archibald's research studies how people, including herself, live with their stories; moreover, how people can live *well* with their stories. Even when "experiential stories" are about actual human lives, there is a direct continuity between these contemporary life stories and traditional stories passed on in families and communities. Everyday life stories and traditional, received stories each inform the possibility of understanding the other, and their worlds mingle. Storytelling is a *primary* form of experiencing; as Archibald writes in her introduction, stories have their own lives. Her words contrast significantly with Riessman's presuppositions:

> I took a long journey with Coyote the Trickster to learn about the 'core' of Indigenous stories from Elders, and to find a respectful place for stories and storytelling in education, especially in curricula.... The Elders taught me about seven principles related to using First Nations stories and storytelling for educational purposes, what I term storywork: respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy. Experiential stories reinforce the need for storywork principles in order for one to use First Nations stories effectively.... I learned that stories can 'take on their own life' and 'become the teacher' if these principles are used. (p. ix)

Here, stories are not material for analysis; they are not folklore with its implication of museum culture, and they are certainly not "data." Stories take on their own life and become teachers. The seven principles are a sort of gloss on how stories teach, but the principles depend in turn on stories for whatever practical content they have. The stories teach the principles, which then serve as a beginner's guide to approaching the stories.

Each author is well aware of the other's world, yet their differences are important for reflection on what narrative analysis is and should be. "At what point," Riessman (p. 14) asks, "did the practice of treating a narrative as an object for careful study (centuries old in literature) migrate into the human sciences?" A useful question, and the key phrase may be *treating narrative as an object*. Narrative analysis treats narratives; in Archibald's storywork, lives seek treatment by narratives as teachers. Each author may be aware of the other's world, but each makes very different choices.

The greatest virtue of Riessman's book, for my taste, is her refusal to reduce method to procedure. "Students looking for a set of rules [for narrative analysis] will be disappointed," she writes (p. 53). Riessman follows her teacher, Elliot Mishler, and her colleagues, especially Cheryl Mattingly, emphasizing that the stories people tell in interviews are never reality itself. Writing of her own research, she sets the terms for any narrative analysis: "All I had were imitations, memories of past events recalled in the present and folded into 'messy talk' that I had to transform into text suitable for narrative analysis" (p. 28). Riessman recognizes that she herself creates that research text, usually the transcription. As she emphasizes, "investigators are implicated at every step along the way in constituting the narratives we then analyze" (p. 28).

Those reflective recognitions inform the rest of Riessman's book, in which she discusses four research styles of narrative analysis: thematic analysis (including but not limited to grounded theory), structural analysis (including sociolinguistic work), dialogic/performative analysis (emphasizing the narrative as an interaction, shaped by its context), and finally, visual analysis (including issues of documentary images and new techniques including video diaries). True to her principle of not providing students with a set of steps, Riessman presents these styles of narrative analysis through close readings of research exemplifying each style. The exemplar studies are well chosen and presented in ways that allow students to learn how each is constructed. Again, those seeking methodological procedures will be disappointed, much to their eventual benefit. I agree entirely with Riessman's judgment that: "there is no canon, that is formal rules or standardized technical procedure for validation (procedural rules are insufficient in quantitative research too, as others have shown). Narrative truths are always partial — committed and incomplete" (p. 186). The book concludes with very sensible advice on the politics and the ethics of narrative research.

The progression of Archibald's book is necessarily more circular: interests are introduced, partially discussed, morph into other concerns, and then — much later in the book — I realize I had learned more than I thought the book had said earlier. For example, in the early 1990s her research seems to have focused on the question of "what makes a good storyteller" (p. 65). To hear of one master storyteller that the stories "just became part of her" (p. 65) is less a "finding" in the conventional social science sense and more an opening. This phrase gains significance throughout the whole book, as we see Archibald returning to stories that have become part of her. In her spiraling, iterative style, Archibald gets as close as any book I have found to a truly narrative pedagogy, as opposed to a pedagogy of narrative. In the phrase of UBC anthropologist

Julie Cruikshank, whom Archibald often cites, Archibald thinks *with* stories, in contrast to Riessman's thinking *about* stories.

The activities included in *storywork* are necessarily diffuse, resisting definitional boundaries. Sometimes, storywork refers to piecing back together stories that have been lost to communal memory, by assembling fragments that different Elders recall (pp. 80–82; 147–49). Storywork can include teaching identity and community responsibility, themes to which Archibald constantly returns. A third aspect of storywork is Archibald's struggle to remain faithful to Indigenous culture while working within mainstream academia. How does she remain Q'um Q'um Xiiem, her name in her First Nations community, while also being Dean Archibald at UBC? She is hardly the first to encounter this problem, but her contribution seeks a distinctly *narrative* way of living within her dilemma. I quoted Archibald's introductory statement, in which she speaks of taking "a long journey with Coyote the Trickster" (p. ix). By the end of the book, I felt — and that verb is carefully chosen — she had shown me this journey, and given substance to what could easily be cliché. Stories about Old Man Coyote recur throughout the book. Archibald's ability to show how they guide her research decisions is the book's most singular value. To stay with her writing is to experience how stories work in and on a life. The reader may end up taking his or her own journey with Coyote.

Riessman ends with the sensible advice that there is no ethical or methodological necessity for individual research participants to evaluate social scientific conclusions. "They may not even agree with our displays of their talk, or what we do with it analytically," she writes (pp. 198–99). I agree, in part because I do not believe that any person or group can own their stories. Archibald does not indicate realizing that at least two of her Coyote stories have exact plot parallels in non-Indigenous cultures. Coyote, I think, would have it no other way, because Coyote is a shape-shifter that nobody can fix to any one cultural tradition; Coyote refuses to be claimed. Understanding Coyote's story in comparative terms enhances Archibald's reflexive demonstration of how narrative research is itself a form of storywork, necessarily perpetuating values. Stories, even when framed within research reports, are about giving lived content to values, including Archibald's seven principles beginning with respect. Reading social scientific narrative analysis, it is easy to forget what Archibald always keeps in mind: to tell stories is to have at least one foot on sacred ground.

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