

## Abstract

### « A mental collaboration »

### Using narrative inquiry and storytelling innovatively

Many respected education theorists, business leaders and even leaders of nations demand educational systems to produce more innovators to secure the future of our today's western way of living. This paper raises the notion that art education holds the potential to teach far beyond crafting and creating pieces of art. As a matter of fact, it argues that art education holds the power to inspire creativity and innovation.

University of the West of Scotland  
Master of Education Artist Teacher  
Christine Anne Berger

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## 1. Introduction

Children are naturally curious, creative and competitive. They are naturally innovative. Robinson argues this is because children are not afraid to be wrong; they 'just get it' (TED Conference, 2014). However, he continues, once children survive years of standardized tests that focus on analytical knowledge, i.e. not holistic knowledge, they learn to fear being wrong. Atkinson argues, 'there is a tendency to promote possibly out of date curriculum models' (2005, p. 26) in today's classrooms and these models should be challenged and resisted. This is a method of learning that was designed for the industrial age, not for our future (Robinson, TED Conference, 2014). Some art educators look for methods that provide 'a stable basis for pedagogy and assessment' and Atkinson argues informed art educators should 'question the boundaries of practice' (2005, p. 24) not look to standardize like their cohabitating educational faculties.

Noddings (2002) and Berger (2013) argue implementing a curriculum of care, whilst using storytelling in the classroom, crosses curriculum boundaries and creates social innovators because of its relational approach to understanding. Can an arts based research method like narrative inquiry (Leavy, 2009) be an innovative educational tool? This paper argues using 'narrative inquiry practices' in art education can 'generate the possibility of new story arcs' (Rolling, 2010, p. 6), i.e. innovative processes that cross 'the boundaries of practice and understanding practice' (Atkinson and Dash, 2005, p. xii). Atkinson and Dash argue for 'a fusion of the practical with the critical' (2005, p. xii) to aid in educational transformation. Thus this paper argues towards implementing a pedagogy-of-storytelling (Kuyvenhoven, 2009) in art education to engage students in 'narrative inquiry' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) (Leavy, 2009) (Rolling, 2010). The paper will start with a review of bodies of work on literature describing the role storytelling and narrative inquiry play in art educational contexts, what narrative inquiry is suggested to be and the tools that appear to support teaching a curriculum of innovation. Next, we will engage in a discussion seeking to create a deeper understanding about the potential value deriving from implementing a curriculum of innovation. The discussion will make use of observations made in my current working environment. Conclusions, including critical reflections, will bring the paper to its end.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Storytelling in Education

Kuyvenhoven`s pedagogy-of-storytelling argues there are three types of storytelling in the classroom: ‘talking, thinking, and imagining’ (2009, p. 184). The first is when students and teachers talk to create their own identities by telling little stories while crafting relationships amongst one another. Noddings also argues stories ‘play a central role in establishing identity’ (2002, p. 62). The second type is argued to be when students use stories to think and contextualize information to create understanding. ‘Imagining’ is suggested to be when students use stories ‘to visualize and interiorize subjects of study’ (Kuyvenhoven, 2009, p. 185). Kuyvenhoven (2009) argues students move in and out of these three forms in no particular order exploring relationships and forming identities to make sense of the world. Kuyvenhoven argues thus storytelling in the classroom to be ‘a distinct praxis with its own complex of practices, knowledge, and meaning-making language’ (2009, p. 154).

#### 2.1.1. Storytelling and Dialogue

Giroux (1997) and Freire (1970), argue that dialogue and dialectical thought act as an agent against hegemony in education. It is generally agreed stories have long been used to start dialogue in educational practices (Kuyvenhoven, 2009). Noddings argues discussion of emotions and values are often avoided in education. She argues the importance of using stories to ‘exercise moral imagination’ not ‘conformity and obedience’ (2002, p. 45). Kuyvenhoven writes, ‘Talking with stories admits diversity and complexity’. She argues further that it allows students to challenge boundaries, have differences and ‘challenge hegemonies and hierarchies that are present in the classroom’ (2009, p. 96). In addition she maintains that jokes are also storytelling and allow students the ‘opportunity to challenge social structure’ (p. 98).

#### 2.2. Storytelling and Image Making

Kuyvenhoven found that ‘picture-making’ is ‘a first step towards getting into storytelling’ (2009, p. 119). Egan writes, ‘image-forming is certainly common in uses of the imagination and may in subtle ways be inevitably involved in all forms of imagining’

(1992, p. 43). Kuyvenhoven found students emerged from a storytelling episode with new 'understanding, insights, and solutions' because they could 'play with characters and landscapes in an effort to explore *real* issues' (2009, p. 143). Pink writes, 'stories are *how* we remember' (2006, p. 101). Cognitive scientist Mark Turner writes, 'Narrative imagining [i.e. story] is the fundamental instrument of thought ... Most of our experience, our knowledge and our thinking is organized as stories' (1996, pp. 4-5). Eisner argues children often make pictures 'intended to tell a story' and they also make 'aesthetic considerations ... but the most important feature is the effort to communicate' (2002, p.115).

### 2.2.1 Teaching Empathy

Columbia University Medical School professor Dr. Charon 'launched the narrative medicine movement...that called for a whole-minded approach to medical care' (Pink, 2006, p. 113). Dr. Charon's intention was to create 'narrative competence' which she defines as 'the ability to acknowledge, absorb, interpret, and act on the stories and plights of others (2001, p. 1897). Robinson argues our successful future depends on our ability to innovate with our creativity which requires empathetic thinking as organizations are built with people not 'cogs and sprockets' (2011, p. 221). Rolling quotes Zeigler, 'persons are more difficult to understand, predict, and control than molecules' (2010, p. 7).

Clandinin found 'Narrative Inquiry' to be 'a deeply ethical project' and 'thinking with stories is primarily thinking relationally' (2013, p. 30). It has been further argued by Kuyvenhoven, 'story world experiences... develop empathy' in students because stories 'satisfy or renew curiosity about people, emotions, and the quality of power' (2009, p. 143). Educating for empathy can be used to create societies that care (Noddings, 2002). Pink argues 'stories can be pathways to empathy' (2006, p. 168) and Leavy argues, 'the arts have the capability to evoke emotions, promote reflection, and transform the way that people think' (2009, p. 255). Greene's theory in *Releasing the Imagination* (1995) argues, 'the extent to which we grasp another's world depends on our existing ability to make poetic use of our imagination' (p. 4). She further suggests, 'It may well be the imaginative capacity that allows us also to experience

empathy with different points of view, even with interests apparently at odds with ours' (1995, p. 31).

### 2.3. Narrative Inquiry

According to Clandinin 'Narrative inquiry, [is] the study of experience as story' (2013, p. 13). It is a collaborative way of making sense of an experience, which includes a combination of the temporal, the environment and the social aspects of the story.

An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that made up people's lives, both individual and social.

(Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 20)

Time, environment and people appear to affect the relationships or vehicles that provide the means to create understanding therefore adjusting our stories into new stories. 'Narrative inquirers study the individual's experience in the world, an experience that is storied both in the living and telling ...' (Clandinin, 2013, p. 18). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argue Dewey's theory of experience (1938) lays a foundation for narrative inquiry. Clandinin argues this is because of 'Dewey's two criteria of experience - interaction and continuity' (2013, p.12). Clandinin further argues, 'narrative inquiry is situated in relationships and in community, and it attends to notions of expertise and knowing in relational and participatory ways' (2013, p. 13). Leavy describes the narrative inquiry method as 'a collaborative method of telling stories, reflecting on stories, and (re)writing stories' (2009, p. 27).

#### 2.3.1. Narrative Inquiry and Identity

Atkinson and Dash argue educational communities support critical reflection in relationship to identity when they focus on 'coming to terms with who one is in relation to others' (2005, p. xiv). Noddings argues stories 'play a central role in establishing identity' (2002, p. 62). It has been suggested that some educational practices have the tendency to listen and think about stories rather than with stories (Clandinin, 2013). Thinking about a story implies one engages in objective inquiry. Thinking with the story implies engagement with relational inquiry (Clandinin, 2013). Clandinin argues

relational inquiry can be thought of as narrative inquiry (2013). Noddings argues, 'relational ethics are founded in ethics of care' (1984, p.30).

#### 2.4. Art Education as Social and Critical Practice

Noddings argues 'critical thinking, requires a starting point in moral sensibility, and the arts can contribute significantly to the development of such sensibility' (2002, p. 40). Robinson writes, 'our ideas can enslave or liberate us. Some people never do make the transition and remain resident in the old world-view' (2011, p. 107). Kuyvenhoven found when students engage in storytelling they 'practise and try out relationships and situations' (2009, p. 143). Noddings further argues we should 'tell stirring stories' because 'this provides a situational starting point for critical thought' (2002, p. 43). Using critical thought in understanding stories develops 'relational ethics' and creates situations where 'we must care about the people, causes, and problems to whom and to which we will apply our thinking skills' (Noddings, 2002, p. 44). The previous is a notion that Noddings brings forth from Thayer-Bacon's work on '*Transforming Critical Thinking*' (2000). Nodding and Kuyvenhoven both argue that story provides a safe place to openly discuss issues and relationships for students. Leavy refers to this place as 'virtual reality'. A place that 'is critical to the practice of narrative inquiry' (2009, p.28).

### 3. Discussion on Narrative Inquiry as Pedagogy-of-Innovation

According to narrative inquirers Leavy (2009) and Clandinin (2000), art education can restory or renegotiate what Atkinson and Dash refer to as 'the boundaries of practice and understanding practice' (2005, p. xii). Implementing a pedagogy-of-storytelling in art education to engage students in an arts based research practice, such as narrative inquiry, appears to support 'a fusion of the practical with the critical' (Atkinson and Dash, 2005, p. xii), i.e. crossing boundaries between making and thinking. Teachers and students, through the exploration and crossing of relationships, are in a social space that allows them to constantly 'survey and interrogate the boundaries of practice' (Atkinson and Dash, 2005, p. xii) and understanding. 'Being creative is not only a matter of inspiration. It requires skill, craft in the control of materials and reciprocating process of critical evaluation' (Robinson, 2011, p. 230). This recipe of boundary crossing, using narrative inquiry and storytelling in art education as mental collaboration, is argued in this paper to support a pedagogy-of-innovation.

#### 3.1. The Challenge and Critical Reflections of an Art Teacher

There are many art lesson plans available on Internet exploring Modernists, e.g. (Kinderart.com, 2014) (First-school.ws, 2014). They are often considered traditional lesson plans. There are books used in art education such as Arttalk by Ragans (2005) with projects and stories about artists and their objects. These tools help 'provide stability and security to the school art curriculum' (Atkinson, 2005, p. 25) by providing the art teacher with a 'stable basis for pedagogy and assessment' (Atkinson, 2005, p.24). However stability and security are not often words one would associate with being creative and innovative. Both creativity and innovation, one could argue, venture outside the common spaces of thought. Many artistic techniques learned are valuable in the dialogue of making; but what if their process and assessment are acts of normalization? Will, as a result, innovation and creativity suffer a stifling or hegemonic effect?

The author of this paper attempted to tell the life story of Van Gogh to her international Swiss school sixth grade art students. Historical and geographical aspects were also explored to support cross-curricular methods. The children were invited to reflect and discuss Van Gogh, his work and life. Afterwards they could make art inspired by their

own interpretations of Van Gogh. Strikingly the life story of Van Gogh appeared to have left a negative impression on the children of what it means to be a creative person. The children clearly revealed this view in discussion. Does being creative have a negative connotation in general opinion? And if so, do we as art educators continue to support this by using the same modernist examples to teach with? Robinson suggests perhaps there is a lack of innovation in industry because being a creative has been stigmatized (TED Conference, 2014). Can art educators change this reputation by changing their methods and processes? In a critical and social reflection, the author decided to implement a process aimed at teaching for innovation using storytelling and experiences in the context of narrative inquiry.

### 3.2. Saving Echo, An Ethical Dilemma

#### 3.2.1. Telling / Listening

The project was called 'Saving Echo' by our class. The students were given a cork, a toilet paper roll, two straws, a six cup egg paper carton, a rubber band, paper-maché and paint. They then listened to the teacher tell Russell's (2013) version of Echo, Jupiter, Juno and Narcissus's story. The teacher told the story from memory. The students sketched while listening. Their task was to identify Echo's challenge, relate to her empathetically and create a solution to save Echo. The students were encouraged to interpret the task of saving Echo however they felt.

#### 3.2.2. Storying

In an open dialogue the class discussed the roles of different characters relating them to real life relationships. The students challenged traditional roles of men and women, the concept of beauty and the metaphor of having a voice as well as other ideas brought forward by the story. They appeared highly motivated, engaged, driven, empathetic and innovative. Their opinions and debates appeared caring.

#### 3.2.3. Restorying

Afterwards the students designed new stories by 'collaboratively access[ing]...life

experiences and engage[ing] in a process of storying and restorying' This appeared to 'reveal multidimensional meanings' (Leavy, 2009, p. 27) as the students interpreted the story and made sense of it. They appeared to cross boundaries between present experiences, i.e. practice, and their cognitive images, i.e. understanding a practice.

#### 3.2.4. Retelling

Next, they prepared presentations, i.e. storyboards, of their own new story in which they presented 'authentic and compelling rendering[s]' of their reflective artistic process (Leavy, 2009, p. 27). Once designed, they had to engage in making. In some cases the story making and art making steps were not linear but rather three dimensional and collaborative. Several students changed their stories while making as if they had dialogue with their own materials (Eisner, 2002).

#### 3.2.5. An Example

One student created a device that would allow Echo to travel back in time to the very moment when she held Juno at bay while her Nymph friends and Jupiter slipped away. The student expressed that she felt it was wrong of Echo to mislead Juno. There was a discussion if misleading is lying. The student had more empathy for Juno and wanted Echo to tell Juno, 'Yes, your husband Jupiter is in there with all the other Nymphs. Please go in'. She felt that if Echo had told the truth, she would not have made Juno mad causing Juno to curse Echo. This approach to saving Echo started a deep and profound discussion amongst the students. The dialogue travelled from historical events, to current events to possible future scenarios seemingly crossing space, time and dimensions. It reached out to different landscapes and social relationships. The discussions wandered even into other classrooms and the homes of the children and teacher as well crossing many boundaries.

### 3.3. Fusing the Practical with the Critical; Creating an Innovative Society

Leavy argues, 'Visual images are unique and can evoke particular kinds of emotional and visceral responses from their perceivers' (2009, p. 215) and she takes this thought further by saying, 'human experiences cannot be understood separately from the

environments in which they occur' (2009, p. 226). This would imply the practical act of making work combined with story leads to exploring and questioning relationships, i.e. crossing boundaries. This process is being argued as a form of fusion between the practical and critical. Wagner and Compton (2012) argue Arts practices be added to STEM faculties. STEM faculties are considered to be: Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (Study in the States, 2011). Wagner and Compton further argue success in STEM faculties is not enough to create innovative healthy societies. Eisner (2002) argues arts education is where innovative thinking is taught and developed. The author raises the question if STEM is lacking the crossing of boundaries that is apparently required to nurture creativity and innovation?

#### 4. Conclusion and Reflection

This paper has argued that story and dialogue help us to critically look at experiences and relationships. We have also discussed that stories are used for forming identity and that stories can define whom we are. Through the use of story in narrative inquiry we have acknowledged that stories are defined by the elements of time, environment, experiences, relationships and the people connected to them. Stories seem to engage us, draw us in and ignite a series of reflections and invite crossing boundaries. Our stories change as our perceptions develop in one direction or another. Directional change appears not static but highly dynamic. The direction is not necessarily always one deemed positive. If we use stories to make sense of the world, and if these stories define us ethically and morally, why do we not pay more attention to the use of stories; also or especially in art education?

We have also looked at how the author engaged art students in storying and restorying in order to promote critical and social reflection. Egan writes, 'A curriculum that sees the arts merely as frills is not educational' (1986, p. 109). He argues that art is one of the great places in education where stories unfold. He further argues most other educational faculties under utilize the children's powerful ability to imagine in order to create new knowledge; and new knowledge, one could argue, leads to innovation, for innovation offers novel aspects to common solutions. Egan writes, 'children's educational development should proceed from the abstract to the concrete' (1986, p. 9) using more of 'story forms' as 'our main tools for making sense of the world' (p. 110). Tim Rollins and the *Kids of Survival* (KOS) worked with a similar practice. Rollins and his students engaged 'with social and personal issues through art practices, developing a method of visual practice' using 'novels as a starting point' and eventually their work 'adopted a critical perspective on social and cultural issues' (Atkinson and Dash, 2005, p. xiv).

Can the pedagogy-of-storytelling and narrative inquiry be fused with social and critical practice to aid in the transformation of education? The author of this paper has experienced narrative inquiry to be 'a deeply ethical project' and has found 'thinking with stories is primarily thinking relationally' (Clandinin, 2013, p. 30). A challenge to this teaching method in art class has been time management. Discussions and making

can be done simultaneously with practice. To the author, this paper provides a means by which she can communicate the value of such a change in arts methodology to administrators and parents alike. Some parents, and educators of traditional minds, have however expressed a sense of loss in the amount of traditional crafts that go home. This sense of loss however inspires critical reflection on what art class actually produces and opens the possibility for dialogue. The author has further found these dialogues in arts curriculum change are emotionally and physically demanding and requires belonging to a supportive peer group. The author intends to continue being critically reflexive in her teaching methods, evolving and developing them in an attempt to create a more ethical and innovative society.

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