

## ***Narrative Inquiry as Relational Research Methodology and Andragogy: Adult Literacy, Identities and Identity Shifting***

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### *Abstract*

Using narrative inquiry as a relational methodology and as andragogy, the research puzzle was to deepen understanding of the experiences of women, living with limited literacies and as they engaged in tutoring. This work animates the temporal, curriculum and life making experiences of a tutee and tutor within the context of adult literacy with a focus on learning to write. As the study progressed and as trust developed, tension filled stories were experienced, shared and reimagined. Thinking through the lens of Dewey's continuity of experience we demonstrate the links between literacies, curriculum making, and efforts to shift identities. Field texts provided textured and nuanced descriptions of narrative inquiry as andragogy, while supporting the tutee to expand her literate identity and the tutor to become more relational. This work invites readers to reimagine the ways in which educators practice alongside adults who are described as struggling readers and writers.

### *Keywords*

narrative inquiry as methodology and andragogy, tensions, writing and identity shifts

### *Always Start with a Story: Sandra Meets Edith*

Sandra contacted adult literacy centers in a western Canadian city. She did this as part of her doctoral studies and in efforts to meet with potential research participants<sup>1</sup>. A center director recommended Edith<sup>2</sup>, who agreed to meet. Edith told Sandra she would be the one walking with a cane. Sandra saw her immediately and invited her to share a cup of tea. Edith sat down and Sandra went to get drinks. Upon return, Edith asked if there was a different location where they could talk; she did not appreciate the noise level. They took the elevator to Sandra's office. Once settled, Sandra described the proposed study and asked Edith if she had any questions. Edith told Sandra she would not sign the consent forms until she had a chance to share and read them aloud with her tutor. Edith also told Sandra she was keen to improve her reading and writing; however, she had to first check with her tutors.

As we rode up in the elevator, I sensed I was being directed by Edith; I thought about agency. After she left my office, I wondered why she had to check with her tutors, before asking questions or signing the forms (*Field note*, Oct, 2009).

Over the next 18 months, the tutor, tutee relationship, and a friendship developed, as did rich field texts (Jack-Malik, 2012). Narratively thinking with the field

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<sup>1</sup> Ethical approval was granted from the University of Alberta (2009).

<sup>2</sup> Edith is a pseudonym chosen by the participant.

texts afforded opportunities to consider narrative inquiry as relational andragogy<sup>3</sup> within adult literacy instruction. Specifically, to think about how narrative inquiry as andragogy supported Edith as she shifted her literacy stories and became increasingly confident in her literate identity. Furthermore, how it helped Sandra shift her teaching stories and become a more relational educator.

This article explores and documents how Edith and Sandra's experiences within an adult literacy relationship were shaped by narrative inquiry as relational methodology and andragogy. Our goal is to provide an animated portrait of Edith and Sandra's stories as they shaped tutoring and life-making. Specifically, to describe and inquire into stories when narrative inquiry as andragogy created spaces where Sandra and Edith experienced tensions (Clandinin et al., 2010) and increasingly knew the tensions as a space to consider other explanations and other forward-looking stories.

We<sup>4</sup> begin by providing an overview of the frameworks that guided the research. This is followed by a short description of why the work is important, as well as researcher positioning. Next we attend to Edith's early home and school curriculum making as shaping influences. Furthermore, we discuss what Edith referred to as her traumatic stories and how they shaped and continue to shape her identities. In addition, we include artwork that Edith created to explore and describe her identities. The section that follows explores the shared experiences of Sandra and Edith as they came alongside one another during tutoring and how narrative inquiry as andragogy supported their efforts to create counterstories. We then inquire into Edith and Sandra's journaling experiences. Finally, we finish by offering thoughts as we move forward.

### *Understanding Edith's Adult Literacy Experiences*

Following two visits to Edith's literacy centre, Sandra noted her experiences as tutee, and later as tutor<sup>5</sup>, fit within a traditional model. Tett and Maclachlan (2008) argued, adult literacy is regularly framed as the acquisition of skills. Enriquez et al. (2016) describe this approach as "sedimented understandings of learning" (p. 8). Edith improved; however, progress fossilized, and she refused to write. Sandra wondered why Edith diligently attended for 15 years, however, her skills were at fifth grade levels. From their first meeting, Sandra was curious about relationships Edith formed with tutors, including how she was positioned. Returning to Tett and Maclachlan (2008), we understand adult literacy discourse is often constructed using a deficit model based on what students cannot do, leading to the subordinate positioning of the tutee.

### *Frameworks Guiding this Study*

In the section that follows we describe three frameworks (theoretical, conceptual and methodological) that provided the structure for this research. As well, we provide the rationale for their inclusion.

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<sup>3</sup> Andragogy is described as "frameworks for programs designed for the adult learner...[with] the idea that the attainment of adulthood is concomitant on adults' coming to perceive themselves as self-directing individuals" (Simonsen, et al., 2012, p. 50).

<sup>4</sup> As part of Sandra's efforts to move her doctoral research forward, she collaborated with Janet L. Kuhnke.

<sup>5</sup> At the adult literacy centre that Edith attended, she received training to become a tutor for adults beginning their literacy journey.

### *Theoretical Framework*

Sandra was driven by research puzzles<sup>6</sup> related to identities and literacies, and how they are shifted and or sedimented over time. She wondered how a literate identity shapes identity making. Sandra therefore carefully selected narrative inquiry because this inquiry seeks to “generate a new relation between a human being and her environment - her life, community, world,” one that “makes possible a new way of dealing with them, and thus eventually creates a new kind of experienced objects, not more real than those which preceded but more significant, and less overwhelming and oppressive” (Dewey, 1981b, p. 175 as cited in Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

Sandra wanted to understand her and Edith’s experiences. She therefore attended to Dewey’s (1934) ideas about experience: “things and events belonging to the world, physical and social, are transformed through the human context they enter, while the live creature is changed and developed through its intercourse with things previously lived” (p. 246-247). Dewey’s notion of continuity of experience also informed this work. It helped us understand how Sandra and Edith’s early childhood, familial curriculum making experiences were a shaping influence on tutoring. Dewey (1938) wrote, “every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after” (p. 35). Moreover, Dewey’s interaction allowed us to wonder “how bodies are shaped by different histories, valued differentially, and open to re-signification across contexts” (Enriquez et al., 2016, p. 9).

Finally, Dewey’s (1938) idea that an experience is educative or mis-educative based on “the inherent values of different experiences” (p. 35) also guided the work. It helped distinguish between experiences “that have the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience” (p. 25) and those that supported Edith and Sandra as they struggled to shift their stories. Having thoughtfully determined the theoretical framework, Sandra, working alongside her doctoral supervisor, D. J. Clandinin<sup>7</sup>, made the decision to explore her research puzzles about literacy while using a narrative inquiry methodology.

### *Methodological Framework*

Narrative inquiry is a relational, qualitative research methodology and a way to understand experience. Narrative inquirers study stories, because “narratives are the form of representation that describes human experience as it unfolds through time” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 40). Narrative inquiry is recursive, reflexive and relational. Throughout the study, Sandra attended to relational responsibilities and tensions as she co-composed stories and field texts<sup>8</sup> with Edith (Clandinin et al., 2011). Furthermore, she negotiated with Edith as they co-composed “interim and research texts” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 49).

Sandra began with the notion of narrative inquiry as pedagogy (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998) because it “embodies potential for shaping extraordinary pedagogy in education” (Huber et al., 2013). This potential is grounded in Clandinin and Connelly’s (1998) assertion that education is at the core of narrative inquiry “and not merely the

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<sup>6</sup> In narrative inquiry research questions are framed as research puzzles as they create reverberations as they “bump against dominant research narratives” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 43).

<sup>7</sup> D. J. Clandinin supervised S. Jack-Malik.

<sup>8</sup> The stories and field texts were co-composed in the spaces between Sandra the inquirer and Edith the participant (Clandinin, 2013).

telling of stories” (p. 246). Understanding narrative inquiry as pedagogy allowed Sandra to narratively consider “who a teacher is and who a teacher is becoming is... connected with the processes, strategies, or style(s) of instruction lived out by a teacher” (Huber et al., 2013, p. 226). Sandra was working alongside a woman within an adult literacy context; therefore she began to think about the notion of narrative inquiry as andragogy. She did this because when she thought narratively about their shared experiences she understood the developing relationship with Edith was an indispensable element to the time and space where together they imagined up and then tentatively lived out counterstories. These are “narrative(s) that take up a shared but oppressive understanding of who someone is, and set out to shift it” (Lindemann Nelson, 2001, p. 95). Within the andragogical space Sandra and Edith engaged in complicated conversations<sup>9</sup> (Pinar, 1995), possible because of their developing trust. They deliberately and narratively attended to the temporality of their stories, the various contexts in which they occurred, alongside the subject matter of adult literacy. Together they discussed which books to read, activities to engage and goals to pursue. They regularly experienced relatedness, tensions and connectedness between themselves, the subject matter and their goals (Macintyre & Kim, 2011).

### *Conceptual Framework*

Sandra read widely in efforts to understand the experiences she was having. The following concepts were used to understand the experiences. Stories to live by and curriculum making as life making, guided the work. Curriculum making as life making involves the storied experiences of Sandra and Edith as they lived out this narrative inquiry. Clandinin’s (2013) “concept of stories to live by [is] a narrative term for identity” (p. 37). It allowed Sandra to see past the dominant narrative of adult literacy as the acquisition of skills, and to consider Edith’s stories as the complex narrative of shifting identities. Furthermore, because Sandra thought narratively with stories, she knew both herself and Edith were in the midst of composing stories of who they are, and who they might become. For example, Edith’s entanglement with political, societal, institutional, and familial narratives, her stories to live by, her identity, and her efforts to shift her literate identity were shaped by, and shaped, the narratives in which she was embedded (Huber et al., 2013). Framing curriculum making as life-making (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992) provided a lens from which to view Sandra and Edith’s efforts to shift their identity stories from within the nested, temporal stories of their lives.

An additional concept that is threaded throughout is tension filled moments. During tutoring and research conversations, Sandra and Edith came to know one another from the stories they lived and shared; these stories included tensions. “Tensions that live between people...are a way of creating a between space, a space which can exist in educative ways” (Clandinin et al., 2010, p. 82). Appreciating this, we carefully selected tension filled stories from the journey Edith and Sandra shared. In the next two sections, we outline the importance of the research and we position Sandra.

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<sup>9</sup> Pinar (1995) argued curriculum is an extraordinarily complicated conversation...He also suggested educators ‘take back’ curriculum and make the curriculum field a conversation.

### *The Importance of this Work*

This work is important because it proposes narrative inquiry as andragogy within adult literacy education in Canada. As well, it contributes a unique perspective by exploring the literacy learning and teaching experiences of a tutee and tutor in specific contexts. Furthermore, the rich and diverse field texts allow the reader to understand firsthand the development of a literate identity, and a more relational educator. Finally, the work is important because it invites readers to reimagine the ways in which educators practice alongside adults who are described as struggling readers and writers.

### *Researcher Positioning and Research Puzzles*

Sandra learned to read early as she sat and listened while older siblings completed homework and were read to. Learning to read was not a struggle. Sandra is and has always been an avid reader. However, when Sandra became a teacher, she regularly encountered students, who had not learned to read fluently. After a few years of failing to teach this group of children to read, she went in search of professional development specific to teaching children living with dyslexia to read. Subsequently, she left public school teaching and opened a literacy clinic where, for 11 years prior to doctoral studies, she worked with children and adults who had not learned to read. From this work she wondered how literacies shaped clients' experiences and identities. Through doctoral studies she came to understand and appreciate, Clandinin and Connelly's (1992) notion of curriculum making as "a life-making process in which identity making, that is, stories to live by, is central" (p. 221). This understanding led to research puzzles about tutoring, tutors and tutees and how separately and together they were shaping influences on identity making.

### *The Study Begins*

Sandra recruited participants who possessed the following characteristics: had attended school where English was the language of instruction, wanted to improve their literacy, were willing to participate in tutoring, research conversations and willing to take photographs.

When the study began, Edith was decoding at a fifth-grade level as determined by an informal reading inventory (IRI)<sup>10</sup>. Sandra was mindful of the passages selected, and how they might be experienced by Edith<sup>11</sup>. Her comprehension, when read to was significantly better; she tested out at tenth grade. She was a reluctant writer, who when asked to write a paragraph describing her hopes for the future, wrote:

I hope to butter myself.

I hope to help my daughter and students.

I like to help Sandra in her studies.

I like to be butter in very day live. (*Research Conversation*, Nov, 2009)

Sandra implemented an Orton-Gillingham (2018) approach, which is an "explicit, multisensory, structured, sequential, diagnostic... approach to teach literacy when reading, writing, and spelling does not come easily" (para, 1). Over the course of

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<sup>10</sup> An informal reading inventory is administered to an individual. It includes graded passages, of increasing difficulty, and a series of comprehension questions for each reading.

<sup>11</sup> Crowther et al. (2001) reminds us to be mindful of how the use of children's reading levels contributes to the deficit positioning of adult learners.

six-months there were 59, 90-minute tutoring sessions. Throughout the study there were monthly research conversations.

Attending to stories Edith shared from early familial, school and community curriculum making and stories from the tutoring sessions, field texts were created. Thinking narratively with the field texts within the metaphorical, three-dimensional inquiry space<sup>12</sup>, interim research texts and research texts were composed (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These texts looked backward and forward, inward and outward, while situating experiences within specific places. The three-dimensional inquiry space allowed us to pay attention to temporality (past, present & future) of stories by learning about historical narratives which were shaping influences. Sandra and Edith also attended to sociality by discussing their inner and outer worlds including the personal and social. Finally, they attended to the shaping influences of the physical place(s) where their experiences occurred (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). When tutoring was completed, Sandra and Edith sat down and negotiated texts. Once Edith and Sandra were happy with the texts, Sandra thought narratively with the texts to identify narrative threads.

### *Edith's School and Home Curriculum Making*

In small-town Ontario, Edith failed grade one. The following September she returned to the same class and teacher. The assumption, another year would result in Edith learning to read. She did not. In grade three, she was described as a “slow and struggling reader” (*Report Card*, 1968). In grade four, Edith was assigned to a contained, special education classroom where she remained for the duration of her schooling. This was also the year Edith and her sister were apprehended by child welfare services and placed with maternal grandparents. For high school she was streamed into a two-year, occupational program.

Mindful of temporality and the connections between stories, the narrative inquiry three-dimensional space, allowed us to place Edith's school experiences within political, familial and social narratives. Edith's high school experiences were shaped by federal initiatives embedded within specific sociopolitical stories. Enriquez et al. (2016) argued, “complex sociopolitical contexts, which include diverse literacy policies...often work to depersonalize and disembodify” (p. 9). The *Technical and Vocational Training Assistance Act of 1960* (Government of Canada, 1961-62 & 1962-63) influenced Edith's high school experiences. Goard (1965) described the act as “financial assistance to the provinces to develop technical and vocational services within... educational systems” (p. 396). John Robarts, Ontario Minister of Education (1968), welcomed the dollars while overhauling the curriculum. The *Robarts Plan*, introduced streaming which grouped students (Edith) by ability, either by individual subject or for all, or almost all classes. Assignment to an ability group was temporary, changed during the year, or relatively permanent (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 2010). Edith's streaming into the lowest group was permanent. In Ontario, there were three streams: a two-year course designed to prepare students to enter the workforce (Edith); a four-year vocational training program; and, a five-year academic pathway towards university. Smaller (2000) argued the following:

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<sup>12</sup> Narrative inquirers and participants are situated within a three-dimensional space with temporality, sociality, and place serving as the three dimensions...thinking narratively means thinking through the three-dimensional space to understand lived experience (Clandinin, 2013).

Streaming works to sort and divide youth... Ironically, this force is supported in large part through the ideology of ‘scientifically’ determined, ‘objectively’ measured, levels of ‘intelligence’ or ‘ability’ - supposedly neutral, objective criteria, which nevertheless, results in significant social separation in our schools and in our society. (p. 3)

Edith was streamed into a contained, special education class in elementary school. We wondered how her familial curriculum making, including stories grounded in tensions: personal, familial, social and economic were part of the streaming decision (see Figure 1). Concerns noted by Smaller (2000) were experienced by Edith. During a research conversation, she described her early and school life:

Mom didn’t care if we went to school and they never made us do homework. We didn’t have many friends coming over because we were like outcasts; we were shunned. Other parents would not allow their children to come over. I remember sleeping at one friend’s, once we moved to my grandparents. It was degrading because other students had parents who cared and ours didn’t. We were teased because of my parents and their drinking. Sometimes we went to school in unwashed, dirty clothes. Sometimes we didn’t have breakfast or lunch. There were six of us kids, so everyone knew about our family. Teachers knew what was going on at home; some cared, but most didn’t. There was one teacher who brought us food, but that made it worse, because children said we were getting favouritism. We were teased because of our family and I was excluded because I was in the special class, but it’s all rolled into one<sup>13</sup> (*Research conversations*, Nov, 2009).

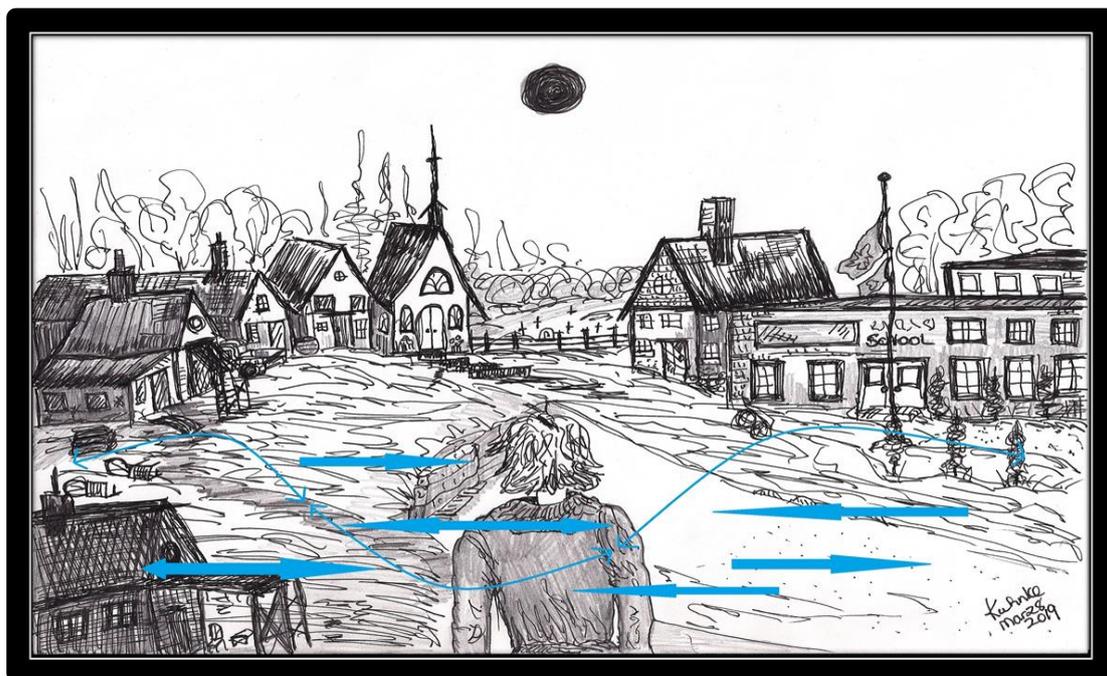


Figure 1. Edith experienced tensions at home and school.

<sup>13</sup> Research conversations and journal entries were edited for readability.

These tension filled memories lived and found expression as she “live[d] and told” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 196) her stories in other places (blue arrows indicate her tensions). This image was created as part of our efforts to push at the boundaries of what constitutes an academic text and to make the reading more accessible. Our intention is to create spaces, where the reader stops and considers the ‘text’ through a different lens and perhaps in doing so, encourages the reader along a different path, one not readily available when text is limited to words on a page (de Mello, 2007, p. 220).

Edith’s early mis-educative (Dewey, 1938) school and familial curriculum making experiences were an ongoing influence on her stories. Edith’s label as a ‘slow and struggling reader’ was deficit based. It occurred early and it endured. Sandra requested and received her student records; no psychoeducational testing occurred. Smythe (2015) argued, “literacy policy is never just about literacy; its meanings and practices are formed and re-formed in a network of ever-shifting actors, texts and practices” (p. 16). Edith’s actors, texts and practices included a deficit label, streaming, and mis-educative familial curriculum making. Clandinin (2013) purports “the stories we live by, and the stories we live in, over time are indelibly marked for all of us by stories of school” (p. 21). Edith’s school and home stories regularly influenced tutoring, research conversations and her efforts to story herself as literate.

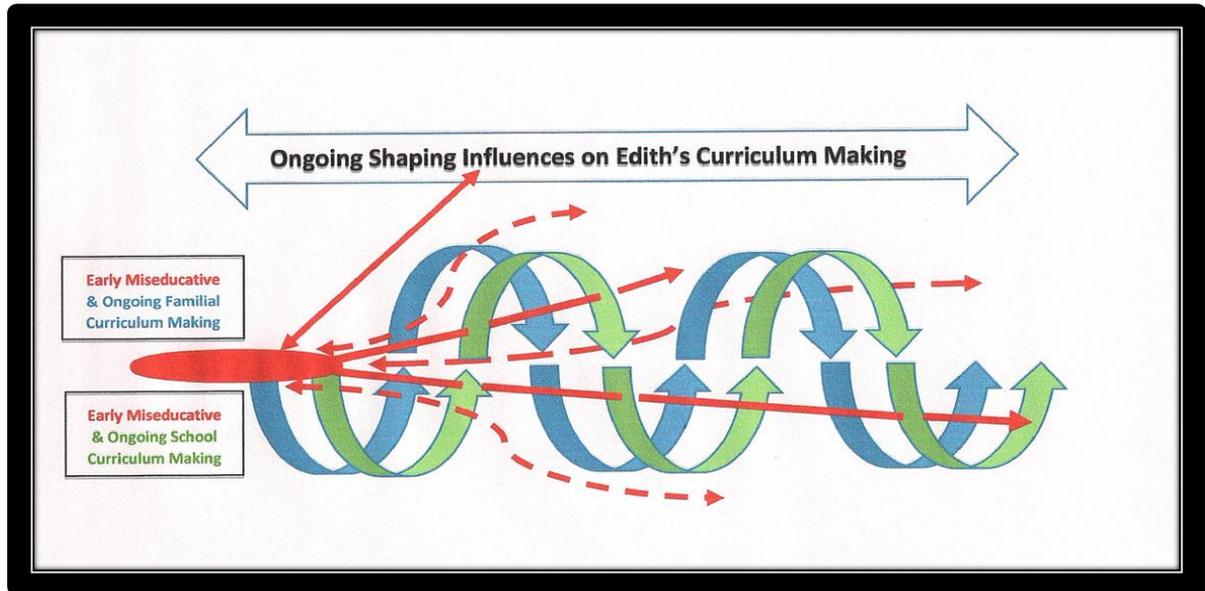
As an adult, Edith had a vehicular accident. Her rehabilitation included a psychoeducational assessment. The psychologist (1985) noted, “... her difficulties in learning to read have an emotional and familial etiology” (p. 6). We understood this as another incident of deficit positioning, the child of ‘that’ family. The psychologist wrote:

Edith is of average intelligence. It must be stressed that since she had average to above average performance in three of the five subtests, her potential abilities, including the fact she cannot read or write would indicate average intellectual abilities... The scores as suggested here would certainly not have required such a dramatic special education intervention during her early years in Ontario. I suggest... she was inappropriately placed... She is a learning-disabled adult with a language deficit and in particular a reading deficiency. (p. 6)

In the midst of mis-educative familial and school curriculum making, how did Edith make sense given she possessed average intelligence? Enriquez et al. (2016) reminded us “... individual meaning-making, institutional and ideological power structures represent individuals as constrained agents but agents and meaning-makers just the same” (p. 14-15). Many years later, and as part of our study it was apparent, Edith continued to make sense through a deficit lens.

### *Edith’s Traumatic Stories.*

Edith repeatedly shared what she called her traumatic stories (see Figure 2) and her chronic pain. Sandra wondered why Edith told and retold these stories. Was Edith’s repeated telling of traumatic and chronic pain stories purposeful as part of her efforts to live out new stories? Sandra observed a “colliding of shapes and images” (Greene, 1995, p. 80) as Edith “struggled toward some new integrations of... [her] perception of being alive” (p. 84), embedded with a desire to improve her literacies. Returning to the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space allowed us to simultaneously examine multiple shaping influences within the context of Dewey’s (1938) continuity.



*Figure 2.* This image was created in an attempt to illustrate how early miseducative home and school curriculum making is an ongoing influence in one's life. This is important because it helped Sandra and Edith understand how their developing relationship, including the tutoring was being shaped by previously lived experiences. Once this was acknowledged, including naming the tension, they were able to know the spaces as potentially educative.

*Edith Uses Pictures to Illustrate Her Identity*

As their relationship developed, and as trust ensued, Sandra invited Edith to take photographs and videos in efforts to provide non word and text centric avenues to understand her curriculum making (see Figure 3). Edith brought "texts" to research conversations. She described them. Once Edith felt Sandra understood, they co-composed written text.



*Figure 3.* Edith constructed a metaphorical wall made up of her dogs, position as tutor, ‘her agency’, and a refusal to write.

### *My Dogs*

I took a picture of my dog (see Figure 4) because he never judges me or tells me I can't. He supports me by not leaving me and never making fun of me. I deal with rude people who are verbally abusive because I struggle. My dog never, ever does that. He accepts me no matter how I read and write. He brings me comfort after I experienced a difficult day. Struggling with reading and writing is an invisible disability. Even though people cannot see my learning disability, I often feel isolated. My dog comforts me and does not care about my literacies. He makes a hard life a little easier. (*Research conversation, May, 2010*)



*Figure 4. Edith's Dog*

### *Journal Writing*

Edith responded to the Orton-Gillingham tutoring; her reading ability improved quickly. Sandra knew it was time to include writing activities, specifically journal writing. Edith repeatedly described frustrations she experienced when attempting to write a journal<sup>14</sup>. She was adamant she **could not** and **would not** journal. She was happy to talk; she offered to speak into a tape recorder because she said there was a huge difference between what she could say, versus write. She also said spelling was impossible; often she could not understand her writing (*Research conversations*, Nov & Dec, 2009).

Tutoring for two weeks, and on a day, Edith had not referenced pain, Sandra described journal writing and the writers' workshop<sup>15</sup>. She explained journals would be a place where Edith could write, ask questions and reflect on her learning and her life.

### *Context for Could Not and Would Not*

During a research conversation Edith shared this story. Following her vehicular accident, lawyers instructed Edith to keep a journal. She was to document activities of daily living she could no longer do independently. Edith was acutely frustrated by the request and her inability to write as directed. Lawyers told her the financial compensation would have been greater had she documented (June, 2010). Edith shared another story, which included fears. Sandra wondered how these stories were shaping reactions to the journal request.

Sandra wrote a response to Edith:

I wish I had a magic wand. I would wave it over you, and never again would you feel like you are back in elementary school where the children and teachers

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<sup>14</sup> Journals were given to participants early in the study. Edith took hers home following each tutoring session and returned it the next meeting. Sandra took it home, read it and typed out a letter in response to the issues Edith raised and to issues raised while tutoring.

<sup>15</sup> Writing workshops are organized to engage students in writing. Students are taught to choose their own topics and to develop their writing style (Atwell, 2015).

are making fun of you. You are teaching me over and over again how these memories influence learning. (*Response to Edith's journal*, Feb, 2010)

#### *Transcript from the Day Journals Were Introduced*

Sandra: I am going to give you a pen and a journal. You can write or draw anything you want. I don't want you to use a dictionary. Please write in pen. Be guided by one thing, if it makes sense, leave it.

Edith: Can I look words up in the dictionary?

Sandra: No.

Edith: I can't look words up? You're taking all the fun out of it.

Sandra: The focus is writing, not spelling. It's for your eyes only. If you choose to share, I'll be grateful.

Edith: You know I am a perfectionist; **I hate this!** (firm voice). I like my things organized and right. I can't do this journal. I tried; other tutors asked me, it never worked. It just worked to get me frustrated. I can't do it! I won't do it! (Edith's voice is loud, commanding).

I am sitting across from Edith, not wanting to react. I step back and formulate a response.

Sandra: Will you try?

Edith: Yes! But it won't work! It never works!

Sandra: Thank you (*Tutoring*, Dec, 2009).

#### *Inquiring into the Journal Writing Request*

I repeatedly listened to the recording of the tutoring session while thinking narratively through the three-dimensional inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Edith had a strong and escalating reaction to the journal requests. I recalled the frustrations she described when she could not get her thoughts down on paper. I also remembered her desire to improve. I want to be cognizant and respectful of the shaping influences of Dewey's continuity (1938) and I want to support Edith's articulated desires to improve her literacy. I am apprehensive and do not want to insist on journals (*Field notes*, Dec, 2009).

Struggling to reconcile the temporality of mis-educative experiences from Edith's early curriculum making and the subsequent shaping on tutoring, I attempted to thread the narratives through time. Using imagination (Greene, 1995) and the three-dimensional inquiry space, I imagine Edith as a small, sometimes hungry, dirty, uncertain, and afraid little girl. Next, a child failing and repeating grade one. Then Edith, living safely with grandparents. Next, a young woman, returned home to care for kid brothers. Across my imaginings, there is Edith a child, youth and young person enduring mis-educative experiences (Dewey, 1938). Inquiring into these tensions filled imaginings, I remind myself Edith is a grown woman, a few years younger than me and increasingly my friend. She is not a child, with parents who are paying for tutoring. She is a woman I respect and admire. What does this mean in relation to the journals, can I insist? What is the best way to navigate Edith's reluctance to journal, alongside her desire to improve literacies? Furthermore, who am I in the tension filled space, tutor, friend, or expert? I am also thinking about 15 years of adult literacy tutoring, how did Edith refuse to journal (*Field note*, Jan, 2010).

Tett and Maclachlan (2008) state "the tutor... [is] a holder of valued knowledge... She is therefore in a position of great power" (p. 663). Regardless of the



her early mis-educative curriculum making stories while considering how they continued to be shaping influences. Considering temporality and continuity allowed them to understand their stories in more coherent ways. Lingering within tension filled moments, they slowly understood they were creating spaces to imagine and try out educative, forward looking stories. Edith became more confident, and willing to imagine postsecondary educational opportunities. Furthermore, these tension filled, complicated conversations (Pinar, 1995) reminded Sandra she could tutor, and engage in research conversations, as long as she foregrounded the relational.

### *Trust Develops and Edith Continues to Share*

I think the isolation I feel is one of the reasons I have been involved for such a long time with adult literacy centres. When I go there, I am surrounded by people who struggle like I do. I feel safe; I don't worry about someone hurting me or reminding me of earlier times. I am comfortable there and I can help others who are beginning to read. (May, 2010)

Adult literacy centres were safe for Edith. She knew them as places she would not be ridiculed, and where she could make a contribution. She did not, however, value them as a place to continue to improve her literacies, or as a bridge to post-secondary institutions. Her attendance includes a primordial need to be safe.

I am thinking about Edith's literacies, her traumatic stories and how they "...imparted a shape to...[her] childhood" (Greene, 1995, p. 74). I imagine temporal, embodied reverberations shaping Edith's identities and her attempts to shift them. I am also thinking about the energy required to construct and maintain a metaphorical wall in the midst of cultural, social and institutional narratives that often assume adults are literate. When it is discovered one is not, reactions are often swift, negative, hurtful and potentially result in traumatic stories. Edith knew to avoid these at all costs.

My request that Edith journal in pen and not use a dictionary may have dislodged one of the carefully constructed bricks in her metaphorical wall. As Edith struggled to feel safe, her anger and a refusal to journal were the only options because she **would not** endure another traumatic story. (Jack-Malik, *Field note*, May 2010)

### *Sandra's Stories*

Sandra was aware Edith's anger and refusal to journal called forward her own tension filled stories from early curriculum making, including a pressing need to avoid conflict. Her reaction was to abandon journal writing; however, in response (Jack-Malik & Kuhnke, 2019) she recalled the importance of literacies, including the potential emancipatory capacity embedded within 'texts'. On one hand was her need to avoid tension, on the other, was her personal practical knowledge<sup>16</sup> (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) which valued literacy. Sandra revisited research conversations where Edith repeatedly said she wanted to get her thoughts down on paper. Dwelling in tensions, and in conversation with her doctoral supervisor, D. J. Clandinin, a decision was made to continue with journal writing.

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<sup>16</sup> Personal practical knowledge: the knowledge is personal and forms the base of teachers' actions for practice (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988).

The following entry further animates the complexities embedded within the journals<sup>17</sup>. Edith wrote:

I had a very bad night. I got up with my daughter and then she went to work. I went back to bed before I went for my class. I was telling Rico<sup>18</sup> about my dream. I also told her about the journal that I am writing - that Sandra told us to do. She thought it was a very good idea (idea). I told Rico that I did not like to write a journal. I found it very frustrating. But I thought I would give it a chance. Rico thought I did well to try. I am very happy I am going to the University for classes. I can learn a lot from Sandra. I get very excited (excited) about our class. I tell everybody about them. I find I am getting more confident with my spelling. (Nov, 2009)

In December (2009), Edith's journal contained the following letter to Sandra.

The more I worked on the journal I hated it. I found that I couldn't put my complete thoughts on paper. I could put down simple details of what I did but not my true feelings in my heart (heart). I would have rather done bookwork or worksheets. I even stopped my personal reading. That made me mad. My other tutor and I sat down and wrote this letter to you because she knows how frustrated I am by doing the journal. And my vertigo did not help me, either.

Sandra (*Field note*):

It was difficult to read and respond to these journal entries. In my arrogance, I never imagined the journals would draw forward so many tension-filled stories. It feels like they hold the potential to derail me, our study, and relationship. I am unsure of myself as a teacher, a woman, and as one who increasingly knows Edith. I want to pass on the journals. I do not want to continue with an activity that is causing Edith frustrations and causing me conflict. I had a second discussion with D. J. Clandinin (Jan, 2010).

During Sandra's weekly doctoral meeting, Dr. Clandinin described the journals as a conversation. She suggested Edith was speaking to Sandra and Sandra was speaking back in her response letters. Framing the journals this way allowed Sandra to shift who she was as she read and responded to Edith's writing. No longer was she tutor and researcher; she was increasingly Edith's friend. This allowed her to read without feeling as if her personal practical knowledge was under siege. It also allowed her to experience narrative inquiry as andragogy because Dr. Clandinin's reframing of the journals as conversation, created a space for Sandra to wonder who she was as a tutor and how her stories were shaping the space between her and Edith. Working through the complex tensions, Sandra came to appreciate the value of the journals as a space where ideas were written and shared that might not have been shared during face-to-face communication (Jan, 2010).

In response to Edith's journal entry Sandra wrote her the following letter.

I wanted to speak about the frustration you experienced writing the journal. Let me begin by saying if you are more comfortable using a pencil, please feel free to do so. Moreover, if you would like to use a dictionary, again feel free. The purpose of the journal is to provide a space to write about things that are happening, questions you have about tutoring, things you are wondering about

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<sup>17</sup> This is how Edith's writing appeared. She could not tolerate having written a word that once on the paper she knew was wrong. Bracketed words were looked up in the dictionary. She didn't want Sandra to think she cheated, therefore she explained (*Field note*, December 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Rico was Edith's long-standing, volunteer tutor.

or anything you choose to write about. There is no one way to use the journal. It was not my purpose or hope that the process would frustrate you and for that I apologise. I hope you will continue to write and share your thinking. Thank you for taking the time to write me a letter to express your frustration. I am confident that in the not too distant future you will be more than able to put your ideas down on paper in exactly the form you feel represents your ideas, creativity and imagination. (*Response to Edith's journal*, Jan, 2010)

Sandra hoped her letter would ease the tension; however, new entries introduced new layers of complexity.

### *Edith's Continues to Struggle to Shift Her Stories*

In January (2010) Edith wrote and read aloud during tutoring:

Dear Diary, I know it's been 3 weeks since my last entry, but my thoughts are important to write in my journal. I know Sandra likes to read what I am about. I know I can write her anything and she always will write back to me. I started back at the university for my classes. They mean a lot to me too go to the class on Mon, Tues, Thurs. I wanted to say I like the letter Sandra wrote to me. The letter meant all to me. I know Sandra can understand my sayings. I have to get more confidence in myself. I have to stop saying that I cannot do things and try my very best work. I can do it.

Edith: (when she finished reading stated) I know confidence is spelled wrong.

Sandra: Remember, the journal is not a spelling test. You read the word, it was correct, the sentence was sensible and the paragraph was outstanding.

Edith: Yeah, I know, but it bugs me so much to see it down there on the page and know it is wrong. Also, I know I have to get away from using 'I like'. There are so many other words. I am confident with 'I like' and I know how to spell it. There are so many other words in the dictionary. I have to get away from using the same words.

Sandra: It is exciting to hear you talk about your writing this way.

Edith: When I look in the dictionary, sometimes I find other words. They have other words in there that mean the same.

### *The Journal Writing and Journal Responses Continue*

Edith wrote entries; Sandra responded with letters. Ideas mentioned in their written correspondence found their way to research conversations and tutoring sessions. Increasingly the three spaces, tutoring, research conversations, and the journals included the unexpected; they were generative. This was evident during a research conversation when Edith stated:

I have to start and believe in myself that I can do the work and if I make a mistake it is ok. I should focus [focus] on the work I am doing now rather than on the past. I feel if something is bothering me I should confront the problem and get it solved (Jan, 2010).

In April (2010) Edith further demonstrated the generative quality of her writing, thinking and learning:

I was focusing on what I was in the past on what I couldn't do but now I'm focusing on, now I can do this. I am really enjoying it, like I mean these classes mean a lot to me. They fit me, I am so focused. When I come home, I have to get right away to my homework. It's so fresh in my mind I want to get my

thoughts right down right. That's exciting for me. Like many times tutors asked me to do a journal. I would start but I would never finish. I **would never**. I would do it a couple days and that would be it. But for you, you read it and give me input on it and it's really good to get your input. I'm thinking you're not marking spelling mistakes and you're not writing in red pen. You focus on what I'm writing down but you're not getting into the nitty-gritty. In your letters you tell me how you're feeling about what I've writing. Well that's important to me because I thought I'd never be able to put my thoughts down and someone else would be able to read it.

In response Sandra wrote:

I wanted to write a little bit about how you described your difficulties when trying to get your thoughts down on paper... Your journal entries are thoughtful and very engaging to read and think about. (*Field note*, April, 2010)

As their journey continued Edith regularly brought questions to the research conversations.

Edith: Do my journals make sense?

Sandra: Yes, they make sense; I look forward to reading them. Your thoughts give me lots to think about.

Edith: What do you think about?

Sandra: Who I am as a teacher and friend. I think about you. I'm not sure I would have the courage to get up three times a week and come to the university if I was in pain. Can you talk about that?

Edith stated:

I can't, I can't, I can't. I don't know the words to give you because I like coming here. I meet my tutors, Rico and May at coffee shops, and they give me the help but I find this, here with you, I am in heaven. I am learning, learning so much. I tell people I am in heaven when I'm at the university. With you, for my classes. I am at the university, learning with you. (*Research conversation*, Dec, 2009)

Inquiring into this exchange, Edith's describes what she does with her tutors as "they give me the help, but". Edith met her tutors at coffee shops. Writing instruction was never part of their meetings. Sandman-Hurley (2008) found "writing instruction and strategies were included in tutor training, but of all the skills, tutors felt the least prepared to teach writing" (p. 101). This lack of preparation complimented Edith's refusal to write. D. J. Clandinin supported Sandra to consider narrative inquiry as pedagogy. Therefore, Sandra began to think about tutoring, journaling and research conversations as places where they could discuss tensions. Moreover, she began to think about narrative inquiry as andragogy.

### *Concluding Thoughts*

#### *Edith*

As Edith journaled and engaged in research conversations, she began to imagine a counterstory (Lindemann Nelson, 1995), to her deficit-based narratives. At the outset, Edith storied herself as a non-writer. This understanding was enveloped within traumatic, early home and school curriculum making. The trust and safety inherent within narrative inquiry as methodology and andragogy supported Edith's efforts to compose counterstories. Specifically, Edith's journal entries and Sandra's responses were a safe space where she shared her thinking about who she was, who she

increasingly knew herself to be and who she occasionally imagined she might become. Greene (1995) helped Sandra understand the process Edith was engaged in:

to speak of a dialectic is to speak of forces in contest: the factors that hold us in place, that stand in the way of our growing, and the factors that provoke us to act on our desires, to break through the obstacles, and to become different, to be. (p. 112)

Edith's early familial curriculum making did not include activities "responsive to, or shaped by, the needs of a family to have food, shelter, to share love, [read and write]...and so on" (Clandinin et al., 2011, p. 25). Rather it revolved around the consuming demands often present in homes where dysfunction occurs. Edith's school making was embedded in deficits. She needed an adult to care and advocate for her. In the absence of such an adult, she constructed meaning hewn from experiences with parents, grandparents, children, subject matter, curriculum outcomes, teachers and places. When the study began, Dewey's (1938) continuity persistently shaped the tutoring, research conversations and their relationship. Narrative inquiry as andragogy allowed Edith and Sandra to inquire into the shaping influences of early experiences and to wonder who they might become if they told different stories. Edith began to live out stories that incarnated a writer's life and increasingly Sandra shifted her focus from expert to a relational educator where she had her ideas "pushed in ways...[she] might never...[have] imagined" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 7).

Edith regularly demonstrated agentic behaviour. For example, on the day Sandra met Edith, she demonstrated agency by asking for a quieter location. Furthermore, it was Edith who commented the tutoring sessions were insufficiently long at 60 minutes; they were changed to 90 minutes. In addition, her refusal to keep a journal was an act of agency; she made a choice. Each day she wrote in her journal, she risked being re-traumatized. However, she valued the journal conversation because she knew she was becoming a writer, who could get her thoughts down on paper and have them understood. She wanted this; therefore, she was willing to take the risk. This is agency. Edith arrived at the study with a well-developed agentic identity, regardless of her deficit positioning as one with limited literacy. How would all of her tutoring experiences have been different, had Edith been known as a woman of strength?

As Edith increasingly attended to content, sentence structure and variety, word choice and her willingness to write, her literate identity expanded. What might have been, had Sandra forgone journaling. Greene (1995) stated, "learning to write is a matter of learning to shatter the silences, of making meaning, of learning to learn" (p. 108); this is precisely what Edith did. As her literate identity stories developed, Sandra wondered how teachers, including herself are complicit in mis-educative school stories. Moving forward, Sandra imagines educators intentionally creating spaces to listen, make decisions, discuss, write about and respond to tension filled stories. Greene (1995) argued "we need to make it possible for writers to name not only the shape and byways of their lived world, but the problems and predicaments that have stopped and silenced them" (p. 108).

### *Sandra*

Dwelling within tension filled stories and living out narrative inquiry as methodology and andragogy, Sandra expanded her understanding of how to teach and be in relationship with adult literacy learners. Edith's loud voice and refusal to journal could have put a stop to the journaling; however, narrative inquiry as andragogy

afforded opportunities to linger in the tensions. Struggling to compose a forward-looking story that acknowledged early shaping influences and in conversation with Edith and D. J. Clandinin, Sandra understood other stories were possible.

### *A Last Thought*

Students continue to go to school and not learn to read and write proficiently. Who will come alongside these children (Clandinin, 2013)? Every student who struggles with literacy requires a consistent, caring adult who persistently advocates for early assessment, research-based remediation and accommodations, regardless of their home curriculum making.

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