

Living Alongside: A Narrative Inquiry into the Impact of
Reflective Practice Training in Real Life

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Patricia Randall Long
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DEDICATION

This Dissertation is dedicated to my father,

William P Randall, Jr.

He always saw me wondrous.

He didn't always understand why I did what I did,

felt what I felt,

or chose what I chose...

But he always understood me.

I wish you were here now, Daddy, to see what you created.

I miss you.

This is for you.

*Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person,
it is born between people collectively searching for truth...*

M. Bakhtin

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this narrative inquiry (NI) was to explore, through personal narratives, the experience of the impact of Reflective Practice (RP) training (offered through an institute for collaborative communication housed within a large southeastern regional research one university) and subsequent practice on the day-to-day lives of two participants. While most published studies focus on RP impact during or immediately after training, this inquiry spanned seven months post training.

Field texts were generated from five open, non-structured interviews, journals, and field notes. The findings were framed within the NI commonplaces of temporality, sociality, and place, as well as seminal theories supporting the concept that dialogic interactions continuously shape and transform our ways of being. The researcher's inquiry "alongside" participants wove her presence into the story.

Participants storied RP experiences in the context of four themes: changes in their roles at work and home, experience of using the aspects of RP, choosing better ways of being in relationship with others, and practicing RP in the future to support and improve skills. They described shifts in their own behavior while, or as a result of, using RP. Through practicing reflective listening, suspending their judgements and pre-conceptions, and actively choosing to be open to new possibilities (reflective, framing, and theorizing levels of RP) they discovered new ways of seeing things, engaged in new types of dialogic interactions, and created new relationships with family members and colleagues relative to pre-RP. Their experiences include Mezirow's three aspects of transformative learning: critical reflection, reflective discourse, and reflective action, leading to both women describing improved practice and experiencing themselves as better human beings as a result of RP.

Though small, this study suggests possibilities for further exploration of RP's impact on educators who practice it alongside their students, as well as its potential contributions to understanding transformative learning outside the classroom. It also opens the door for a larger conversation regarding a broader role for educational psychology beyond classrooms and academic outcomes to making more lasting, transformative differences in people's lives.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

PRELUDE TO THE STORY

At the beginning of my doctorate journey, I took a course entitled “Reflective Practice” (RP) at the University of Tennessee. As I sat at the round table, looking at all of my classmates, I had the usual thoughts: will this be interesting, how much work am I facing, and of course, what will my instructor be like? When the instructor came in, placed a candle in the middle of the table and lit it, I realized that probably, none of those questions was going to matter much. THIS was going to be an experience. What I did not realize at that time was that I would be inquiring, at the end of that journey, into the lives of people who experienced the same processes that were the basis of my course. My goal of this study is to look deeply into the experiences of two such people and discover with them their story of the impact they perceive from RP training in their day to day lives.

RP, the course, is based on a dialogic relationship with others as we explore topics together. In it, participants move through the RP levels of almost instinctive pre-reflective responses to the group; conscious reflecting on and in actions while participating in the dialogue; recognizing the frames through which we see both topics and other people; suspending our assumptions to fully hear each other; and co-creating something new, a new knowledge, with the group (Peters & Ragland, 2009). The goal of the course had little to do with the topics covered; it was learning a new way of being with one another that allowed us to be reflective: consciously aware of ourselves and each other and what is being co-created in the dialogical space we create together.

What I noticed was that while I was experiencing in the classroom a different level of relationship and an openness and creativity that was unique, I was also experiencing something

different in my personal and work life. In my office, I found I was using the skills I was learning, such as “asking back” (a way of keeping attention on what the other person has said) and suspending my internal conversation to listen without my filters in meetings and with my staff. This made sense... we were often talking in class about how RP did indeed impact our ways of being as practitioners. But what was happening outside of the office? If I was not using the RP tools in my interactions with family, I was at minimum asking myself the question, why not? I was consciously looking at my filters, how was I hearing my husband, my son? What was my intention? What were we creating together? I began to see how my being-in-the-world was a construct, and I authored it in relationship to others. My relationships were all dialogic; indeed, existence itself is dialogic (Bakhtin, 1986; Isaacs, 1999; Shotter, 2005). And, this became my ontological stance: existence is dialogical, constantly in response to others. From there, I realized that as a reflective practitioner, I could respond to my world from an inquiry stance rather than a fix it stance. I had taken the concept of reflective practice from my course and come to see it as a way of being, and felt that change in my ways of working with my partners and in my way of relating to and with my family and friends.

I became curious about the experience of participants outside of their work who did RP to improve their work performance or outcomes. What if those participants were involved in working toward social improvement, grappling with complex and difficult issues that brought out for them their habitual thinking, their unexamined beliefs and assumptions? Would they experience the transformative change I had experienced in their lives outside of that work, and if so, what would their stories be?

Background of the story/study

I consult with systems involved with non-voluntary populations (child welfare, juvenile justice, criminal justice). I am asked to create, lead, and manage collaborative projects that impact the provision of services. I also manage, assess, or otherwise support community initiatives to address issues that lead youth or families into court involvement. Fortunately, that involvement has fostered a relationship with a core group of people who share a common vision of improved child wellbeing in our community. We have, over the years, come together in various small and large projects; we do not all work together under one roof, but have found ourselves working closely together as we create initiatives to support that vision. Even unplanned, we find ourselves often on the same board or committee, smiling across tables with an “of course you are here” look. And, while my efforts and those of my project and community partners always point toward a sustainable system change, I have realized that what is created between us is unique to what we, as a group, are together, at a given time. It is in our goings on together that change begins and new directions and ways of doing our practices are created (Senge, 2006; Shotter, 2006).

The joint reflective dialogue that was the basis of my course is now the basis of trainings by the University of Tennessee Institute for Collaborative Communication (ICC), where communities of professionals (e.g. school counselors of a particular district, court staffs of a judicial district) are being trained to support collaborative workplaces and collaborative approaches to issues they face (Peters & Schumann, 2010). My consulting company agreed to bring that training to our community partners, those faces around the table with whom we are working to improve the lives of youth and families in our communities. This form of RP utilizes the dialogic approach of my course and participants experience the different levels of reflection

mentioned above; however, it is tailored to a professional setting, is practice centered, and emphasizes specific dialogue-based skills and collaborative problem solving. I discuss the particular content in Chapter Three.

As part of a grant funded project, my company provided the RP training according to the ICC curriculum and with an ICC facilitator to staff from community agencies participating in this project. I assisted in writing the grant for the project and continue to serve on the community collaborative group that is spearheading the initiative. Twelve individuals from the involved agencies began the six-day training, spread out over three months; eight completed. Of the eight who completed, only two attended all sessions of the training. These two asked to informally meet occasionally to practice what we had learned. We met two times after the trainings, and although we did not practice RP as much as talk about how hard it was to practice the aspects in our home and work places, these meetings piqued my curiosity. What, I wondered, was it that had them want to keep meeting, to have a space to practice the skills they learned in the training? After the dialogical processes of the training, what would they notice about their larger lives, about the relationships, actions, and reactions to the world that most of us see as separate from our “professional” lives? And, how would the story of what they noticed develop, weave together professional and personal, or would it? That curiosity about what lays beyond participation in the RP training was the basis of my research puzzle about what participants perceive as the impact of RP in their day to day goings on, after the training.

Presentation – authoring the story/study

My study is a narrative inquiry with methods based on the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000). They have developed research steps and processes for narrative inquiry in a combination of works that span two decades (Clandinin, 2006, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly,

1998, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 2006). While I go into more detail in the methods section, a brief grounding in the presentation of narrative inquiry is warranted. Clandinin (2013) describes the researcher as “in the midst” (p. 203): in the midst of her life, the lives of participants, and the larger context of living in a relational world. While we are narrating our experiences, we are experiencing the narrative... there is not an end to the story. Narrative inquiry is never complete as human beings are continually reframing the stories of their lives and re-visioning their futures through those lenses. And, the researcher in the midst is also co-experiencing and co-authoring the story of the inquiry and impacting the stories of the participants as she lives alongside them throughout the study (Clandinin 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

This methodology has a language that is unlike the more traditional qualitative methods to support the fluidity and co-authoring that occurs in narrative inquiry. For example, Clandinin and Connelly (2006) describe the context of the study as the relational space of the inquiry:

As participants’ and researchers’ lives meet in the midst of each of our unfolding complex and multiple experiences, we begin to shape time, places, and spaces where we come together and negotiate ways of being together as ways of giving accounts of our work together (p. 44).

This space is the inquiry field, and the concept captures the constellation of contexts in which participants and researcher experience their lives, such as familial, social, cultural, and myriad other contexts within which we all have our being. That awareness of the complexity of existence and experience guides the researcher, whose entrance into the stories of participants brings her own contexts. As they note, for the inquirer “exit is never a final exit” as the inquiry field is now situated in the ongoing stories of participants and researcher.

Data collection is also a bit different in narrative inquiry. Connelly and Clandinin (2000) use the term “field text” rather than data to better capture the intersubjectivity and experiential nature of inquiry data. That data is not static, but rather co-created between the participants and the researcher as they reflect the ongoing interpretation of experiences. In this study, field texts include the interviews, journals, and reflective notes that combine to capture the stories of the participants AND researcher. The presence of the researcher impacts the story, and this is kept visible and transparent to the participants in the inquiry.

What would traditionally be referred to as findings is, in narrative inquiry, the creation of the interim research text. This text captures the stories of the participants and through interaction with the participants, comes together for the researcher to allow for analysis and interpretation... the re-storying of participant stories. Finally, the research text is the presentation of findings and conclusions in traditional dissertation format, and pertinent literature is woven throughout as it is part of the framework of the inquiry story.

I present this brief grounding in the language and construction of a narrative inquiry presentation because I, as researcher, must fit this methodology into the requirements of institutional context. Therefore, to be true to the methodology and communicate to my audience clearly the story of this inquiry, I will be using the language of Clandinin and Connelly alongside the traditional headings and divisions of a more traditional presentation. My literature review of foundational works in social construction theory, transformative learning theory, and reflective practice is brief, while a more detailed review of pertinent works that share in the unfolding story of RP is woven into the discussion section.

Statement of the Problem

There is a great deal written on reflective practice in various settings. Far less, but growing, is a body of research on the specific form of RP developed at the University of Tennessee and its associated components which is primarily but not exclusively dissertation research (e.g. Duncan, 2009; Gaskin, 2007; Gray, 2008; Peters & Armstrong, 1998; Ragland, 2005; Torres, 2008). A few dissertations look at what participants in organized training events or academic courses in RP experience during the events themselves (e.g. Alderton, 2001; Armstrong, 1999; Crosse, 2001; Dillivan, 2004), but only Burress (2013), in her phenomenological study of an RP course, specifically examined participants' experience of their "way of being" changing (p. 168), suggesting an impact beyond the classroom. However, as is the case with other RP studies, Burress' study is still limited to what participants experience while in RP.

This RP approach is the basis of a limited but expanding body of non-dissertation research, (e.g. Burress & Peters, 2012; Duncan et. al. 2013; Gray & Peters, 2009; Muth & Peters, 2010; Peters & Gray, 2006; Peters, Taylors, & Doi, 2011; Rong & Peters, 2007; Skinner & Peters, 2014), but again, the focus is primarily on the professional or classroom setting and the experience of participants within the training or course itself. I found no studies that look closely at the perceived impact of that experience on the lives of participants beyond the time of the RP experience.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study is to give a richer understanding of what happens for people after experiencing training in the dialogical process of RP. Often in conversation with others who have experienced RP, I have heard that the lives of these individuals were changed as a

result, or that their relationships were different, or that their perspectives of themselves and their roles were altered. This anecdotal evidence combined with my own experience and the research gap mentioned above helped me pose my research question: What impact, if any, do participants in an RP training perceive in their day to day lives post-training? For the purposes of this study, impact refers to those perceived changes in participants' lives. There is no attempt to establish a causal relationship between the training and post-training changes; rather, this study gives voice to the participants' perceptions of what they experience as impact.

Conceptual Framework

Human being is a collaborative process. We live in a shared event (Bakhtin, 1986), each of us affecting and being affected by the other. In that process, we create the context of our lives... the context of our beliefs and assumptions is also the context of problems and solutions, and we create it all. Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic nature of existence is fundamental to my study: human beings create new ways of being through a dialogic relationship with others (Holquist, 2002). And, those new ways of being come from new ways of knowing. Knowing is the act of relating to and in the world around us. I will discuss this further later, but it is important to understand this connection to RP. How we know is how we relate to our worlds, whether personal or professional, and informs how we go on with others in our lives (Cook & Brown, 1999; Gergen, 2005; Isaacs, 1999; Lee, 2006; Shotter, 1993, 2005). RP is predicated on a willingness to consciously be in that dialogical relationship, aware and awake to the way of knowing or relating to other. It is the making ourselves aware of what is hidden (for example, the social constructs that inform our ontological stances) that leads to transformative change (Friere, 1970; Gergen, 2011).

Although the idea of examining and reflecting on our choices and results has been part of many adult education and adult development theories (Bjorklund & Bee, 2008), Schon introduced the idea of reflective practice (1983), where practitioners reflect on actions after they have occurred, and reflect in action, inquiring and examining while in the process of acting. Peters and Ragland (2009) further expanded the Schon concept of reflective practice to include the process of identifying the practitioner's assumptions, theorizing about the impact or effect of these assumptions on her practice, and acting from the new theory that has come from this examination through a series of removes or stepping back. In other words, the RP process exposes what is unconscious in our theories, those tacit beliefs that inform our actions more than what we think we think (Argyris & Schon, 1974). In addition, this reflective process moves beyond the individual practitioner's consideration of his or her own way of being, frames, and constructed theories to a joint reflective process embedded in relationship and collaborative inquiry... a dialogical process (Isaacs, 1999).

Significance of Study

Using narrative inquiry methods for my data collection, analysis and reporting, I present a different view of the experience of RP than that presented in other studies of this particular form of reflective practice. Because narrative inquiry explores the experiences of participants and the meaning they give them through their voices (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Moen, 2006), this study provides a fuller understanding of what *participants* perceive as the impact in their lives from training in and practicing RP. In addition, I raise the possibility that transformative learning may result from the experience of RP, demonstrated in reported changes in ways of being in the whole context of the lives of participants.

Narrative inquiry as a research method for studies of RP is rare; indeed, while I found many instances of action research using various methods, no narrative studies surfaced. Yet, narratives situate an experience in people's life stories, privileging their perspectives over those of an observer or participant researcher. This can enrich our repertoire of methods for examining phenomenon in adult learning and impact how we train and teach reflective practice.

Limitations of Study

Several limitations to this study are notable. First, my conclusions about the impact of RP in MG and WD's lives are limited to their particular lives and experiences, and cannot be generalized to larger populations of participants or considered in any way to provide a value statement about RP trainings. The effectiveness of RP trainings is another research topic that would be very valuable to explore. Second, this study is limited to the lives of two women who share geographical location, race, educational level (college), and professional level in common. A broader study of a larger and more diverse set of participants would allow for an examination into life situations that possibly affect the experience of impact of RP such as socio-economic level, experience of oppression, and cultural identity. Third, the storied experiences that MG and WD share are fluid. While they may tell the story of impact and transformative learning in the present context of the study, their interpretation of those experiences could alter markedly with the passage of time. Indeed, even within the time period of the study, both women will tell the story of a particular experience of RP differently from one interview to the next. Finally, my relationship with the participants as friend and colleague colored our interactions in the interviews and journals. A more objective study of what participants' experience over time from RP could provide a stronger argument that RP training has a transformative impact on participants.

Organization of Study

As noted above, the language of narrative presentations of narrative research is unlike that of more traditional research methodologies. Respecting that difference and my audience, I organized my study to both provide the information in a format conducive to research and that protect the continuity of the joint story I created with WD and MG. I present the dissertation in six chapters. Chapter One introduced and gave the background for the study; briefly described the presentation of narrative inquiry and its unique structure and language; and provided a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the conceptual framework, significance of the study, and limitations of the study. Chapter Two offers a brief literature review to situate the study in the larger context of social construction, dialogue, adult learning, and reflective practice. In a narrative presentation, further examination of research literature is woven through the narrative of the study. Chapter Three presents the narrative inquiry methodology that stories and re-stories the experiences of the participants and the researcher, selection of participants, procedures, inquiry processes, and validity and trustworthiness. Chapter Four presents my findings: the participant's stories of RP impact and the threads, or themes, that are common to both. Chapter Five discusses my findings, restorying them by weaving together MG and WD's stories, my own as researcher, and the research literature that is relevant to my conclusions. Chapter Six is entitled Conclusions and New Beginnings because it provides a summary of the study, my conclusions as researcher and co-author of the restoried impact of RP training, and implications for future study, but also to respect the narrative inquiry stance that the story does not end with the product of the research, it continues through the relationships created with the participants and the future research that may be suggested or impacted by the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

SITUATING THE STORY

I begin my literature review with a discussion of social construction as a conceptual framework for my study, and specifically the epistemological concept that by making explicit the unconscious or unaware beliefs and constructs from which we operate as human beings, we can generate new ways of being. Following this, I spend some time in discussing transformative learning theory as it relates to perspective transformation and reflection, since it is the integration of our experiences into our lives, the meaning we assign them and the learnings we take from them, that I believe is the heart of transformation, a continuous process of growth (Kegan, 2000). If participants in my study have found that their lived stories have been impacted by RP, the experience they describe exemplifies that process of growth. Finally, I present what I believe are the foundational works for the dialogical aspect of reflective practice and its transformative potential. These sections provide the underpinnings of reflective practice and specifically the approach to RP that is the focus of this study.

Social Construction Philosophy

The philosophical context for my study is social construction. Social construction holds that we understand our world, and our experiences within it, based on co-construction with others: real world experiences become phenomena whose meaning is constructed in the context of the larger social construct within which our lives are situated rather than by some outside set of physical or social laws (Bohm, 1996; Gergen, 2005; Gergen & Gergen, 2011; Shotter, 2005). This fits my interest in how RP participants construct meaning from their experience of RP.

Our experiences as practitioners are phenomena whose meaning is constructed within the frameworks of our interpretations of past experiences, cultural beliefs, and social norms (Bohm,

1996; Gergen, 2005; Isaacs, 1999). For example, our concept of juvenile crime is a social construct, based on many contributing beliefs that are both social norms and individual beliefs about what is wrong or bad behavior (e.g. is substance abuse a crime or an illness?), what is appropriate response to such behaviors (punitive, rehabilitative, or service?), and who deserves compassion versus punitive sanctions (based on personal story, record, race, age, gender?).

Gergen (2005) believes that social construction as a world view offers “The invitation ... to generate alternative understandings of greater promise” (p. 40) by calling into question and examining those understandings we, as a society or a community, have already constructed between us. Bohm (1996), in his theories about dialogue, agrees that society “is a reality created by all the people through their consciousness” (p. 101). Both Gergen and Bohm deny *inherent* value or truth: meaning is negotiated and shared. We construct our way of being and the culture or context in which we have our being.

As co-creators of our social worlds, we have a shared responsibility as well as capability to effect social change (Bohm, 1996; Gergen, 2005). Certainly this is true of those of us who have committed to assisting others to improve their lives. Gergen suggests that in a transformational dialogue that acknowledges the “conjoint reality” we create together, human beings can “generate alternative understandings of greater promise” (Gergen, 2005, p. 40). This is a fundamental epistemological stance for RP: we can generate new possibilities through an intentional dialogue that examines our underlying socially constructed beliefs and assumptions.

Transformative Learning Theory

Following a social construction epistemology, our growth as human beings is a process of learning, of interpreting our experiences in life and constructing new meanings from those experiences in relationship with others (Gergen & Gergen, 2011; Gergen, McNamee, & Barrett,

2001). Our interpretations are based on the perspectives through which we frame our lives. Usually, those perspectives are unexamined, inherited from cultural, social, and other environments (Gergen et al., 2001; Kegan, 2000). By uncovering what is tacit and examining those inherited perspectives, we can change the perspectives or frames through which we make meaning (Kegan, 2000, p. 59). Human beings can choose who we become by authoring our interpretations rather than being authored by them (Frankl, 1984).

In transformative learning theory, Kegan (2000) describes that perspectival change as a transformation of the way we know, the way we give meaning to experience. The new meanings we construct from re-interpreting our experiences may lead to a “more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspective” (Mezirow, 1990, p. 14). In other words, when we experience something that is not in alignment with our existing frames, we can adopt new or reify existing perspectives, expanding our possible interpretations (Mezirow, 1998).

Perspective transformation is conditioned upon critical reflection in revising the meaning we give to an experience and how we incorporate this into our self-definition: “Reflection is the apperceptive process by which we change our minds, literally and figuratively. It is the process of turning our attention to the justification for what we know, feel, believe and act upon” (Mezirow, 1995, p. 46).

In RP, a group creates the joint reflective process, a dialogue that is a collaborative learning experience. This happens in a shared discourse that is embedded in relationship: “Intimate speech is imbued with a deep confidence in the addressee (listener), in his sympathy, in the sensitivity and goodwill of his responsive understanding. In this atmosphere of profound trust, the speaker reveals his internal depths” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 97). The result can be transformative, changing our way of being in the world and impacting the web of participatory

relationships that define our human being (Bakhtin, 1986; Bohm, 1996; Holquist, 2002; Isaacs, 1999; Maturana & Bunnell, 1999; Palmer, 1987).

Mezirow, along with Freire, saw transformative learning as part of adult education that should lead to self-empowerment (Freire, 1970; Mezirow, 2000). RP, in the joint context I describe above, is adult learning that is emancipatory, involving critical reflection through dialogue that can develop awareness of power and agency in participants and uncover new ways of being (Taylor, 2008). Mezirow's theories, along with those of other authors, figure largely in the interpretation of my findings, and therefore are explored more fully in Chapter Five.

Reflective Practice Foundations

As noted above, RP fits within a social construction framework: human beings co-create our reality, including the beliefs and assumptions that frame our ways of being. In practice, RP can be a transformative learning process. Indeed, to have the outcome of practice improvement that RP strives for, it must be. The mechanisms of that approach, especially the generative dialogue at its heart, come from several theoretical paths.

Bohm (1996), while not specifically addressing reflective practice or practice improvement, elucidates many of the core concepts of generative dialogue that support RP. He sees the process of dialogue as a vehicle for affecting a fundamental change in how we move through our world together. He says, "Dialogue is the collective way of opening up judgments and assumptions" (p. 53), and he goes on to say that, because it reveals limiting ways of perceiving the other, "transformation of the nature of consciousness, both individually and collectively" is possible. This is similar to transformative learning theory explored above. However, for Bohm, this is more than surfacing assumptions and perspectives: dialogue can effect this kind of change only when the nature of thought itself changes. Thought informs our

individual and collective consciousness, and therefore when thought is in error, when thought creates the very assumptions that fragment and limit our ways of relating with one another, it “pollutes” (p. 57) the source of our connections to each other. We have resistance to seeing the source of our thinking as changeable; we hold on to those representations that we consider to be truth and fall into self-deception rather than accept the possibility of error. Bohm believes that changing our very consciousness and therefore how we go on as human beings depends on becoming aware of our thought processes:

What is called for, then, is a deep and intense awareness, going beyond the imagery and intellectual analysis of our confused process of thought, and capable of penetrating to the contradictory presuppositions and states of feeling in which the confusion originates. Such awareness implies that we be ready to apprehend the many paradoxes that reveal themselves in our daily lives, in our larger-scale social relationships, and ultimately in the thinking and feeling that appear to constitute the “innermost self” in each one of us. (p. 78).

The awareness he describes can come if thought becomes proprioceptive, aware of itself. Such thought is self-reflective. We are not just reflecting *on* our thinking; reflecting on thinking is thinking itself; we also reflect in the act of thinking, aware of and suspending the assumptions and notions that cause us to distance from others. In RP, the process of stepping back and becoming aware of thinking to surface the underlying perceptions and frames that thinking is creating is what Peters and Ragland (2009) call “levelising”. We go through this process to be able to recognize where our beliefs, assumptions, and judgments come from, and then suspend them to engage in transformative, generative dialogue (Bohm, 1996; Gergen, 2005; Isaacs, 1999).

Peters and Ragland's (2009) levelising process illustrates how practitioners can move from pre-reflective, unexamined responses to aware, open, and co-creating dialogue. That process is helpful in framing Bohm's call for thought itself to become proprioceptive and aware. The levelising construct includes four levels: pre-reflective being, reflective being, framing, and theorizing (p. 1). It originates in an unarticulated, unaware state of tacit knowledge, but leads to a more attentive and expanded perception of the self in practice and in connection to the other:

The process begins in our routine and largely unexamined ways of being; from various perspectives that are themselves subject to reflection, we come to know more about what we do in order to go on together (p. 1).

Similar to Bohm's comments on thought being tacit and reflexive, Peters and Ragland (2009) describe pre-reflective being as

“A practitioner engaged in her practice [who] acts into situations based on considerations that she would be hard pressed to articulate if required to do so. The actions of our everyday lives do have bases, but those bases are not, for the most part, the result of conscious deliberation” (p. 3).

Pre-reflective being equates to Bohm's non-proprioceptive thought. In pre-reflective thought, the thinker continues as the object separate from her thought. It is also reflexive thought. Human beings think and feel in reaction to thought. Unaware of the origin of our reactions, as they are reflexive, we build upon that reaction and create a series of assumptions. Without the next level, reflecting on what began the chain of thinking that led to the resulting assumption, we misinterpret that assumption as fact or truth. Thought is tacit, automatic, and without awareness of its being.

In Peters and Ragland's reflective being, "the [practitioner] not only retains her relationship to the practice, she seeks to examine that relationship" by "reflecting on what [she] is doing with the intent to understand [herself] and that [she] can capture [her] own history in descriptive terms if not in its full essence" (p. 4). Applied to self-reflective thought, level II is thinking in awareness, attentive to the process of thought and that which occurs with thought.

Bohm (1996) sees this attending to thought as integral to discovering the errors by which we relate to each other and our world. Erroneous, unconsidered thinking fragments and divides, creating the problems we struggle with without knowing that their origin is in our own ways or thinking (p. 57). Recognizing origin allows us to look closely at the frames through which we developed those assumptions. A reflective practitioner can accomplish discovering the origins of this unconsidered thinking through framing, level III of the levelising model: "Through reflection one begins to become aware of herself reflecting and to see that she is operating from within a conceptual framework" (Peters & Ragland, 2009, p. 3). That framework is defined as a "point of view... framed by windows on the world constructed by the culture; just as windows in buildings, perceptual windows focus one's gaze in a particular direction and eliminate other vistas entirely from view" (Peters & Ragland, 2009, p. 4). Framing allows us to suspend our own assumptions and recognize not only how they impact our thinking, but the origin of the thoughts and their effect on our going on with others.

Bohm's (1996) vision for dialogue is to be transformative and generative. Through recognizing and becoming aware of our thought and the limitations it creates, and by then suspending and working toward resolving the paradoxes of unreflective thinking, we can shape our own lives and create a new way of being in relation to others. Similar to Mezirow and Friere's discussions of the potential of transformative learning, Bohm believes becoming aware

and attentive to individual and collective thought and the possibility of changing how we think can lead to a “transformation of consciousness, both individually and collectively” (p. 109).

The fourth of Peters and Ragland’s levels, theorizing, is the step beyond the context of an individual’s practice and into a collective approach to improving practice, in which “solutions can be jointly created” (p. 6). This level leads to participatory thought, in which the thinker is taking part in and of collective thought, actively aware of her part in co-creation (Bohm, 1996; Gergen, 2011; Isaacs, 1999; Shotter, 2002).

Bohm (1996) says “Everything depends on thought – if thought goes wrong, we are going to do everything wrong” (p. 58). The process of examining thought, of thought becoming self-aware and proprioceptive, is fundamental to changing shared consciousness, which in turn would open up the possibility of transformation of how we go on as human beings in relation to each other and the world we are constructing together. Gergen (2005) agrees with Bohm that knowledge of our world is created from a larger source, a communal source, rather than from the individual. Gergen refers to this source as communal traditions (p. 122) while Bohm (1996) refers to it as participatory thought (p. 99). Either way, it is the examination of and making explicit participatory thought through dialogue that fuels the reflective process. Inquiring into our practices, what Schön (1987) referred to as “reflective conversation with the situation” can help to identify areas of strength and areas that could be improved (p. 268). Dialogue creates a culture, a group that “collectively share[s] meaning” (Bohm, 1996, p. 15). Members of a group can inquire together into their practices and create new approaches to the problem situations that they discover, new knowledge that did not exist in any individual but was created together upon communal inquiry (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Cook & Brown, 1999; Lee, 2006).

In the context of a mutual desire to generate new solutions or ways to address issues, Gergen, et al, (2001) recognize there are forms of dialogue that can generate “new ‘ways of going on together’, ways of coordinating activities” (p. 682). Their emphasis is on transformative dialogue, dialogue framed in the social construction approach that is a means to address conflict and a counter to the prevalent divisive discourse that dominates in many cultures today. Gergen and his colleagues present a new vocabulary for framing dialogue that supports the co-construction of alternatives and the mutual change that is represented by RP (Gergen, 2009; Gergen et al., 2001). The components of that framework include relational responsibility, significance of self-expression, affirmation, coordinating action, self-reflexivity, and co-creation of new worlds.

These components can provide the context for seven skills emphasized in RP: climate building, listening, focusing, questioning, facilitating, thinking and acting. The skills provide the parameters for a generative dialogue aimed at creating new possibilities for resolving issues faced by the participants in their practices (Schumann, Peters & Olsen, 2013). As seen in the Table 1 below, these skills are a practical process for creating a context for Gergen’s transformative dialogue. In the table, each of Gergen’s transformative dialogue components can be seen as connected to one or more of the skills taught in RP. The first, relational responsibility, acknowledges the socially constructed, mutual meaning making that underlies all our assumptions, beliefs, and actions. Relational responsibility suggests that shared responsibility for the meaning we make and the actions we take creates a shared perspective and accountability for our current and future joint constructions. This acceptance of mutual responsibility prevents a blaming mentality, creating an environment where collaboration is supported. Participants create this environment through climate building, intentionally creating a climate of safety and respect.

Table 1: Relationship of transformative dialogue components to RP aspects

Components of Transformative Dialogue	Characteristics	Skills of RP	Context
Relational Responsibility	Shared responsibility for meaning we make and actions we take	Climate Building	Creating an environment in which there is a sense of safety and respect, supportive of a collaborative relationship among all participants.
Significance of Self-expression	To hear and be heard with understanding, engagement and acceptance	Listening Focusing	Skillful listening to others mental models, wants, assumptions, and values. Seeing and hearing what each other says and how they say it, moment to moment, individually and jointly.
Affirmation of Other	Understanding and accepting the frames of others	Focusing Questioning	See above Asking questions that help identify assumptions, clarify thoughts, and develop fair and balanced expectations.
Coordinated Action	Conversational moves join participants	Facilitating	Enabling conditions that create and sustain dialogue by participants.
Self-Reflexivity	Questioning our ideas and beliefs	Thinking	Identifying and suspending one's own frames, assumptions, values, and biases, in order to understand one's own and others viewpoints and behaviors.
Co-Creation	New alternatives being constructed.	Acting	Taking next steps based on critical reflection of one's own and others' thoughts, feelings, and actions.

The significance of self-expression is the need to be heard and the opportunity to connect to the experiences of another through shared narratives. This component is supported through listening for what is behind the words, the frames through which others make sense of experience. It is also supported through focusing on what is happening in the moment, both individually and jointly, so that each is fully engaged in the dialogue.

Affirmation goes hand in hand with self-expression. By affirming we support and honor the speaker, creating a safe space for expression. This requires an openness to the other's frames or the ways the world occurs to him or her. Again, this is supported by focusing and being fully engaged with what is being said and how it is said in the moment. This component is also supported by the skill of questioning, asking in ways that uncover and clarify.

Co-ordinated action that is co-constituting (Gergen et al., 2001) connects utterance and response in a way that generates a joining between participants. We say what will "validate, affirm or reflect" the other's expressions, coordinating expression to create mutual support. This coordinated discourse is supported by facilitating the creation and sustaining of dialogue by participants.

Self-reflexivity requires a shift in our conversational stance. Traditionally, our stance is that our ideas must be complete, coherent and whole before we share them. Fully thought out and considered, we share them as absolute positions. If we come from a self-reflexive stance, we are questioning those ideas and therefore opening up to possibilities that would otherwise be unavailable to us from the above approach, which is committed to the already formulated and therefore fixed idea. This questioning stance requires a high level of reflection-in-action, reflecting on what we are creating, thinking, saying while in the action of creating, thinking and

or saying (Schön, 1983). This is supported by the RP skill of thinking, which entails identifying and suspending one's frames to better understand his own and those of others.

The co-creation of new worlds is the focus of dialogue on the new alternatives being collaboratively constructed within the discourse. It is the purpose of the dialogue, yet not a fixed envisioned goal. Rather, a new world unfolds through the dialogue, revealing "new, unifying amalgamations of perspective" (Gergen et al., 2001). Through the skill of acting, taking next steps based on the critical reflection experienced in the dialogue, new alternatives can be co-created.

Gergen (2009) emphasizes moving toward social action through transformative dialogue. The RP model can be seen as a practical application of Gergen's work: new alternative actions are identified and taken in the workplace through a process dependent on looking at what we think we know and discovering where that knowing comes from, and then constructing new knowledge together through dialogue. Participants, practicing these skills in the RP dialogue, may experience transformative learning that can be described in the stories they tell of what happens afterwards, in the goings on of their lives.

Summary

In this chapter, I have introduced some of the foundational theories and touched on empirical studies that support RP and the potential of RP to be a transformative learning experience. RP is situated in the epistemological and ontological background of social construction theory; it provides the possibility of a transformative learning experience by way of the disorienting dilemma of surfacing and challenging the frames of reference through which the world occurs to one; and it is built upon a concept of generative dialogue that leads to collaborative creation of new alternatives. The literature review helped to frame the inquiry field

of this study, and a further discussion of related literature follows in Chapter Five as part of the story of my inquiry. The methods I describe in the following chapter outline my exploration of the experience of RP and the possible transformative impact perceived by participants as described in their lived stories.

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

STORYING AND RE-STORYING

The following chapter describes my approach to narrative inquiry. I have included in the design a brief justification of my use of qualitative narrative methodology and specifically Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) narrative inquiry methodology. Their methodology encourages a narrative presentation of results as well as the narrative processes involved in collecting data, which would suggest a narrative format for my actual dissertation rather than the traditional format. Therefore, I spend some time explaining the components of the research design and the concept of "re-storying" the stories of my participants.

I also further explain the narrative inquiry terminology suggested by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and show where the components of a more traditional approach fit with theirs. This is demonstrated in my discussion of participants, procedures, and validity and trustworthiness.

Research Question

My study is concerned with life after RP training, as noted above, and how participants experience RP in their lives. This focus is situated in a broader interest in hearing about the meaning of a life experience to individuals through their own voices in their stories. Based on my research puzzle about the effect of RP on peoples' lives, my question for this inquiry is *what impact, if any, do participants in an RP training perceive in their day to day lives post-training?*

Design

Qualitative research is very much a logical partner to my social construction epistemology and approach to the human experience, as inherent in social construction is the belief that human beings assign meaning to their experiences, constructing their beliefs,

standards, morals, even social institutions themselves in the context of the constellation of previous events, experiences, and social norms in which experience is situated (Gergen, 2005; Moen, 2006). And, equally, that this meaning is created in relationship to others; we are co-creating with others (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 2005). Qualitative research methods tend to focus on participant experience and embrace the contextual nature of that experience. The qualitative researcher is focused more on the process of experience than the product (Bogden & Biklen, 2007; Kramp, 2004).

Because my research question is concerned with if and how participants experience the impact of RP training in their lives, I believe a narrative approach to both the study and report would be the best research methodology. Their stories will tell us what meaning that experience has in their day to day goings on, contributing a unique perspective on reflective practice to our field. That perspective gives us a broader, more holistic view of reflective practice and may fuel opportunities for further research into the why and how of long term practice change or lack of practice change resulting from RP.

Narrative research “looks backward and forward, looks inward and outward, and situates the experiences within place” (Creswell, 2006, p. 185); it is an approach that examines the completeness of an experience, situated within the life and reality of the experiencer. Narrative research has generally been seen as a method for collecting and analyzing data (collecting the stories of participants, for example) or a method for reporting (telling the story of the participants), or both.

Human beings are story tellers... more than that, we are story-ers. We experience in narrative, cataloguing and recording our experiences within the context of the settings, plots, and timelines of our lives, creating the stories as we experience, before we begin telling the stories to

ourselves or to others (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; McAdams, 2008; Moen, 2006). It is a way of knowing, a way of both constructing experience and giving meaning to experience (Bruner, 1987; Kramp, 2004; McAdams, 2008).

Narrative, as a way of knowing, results in the story, the way of telling (Kramp, 2004). It is in the story that the participant frames his or her experience, authors it, and in narrative research tells the researcher what mattered, what meaning the experience had to the participant (Kramp, 2004). As Bruner (1987) described it, participants will narrate, in the context of culture, audience, and social norms (life told) the experience that is remembered through images, feelings, consequences, thoughts (life experienced) of the event (life lived). And, as nothing is told outside of the relationship of speaker to audience, (Bakhtin, 1986), I as researcher am in a collaborative dialogue with the participants throughout the research and reporting of their experiences (Clandinin, 2013; Creswell, 2006; Moen, 2006).

Narrative Inquiry Methodology

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) further refined the narrative research approach to specifically a narrative inquiry methodology that begins and ends “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” (p. 20). They frame the inquiry within what they refer to as a three-dimensional space: temporal, social, and physical (place) (p. 39).

We situate our experiences in time, integrating them into the ongoing narrative of our lives (McAdams, 2008). There is a temporal flow to experience and its meaning: “Experiences grow out of other experiences... and lead to future experiences” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Inquirers attend to this temporal reality of experience, including the temporal nature of their own research experience.

The social commonplace refers to the relational nature of both the experiences of the participants and the researcher. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) enfold the internal and external conditions of participants into the social commonplace. The inquirer attends to the internal conditions that shape participants' ways of framing experience and how those conditions (e.g. emotions, moral or ethical stance) may have been shaped by larger narratives (family, school, culture). And, the outward conditions are also attended to: events, people, and actions. Also included in this social commonplace is the relationship of the inquirer to the participants. As life stories do not end with the end of a research project, relationships with the participants and their stories is part of the longer narrative of their lives and that of the researcher.

Place, the third commonplace, is the physical location of the experiences under study and the inquiry itself. Our stories, or life narratives, are situated in places, the landscapes of those stories. Those places in turn impact the meaning we make of our lives and experiences.

Narrative inquiry is collaborative and dialogic as the researcher and the participants "reach a joint intersubjective understanding of the narratives that occur during the research process" (Moen, 2006). Rather than the more traditional process of data collection, analysis, and reporting, Clandinin (2013) suggests a fluid approach that generates field, interim and research texts, all shared with participants throughout the research. I discuss these in more detail in the procedures section below.

The collaborative relationship between participants and research is also expressed in the re-storying of their stories. As noted above, human beings give meaning to experience by situating it in time, place, and relationship to other; we story it (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Re-storying provides an overall narrative structure to the stories of participants in order to share what, if any, meaning RP has as seen in the goings on of their lives. Re-storying must be done

jointly with participants to ensure their stories are captured; in addition, new meanings can come from the experience of re-storying their stories, as they see them situated again in a larger context of the stories of others who shared the experience of RP. Within Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative framework, I will re-story the participants' stories, looking for those epiphanies or "turning points" that signal an impact on how participants go about their lives (Creswell, 2006).

Participants

I recruited two participants for this study, women with whom I have worked in different capacities for several years. MG and WD are college educated. MG has a graduate degree and WD has an undergraduate degree in their specific fields. They are both in their 40's. Both are white, and fall in the upper middle class socioeconomic level. Each works with the Juvenile Justice system in different capacities and they have worked together for several years representing their respective agencies in joint projects as well as providing services. MG and WD participated in the RP training and attended all sessions, and as noted in Chapter One, they both had expressed interest in continuing to meet and practice RP. This was in line with the narrative inquiry methodology, which often looks into the lives of one or few participants to allow for a closer involvement, as the researcher delves into their lived stories as they are occurring.

For some time prior to the trainings, WD and MG had been interested in participating in RP. I wanted to inquire into their experiences because they had in common that interest; jobs that focus on finding ways to assist children and families who become involved in social service systems. In addition, each is successful in her profession and has expressed satisfaction with her career and position, and both have taken leadership roles in community wide initiatives to

improve the lives of children and families. They meet Maslow's definition of meta-motivated individuals. I wanted to recruit individuals who were self-actualized so that examining the impact of the training was less likely to be confounded by the struggles of meeting their basic needs (Maslow, 1973).

Selection was also influenced by access. Because of my work with each of the participants in varying projects, I had easy access to both participants. In addition, they live locally to me and our shared work interests bring us in regular contact. Trust had already been established between us because of long and positive relationships together, which assisted in creating a field of inquiry that was safe and conducive to sharing their lived experiences and meanings (Clandinin, 2013).

Procedures

Informed consent

After receiving IRB approval, I created consent forms for both participants. I met with them individually about the study, data collection, and reporting of findings prior to the first interview, described in more detail below. At those individual meetings, the consent forms were discussed and signed. The consent forms include a detailed description of access and presentation of field texts including the use of cloud technology and web environments. Field texts include electronic journal entries, interview recordings and transcripts, reflexive researcher notes, and hand written notes from two phone interviews. All are saved in a secure environment using my encrypted Digital Dropbox account, and any physical documents are kept in a locked file in my office. Participants were asked to read and provide feedback on their own data and texts I generate specific to them. The analysis or results, my final product, was shared with both participants who offered feedback via e-mail.

Transcriptionist confidentiality

I engaged a transcriptionist to transcribe all eight of the interviews with MG and WD. As the interviews were completed, I uploaded them via my digital Dropbox. I gave password protected access to those files to the transcriptionist, who then uploaded the transcribed interviews as documents back into my folder. The transcriptionist signed a confidentiality form prior to beginning transcription services.

Inquiry Processes

Data collected was comprised of interviews (face to face and phone), journals, and researcher notes. As noted in Chapter One, Clandinin and Connelly's narrative inquiry methodology uses a non-traditional approach to and format for data collection and reporting (Chase, 2005; Clandinin, 2013; Creswell, 2006), I take some time in the following section to discuss more fully the terminology and thinking behind their processes.

Researcher autobiography

My responsibility, as a narrative researcher, is to re-story in a way that gives voice to my participants, is true to their stories, and presents a new narrative that weaves theirs together with the meanings I have uncovered in my work with them. My inquiry began with my own autobiographical narrative (Clandinin, 2013). This allowed me to attend to my own life narrative and how my story potentially intersected with and impacted the stories and re-storying of my participants' experiences. By writing and reflecting on my story from the three-dimensional approach (time, place and sociality), I became aware of the crossroads of my experiences with theirs and was better able to navigate the tensions of self-examination, both my own and that of the participants. While usually the entire narrative autobiography is not included in the final research text, according to Clandinin (2013) this narrative beginning "can make visible [my]

ontological and epistemological commitments” and how they impacted my research puzzle, my choice of participants, and my goings-on with those participants (p. 89).

My autobiography allowed me to look at my existing relationships with MG and WD. I had a somewhat unique research position: I was a friend as well as a colleague, and we already had a history of sharing personal stories. That “insider” space in the inquiry affected my findings. My relationships with each of these people is important to me, both personally and professionally... one of the places my story intersected with theirs. My awareness of this helped me stay cognizant of coloring my findings by protecting their feelings or putting the most positive spin on what they shared. I am also an “outsider” researcher, not participating as a first time RP trainee but rather observing and studying others who are. In addition, while we share interests in and desire to improve juvenile justice and children’s lives, I do not work directly with clients nor do I supervise those that do. My professional path had crossed with MG and WD many times, but my practice as a system designer and trainer is very different from theirs.

S. Dwyer and J. Buckle (2009) describe a “space between” inside and outside researcher: “The intimacy of qualitative research no longer allows us to remain true outsiders to the experience under study and, because of our role as researchers, it does not qualify us as complete insiders” (p. 60). In this narrative inquiry, I lived alongside the participants, experiencing with them their own stories of RP after the training. I am not a subject of the study; my role in the trainings was as coordinator, and in this inquiry I was researcher. However, I was experiencing alongside my participants what was happening for them as they went about their lives post training through our face to face meetings and their journals, and in our work related meetings. The stories they tell are not retrospectives about distant events; they are lived stories situated in

the current lives of participants that were told as they were experienced. And I, as researcher, was “part of the storied landscapes [I studied]” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 82).

Therefore, researcher bias was an issue of my own reflexive stance; I had to stay aware of my own stories and how they impacted 1) my way of seeing the participants and 2) how I identified and selected the threads of meaning that connected their stories. My effort to stay alert to what impacted my perceptions and analysis Clandinin refers to as the “personal justifications” of the inquiry (Clandinin, 2013, p. 36).

Because qualitative research and perhaps more so, narrative inquiry, is relational and requires a level of collaboration and connection with participants that is intimate and often lasting, a distant, impartial stance as researcher is impossible (Clandinin, 2013; Creswell, 2006; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). What is imperative in this research methodology is “an ability to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experience of one’s research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience” (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 59). Clandinin (2013) explains that “although our intent is to enter the relationships with participants as researchers, participants come to know and see us as people in relation with them – a reminder of our short-term and long-term relational and ethical responsibilities” (p. 51). This suggested that transparency and authenticity with my participants of my own stories and my ways of seeing and re-storying their experiences was the best way to navigate my researcher bias.

The narrative inquiry field

The narrative inquiry field (Clandinin, 2013), as introduced in Chapter One, is a relational space within which stories can be shared, much like the dialogical space described earlier that is part of the reflective practice process. It encompasses the physical setting

(interviews were done in locations specified by participants that were private, such as their or my offices); the time (generating and analyzing field texts was seven months, generating the final research text was an additional four months); and a trusting environment between the researcher and the participants supported by the informed consent and confidentiality agreements.

I chose the duration of six months for generating field texts for several reasons:

1. I wanted to provide the participants enough time to engage in processes in their lives that could reflect RP practices; since data collection began six months after the trainings ended, they had between six months and one year (when data collection ended) to experience impact from the training.
2. Narrative inquiry is relational: to live “alongside” and “in the midst” of participants lives requires me to be actively engaged with them. I am not studying experiences already lived, but rather the ongoing experience of RP in their lives for this period of time (Clandinin, 2013).
3. Both participants have busy schedules, and more frequent engagement than the bi-monthly interviews and bi-weekly journal entries would be difficult to arrange in a shorter time period.
4. I wanted to leave time for the “back and forth” Clandinin describes with the participants, the process of storying and re-storying their narratives in partnership with them.

I was also very aware that, in narrative inquiry, the inquiry does not complete at a set time (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Huber, 2010). And, as I analyzed the field texts, aspects of the participants’ stories sponsored further inquiry. I was grateful I had allowed myself the time to

explore fully the tangential pieces of their stories and present them in a way that respected the voices of MG and WD.

Field texts

I began creating my field texts (data collection) six months after the training. Over a period of an additional seven months, I interviewed WD and MG face to face four times, and once by phone. The first face to face interview occurred at the beginning of the data collection period, and all face to face interviews were approximately 8 weeks apart. The final face to face interview allowed me to follow the threads I had started seeing weave through their stories and to elicit from them feedback on what I was seeing. The phone interview was to collect background information that I felt was missing from their stories, and it occurred the last month of the data study. Journal entries were far more sporadic than I had anticipated, but provided me a great deal of insight into the kind of day to day activities and efforts at practicing RP that WD and MG were experiencing. I also wrote my own impressions, concerns, and reactions in my field notes as well as created my autobiography which was partially recorded and partially written.

Field texts are the living stories of the participants. To capture those living stories, I chose to use the narrative interviewing technique suggested by Chase (2005). Narrative interviews position the interviewee as the narrator, and the interviewer as the listener (Chase, 2005). Interviews are open rather than structured to allow for flexibility to enter into the places, time, and relationships with participants that they feel are important. Eliciting the story begins with a general, open-ended question that is embedded in what the researcher senses is “story-worthy”, e.g. the frame of the research. From that entrance into the story forward, however, the researcher as listener gives over to the narrator and the story itself, open to what the narrator is telling:

On the one hand, a researcher needs to be well prepared to ask good questions that will invite the other's particular story; on the other hand, the very idea of a particular story is that it cannot be known, predicted, or prepared for in advance... [it] is not identical to—and may even depart radically from—what is “storyworthy” in his or her social content. (p. 662).

With the above approach to narrative interviewing in mind, I began the interviews with brief conversation to set the participant at ease and reestablish relationship. My initial interview questions in the first interview focused on if and how they saw RP impacting their lives, such as:

“What are you seeing in your day to day life since the training?”

“Tell me about your day to day experience of life since the trainings?”

It is in the unanticipated that their stories emerged as they moved from answering me into the stories of work and home and their relationships in both places. Questions after the initial ones were in response to what I was hearing. For example, after Dianne said she was “listening patiently, you know, RP listening,” I asked, “can you say more about RP listening?” From there, she told the story of her way of being with one of her staff members and their interaction. The next interviews began with questions that I had based on the prior interviews or journal entries, and follow up questions followed the threads that I saw in their responses. And, I was co-creating these stories. Several times, I found us in a dialogue about RP and the practice of it that led me to share some of my own stories. In some of these times, I experienced us creating new ways of seeing what using RP in work or home settings in the future could look like.

Four of the interviews were transcribed by a contracted transcriber who signed a confidentiality agreement prior to beginning her services. The one phone interview was a briefer

conversation about their background stories of the experiences that brought them to this juncture of their lives, and my notes from those two conversations are also on file.

My prompt for the journal entries was similar to my initial interview question. I asked them simply what their experiences have been since RP training. The initial entries were very broad. Therefore, my second journal prompt based on the first entries was what they saw if anything in their lives that they associated with RP training. The journal entries then became more specific to RP. No other prompts were given.

My researcher notes were recorded or written immediately after the interviews and initial readings of the journals. I also recorded or wrote notes each time I reviewed transcripts and entries and as I encountered my own story of RP in my home and work places.

Interim research text

The analysis of data in a narrative inquiry is fluid and flexible. Although field texts have been generated, in the midst of analysis, the researcher may return to participants to say more about one or another aspect of the story, or to expand the story. In addition, throughout the analysis, the researcher is sharing her interpretations with participants in an ongoing co-creative process.

After creating my field texts through the interviews, journals, and field notes, I moved from field text to interim text. This began with reading through the journals and listening to the interviews an initial time, writing down or recording my initial reactions. This step occurred simultaneously with generating the field texts, as I used my initial thoughts and reactions to help me frame my next queries. This process occurred each time I completed an interview or received a journal entry.

The purpose of the interim research texts is to “make visible the multiplicity, as well as the narrative coherence and lack of narrative coherence, of our lives, the lives of participants, and the lives we co-compose in the midst of our narrative inquiries” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 49). The interim texts begin to answer the questions of “meaning, significance and purpose... who, why, what, how, context and form” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 121). With that in mind, I read the transcripts of interviews as I received them to look backwards at previous statements or vignettes and begin to discover general similarities and differences between the two participants’ responses, again making notes. In the next and subsequent several readings, I then identified stories within the stories that reflected the structure of Clandinin and Connelly’s (1998, 2000), three dimensional frame: commonplaces of place, time, and sociality (which I interpreted as relationships). I began to narrow the similarities and differences to thematic threads, reflecting the commonplaces. The threads were home and work, relationships at each, and practice, present and future. As I began to work with those threads in mind, I found that several other threads began to weave together their stories. In the commonplace of place, both situated their stories in home (personal) or work (professional). Reflecting the commonplace of sociality, their stories revolved around family, colleagues, staff, community leaders, and (surprisingly) the three of us. Reflecting time was their concerns about practicing RP in their lived experience now, and about how they could practice it or improve it in the future. At this point in generating my interim text, I re-read all the interviews again, looking specifically for instances of these three commonplaces and the threads I had identified.

I looked deeper into the instances of the same stories told in various phases throughout the four interviews, then for examples of similar stories. I found that the stories of relationships occurred in the places of work and home, but were told from the perspective of the roles they felt

they had in those places. And, as their stories of RP unfolded in the day to day, they framed them in the aspects of RP that they had learned, and how practicing those aspects played out in both work and home settings. I noticed that the stories of practicing the aspects in their different roles had certain characteristics that both MG and WD identified as necessary to practice RP and as ways of being with others that they valued.

I reviewed all my reflexive notes and looked carefully at the themes I had selected to identify where I may have been influenced by my own experience of RP or what I saw through my living alongside them as they each faced challenges in their lives. I realized that I shared with them a sense that practicing RP caused us to be better people, to behave in better ways. I re-examined the transcripts for evidence of where I had inserted into the interviews my own ways of seeing RP. I was dismayed initially to find that there were several instances where I had spoken of my own sense of what reflection meant, or I had led them toward talking about self-reflection and reflecting in action, what one of them referred to as mindfulness. Then I remembered that narrative inquirers are not unbiased observers... of course my story would intersect with theirs! So I identified those moments in the interviews where my story was crossing into theirs, and I was able to see more clearly where the crossroads reflected what we all thought, and where I had been leading my participants into my own story. The final themes I identified were changes in roles, using RP aspects, better ways of being, and practicing RP. The themes were framed within the three commonplaces.

In the interim text I positioned the experiences of my participants temporally, socially and spatially. In addition, however, I positioned the research contextually in the theory and literature of my field of study, looking at empirical studies of RP and components such as generative dialogue as well as theoretical underpinnings from adult development, transformative

learning, and other areas to find where my findings mirror, support, or challenge other research findings. I then shared the interim text with MG and WD for their feedback, asking simply if I had told their storied experiences as they would have them told. Both told me they felt I had, but also corrected several places where they believed the transcriber had misunderstood them. After making corrections, I shared the texts again and both women agreed I had accurately re-storied their stories, and agreed with my conclusions.

Research text

My final research text was generated from the field texts and the interim texts and feedback and input from the participants. It, like the creation of the interim text, was also a fluid process of capturing my conclusions while staying true to the stories of MG and WD. As with the interim text, I engaged the participants in my thoughts and eventual findings and conclusions.

Validity and Trustworthiness

As I noted above, when I re-storied the participants' stories, I shared with them my own story and narrative of theirs for feedback as to the "truth" of the story and whether or not I had honored their voices, what Clandinin and Connelly (1998, 2000) refer to as "back and forth" (p. 56). In this way, validity is supported by those whose actual experiences and meaning construction I am endeavoring to capture. In summary, I used three validation methods to show the trustworthiness of my data, as described in Moen (2006) and Creswell (2006):

- Triangulation with data from field notes, interviews, and journals;
- Clarifying researcher bias through a reflexive autobiography;
- Member checking through the process of "back and forth" with participants

The above validation strategy answers the evaluative standards that Creswell (2006) outlines for narrative studies. I have captured the stories of only two participants, and those stories are about

a significant experience in their lives. I have chronologically connected their stories, following the storyline from the training, through their day to day living of practicing what they learned, to their imagined future practice. I have re-storied their stories to hopefully bring MG and WD to life and honor the alive-ness of their experience of RP. And, finally, I have shown how I am part of the story that we have woven together.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

THE STORIES OF RP IMPACT

I present my findings below using the commonplaces from Clandinin and Connelly's narrative inquiry as a frame for the themes that surfaced in the interviews: changes in roles, use of RP aspects, better ways of being, and practicing RP. Because of that framework, further explanation of the commonplaces (temporality, sociality, and place) is warranted.

Temporality refers to the very fluid "when" of participants' stories, both as told in retrospect and as lived stories, unfolding and anticipated. MG and WD's stories are lived stories of the impact of reflective practice training on their day to day lives. While they may look backwards to before and during the trainings as a comparison when they are considering the changes they are experiencing, most of their stories unfolded through the post-training months of the study. They follow a living storyline, even noting that because of our interviews or their journaling, they reconnected to RP or noticed how they were practicing it in their professional and private lives.

The second commonplace is sociality: the context of each individual life that includes both their internal and external relationship with the world. Clandinin and Connelly explain the internal relationship as "personal conditions... feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic relations, and moral dispositions" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). Both participants speak of internal changes in their ways of being, often using the terms "spiritual" and "therapeutic" in describing the experience of being in a way that allows them to focus on others rather than self. The external is comprised of the "existential conditions, the environment, surrounding factors and forces, people and otherwise, that form each individual's context" (Connelly & Clandinin (2006), p. 447). For both participants, their ways of being in relationship with others are related

to the skills they ascribe to the RP trainings, mainly the aspects of questioning, listening, and thinking.

A third dimension of the sociality commonplace is the relationship between participants and inquirer; as inquirer, I am living alongside the participants and a part of the social commonplace of their stories. Our stories intersect, indeed, they blend often. I find myself, in the interviews, building from their observations, sharing in excitement with them about what we could do together using RP skills and our new, deeper relationship that has grown from the time spent together in this inquiry. As noted above, they see their practice of RP impacted by the interviews and journals they share with me.

The third commonplace, place, is the where of inquiry. The stories of MG and WD occur primarily in the place of work, (not limited to physical location), and, especially in MG's narratives, in the place of home (family, friends, the world beyond work). MG explores who she is since reflective practice training in the work setting and the family setting. WD notes several times that her place for practicing the skills of the RP training is work, yet in her home place she describes choosing to practice the RP aspects and changes in her ways of being with friends. But, it is in her professional practice that the impact of RP is most obvious for her. This commonplace emerged as a primary framework for analyzing the themes of changes in roles (fixer vs facilitator, problem solver vs. nurturer) and use of the RP aspects of questioning, listening and thinking. As mentioned above, the second commonplace of sociality frames the third theme I identified, better ways of being, although it is also storied in terms of the home or work places. Finally, the theme of practicing RP reflects the commonplace of temporality as well as sociality. Although there are fewer examples of this theme, the desire of WD and MG to practice with one

another and myself struck me as important, as was the acknowledgement of how the participants were currently practicing RP and what RP would mean for them in the future.

MG'S STORY

In her workplace, MG is the co-owner and executive officer of a mental health company in western North Carolina. She participated in the RP Training in October of 2014 and in two ad hoc follow up practice meetings with WD and myself. She is married with two children. From early in her life, MG was interested in “how we work together” as human beings involved in systems, whether family, agency, or other systems. She describes herself as a “peacemaker” and “fixer” since her childhood. Each educational choice was driven by a desire to work with people in addressing the challenges of their lives. However, she quickly saw that a commitment to collaborative solutions between community leaders, agencies, and others who impact services to families meant better outcomes for more people. As she said, “I intentionally put myself in places... to collaborate”.

At the time of the RP training, MG was facing a crisis in her company as they underwent policy compliance and financial audit by the state. The following year, while this study was occurring, another larger mental health agency (NMC) was encouraged by the state mental health entities to merge with, and in essence subsume, her own agency. Indeed, throughout our journey of this study, MG has grappled with fitting her own agency vision and practices into the new environment of NMC: “Life has thrown so many unexpected twists and turns, expectation is a never-ending moving target.” She notes in her journals and interviews her efforts to create a positive transition for her own staff, protect the practices they believed were best for the children and families they served, and manage her relationship with her business partner as they faced this major change in their lives. In her second journal entry, in response to the question of what she

is noticing in her day to day life, she describes being consumed by the struggles of her company. She says “I’m tired of not being able to focus on relationships, connecting, engaging, and spreading my light to others...” and “this year that I’ve had, this really crazy, awful year...”. At home, the second place of her story, MG is married with two children. Her daughter is in elementary school and her son in his first year of middle school. She has been married 14 years, and her husband’s company is closely aligned with and serves her own mental health agency. She often describes her home life as a haven.

In both places, with the characters that people her life, she describes the impact of RP in the midst of the changes described above. That impact is presented through the four themes changes in roles, use of RP aspects, better ways of being, and practicing RP.

Theme of Changes in Roles

“I don’t need to fix everybody’s place in their world”

Owner/boss:

As noted above, this has been a year of transition for MG. Many times throughout her interviews, she talks about the specific changes in how she is practicing her role of both owner and boss. The following passage captures how she perceives this change:

I had this, kind of this need to let people know what it’s really like out there being an owner... what my position has to deal with out there... I understand that employees feel, like this automatic kind of feeling of injustice with how hard and grueling their job is, and all the regulations... they easily put blame on the leadership, because we’re right there... and so I find myself trying to open their perspective and see the reason why we have to do regulations and what’s going on... that there’s a bigger picture, bigger perspective, so I found myself doing that

a lot. Like I'll try to defend and explain and shed light... and, it's just way too much. I've noticed ... these people need me to just listen more than to hear me talk. So, that's really, this [RP training] has really, really helped me. ... When I'm asking questions and listening and 'tell me more about that' and 'what else about that', 'how are you feeling about that' and 'what would YOU do in this situation', oh man, it's just, they just get animated and they, they appreciate it, they feel, ... just all kinds of good stuff that happens.

An example of how those changes play out in her work life is the story of a meeting with staff in which MG was conscious of “using RP” in contrast to her previous version of owner as boss/fixer. During this meeting, an employee brought up a grievance with MG, which was followed by several of her staff members jumping in and also airing issues. She “just started getting it left and right”. However, she intentionally used the thinking aspect of RP, and reflected in the moment on what she was feeling and what the others could possibly be experiencing. She describes:

[I was] being aware of my emotional reaction and catching it, and knowing that, uh-oh, I am going into close up mode and defensive mode and shut down mode, and I don't need to do that. I need to remain open, and be present for these people and respond in a way that's going to make them feel good and empowered.

MG has seen herself as “the fixer” in her work roles, but has experienced a shift to a more nurturing role, facilitating her staff. She refers to this as “growing up leaders” in the organization: “that's not the role [fixer] I need to play. I need to be the bridge... I don't need to fix everybody's place in the world” . One staff member, BL, is someone recently promoted to a supervisor position. In working with her to lead a staff meeting, MG speaks of “growing her

through being quiet and not, not filling up the space with my agenda and what I want out of it...” and “not jumping to my own assumption about what she might be saying”. MG says she is committed to using her RP skills to model for and support BL: “so I’ve been intentional about asking her questions and trying to understand where she’s coming from and listening to where she needs me to lead her next...”. She emphasizes listening to understand her staff and being open to their thinking and solutions is the way to “nurture them, and care about them, and grow them, and lead them”. Referring to another staff meeting, she recalls thinking “this doesn’t need to be me all talking, this needs to be, you know, throwing it out there and really kind of helping them”. After listening to her staff rather than directing them through her agenda, they came up with ideas and solutions she had not thought of, “taking it to the next level”. She states “I do that stuff a whole lot better now [since RP training] than I used to”.

In every interview, the conversation turned to the necessity of modeling the aspects of RP since most of the people we all come in contact with will not have RP training. In this past year since the training, MG sees this as part of her job as a leader in her workplace:

I’m kind of feeling myself modeling [RP]. I, I, you know, intentionally, this whole idea of I’m listening to you, what’s important to you, so I’m using those words, doing this, and making these choices, so they can see that I really heard them. Um, and I think I think, in the back of my mind, I’m hoping that they catch on. I think that’s what’s happening there.

Partner:

MG opened her agency with TR and has been his partner throughout much of the state mental health reform, changes in Medicaid funding, and other crises in mental health provision in North Carolina. Now, she and TR face closing their company as is it subsumed by NMC, the

largest provider in their multi-county area. When asked if and how she sees RP impacting her relationships, she spoke about her role as his partner: “For over a decade, I have played this role with him... I’ve been kind of like the dumping ground for his ranting and raving... and then I take it and I fix it for him, I’m like the fixer and I’m the calm one”. She tells the story of how being more reflective, willing to examine how she is being, has led to changes as they move through the process of merging. In the midst of meetings concerning the merger and changes in the company, she tells me:

...then he comes to me and, and just dumps it all on me, and what I’m finding is that I’m not really hearing him. That I’m just being defensive... and that’s probably not healthy for us, in this venture, that we both really need to be the same team and look at things with reality eyes and, and address them in a strategic way.

Since the RP training, she said she has learned to “put [her]self aside and put the person first” in listening. She refers to this as listening with humility, and sees TR from a different perspective: “when I put on my humility kind of place and space, I think ‘well, this is his process... you know, this is what he does’... he has to emotionally process through it, and then gets to that place of strategic and calmness”. She also sees herself as less likely to “be as triggered, and, or reactive” because of the training. Where before she was afraid “he was going to mess it all up”, now she sees herself “being able to do a lot of really good, humble listening, you know, without worrying about where his stuff is going to lead... it’s going to be a lot easier and I think it’s going to help a lot”.

Employee (“having a boss”):

Another change resulting from the merger with NMC is the shift in MG’s role as owner/boss to staff member. She is joining a team and will, for the first time in over a decade, have someone else making decisions and choices that will affect her work rather than being in charge of her own work environment. This new context has already begun, even though the merger is not complete. Navigating the merger process and creating contractual agreements about hers and TR’s positions in the NMC have placed her in situations where she is very conscious of a “boss” and of being in a position where someone else has positional power. MG describes the CEO of NMC as “a very traditional... male boss guy”, and finds herself unsure in areas she has not been within her own company. In this example, she explains how she sees RP impacting the process of creating relationship with this CEO through using her listening skills: “...I’m doing a lot of listening. Just, where does he stand, what kind of authority is he? What does he need me to be? What is he not needing me to be? Does he even like women... I am just constantly trying to understand where he’s coming from...”. She also points out that she is more aware of her own bias and acknowledges that her doubts are “all my assumption, all my judgement... and my insecurity of being a little woman”.

The change in her role from director/boss to team member and colleague has created new stresses as well. In recounting a conversation with two of the executive team of NMC, Greta describes her concern:

we talked about some nitty-gritty data, and processes, and we’re, and I saw where we really differ, and I remember reflecting, ‘well, how did I do there?’ ... and reminding myself, ‘oh wow, it’s going to be really important to use some good skills here because we’re going to have conflict’.

In one conflictual situation, one of the staff from NMC expresses her frustration and says she is “upset” with MG not sharing some information with her. MG describes using reflection and suspension, and choosing a response from there: “I felt myself get defensive, and I started getting defended answers for her, and then I realized... I just need to apologize”. Once she apologized, and listened to the needs and concerns of her soon-to-be co-worker, she was able to provide a solution. She points out, prior to RP, “I would have not come in that moment of, in that space of really trying to hear what’s important to them, I would have missed those opportunities”.

Mom:

MG notes that her role as mother and as wife has also been impacted by the RP training, shifting her sense of how she is in relationship with her children and husband. She sees herself as often controlling and results-driven in her relationships at home, whereas when she is practicing RP, she describes herself as facilitating and open. At home, she has been the “drill sergeant mom”: “I’m noticing that, you know, you wear that mom hat which automatically says do this, do that, do this, do that, nag, nag, nag, direct, direct, direct and I’m hearing myself more not enjoy that part of my parenting”. She would prefer to be the listening, facilitating mom who allows her son and daughter to find their own ways of working through challenges, but: “I feel like the drill sergeant part of me dominates most of our existence and I don’t like that”.

Practicing basketball with her daughter, MG intentionally tried to use thinking and listening RP aspects, and step back from the directing side of her role of mom. She believes that a direct result of her shift to an RP approach was not only that they had fun and enjoyed their time together, but also her daughter was able to experience deciding for herself what practice should look like and leading her mom through the process. She had a sense of confidence as she felt she improved her performance. MG observed:

If I were to have been more directive, and not listened, and not opened myself up to her directing that experience, it would have been hard for her because she would have been... ‘I have got to do it this way, because mom’s telling me to do it this way’.

With her son, she notices how differently he responds to her when she is choosing the facilitator rather than drill sergeant:

When I am in that mode [RP], I find its really easy and fun... umm, because he just will explore all kinds of different ideas... and if I... just keep, keep asking him kind of open-ended questions, or just stop and let the silence sit there, and then he’ll add some things...

She sums up that, since RP,

I’m hearing myself more...not enjoy that [directing] part of my parenting... when I do take the time to just sit back and let the conversation just flow the way they want it to go, and then just asking those probing questions that allow them to explore, they’re really, really good times, and they’re very meaningful, and I like, I like who I am when I’m not drill sergeant mom.

Wife:

In a conversation with her husband, MM, she points out how her new self-awareness, being “more sensitive to why I’m triggered by things, what’s that all about” impacted her response to him: “I wasn’t crushed at all [by his observations], I wasn’t like ‘Oh man, you know, he doesn’t love me’”. She realized that where before she would have heard criticism, by suspending her reactions, she heard something else... that she was “meeting his needs the way I would want my needs met which really isn’t really how I want my needs met either!”

Theme of Using RP Aspects

“I’ve watched my brain do a couple of things...”

MG speaks often in her story of listening differently, asking open questions to encourage others to be heard and understood, and thinking or reflecting on her own assumptions and reactions. While the seven aspects of RP defined earlier were discussed in the training, these three were particularly emphasized. MG becomes aware of these skills becoming part of her work practice both intentionally and unconsciously. MG describes listening, questioning, and thinking skills in how they impact her way of working with staff in the following passage:

There’s a lot that can go on with listening now vs. just being curious about what’s going on with the person. There are things that happen. Like how I am taking in the information and what I am doing with it, what kind of assumptions I’m making (*thinking*)... and then there’s the whole leading questions, ideas of um, you can lead somebody places or you could not, you could just keep opening new questions going on (*questioning*). Um, I see that a lot differently than I used to. I didn’t really understand that before, as much as I do now... and then, and then knowing that what they’re saying, there’s more than just what they’re saying, and what’s behind that, so I’m just kind of curious and seeking more of a depth to perspectives (*listening*). So that’s different, whereas before I think I just listened, like, well, I’d get their feeling, you know, but now I’m kind of getting their belief systems and kind of expectations. I think I’m getting more out of it.

Below I describe MG’s awareness and development of each of these aspects of RP.

Listening:

In RP training, listening is defined as “Skillful listening to others’ mental models, wants, assumptions and values” (Schuman, et al., 2013). MG interprets this as a way of having others feel heard and encouraging them to create their own solutions to issues they face: “RP has definitely helped that process [helping them to be heard] better, more, you know, to be more, more effective”.

Often throughout the interviews, MG refers to RP listening as requiring she set herself aside, “not filling up the space with my agenda and what I want out of it”. She says she had to learn to be quiet and allow the other to speak fully, noting that “RP just kind of made me more aware of how important it is to not talk so much but listen more”. She also notes that the RP way of listening is an intentional listening: “when I’m getting ready to have a meeting ... I tell myself ‘O.k. use your good listening skills’; like I prep myself for it”.

RP listening involves allowing the other to feel heard, listening for the context they may be coming from, and suspending her own reactions. MG notes that when she is using this form of listening, she has better response from her staff. For example, she describes one conversation with one of her managers where she saw “that’s [making her feel better] probably not what it is that she needs... even in the moment, I could feel that would just be the wrong way to react, and that she needed validation”. The manager came to her later, saying: “You know, I really appreciated you listening to me during that experience, because you didn’t try to convince me that I was wrong, or try to convince me of something else”.

She also notes a difference in how she interacts with her husband when she is using RP listening:

He's probably the person I misbehave the most, with listening, and I am learning to pause a little bit more, because I'm finding, I don't know, I'm picking up on his frustration with me for trying to prove my point, I guess, like I pick up on it faster and easier and I'm remembering to just hush.

She learns more about him through listening, and realizes "the more and more I'm able to get some of that out [hearing him], gosh, just amazing stuff in there ... it's almost like I'm reading this book, this new book ... on this fascinating character".

Questioning:

Since the RP training, MG notes "I do ask questions more...". However, she also acknowledged several times that RP questioning goes beyond what she refers to as reflective questions (reflecting back to the other what the listener heard): "I think some of it has to do with being able to read where that person is, and what they need in that moment". Questioning according to the RP training goes beyond gathering information specific to a situation or problem; it involves helping to "identify assumptions, clarify thoughts, and develop fair and balanced expectations" (Schuman, et al, 2013). There are several tools to using questions in this way: asking back (e.g. why did you ask?), asking open ended questions (e.g. what was that like for you?), and reflecting back for clarification (e.g. I heard you say...). MG says that asking questions through that RP lens during conversations with her staff has created a way for her to support their development: "I need to just really let that space be for them". As examples she describes typical questions she will ask:

"So tell me more about that and what do you think about that?"

"How do you feel about your job load right now?"

"What do you think?".

Historically, she has begun meetings and conversations from an “authoritarian” stance, having already considered solutions and prepared to offer them. Now, she says, “I’m finding that’s it’s, um, more effective to do it reflective practice way versus telling them what to do”. She is specifically referring to asking questions as a skill, continuing with:

I am wanting to do that more...instead of answering the, the question, asking them, “what have you already thought of? Or, “what can you think of” and um, you know, and that gives them the opportunity to share their idea, and if it’s a great one, which a lot of times it’s, um, I’ll get to say “Gosh, great idea!” and they get to hear, they get to have that little pat on the back that they had a pretty big impact into a system changing.

In her relationship with her partner, as described above, she often felt frustrated in trying to deal with issues facing their company. The skill of RP questioning had an impact on how she could manage that situation:

I think both of us were closed off to listening and hearing on another... that’s what it was Because sometimes he would start talking about stuff and I would just close it off and shut down and say ‘you know, I just... this isn’t helping’ and then, now, I’m able to say ‘oh, o.k., what are you really saying? What do you really need right now?’ and I’ll find something different.

Questioning has also been instrumental in her new perspectives of her husband. Above, I pointed to her statement about seeing MM as if “reading a new book”; she also notes that to do this, she has learned to ask RP questions to “draw it out of him” and get to the “new stuff”. She has a similar result with her daughter when she uses RP questioning rather than reacting to what she thought was happening. In this story, her daughter had begun talking about how she and her

friends felt about another little girl in their class. MG has immediate concerns that her daughter and her friends will gang up on the child or at least judge her negatively, not understanding the limitations of the disability the child has. So, she begins with directing, “telling her what to say” to the child, and realizes “she just is not ... hearing it, obviously.” But when she shifts to RP questions, she is surprised at what she discovers:

[I asked] ‘Well, tell me more about that, what do you think she’s going to say and what is your response?’ and ‘o.k. and then if that doesn’t work, what else could you say?’ ... and then, when I opened it up, boy, she told me the whole story, the whole back story and I mean, there was so much information I would have lost!

She contrasts her daughter opening up and talking more with “just shut[ting] down”, what she believes would have happened if she had responded as she usually did.

Thinking:

When MG describes using the skill of RP questioning, she often speaks of her efforts to notice her own reactions in the moment and choose an alternative response. This capacity to see and understand her own reactions and set them aside demonstrates the third RP skill that was emphasized in the training, thinking. The thinking aspect of RP is the skill of “identifying and suspending one’s frames, assumptions, values, and biases in order to understand one’s own and others’ viewpoints and behaviors” (Schumann, et al, 2013).

MG often associates this skill with self-awareness and humility. As noted above, she says she is “practicing more that suspension”. She says that since the training, suspending her own agenda or reactions in order to listen differently has become “sort of subconscious” so that “instead of the conversation going the way I want it to go, I’m allowing it to just happen”. She is “really trying to hear what’s important to them”. She refers to this as “humble listening”.

In her story of the difficult meeting with TR, MG has a moment when she stops reacting and pauses to consider what was happening within her: “I remember... I was thinking, ‘Gosh, listen to me defend. I’m defending, defending, defending the other point.... Why am I defending them so much?’”. Identifying the frames through which we are seeing an experience is an important feature of reflective practice as it supports the practitioner in suspending his/her underlying assumptions and beliefs to allow a deeper understanding of the other. MG goes on in this passage to show the step of then identifying the possible frame of the other: “I noticed that and then I also noticed with him, that he is very scared, and he’s having this letting go of control process, and he feels like his hands are tied, and then he’s also looking at things in his doomsday perspective that he has...”. From there, she responds with a solution based inquiry rather than what she describes as her usual reaction to TR (arguing and defending): “and I find myself defending and I’m realizing that’s not working, that’s not going to help. And I remember thinking gosh, you know, what is going to work with him with this? What’s going to work with me?”.

MG demonstrates this aspect again in her description of interactions with the CEO of NMC. She describes a new awareness to her reactions to his behaviors: “[I am] more sensitive to why I’m triggered by things, what’s that all about, vs. just getting triggered and not really looking at that”. Again, though, it is what MG does with that awareness that demonstrates the impact of practicing this aspect of RP on her own behaviors:

Being aware of my emotional reaction and catching it, and knowing that, uh-oh, I’m going into close up mode and defensive mode, and shut down mode, and I don’t need to do that. I need to remain open, and be present for these people, and respond...

And, in her relationships with MM, MG notices that she is “doing that pausing, stepping back, and saying wait, what is it you’re really trying to get at here? Where is he going with it?” One result she notes from that approach is hearing him differently as they discussed an idea he had proposed in the past, and realizing that indeed, it was something worth pursuing in their joint work together.

Theme of Better Ways of Being

“MG, what is your story of RP?”

“How to seek to understand before being understood, and respond, instead of reacting”

The third theme that surfaced was changes in ways of being. This crosses over both settings for MG and WD’s stories, work and home, as they speak about their experience of themselves when they are practicing RP and when they are not. In MG’s words,

I think this whole process has been really good for me. It’s, it almost feels like therapy, just being able to reflect and learn and then be more intentional about stuff. So, it’s interesting, I definitely have a lot more grace about myself than I used to, and how I manage is a lot, a lot better, I think. I’m not as frustrated, I’m just so much more patient.

MG primarily couches these changes as developing humility, setting her needs aside for others; patience, choosing not to react, control or follow her own agenda; and openness, a term both participants use to describe nonjudgment and willingness to accept the perspectives of others. Some examples of her awareness of each of these ways of being follows.

Humility:

Many times, MG describes a new awareness of her way of being with others and the need to focus on the other rather than the self if she is choosing to practice RP. She describes this

awareness and willingness to set herself aside as humility, or humble listening: “it’s definitely a higher level skill ... it’s kind of being in your best spiritual place. You can come at the world with humility, and, oh, compassion, that kind of perspective”. For example, in response to the question of what has opened up in day to day life, she talks about a realization about herself:

I really don’t want to know what people think, I want them to know what I think.

I want to express, and, and then I realize o.k. that’s an unmet need that I need to take care of somewhere else... So that was really a big realization... [work] is not the place to meet that need.

And, again, “I used to be such a talker, with whoever will listen, and now I’m not doing that as much”. She notes that since RP, she notices how she is being in the moment and is aware of how that impacts the other:

I just have learned over and over again when I’m coming at a situation either kind of analyzing it or behaving in it, when I’m coming at it in more of a self-centered ‘me-mode’ if I could get my needs met, then I’m just not able to be doing any of that stuff, any of the listening stuff. But if I agree to put myself aside and put the person first ... if I’m just kind of interacting and solving problems, and I have to kind of put that hat on of humility to really hear where that person is.

Patience:

Throughout the interviews, MG either alludes to or specifically names patience as one of the primary characteristics of “doing RP”: “choosing to be, choosing not to react, and to just kind of sit there and really take in all the information that I’m getting and then looking at what I’m doing with it, and then responding.” However, when she is practicing RP listening with her

partner, she says: “it takes a lot of patience and willingness for me to really hear what he’s really trying to say”. But it is this patience that supports the reflective practice skills: “I have these emotional reactions, I have these thoughts, and I say [to myself] hold on a minute, let’s look at that, what am I doing there, and then, that always changes the way I respond, and I think in a better way”.

Indeed, she sees herself as changed by the experiences of the year and grappling with much of the changes through an RP lens. She is “living more in the moment, too, and just kind of allowing life to happen versus wanting to control it and make it fit into the box that I need it to be in”. Specifically, MG reiterates that RP has had that impact:

[I am] doing a lot of noticing... and I think that’s very different than in the past. I think before [RP], I was much more impatient, much more reactive, much more ‘I have been thinking about this and obsessing on it for days and it’s such a good idea and I need to let you know and you guys please be excited about it... you’re not excited about it? Why not?’ and I would just crash and burn.

Openness:

When prompted about how she responds to herself (do you listen to YOU from that reflective stance?), MG says “I probably fill my brain up with too many thoughts, though, versus kind of letting, letting things just simmer and sit without making judgements, just being open to things”. When asked to say more, she responds, “ok, open, what would open mean to me? I guess not making assumptions ... assumptions about management entity; assumptions about employees judging and complaining about me”. Looking forward, she says “I need to remain open, and be present for these people, and respond in a way that’s going to make them feel good and empowered”.

MG also sees openness as letting go of expectations: “[I am] listening for life’s messages... like listening differently, versus listening through the lens of expectation”. And, in being open, she finds “It’s pretty wild when I’m there in that moment thinking about it... living more in the moment, too, and just kind of allowing life to happen”.

MG goes so far as to see RP as a means to improve who she is as a human being:

[RP] is a resource, like it, they’re tools, to get me there. I think it, it kind of puts a name on ... you know, I could, I could say things like, be a better listener, or be calm, or you know, do these things so you can be that person, so all the, you know, it puts a name on that, it’s like if you use reflective practice that helps you become that person, more often than not.

Theme of Practicing RP

“Sometimes I’ve realized ‘Oh wow, look at me, I’m doing it [RP]’ And then sometimes it’s like ‘Oooh, I need to do it!’”

MG acknowledges practicing RP, in an intentional or continuous way, several times in her interviews. For example, when she is discussing what RP is, she says:

It’s a kind of a practice where I will reflect maybe not every day but several times a week, I know I’m reflecting like that, different conversations that I had and what could I have done differently and conversations coming up, what do I, what could I remember to do differently that’ll make things better.

And, when asked specifically about what she has seen in her life since the training, she responds: “I just felt myself thinking differently and hearing differently than I think I would have a year ago [before RP]” and “I am practicing more that suspension, and

instead of things, the conversation going the way I want it to go, I'm allowing it to just happen".

MG also seems to see RP as part of her day to day living, part of her practice in terms of life and relationships: "when I went to the training I learned things and I think now they've all become sort of subconscious things". She sees potential in using RP: "that was the, the neatest thing, to realize with reflective practice, it doesn't mean that you have to not meet your needs at all".

WD's comments about the need to practice as in review the skills and lessons from the training led me to ask MG about her view of practicing in the future. Her response was "Practice makes perfect. I just, I don't think there's anything in depth about it, it's just you know you can learn something but if you don't practice it, you know, you are more apt not to implement the learning". Like WD, MG sees the interviews as lending to practicing the lessons she learned in the trainings:

I think the interviews actually helped too, because you're reminding me and making me analyze it and think about it, and it's there ... that's pretty powerful. I think just reviewing those concepts of, we were just reviewing the concepts and just, I think it's helpful.

WD's Story

WD, like MG, is in an executive position with her agency, a division of the state's criminal justice system. Her role is Chief over a multi-county catchment area. She first became interested in working with children and families who come in contact with the court system when she was in high school and saw a friend enter the criminal justice system as a youth for a minor infraction. Because he was trapped in that system, he ended up an adult offender and in

prison after many years of moving in and out of services and care. This experience fueled her desire to collaboratively work across systems to improve outcomes for children who become entangled in the juvenile justice system. As a court counselor, she realized the value of taking the time to listen to the needs and problems of the youth under her supervision and assist them in “solv[ing] the issue and work[ing] on it”. This history points to her awareness of and willingness to practice the aspects of RP that were highlighted in the trainings: listening, questioning and thinking.

Much of her story is framed in the workplace commonplace. As the administrator of her seven county region, she supervises and manages all staff. She feels acutely responsible for creating the leaders who will not only assure that quality services are provided to the population they serve, but also who are open to exploring new ways to improve those services and prevent family involvement with state systems. She is very aware of her own retirement in a few years, and concerned with preparing her possible successor: “If I’m going to retire in five years, I really do want to teach them ... because five years will go just like that [fingers snap]”.

Her position as administrator also affords her access to other community leaders who have an immediate and profound effect on the lives of youth such as superintendents of schools and state mental health administrators, among others. She often describes herself in meetings with various representatives of these groups attempting to collaboratively solve issues in the community that impact juvenile delinquency and the wellbeing of families in the counties of her catchment area. This role as community leader is what brought WD and I together several years prior to the study, as we worked together to improve mental health services to youth involved in the juvenile justice system.

In our lived story together, we began a project with MG to improve school environments throughout the seven county region. That joint project caused interest in improving how we and our staffs worked with one another, community stakeholders, and families in need of services. As noted earlier, that interest led to the shared training in RP. Like MG, WD describes in interviews and journals experiencing the impact of the training in her day to day goings on; I have emphasized below the same themes that were reflected in MG's story: changes in roles, using RP aspects, better ways of being, and practicing RP.

Theme of Changes in Roles

*“If I do real reflective practice, most of the time I’m not solving the problems,
the other person is.”*

Many of her comments about the impact of the RP trainings are in the context of WD's professional roles of supervisor, administrator and community leader; however, although far less than MG, WD still frames some of her story in the place of home through interactions with friends. She notes that her roles in both of the place commonplaces, work and home, are changed when she practices RP.

Supervisor:

WD describes herself as a “fixer” in her role as supervisor: “my biggest problem is I’m a fixer, so I listen, listen, listen, but then I go back to “how can I help her, how can I fix this, how can I make her feel better?” For her, practicing RP with her staff means facilitating their choices and solutions, “letting them solve it... that’s what I want to do more of”. Throughout her interviews and journals, she speaks of this challenge as both her “biggest struggle” and her strongest evidence of the impact of RP, as in her work with her staff member, GL: “I practice it with GL and it appears she is getting more confidence. Now when she staffs cases she seems to be staffing it to tell me what she’s done instead of asking me what to do”.

WD sees RP as a process for teaching her staff the skills they will need to lead the department. Rather than her immediate reaction of “solve it” when her staff brings her issues, she wants to “teach them to handle those, to think like that, you know, solve it [themselves]”. She notices that her fix-it-now reaction may be counterproductive: “I’m helping them at that moment, but I’m not giving them the confidence and showing them that they can solve it on their own”.

When she is using RP, though, she feels she is giving them something more:

[I’m] teaching them how to process it on their own, and they know it already... they know what they want to do, they’re very smart, they’re good court counselors. And, let them process it and come up with it. You know, I think we’ll help them and it’ll give them confidence ... and I do brag on them when they, you know, it’s like ‘GL, good job for even seeing this’ and all that other stuff. But, it just gives them confidence and practice to solve issues.

She notes changes with the progress of her weekly meetings to share information on cases: “I can say in the staff meeting, you know, that’s really, [RP] is really good stuff”. Even the quality of the meeting seems to be altered:

[Practicing RP] gives, it seems to put more energy into the staff meeting; instead of hearing me or SD (Court Counselor Supervisor) talk, or one other person talk, it actually just starts discussions, a lot more discussions. So, I, to me it feels like it, when the, all the court counselors are involved in a discussion, then there’s more energy instead of just like, ‘oh, when is this going to get over’.

And, WD believes through modeling RP for her staff, she can create some sustainable changes in behaviors: “and then the more I do it at staff meetings, I think the more, maybe, they just, court counselors just naturally pick it up, could pick it up themselves. You know?”

Administrator:

As in all her other roles, WD describes herself administratively as a “problem solver”. Her position as administrator for juvenile services in her region requires she work with the court system (judges and district attorneys) and other state agencies in direct relationship with the youth in juvenile justice supervision. She describes several instances where she saw how RP could have improved an outcome, or where her practice of RP did improve the outcome. She also experiences the challenges of time and willingness in using RP in these settings. In this role, she feels she has little time for RP: “I have got to rush it out, and get [courts, state agency] approval, then move on because they’re busy”. But, when she can, she believes that meetings requiring collaboration are “the best place for [RP]”. She tells the story of a meeting with social services to discuss a difficult case where three involved agencies (juvenile justice, mental health and child protective services) were not in agreement with how to support the family. In that meeting, she describes listening to understand the other agency representative: “hearing all that from him and understanding that’s truly where he feels he is, and just saying I, you know, I hear you, you know I understand”. The outcome was a joint solution that satisfied all agencies. In a longer discussion about suspending agenda when listening, she continues the same story, specifically how her RP approach impacted the process:

I feel that we did it really well one day. Um, not that everybody practiced it, but we all had that respect, and we had a very difficult kid and family and DSS was involved ... I told GL ahead of time, because she asked me to come to this meeting, that the goal was not to say to DSS “you need to take custody”, the goal was ‘let’s all talk about what this issue is, what we can each, what we can all do together, each of us, and then from there come up with a plan’.

In the setting of these collaborative meetings, WD sees RP demonstrated by

...kind of letting other people be part of the team ... they're an equal member of the team, you know, so you're hearing what they have to say ... really you're saying, you know, I'm going to listen to every single one of you, whoever wants to say something, and truly listen to their idea.

She also experiences the limits of the RP approach she describes above when the other party is unwilling to collaborate. In a meeting with one of the county clerks, WD intentionally resolved to use RP in trying to solve the issue of serving summonses:

I went in with the idea that I was going to practice that [RP], and man, the first thing she said is 'I don't have meetings to have meetings' ... so I'm still trying to be nice and I had to actually step back and ... [be] stern, in that, you know, 'No, you're not going to bully me, and this is our line, and you know, you can try to push back all you want.' So I left there, like, ha, that was the farthest thing from Reflective Practice I've ever dealt with!

Upon my further inquiry about whether or not she saw herself as practicing RP in that meeting, regardless of the outcome, she continued her story:

With the juvenile clerk, you know, they expect us to do certain things, and we've always done it this way, and so, I went with the idea of, let's talk it out and come up with some idea we all agree with. We'll give a little bit; you guys give a little bit. Did not have that... *I mean she was not there*, and so it was really like, well, she goes: 'just get to the chase, what do you want?' And, it was like, 'we would like you guys to do the summonses for us' ... and we said something else and I thought we were good with the summonses, so I go back and I was like, 'alright,

what do you need from us then?’ And she was like, ‘for you guys to do the summonses’. ‘I thought we already decided you were going to do the summonses?’ [She said] ‘No. If you’re asking me what I want, I want you guys to do the summonses.’ And then, that’s when I just step back and say ‘No” you know, and then ... that’s when I had to *put up a wall* and it’s like, you know, ‘you’re not going to push me further back’ ... So, you know, when you don’t even try to be, and I might have been in that place [RP] ...but if I was totally there, then I just feel like *she would have just taken total advantage of us* you know? I, well, I don’t know, that’s not what Reflective Practice is about [emphasis mine].

In the above passage, WD is choosing RP as a way to respond to others, but a choice among other choices. She sees the need to act from her more traditional behaviors as administrator when warranted by the unwillingness of the other. WD initially is willing to use RP as her approach to this difficult situation. However, when the clerk does not seem open to collaborating (“she was not there”) WD feels she has to respond more from an authoritative space (“put up a wall”) so as to avoid being pushed into giving up what she needs for her staff (“taken total advantage of us”). In her role as administrator, RP is another tool to be used, but use of RP is constrained by a willingness on the part of the others to dialogue and the time to ask questions and explore.

Community Leader:

WD describes her meetings to improve those problems in the community that impact juvenile justice as her “best part” of the job. She acknowledges her propensity to be the problem solver here, as well, coming into these meetings with her own agenda and controlling the

meeting to achieve her desired outcome: “before it was always, like I said, coming in with a plan, and yes you listen, but at the same time you're waiting to get to that next, you know, ‘so o.k. we’ve done this so let’s go over [what’s] next’”. She notices a difference in the meetings when her role switches to facilitator, or as she refers to it “equal member”, rather than driving the agenda. In response to a question about what if anything she saw in her meetings that she would associate with reflective practice, she describes her original mindset entering into a difficult meeting concerning an initiative to address truancy in the schools:

So we've really been working with Clay on [truancy issues]. So this meeting was to, to say, ‘You guys really want this? Or are you just pacifying us and saying just do it?’ And so I actually went in there thinking that the, the elementary school principal would be, you know, ‘oh, yeah, you know we just don't want to do it’ or whatever.

Then, she actively chooses to use what she sees as RP tools:

Well, I had to practice patience, because, umm, we had to talk about these cases. And, at the time, you know, it's two in the-- or one in the afternoon and it was just like, let's get down to it, let's get to the meat of it, and then move on. That's the attitude I went in with ... the principal starts off with, you know, he's got this kid he's worried about, and blah-blah-blah, and, umm, so as he's talking, and I'm like, you know, ‘I want to move on, I want to move on’, and it's just like, *I had to make myself stop, and be patient, and listen to what he was saying, and his concerns* [emphasis mine]. And, everybody was processing with him, but it actually, it was just, helpful to, uhm, sit back and listen to, to where he was coming from.

This story demonstrates the shift in her approach in these meetings from one of the problem solver who drives the agenda to one of the equal partner facilitating a solution. Here she describes what that role entails:

When you're in meetings and stuff, it's kind of letting other people be part of that team. You know, they are an equal member of that team, you know, so you're hearing what they have to say. You know what you want ... 'this is the best solution, I know we want to do this' but really [with RP] you are saying, you know, 'I'm going to listen to every single one of you, whoever wants to say something', and truly listen to their idea.

Of note is WD's intentional choice to practice RP even in the moment in order to create joint agreement as opposed to pushing her own ideas.

Friend:

Prior to RP, WD explains, her "fixer personality" extended to her friendships, where she would find herself giving advice, or otherwise doing "a lot more talking". When asked where she sees RP showing up in her personal life, she refers to her experience with a friend whose husband suffered a heart attack:

well, so I'm not good at [practicing RP]. But I really wanted to know this time, and she was a therapist and so she was talking and she said something off the cuff and ... I said, 'well, tell me more about that.' And, she said something... then I said, reflected back something, because I was really interested in trying to understand.

She contrasts this post RP training approach to how she would have reacted before:

So if she'd have said, 'I just don't want to go through this again' ... I would have said, 'yeah, I know, you know, I guess that would be hard' ... and just, really, probably done a lot more talking and stuff, and probably, yeah, I wouldn't have asked questions.

Theme of Using RP Aspects

"If you want to reflect back, and ask questions, and 'tell me more about that' ... it just takes time, and it's a GREAT thing, and when I've done it, it's worked wonders.

WD described herself in all three of the above roles as naturally being the fixer, and reacting immediately to issues by coming up with solutions. She notes that she shifts into a more facilitating role when she practices RP, although her use of RP is constrained by time and willingness of others. Throughout her story, she describes RP as listening differently, but when she gives detail about how that listening is different, she also describes the RP aspects of thinking and questioning. She emphasizes the importance of listening patiently, (as she describes the RP aspect of listening), being aware of and suspending her own agenda (RP aspect of thinking) and asking questions that allow others to come up with solutions (RP aspect of questioning) to shift from fixer to facilitator.

Listening:

In the RP training, as described in Chapter Two, participants of the RP training were introduced to Brickley's levels of listening (2001). WD points to this when she tells the story of the truancy intervention meeting with one of the schools in her region. Throughout her interviews and journals, she refers to listening more than any other aspect of RP, and seems to see it as the skill that is at the heart of changes in her practice. When I asked WD if the

aforementioned meeting would have gone the way it did regardless of whether she had ever done RP training, she responded:

I wish we'd had more work with reflective practice but one of the things it did make me become, I think, is be more patient in listening. So, I can't, that's a great question... umm. I'm not sure. But I have really worked on... listening a lot better, because before it was always, like I said, coming in with a plan, and yes you listen, but at the same time you're waiting to get to that next, you know... ok we've done this so let's go over [it] instead of sitting back and being patient and making yourself listen. I'm not, I'm not sure I would have done it, that way, without [RP training].

Her description of RP listening involves setting aside her own thoughts to listen to the others:

“Well then I DO listen. I mean, I don't have anything in my head. Now I'm really listening to what direction they do want to go ...”.

She notes that RP listening leads to understanding others, allowing them to move forward:

You can do it, like when we did early intervention, you can, you... I think we did it to a certain degree. You listen to what the other people want in their framework and then, and then you focus around that, you know, ‘O.k. so this is where they are, this is their barriers’ and stuff like that.

Again, in referencing the school meeting, the final agreement to use the truancy program came about because of using RP listening prior to discussion about solutions: “You had to get out all the gunk, and then find out where everybody felt it was a good thing for them to be involved, you know, how was it going to help them”.

WD also points to the difficulty of practicing this kind of listening, being in what she calls the RP “zone” where she would “totally shut off [her] brain and just be there for that person”. She goes on to say that listening, then, requires silencing her own thoughts:

You have to totally be there for them and just focus, not even thinking about ‘we’ve talked about this before,’ ‘what am I going to say next’, or you know, ‘Oh, they’re talking about that, let me remember to tell them this.’ ... But I’ve have got to let those things go. Just totally be in the moment and if I forget what I was going to say then I just need to push that to the side and just keep listening and that’s, for me, that’s a hard... it’s effort. It takes work. It takes patience.

RP listening is closely related to the other aspects, and particularly involves asking questions to understand more fully what the other person is saying: “Because I really, it, it did enter my brain to be more patient and listen a lot better. Now the reflective work you know, you listening to understand, like the asking back, that I certainly need to practice more”.

Questioning:

The RP aspect of questioning, as WD observes above, is very much part of the listening process. She is aware that RP questioning helps clarify the speaker’s thoughts not just for the listener, but also for the speaker herself. She uses this in working with individual counselors to solve case specific issues “because they have got it in their head and it’s just really asking them, and then as they talk about it, it’s like ‘Oh, really this is the direction’ you know...”. WD notes this leads to the independent problem solving she hopes for in her staff: “I mean, that’s what I see Reflective Practice is, is you just trying to find out what’s going on with them and to me, the great outcome with it, is they resolve whatever’s bothering them by you just asking them questions, you know?”

WD uses RP questioning skills in both her work and home places. WD's story of her interaction with her friend exemplified this aspect for her:

It just really is, 'tell me more', you know, and just like, you know, my friend whose husband had a heart attack. I didn't know where, you know, we were going to go with it, and even if she wanted to, you know? ... and then eventually it pops up, and you just, let everything go and just try to practice listening and asking questions.

In describing supporting her staff to be independent problem solvers, she says, "... just, asking back more brings up more... instead of me trying to think of solving it for them, asking back helps them solve it themselves". She provides in the following quote several examples of RP questions she may ask her staff:

I mean, so, when they throw something out at you, 'n' you're like, 'Well, tell me more about that,' you know, and then they're going to say 'Well, da-da-da-da-da-da' and it's like, 'well when you say this, what about,' you know, 'what did you mean in there,' and ... 'did I hear you say you were thinking about going that direction?'

WD expresses her own awareness that for RP questioning to be effective, it requires suspension and willingness to let go of her own opinions: "so when I ask that question, I really have to be willing to say alright ... if I'm going to ask it, and let her do it, then I have to be O.K. with the direction she wants to go". This leads to the third aspect of RP, thinking.

Thinking:

RP thinking requires "identifying and suspending one's own frames, assumptions, values, and biases in order to better understand one's own and others viewpoints and behaviors"

(Schumann, 2013). While she does not name the aspect of thinking directly, WD often refers to noticing her frame or suspending it, either directly or by implication:

I mean you really, you've got to suspend, I mean you just have got to let it all go, everything, you know, and be ok with whatever this person's talking about. You just want to know about it, whether it's right, whether you think it's right or wrong, you just have to let it go.

She has become very aware of her impulse to argue her own viewpoint and the struggle to set that aside:

That's really hard. And I do struggle with that. I, I consciously, at times, want to say something. It's like, you know, when I'm in a ... sometimes I do it, but then other places I can say, you know, 'stop, you're, you don't need to say what you're thinking in this moment, let this happen the way it happens' you know? ... I do remember, many times, sitting there thinking, you know, you think your opinion is important, and it's not any more important than anybody else's, you know. Or who's to say what you think is right, and what they're saying is ... wrong.

In this exchange, WD acknowledges development of the thinking aspect (which she describes as recognizing and suspending her opinions and judgements) as tied to the RP training:

P: How do you see [recognizing and suspending] equating with RP?

WD: Because, again, in your head, you're listening to what they say but you're also, if you've got a judgement, you know, in your mind, if you've got your opinion and it's right, then you're not going to hear what they say ... There's times I can't wait to say what I want to say, because, like 'you guys are so wrong!' (P and WD laughter)

WD: But, yeah, ... I mean, that's not a good thing ... really more in the personal role, when you're talking to somebody who's more of a conservative, and they're throwing something out and, you know, I just can't wait to say, well, you know, da-da-da-da..." and so, that's hard to suspend, you know, what they say and the place that they're coming from.

PL: Do you find you want to do that more [since the training]?

WD: I am better at it now, I do, I am better at it now.

PL: Personal as well as professional [setting]?

WD: Probably even more better, better in both, yeah, I think so. I think, because consciously, probably more now than ever, is when I'm, that little voice is in my mind ... 'you don't need to give your opinion; you don't need to give your opinion. It's not life threatening or anything that they've have got to hear your opinion' so, you know, because a lot of conversations we have, why does somebody need to know my opinion?

WD also notes the importance of choosing to use this skill, noting it does not come easily: "you have to be, whether you think it's right or wrong, you have to just say, "Ok, I'm going to listen to them, and let it go" and "I've got my judgement, or my ideas, and if I really want to do [RP], I've got to *actively* [emphasis mine] let that go".

Theme of Changes in Way of Being

"I don't think you can always live it, but I think when you're ... in the zone, or whatever, and it's just a natural zone, ... then I think you're being it, you know?"

WD, like MG, speaks of changes in her way of being when she is in dialogue with others and practicing RP. As noted above, I have categorized the ways of being they discuss into three

sub-themes: humility, patience, and openness. For WD, humility presents as a willingness to put others ahead of herself; patience is the willingness to pause in reaction and respond after fully hearing other; and openness is the willingness to change one's own perspective or plan based on what is heard or experienced from other. These sub-themes are further explored in the discussion chapter below.

Humility:

In the following passages, WD describes setting aside her own opinions; holding the other person's opinions as important or more important than her own; and focusing on the other person more than herself. Because these behaviors seem to privilege the voice of the other over self, in this study these behaviors represent humility. This way of being seems to be, for WD, a fundamental part of RP: "...you almost have to put yourself in a place of being that way... that you're not the most, you're not the most important ... if you're just being, and really you're just, if you're really being in Reflective Practice, you know, it's you're trying to understand others, ... it's letting yourself go...". When asked what RP is about, she respond "It's hearing, it's hearing what the other person has to say", which she believes can only happen when she is focused on others in the conversation:

You have to totally be there for them and just focus not even thinking about, 'we've talked about this before,' 'what am I going to say next,' or, you know, 'Oh, they're talking about that, let me remember to tell them this' because I've got a bad memory. But I've have got to let those things go, and ... Just totally be in the moment, and if I forget what I was going to say then I just need to push that to the side and just keep listening and that's, for me, that's hard.

WD repeats multiple times that the process she describes above of setting herself aside and focusing on the other is hard, and does not come naturally to her. In the following passage, WD speaks of the effort it takes to be humble in this way:

But, it's hard to be in that zone, because we, a lot of us are rarely, I mean honestly, I don't know that many people that, um, are totally about other people all the time, you know? You always have something in your brain about yours, you know, what am I going to say next, ... you know? And it's hard to always be in the moment for someone else. I mean, you know, maybe a preacher is ... I mean, it is really hard to be in the moment for somebody else all the time, when you're always wanting, you have your opinion. Especially if you are opinionated. You have an opinion, you want to say "oh well, let me ... give you my opinion", so it's really hard to totally shut off your brain just to be there for that person.

Below, WD specifically states that understanding other "matters more" than her own opinions:

It's not important to tell my point of view, or you know, in some things. I want to give an opinion out, who cares what it is. You know, it's just something that like, who cares? You know, but so, to me, it's just like what matters more, like, is, *you're really truly trying to understand everybody else* [emphasis mine]. And, it's not important to give your opinion.

It is also notable that she equates RP with the effort to understand others. As noted above, putting others before self is for our purposes the definition of humility. She suggests that this change in how she is being with others is showing up consistently:

because, consciously, probably more now than ever, is when I'm, that little voice in my mind is, you know, 'you don't need to give your opinion ... it's not life threatening or anything that they've have got to hear your opinion.

Patience:

WD refers to patience several times in the interviews as an essential element in listening. RP has made her "more patient in listening", so that she can pause her own drive to a solution or outcome. In her story about the truancy meeting, quoted above in the Changing Roles section, WD specifically names patience as the way of being that allowed for the collaborative process, "Well, I had to practice patience." She contrasts this with her usual "attitude":

at the time, you know, it's two in the-- or one in the afternoon and it was just like, let's get down to it, let's get to the meat of it, and then move on. That's the attitude I went in with.

In direct response to my question about the role of RP in this change, she says that she, prior to RP, would "com[e] in with a plan, and yes, [I would] listen, but at the same time [I would be] waiting to get to that next [thing]" instead of "sitting back and being patient and making [myself] listen". Now, her way of being is less focused on "what [she'd] like to get to" and more about "what direction do [they] really want to go and [I] mean it and not try to push them one way or the other".

Openness:

Suspending her reactions and need to move quickly to solutions is expressed above as demonstrating patience. Closely related to that is being open to other's ideas and perspectives, what she also refers to as suspending, but in this context she is talking about "letting go" of what she thinks, or where she believes the conversation should go:

I mean you really, you've have got to suspend, I mean you just have got to let it all go, everything, you know, and be ok with whatever this person's talking about. You just want to know about it, whether it's r- [sic] whether you think it's right or wrong, you just have to let it go.

She acknowledges the need to be genuinely open: “if I’m going to truly do it right, then, then I’ve have got to let her go that direction and not manipulate...”. She calls this state of openness being in “that place” in her story of her conversation with her conservative friend where she felt they had a respectful exchange of ideas: “you're able to be in that place, because I- I was in *that place* [emphasis mine] with that fella on the Affordable Care Act”. Earlier, I noted WD’s description of what I labeled as humility, acknowledging the equal importance of another’s opinion. Openness, however, is not only valuing the opinion of the other, but allowing for the possibility of her own perception change, as she did in that same conversation: “and so it was one of those I was OK hearing another opinion to show that I might not be right”. Again, she notes the importance of this way of being in a difficult collaborative meeting: “so you have got to be listening to him, thinking that hmm, you know, I'm willing to give up the idea that I'm right, or I want, you know, my direction is right, and maybe there's some other direction”. WD does see the ability to be open connected to her respect of the other. Her openness to her conservative friend was easier because of their “mutual respect”, whereas on a rather dissatisfactory date, she discovers she is not able to be open when that respect is not present:

...as I talked to him more, [I] didn’t have a whole lot of respect for... he was racist... and so the more I found out about him, the least I even cared what he had to say, you know? And so, to me, I do a better job listening to understand if I really respect that person and we have a real conversation about something.

Theme of Practice

*“When we’re done with this...four years down the road am I going,
is this going to be in my conscience?”*

Like MG, WD describes RP becoming a part of her day to day practice, especially in the work place: “But I have done [RP] a lot more. Um, and we have better staff meetings because [of it]”. Her staff have become so accustomed to her use of the tools, they tease her about RP in their staffings: “Yeah (laughing) they do, because they know I was in that [training] then they'll point it out -- ‘Oh, you're doing, you know, reflective practice!’”. And, more than MG, she expresses her concern about improving her use of RP, embedding it in her work:

The tool [of RP] comes in when, you know, you have to do it and it’s work related. The zone, or the being or whatever is in it, on those days that you’re consciously making that effort to do it. And it comes unconsciously too, the more you practice, the more you DO do it, a little bit more.

WD clearly values RP in the work context, as noted above in the theme of changing roles section. She particularly notes improvement with her staff: “I feel like I'm doing better with the court counselors over all. You know, it's um, it's starting to become more of a, a way of doing, instead of ‘let me practice this.’ But, it's far from perfect yet...”.

WD talks about her concern that she will forget the skills without practicing it: “If I practice more, you know, then you think of it more, but you don't, it's not always in my conscience to do that” and “[RP] is not, that, it's not an easy thing to do. I mean you have got to remember to ask back, and all that other stuff, and it's not natural, especially in a work environment”. Like MG, she acknowledges that the process of participating in the study has been a prompt to practice: “...when you send a reminder on your journal or we do this, or me,

you and Greta get together, then it's like 'Oh yeah, I need to practice that more' and then, [in] the next few days, I have started practicing that". She goes on, however, to say that after these meetings, using RP "goes down the wayside in a lot of times".

WD's solution to "going down the wayside" is to intentionally practice not only on her own, but also with MG and myself to continue to sharpen the RP processes:

like me, you, and MG do... sometimes we get off on a tangent. We're all probably not the best reflective practitioners, none of us (laughter), but if we consciously set some ground rules and try to practice it once a month, you know, that helps you keep in in your conscience ... You need something like, you know, sometimes people need to go to church to remember God, you know?

Summary

In my findings, I identified four themes that describe the experiences of the participants: changes in roles, using RP aspects, better ways of being, and practicing RP. The themes are explored narratively through Clandinin and Connelly's commonplaces of place – professional or home; time – post training to present; and sociality – relationships with others. These categories provided the context for MG and WD's stories presented above. In the following discussion, I will re-story their narratives into the larger narrative of the impact of RP on our lives as participants and researcher living alongside them through the story.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISSCUSSION

RESTORYING

Analysis in this narrative framework is a re-storying: retelling participants' stories of their experience to communicate broader significance (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Kramp, 2004). In the retelling, I am pulling out from their experiences the larger narrative that their stories form together, along with my own, as I lived alongside MG and WD over the six months of the study.

To briefly review, MG and WD are two women who participated in the training in reflective practice as provided through the University of Tennessee Institute for Collaborative Communication (UT-ICC). The training in the fall of 2014 was arranged to support staff from the participants' agencies in improving their work with children and families involved in mental health and juvenile justice systems. I also participated in this training as co-facilitator. In the RP training, participants engaged in dialogical processes that were specifically designed to cause reflection on and in participants' practices by bringing to the forefront what is usually unexamined, specifically focusing on individuals' assumptions and beliefs, the way we listen or don't listen, and the unconscious frames through which we engage with others. The study began six months after the training to explore what impact, if any, the participants experienced from the trainings in their day-to-day goings on.

The findings presented in Chapter Four came from the stories told through five interviews with each of the participants, journal entries, participant feedback, and my notes as researcher. The table below presents the themes and sub themes as they relate to each participant.

Themes and Commonplaces

Both MG and WD's stories occur in the work and home places. Their stories involve social connections described in terms of roles. For MG, the role of boss, partner, and employee are played out in the work place, while her roles of mother and wife are very much set in the home place (although she and her spouse do both work in connection to her company). It is through these relationships that she describes the changes in her ways of being that she experienced after the trainings. WD sets almost her entire story in the work place: her roles there include supervisor, administrator, and community leader. Her role of friend occurs in the home place, as she shares two short vignettes about changes she sees in herself with friends. She, like MG, frames her experience of the impact of RP through how she is being in relationship with others in those roles.

The time commonplace for their stories is fluid. Both participants describe their experiences looking back at how they were prior to the trainings and how the aspects of RP as *presently* developing in their lives. For example, MG speaks of changes in how she lives her roles while in the midst of the changes in her position with her company; WD describes the need to train her staff as she considers the changes coming from her retirement within a few years. As I will describe later, they both look to the future when they speak of wanting to practice RP more, and we leave the study with a plan together to meet regularly for that purpose. While the commonplaces are a way of providing the context of MG and WD's stories, the re-storying of WD and MG's experiences are best illustrated through the themes that surfaced in the findings: changes in roles, using RP aspects, better ways of being, and practicing RP. Table 2 illustrates these themes and their related subthemes.

Table 2: Themes and subthemes

Themes	Subthemes	Participant
Changes in Roles	Owner/Boss Partner Employee Wife Mom	MG
	Supervisor Administrator Community Leader Friend	WD
Using aspects of RP	Questioning Listening Thinking	WD & MG
Better ways of being	Humility Patience Openness	WD & MG
Practicing RP		WD & MG

Most of the sub-themes are shared by both participants with the exception of changes in roles, which varied for participants in both work and home places. These themes are the common threads of the participants' stories, as described below.

Theme of Changes in Roles: Co-Constructors of Solutions

MG and WD both acknowledge that after the RP training, they experienced themselves co-constructing solutions with others in ways they had not before, moving from problems solvers and fixers to collaborators. For MG, the roles she serves at work have always, as noted in the findings, been based on being the problem solver. She has seen herself shift her perspective and since the trainings, especially with her direct staff. Rather than jumping into the fray and fixing the issues the staff bring to her or face as part of their responsibilities, she has begun nurturing them, or as she refers to it, “growing” them. In the setting of difficult meetings with people involved in NMC with which her company is merging, she describes herself as a learner rather than a problem-solver, approaching others in the dialogue from the frame of wanting to understand rather than defend and push through her own agenda. This is a substantive change for MG, moving from the control of a fixer or problem-solver to the more vulnerable role of facilitator or nurturer.

That change in her professional role is also apparent in her roles as mother and wife. There, too, she finds she is now more likely to let go of the control of the “drill sergeant mom” and allow the space for her children to first attempt to manage their lives and, importantly, allow them to give voice to their own ideas and solutions. She describes an important shift in her way of being with her husband in the wife role. She had, in that role, been the negotiator who was responsible for fairness in their activities, trying to balance everything between them. She saw, though dialogue with him, that she also had been sacrificing the spontaneity of just being in a

way with him that is open and free, of being herself. She hears him differently since RP when he says “I just want more of you”; rather than criticism, she hears that “he just loves me”.

WD, like MG, saw her role change as well. In her relationship with her staff, she has moved from problem solver to teacher and supporter, as she sees her staff coming up with their own solutions rather than depending on her. She also experiences co-construction of solutions in her administrative and community leader roles when she practices suspending her own opinions, listening, and clarifying. She credits her experience with RP training for her ability to shift her thinking from defensive or protective to being open to the experience of others in difficult situations, much like MG in her meetings with her partner and the administration of NMC.

While MG does share with WD the efforts to allow others to solve their own problems and come up with their own solutions, WD also specifically names that she is creating equality in meetings through using RP, making an effort to co-create rather than cause others to accept her own solutions. She is also feeling the impact of RP in her conversations with friends, noting that she is having “better conversations” and “big conversations” since the training.

Using RP Aspects – Levels of Reflection

Both MG and WD primarily speak of listening as the aspect of RP that has had the greatest impact. Listening from the RP context of the trainings, as noted earlier, is listening to understand other and is closely associated to questioning and thinking, the other aspects that were the focus of our training. While MG and WD may not always name the other two aspects separately, they are aware of intentionally practicing all three. For MG, the experience above with her husband is an example of practicing all of these aspects: reflecting on her own behavior in the moment and noticing her reactions; identifying her own assumptions about fairness and balance that framed her viewpoint and choosing to suspend them to fully hear his; and theorizing

about his frames, “mental models, wants, assumptions, and values” (Schumann, et. al., 2013) by clarifying what she heard through questioning that was genuinely about understanding him. WD describes a similar experience with her friend, consciously noticing herself in the dialogue and choosing to practice asking back and clarifying questions to more fully understand what her friend was going through with her husband’s illness while consciously suspending her impulse to comfort or give advice as the fixer.

Awareness of the frames from which we interact with others is key to RP dialogue. Our frames represent our way of looking at the world, and suspending our assumptions and opinions comes from making conscious the frames that support them (Peters & Ragland, 2009). Questioning makes visible the frames of others while thinking helps identify one’s own frames. Both MG and WD describe surfacing the frames through which they see others in the process of practicing RP. MG realizes she doesn’t really care as much about hearing from others as she does being heard herself and notices her own pursuit of understanding and acknowledgement from others. She becomes very cognizant of suspending this need in order to “be for” others. WD realizes she struggles with focusing to really hear others, often multi-tasking while her court counselors or other people are speaking with her in an effort to control outcomes. WD points to the need to set aside her own opinions in order to really be open to those of others, and this is a struggle for her because she wants her opinions heard, often believing even when she is asking questions that her answer is the right one.

Better Ways of Being – Creating a Space for RP

One of the aspects of RP not specifically addressed in the training that WD and MG experienced was climate building, “creating an environment ... supportive of a collaborative relationship among all participants” (Peters & Schumann, 2010). Yet, both women describe

creating a space for practicing the aspects of RP in which they are being humble, patient, and open. For WD, taking the time to practice questioning (specifically asking back), or to listen completely to others, is very difficult in what she refers to as the “fast paced” world of her work unless she is in the “RP zone” where she is being patient and open. MG believes she has to be in the right frame of mind, noting that when she is hurried or facing other stresses, it is difficult to be in “that space” of RP.

To MG and WD, RP requires setting themselves aside and holding others opinions, needs, or voices more important than their own in order to understand others. MG referred to this as humility and contrasts it with her “me-mode”, where she is focused on her own need to be heard or to dictate the solutions. WD refers to this as “totally be[ing] there for them”, and is aware of when she chooses other over her own need to be right about the plan or pushing her solution. Patience is the way of being that WD mentions most as both her challenge and the requisite way of being for listening from an RP perspective. Patience is focusing on being in the moment, hearing the other, and taking the time to fully explore what he or she is saying. For MG, patience is the willingness to pause her reactions to thoughtfully respond to what is happening in the dialogue. When WD experiences openness, she is willing to be wrong. She actively chooses to let go of her own opinion and allow herself the opportunity to change perspectives. MG experiences openness as letting go of her own assumptions and listening without expectation or agenda, being open to “life’s messages”.

Openness has a third dimension in their stories. More than being open to the ideas and opinions of others and listening without expectation or agenda, WD and MG also describe being open in terms of sharing their own feelings and thoughts. WD briefly refers to this when she is talking about sharing her liberal leaning political stands with someone who is more conservative,

and feeling she could respectfully share her own way of seeing without being challenged by his expression of his beliefs. Although MG expresses concern about stifling her voice in the process of setting aside her need to be heard, she also describes an experience of giving voice to what she historically held back. By thinking carefully about her reactions and the frame that feeds them, she comes to a new understanding with her partner.

Practicing RP – Maintaining and Improving Practice

Prior to beginning the study in 2015, as mentioned above, we had two meetings to practice the RP aspects, recognizing how hard it was to create the dialogical space of the RP trainings with people in our lives who had not undertaken that training. While we did not end up engaging in RP dialogue as we had in the trainings, we did talk about how much we wanted to embed the aspects somehow in our practices. We laughed, we explored, and we came up with new ideas for joint projects. In conversations outside of the interviews, both MG and WD refer to these practices as important to them, just as any chance to talk about RP together. In the interviews, both women say that doing interviews and journals helped them to remember to practice what they had learned.

What was striking in both MG and WD's talk of practicing is that they saw RP as valuable enough a part of their lives that they wanted to continue using it. Both ended the study with requests to continue to meet and practice together to maintain what they had learned and improve their practice.

My Story

In the section above, I have shown how the themes I identified weave together a story of the impact of RP for both WD and MG. In the section below, I tell my own story of my involvement in this study and the possible impact my presence had on the participants'

experience. As a narrative researcher, I co-created the stories along with MG and WD of their experience of RP, living “in the midst” of their living stories (Clandinin, 2013). What I, along with MG and WD, discovered in the inquiry space we created was a commitment to continuing our story, together.

Prior to beginning this study, I created a reflexive autobiography, as suggested by Clandinin (2013), as a way of identifying my own beliefs and assumptions about RP and clarifying my research puzzle. I realized that my interest in collaboration and bringing people together had begun before high school. Like MG and WD, the seeds of my interest in collaboration had been planted early in my life as I played the role of peacekeeper as a middle child. My experiences with traditional classroom teaching, troubled adolescents, and political systems suddenly seemed less disparate; I saw patterns in my ways of being with others in each setting that hinted at the passion I would later find for collaboration and dialogue. My odd road to my current career and doctoral program had many moments that returned to me as I considered why reflective practice had resonated so much with me when I was introduced to the concept over beers and a fire eight years ago. What I was left with was an awareness that I believe dialogue, when practiced through the lens of RP, can be transformative... and had been a transformative experience for me.

This of course also caused me to reflect carefully on what I would bring to this narrative inquiry. Living alongside my participants during the six months of the study, working alongside them in a community project while simultaneously following their stories of RP post training, meant my story would weave into theirs. I have noted in myself many of the changes they have talked about in their interviews. I participated in the trainings with them, as both a refresher (I had taken multiple courses in reflective practice) and an opportunity to co-facilitate. In the study

of the impact, however, I learned much about myself and my own way of being in the world when I am practicing RP.

Throughout the interviews, I am very much present. I engage both WD and MG in discussions about their responses, and several times we end up noticing we are demonstrating RP in our conversations, laughing together as we notice we are asking back or suspending. This was especially apparent after the first journal entries, when both MG and WD said that they had enjoyed being reminded to practice RP through writing the journals. After the first interviews, they also commented that interviewing with me was like doing a practice RP session, and reminded them not only of the aspects of the trainings, but to practice those aspects in their work.

Many times in the transcript I am with them in exploring meaning in the terms and aspects of RP. I noticed that questions about what they saw or what they meant by some of their responses led to my curiosity about areas I had not foreseen. For example, I brought up the first comment about ways of being, a phrase that neither participant used until after I asked if they experienced RP as a doing or a being. Therefore, my curiosity about and own story of RP affected their narratives of the impact of RP.

The interviews built one on the other, as I used the back-and-forthing described in Clandinin and Connelly to explore various threads that I saw in our conversations. I would bring my view of what I had heard in our previous interviews to them in the forms of clarifying questions, and they would correct, clarify, or redirect me. In the third interview with WD, when she is discussing her need to give an opinion and efforts to suspend that, she brings me into her story:

WD: “that's what me and you struggle with, though, is you're more conscious of listening, but we both are opinionated, and when you're opinionated, which

almost everybody is I guess, um, then what we're thinking about is 'Yeah, I heard what you just said, and, ok, so do I agree with that or not? And here's where I'm at, and now I want to make sure they understand my side of it, because I think I'm really right.'"

P: "I'm right." (laughter)

WD: "Just like [your partner]" (laughter)

P: "And if [he] would do it my way!" [laughter]

I realized when I reviewed the transcript that here was one of those moments of me stepping into her narrative. This occurs again when she refers to a moment I shared with her about using RP with my husband, rather unsuccessfully. She is talking about being open to being wrong, and says,

whatever the issue was with Joseph, because he thinks he's right, whatever that was, and so you've got to be listening to him, thinking that hmm, you know, I'm willing to give up the idea that I'm right, or I want, you know, my direction is right, and maybe there's some other direction.

I am also present in MG's story when she says that our interviews are like therapy for her in that she can share things she can't share at work. She also points out the similarities she sees between her relationship with TR and my relationship with my partner and our attempts to practice RP with these people closest to us. In fact, like both MG and WD, I found the interviews and journals made me more aware of when I was consciously choosing to listen, question, and think from the RP perspective, especially in difficult work settings and stressful times with my business partner.

RP Training as a Transformative Experience

Both MG and WD tell the story of a transformative impact of RP in their day to day goings on. Their story of RP takes place over time and in the social setting of their personal and professional roles. The context of this study is unusual. Other studies examine the experience of RP in a classroom, training, or coaching environment, and the study concerns a brief period of time, such as the period of the training itself or shortly after. This is reflected, as noted in Chapter Two, in multiple dissertation studies on RP (Alderton, 2001; Armstrong, 1999; Burress, 2013; Crosse, 2001; Dillivan, 2004; Duncan, 2009; Gaskin, 2007; Gray, 2008; Gray & Peters, 2009; Ragland, 2005; Seeley, 2015; Torres, 2008) as well as non-dissertation studies (Burress & Peters, 2012; Duncan et. al. 2013; Muth & Peters, 2010; Peters & Gray, 2006; Peters, et. al. 2011; Rong & Peters, 2007; Skinner & Peters, 2014;).

Burress (2013) concludes that participants in her study of RP do describe a “perspective transformation”, which she defines as “both an epistemological process, involving a change in worldview, and an ontological process, bringing about a change in being in the world” (p. 21). Burress connects the different, although closely related, approaches to transformative learning that Mezirow, Kegan, Friere and Taylor represent to RP, and points out that RP processes such as levelising and the surfacing of tacit assumptions and beliefs through dialogue reflect those theories. She points out in her findings that her participants’ perspectives shifted from the beginning of the RP course she studied to the end, and that their ways of being shifted as well: “Participants built relationships with other members, learned to embrace similarities as well as differences in beliefs and experiences, and grew comfortable with their uncertainties” (p. 151). Similar to this study, Burress suggests in her discussion that the experience of RP may lead to a transformation in participant perspectives, but this is based only on their experience in the

classroom (2013). This study explores what participants experience as an impact of RP in their day to day lives beyond the training.

While research on TL theory is much more expansive (Taylor & Snyder, 2012) than research on RP, there are only a few studies that point to TL as occurring in the day to day, ongoing experiences of participants (Nohl, 2015; Heddy & Pugh, 2015). For MG and WD, the transformative impact of RP is an ongoing impact, settling into their professional and personal goings on and their ways of being in relationship and response to others in their lives. This is an unusual perspective of TL and RP.

As noted in Chapter Two, transformative learning theory and RP are closely related. RP depends upon becoming aware of one's own frames and those of others in the dialogue, being willing to suspend those frames to fully hear other, and choosing to co-construct new ways of moving forward together. Mezirow holds that critical reflection is a necessary step in moving from a reflective examination of one's own frames of reference into living from the new frames that result from an experience that challenged the original framework (Mezirow, 2012). The RP training created a dialogical learning environment that supported a TL experience for the participants, but their choice to continue to develop the aspects of RP and continued learning fits Mezirow's description of cumulative TL (2012).

Originally, Mezirow said TL began with a major disorienting dilemma (1991), what he refers to as epochal transformation. Later, he revised his thinking and acknowledged that TL can be a cumulative transformation, "A progressive sequence of insights resulting in changes in point of view and leading to a transformation in habit of mind" (2009 p. 94). Two important elements of TL are critical reflection and dialogue, or reflective discourse (Mezirow 2009, 2012). Both elements are present in the stories of WD and MG over time. They describe their own processes

of examining the frames through which they interpret their experiences, which they describe as their assumptions (Mezirow refers to this as their habits of mind) and resulting opinions (points of view) related to their professional and personal roles and related activities as well as their deeper beliefs about themselves and their habitual ways of being with others (Mezirow, 2012). They participate in dialogue with me in the interviews but also with others as they attempt to practice the skills they learned through the RP training. The benefit of a narrative inquiry into their experience is that we frame their story in past, present and future experiences. The transformative occurs for them over the passage of time from their training to the projected future practice they hope to engage in.

As noted, Mezirow describes the transformative learning experience as beginning with a disorienting dilemma, whether epochal or cumulative (1991, 2009, 2012). Many authors agree that a change in one's frames results from if not a specific event, at least a state of dissatisfaction or discomfort with one's current experiences or perceptions (Cox, 2015; Franz, 2010; Howie & Bagnall, 2015; Hullender, et al, 2015). However, MG and WD did not experience a disorienting dilemma as defined by many of the authors (Courtney, et al, 2000; Mezirow, 2012; Taylor, 2009). Without ever describing a sense of dissatisfaction with their current ways of being, they do describe a change in their perspective of themselves and how they live the roles identified above, the change in perspective stemming from a TL experience causes. Their descriptions of themselves and their actions align with characteristics of reflective practitioners, and they speak of this movement from being what they called controlling, fixing, problem solvers to collaborative partners. They demonstrate the value of this change to them by practicing and wanting to continue to practice the aspects of RP that they felt supported their changed perspectives.

A few recent studies were notable in similarities to my findings and suggest that transformative experiences may occur without major life changes or a conscious desire to change. Nohl (2015) explores a different set of phases for transformative learning that are distinct from Mezirow's ten phases and other adaptations of Mezirow's phase model. Nohl cites Taylor & Snyder (2012) in pointing out that most of the studies that elaborate on or substantially alter Mezirow's phases were restricted contextually (e.g. educational, medical, and business settings or student or trainee populations) and did not identify characteristics that could apply to all transformative learning experiences. His work seeks to provide a general phase model for describing transformative learning across social and personal situations. In Nohl's study, he intentionally stepped outside of any system context (educational, medical, business) to identify transformative experiences in the lives of participants. Nohl used narrative interviews with a cross section of participants to identify life orientations, similar to Mezirow's frames of mind. He then identified those individuals who described a change in that orientation. He created from the analysis of the interviews a more expanded phase model for transformative learning with five phases: non-determining start, experimental and undirected inquiry, social testing and mirroring, shifting of relevance, and social consolidation and reinterpretation of biography. He concluded that transformative learning can "begin unnoticed, incidentally, and sometimes even casually when a new practice is added to old habits" (p. 45). As evidenced in his findings, he posits that transformative learning does not have to be "disorientation driven" and does not necessarily come about because of a need or dissatisfaction with one's current ways of going on.

Many of the studies I reviewed define transformative learning by the impact it has, and the authors see the evidence of TL as an important, notable, even dramatic change in one's world view (Boyd, 2009; O'Sullivan, 2002; Taylor, 2008). Heddy & Pugh, in their discussion of TL

and classroom experiences, suggest instead that there are two types of transformative learning, large scale and small scale. The large scale events, as noted above, create “a deep fundamental change in one’s perspective” (p. 53). The smaller scale events, however, are also transformative. These they refer to as transformative experiences (TE) resulting in small shifts in perspective that impact learners in broader terms than mastering content. TE in the classroom involves students “re-seeing” the world through the lens of the lesson content, while teachers may use small group dialogue to support the concept of “liv[ing] the content” (p. 55). While Heddy & Pugh refer to TE as a formal teaching method, their description of large and small scale transformative learning aligns with the experience of WD and MG of both RP training, where through group dialogue participants engaged in the aspects of RP together as a means to learn the processes and use them in their work practices, and subsequent efforts to practice what they had learned. Their experiments with the aspects of RP and the smaller changes they noticed in how others responded did create those small shifts in perspective, such as WD realizing her opinions can be second to others, and MG realizing that suspending her own need to be heard allows others to be authentic with her.

I have told the story of and restoried the experiences of both MG and WD and shown in my findings both women describe an impact, describing themselves as behaving differently with people in their lives by practicing the aspects of RP and choosing to be in such a way that cultivates reflective dialogue. I have also presented support for the theory that the impact of RP training and use in their day to day lives may have “transformed meaning perspectives, frames of reference, and habits of mind” (Mezirow, 2006). Establishing causality is not the aim of this inquiry. However, there is value in looking at what is different in the ways of going on for MG and WD that they associate with the experience of RP, and if their stories suggest they have

found themselves practicing as reflective practitioners. One frame for examining if the transformative learning is manifested in practicing as reflective practitioners is levelising (Peters and Ragland, 2009), introduced in Chapter Two.

Unlike other studies focused on the levelising models (Duncan, 2009; Gaskin, 2007) I did not incorporate in my study a specific tool for measuring if levelising was demonstrated in the dialogues of participants. However, in various vignettes both women describe themselves in ways that correspond to the pre-reflective, reflective, framing and theorizing levels. Below I revisit the earlier discussion of transformative dialogue (Gergen, 2009; Gergen et al., 2001) and RP aspects (Schuman, et al, 2013). Practicing the aspects of RP in work and home has created opportunities for WD and MG to engage in dialogue that has some of the attributes of transformative dialogue and, in so doing, have demonstrated the various levels of the model.

When WD describes going into the difficult meeting with one of the schools, she begins the meeting in a pre-reflective state, acting from the perspective she has that schools are not easily cooperative and do not want to take on additional work. Her habit of mind, based on those assumptions, limits her choices to presenting the information and requesting they decide yes or no, otherwise she will waste her time. This in turn was supported by her frame of reference, that she alone could solve the problems and knew the answers, and therefore if they did not agree there would not be any movement forward.

In the meeting, however, she describes stepping back for a moment and noticing her assumptions, engaging in reflective being as she notices her thoughts and approach to the meeting. She says she “decided to do RP” and practice listening, thinking and questioning. She becomes aware of her opinions and belief she is right. From this point, WD actively chooses to suspend that thinking and focus on understanding the principal’s viewpoint. She lets go of her

agenda and the either/or position with which she started the meeting. Demonstrating the third level of the model, framing, she realizes that her frame of reference for working with the schools on truancy had been that they are in need of help and that her new program was the best answer to the issue. This point of view was strongly supported by the culture of juvenile services who had to address delinquency that occurred when the schools failed to intervene in time. Finally, she describes becoming aware of the principal's frame of reference, his fears of overcommitting, his divided focus between using new programs and immediate response to difficult children, and his distrust of new initiatives based on the past experience of the schools. This is the level of theorizing, and she takes action based on this new understanding by engaging him in dialogue about what solutions he did see for the issues they faced. The outcome was agreement to go forward with the program, and WD points out that had she gone about the meeting in her habitual ways, they would have left without the participation of the school.

MG describes a similar experience with her partner. She begins in a pre-reflective state, reacting to his behaviors based on past interactions. In the reflective level, she notices she is reacting, even asking herself the question "why am I getting triggered?" as she becomes aware of her thoughts about his "doing it again". She notices her reactions are a result of the frame through which she sees herself as responsible for solving issues and making things right, a way of seeing herself that she has been noticing in several interactions with others. She steps back once more, and focuses on what is happening for him. For MG, this level of theorizing is the stepping off place for choosing to respond rather than react, and she and her partner begin a dialogue about what they are experiencing from each other and how they can move forward into the new work environment resulting from the merger.

WD and MG describe similar processes in other interactions as well. They are describing the process of levelising in their experience of stepping back, becoming aware of their thinking, examining the why of their reactions and suspending them, and arriving at a new understanding of the other. Both call this process RP and say that it is becoming integrated into their lives: MG says it is becoming part of her unconscious, and WD says she is stepping into the RP zone without thinking. She also refers to this as being RP rather than doing RP.

In the examples above, WD and MG generate new possibilities and unexpected outcomes through transformative dialogue. In Table 3, I have revised Table 1 to illustrate the relationship between transformative dialogue, the aspects of RP, and the levels of reflection from the levelising model that supported practicing those aspects and creating the dialogue.

Table 3 Relationship of Transformative Dialogue Components, RP aspects, and Levels of Reflection

Components of Transformative Dialogue Demonstrated in Findings	Characteristics	Skills of RP	Context	Levels of Reflection
Significance of Self-expression	To hear and be heard with understanding, engagement and acceptance	Listening	Skillful listening to others mental models, wants, assumptions, and values.	II Reflective Being III Framing
Affirmation of Other	Understanding and accepting the frames of others	Questioning	Asking questions that help identify assumptions, clarify thoughts, and develop fair and balanced expectations.	III Framing IV Theorizing
Self-Reflexivity	Questioning our ideas and beliefs	Thinking	Identifying and suspending one's own frames, assumptions, values, and biases, in order to understand one's own and others viewpoints and behaviors.	III Framing IV Theorizing

WD and MG practiced the aspects of RP of listening, questioning, and thinking. And, both women acknowledge that using the aspects calls on them to be aware of their own reactions (level II). They notice the frames (points of view) that may be influencing the reactions (level III), and focus on what the frames of the people in their lives may be and how they come to the positions they hold (level IV).

I posit that both participants describe an experience of the three aspects of transformative learning (Mezirow, 2009, 2012). They demonstrate critical reflection on how they are thinking and reacting in the moment (in levelising reflective being) when they are practicing the aspects of RP and when they are not. They identify their own perspectival frames (in levelising, framing) that both support them and that they choose to suspend to be more open in their dialogue with others through the roles they play in both work and home settings. Reflective discourse occurs when they use the aspects of RP which require both framing and understanding the perspectives of the other while being open to new ways of seeing or other possibilities (in levelising, theorizing). They take reflective action in choosing new ways of being in their home and work places to support use of RP and planning to create future opportunities for practice to improve and support their use of RP.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

NEW BEGINNINGS

In this chapter, I revisit our stories to support the conclusions I present. In addition, I will present the new beginnings that may come from this narrative inquiry, such as new lines of inquiry into RP and transformative learning.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of my study was to provide a deeper look at and fuller understanding of the impact of in the lives of people after experiencing training in the dialogical process of RP. While many studies look at reflective practice, and a smaller but growing body of research centers on the specific model of RP that was created at UTK and taught or used in classrooms or training rooms, I found no narrative inquiries into how participants give meaning to the experience of RP over time and in the context of their day to day lives. I intended, through my participants' stories and my re-storying of those stories, to increase our understanding of the phenomenon of RP training in the context of the professional practice and personal lives of two women whose professional and personal settings were conducive to such a study.

I briefly reviewed seminal authors relating to the theoretical underpinnings of the UTK model of RP: social construction theory, dialogue, reflective practice and transformative learning. Primarily I focused on the foundational works of K. Gergen, J. Mezirow, and J. Peters in restorying the experiences of my participants in my discussion section. I also brought in the theories and findings of other authors who expanded the literature on transformative learning experiences and reflective practice. Some of those studies found TL experiences could be small happenings or gradual realizations in learners' lives. Others provided me with the framework for showing how MG and WD's stories of the impact of RP intersected with their descriptions of

experiencing transformative dialogue, using the RP aspects, and demonstrating the phases of levelising.

My method for this investigation was narrative inquiry. I chose a narrative research method for this exploration of the impact of RP because my inquiry was based on a fundamental belief: if we, as human beings, construct our reality, we are the truth tellers of our stories. There are many studies, as referenced in my literature review and discussion sections, done on the experience of reflective practice training by students or professionals either in the classroom or the training room. Most of these studies examine what the *researcher* observed as impact, and are limited to the time of the course, or shortly after, or the time of the coaching and the impact on professional practice within a short time frame. What was lacking, I found, was a study that simply asked participants what was their story of RP and its impact in their day to day goings on, over time. Burress (2013), for example, explored the experiences of adult learners in a reflective practice course and found that participants experienced changes in specific beliefs and assumptions concerning teacher vs shared expertise; authority versus equal voice; and discomfort vs comfort with dialogue during the course, but notes the need for further exploration of any sustained change. However, what of that experience then showed up outside of the classroom was not explored.

I recruited two participants who, as noted above, were women who were in a place in their lives that allowed for the freedom to train in RP and experiment with incorporating it into their practices. I began my study with the important step of autobiography to identify my own beliefs and perspectives that could impact my findings as well as to find where my experiences and relationships culminated in a research puzzle that I wanted to inquire into (Clandinin, 2013).

The resulting research question was what impact, if any, do participants in an RP training perceive in their day to day lives post-training?

My field texts, which correspond to data collection in other research methodologies, were comprised of five interviews (one by phone) and participant journals as well as my own researcher notes. Multiple times of hearing the interviews and reading the transcripts and journals let me to my findings, the interim research text of narrative inquiry. I identified four themes that presented in both women's stories: changes in roles, using RP aspects, better ways of being, and practicing RP. The themes were framed by the narrative inquiry commonplaces of temporality, sociality, and locality (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

Below I revisit MG and WD's stories of RP and its impact through the lens of the four themes I identified in my findings and follow with my conclusions and suggestions for future research.

MG's Story Revisited

"I just felt myself thinking differently and hearing differently than I think I would have a year ago"

MG's story is set very much across the places of her life, told through her work and home experiences with her business partner, staff, new colleagues, and family. At the beginning of our story together (my inquiry), MG was facing the end of the company and partnership that had defined her professional world for over a decade. She had navigated her marriage and mothering roles in a busy life much the same way she had her work roles: she fixed. She also described herself as someone who wanted to be heard, loved, and accepted, often to the extent that others – colleagues and family – were accommodating her solutions rather than co-creating new ones.

When she participated in the RP training, she was at this crossroads in her life, moving from business owner to employee of a larger company and managing a busy home life with two children. She recognized the potential value of RP while she is in the trainings, and wondered if she would be able to take what she learned into the new roles she would have. By the end of the study, as discussed in the discussion section, MG had experienced changes in how she was in her day to day life exemplified in a new understanding of herself and different responses to others who populated her personal and professional worlds. She ends her story relating those changes to the impact of not only RP training, but also the process of practicing the aspects of RP and the opportunity to discuss them in the interviews and journals.

WD's Story Revisited

“If you are really being in Reflective Practice, you know, it’s you trying to understand others.

It’s letting yourself go”

WD’s story is set in her work more than her home place, yet the impact of RP on her ways of being in relationship is seen in both. Her story is peopled with staff members she was training and preparing for eventually taking her place; friends; an almost date; and the community and agency folks with whom she collaborates to improve the lives of children and families who become involved in the judicial system. She described the change from working as an agenda driven problem solver to, when in her “RP zone”, a collaborative partner with others. WD, like MG, experiences the impact of RP as changes in her ways of being with others in her life. In becoming aware of how much her responses to others have been colored by her own opinions and assumptions, she recognizes a pattern of being the “problem solver”: assessing situations, coming up with a solution, and then convincing others to follow her plan.

For WD, her story of RP does not end with the changes she has experienced since the training and our joint inquiry. She foresees future practice to improve her use of the aspects she learned and find a way to use the aspects to improve collaboration in future community wide efforts.

Weaving It All Together

Themes and Commonplaces Revisited

Theme of Changes in Roles

Both WD and MG experienced changes in their ways of relating to and working with people in their lives. MG finds she is, when responding with an RP approach, a nurturing boss, focused on “growing up leaders” in her staff. The nurturing boss contrasts with the authoritative boss, her general approach prior to RP when she was much more oriented to solving problems and “fixing everyone’s place in the universe”. She also sees her role as partner move to a more equal relationship. She describes herself prior to RP playing the part of “dumping ground” for her partner’s frustrations and concerns and “fixer” in trying to make everything right. When she is using an RP approach, she creates equality and they share openly about their concerns. She finds her voice with him, and discovers the partner she “wishes she had had” prior to the merger ending their company. A similar shift happens with her children and husband as she moves from “drill sergeant mom” who knows the right way to do things to supporting her children in their independence and growth and suspending her urge to make everything right to be in a more authentic relationship with her husband.

WD, like MG, sees herself as the fixer, using the same terminology... fixer and problem solver. MG referred to growing up leaders; similarly, WD speaks of causing her staff to take a leadership role in solving issues they face with helping the children who come into their services.

She speaks of using RP in staffing meetings and one-on-one interactions with her staff to let them come up with answers for themselves and build confidence in themselves. In her role as administrator and community leader, she discovers that her way of collaborating prior to RP was driven by her agenda and her ability to drive meetings toward her goals. When she is choosing an RP approach in meetings, “everyone is a partner” and she finds that she creates an open space where they, system representatives or community leaders, jointly come up with ideas or solutions. WD describes an impact from RP on her role as friend. She intentionally practiced RP aspects of listening, questioning and thinking in conversations with a troubled friend and a friend with whom she disagrees politically. In both instances, she found herself moving from having the answers and wanting to be heard to listening to understand better what others believed.

Using RP Aspects

Above I point out that WD used the three aspects of RP that were the primary focus of the trainings in her interactions with friends. Actually, throughout her story, she describes steadily increasing occasions when she intentionally chose to listen, question, or think through an RP lens. In several interactions, she notices she is not listening to understand, but rather framing a response or multi-tasking and splitting her attention. After RP training, she finds she at least is aware of the differences in her listening, and more and more often chooses to use RP listening, what she defines as listening to understand. She is also intentional about using RP questioning to uncover what is important to the other person and to clarify what their perspectives are. She experiences better outcomes in meetings and interactions when she is asking back, reflecting, or clarifying through questions. In WD’s experience, the RP aspect of thinking is illustrated by recognizing when she is acting from her opinions and beliefs and suspending them. WD is very clear that this RP aspect is particularly hard for her, as she often feels she is right and has the

answer and suspending her reactions and urge to tell others her opinion and push them to act accordingly goes against her habitual ways of interacting. Since RP, though, she has accomplished suspending her opinions and beliefs and recognizing when she is open to others and when she is holding on to her own sense of being right. She says she needs to practice “that suspending thing”.

MG’s use of the three aspects colors much of her story as she also notices she is listening, questioning, and thinking differently since RP and as she practices it in her various roles. She notes, like WD, that listening, questioning and thinking are all so closely related one happens with the others. For example, when she describes listening to understand her partner rather than listening for what she needs to do to resolve the problems, she also describes asking questions to clarify what he is saying and asking back to give him the opportunity to voice his concerns. At the same time, she recognizes in herself her frame of comforter and fixer and suspends that urge so that, again, she can listen to understand and ask authentically for his input in coming up with answers. Prior to RP, she tells me, she would have “gone into close up mode”.

Better Ways of Being

MG at one points says she wants to practice because she wants to be “that woman”, the one who is patient, humble, and open. These three ways of being are also important to WD, and both women see them as both necessary to using the aspects of RP but also as resulting from using the aspects. They speak of having to be patient to practice RP listening, willing to pause their almost instinctive urge to resolve issues long enough to hear from others. Humility is the way of being that puts others ahead of self, and again, they share an opinion that this is a “good” way to be. Both have experienced themselves choosing to privilege other voices over theirs. Humility is related to suspending, what they see as putting one’s own reactions and needs aside

to better understand the other. Openness is also closely related to suspending. Openness is the willingness to see and accept another's opinion or belief, which requires one to "let go" of one's own opinions or agenda. Both women see themselves as better at their roles and use the term spiritual to describe practicing these ways of being. They also both agree that being humble, open, and patient all of the time is more than anyone can do, unless, as WD says, one is Buddha.

Practicing RP

MG and WD value what RP has come to mean in their lives. After the trainings, they began trying to use the aspects of RP in staff meetings, planning sessions, and one-on-one interactions. Both give examples of not doing RP well, laughing about the missed opportunities. What is noticeable, though, is that they are aware, upon reflection, of those missed opportunities to practice the aspects. They also both at different points in the six months of the study point out that they are practicing more and more, intentionally deciding to use RP. And, both describe wanting to find ways to meet and practice together so that the skills will not "go by the wayside". They also speak of the importance of dialoging together to remind ourselves of what we want to create in our joint efforts to improve the lives of families in our communities.

Commonplaces

The three commonplaces of narrative inquiry, sociality, temporality and locality, provided the frame for exploring these themes. Almost all examples of MG and WD's experience of RP are described in terms of relationship, the commonplace of sociality. The experience is played out in the roles they have and discussed through the lens of the changing roles theme. MG plays the roles of mother, wife, boss, employee, and partner; WD plays the roles of supervisor, administrator, community leader, and friend. Both participants observe that the practice of the RP aspects has them approaching their roles differently, shifting from a fixit

or problem solver role to a more facilitative or supportive role that allows for co-creation of new solutions to issues with others in their lives.

The commonplace of temporality sets their experience of the impact of RP in the present goings on in the time period of the study. While they learned the aspects of RP in the past training, their experience of impact occurs in the present time of the study as they develop the aspects of RP. Indeed, the inquiry itself and my presence living alongside increased their awareness of and attending to that experience. The exception is their talk of the future in wanting to improve their use of RP.

Both MG and WD's stories are located, either emotionally or physically, in the work place or the home place. In these locales, their relationships are impacted in their day to day goings on. As they grapple with challenges in these places, both women experience changes in the ways of being they demonstrate with others, particularly finding they are humble, patient, and open.

Conclusions

What is the Story Telling Us?

My first conclusion is that both WD and MG's stories describe an experience of impact on their day to day lives from the RP training, demonstrated by their choice to use and improve their use of the aspects of RP and exercise ways of being that are conducive to a more collaborative approach in their roles at home and work. My second conclusion is that the impact was transformative, as demonstrated in their new ways of seeing themselves in relation to other and self and their new awareness of RP and how it can affect their ways of going on with others through the roles they play at both work and home. This is further evidenced by their demonstrating the levels of reflection, framing and theorizing when engaging in the aspects of

RP during dialogue with others to generate new directions or possibilities. Both women speak of experiencing themselves suspending their own reactions based on their perspectives to hear the others in their lives differently, listening to them to understand their perspectives and support their ideas.

My third conclusion is that my involvement as inquirer living alongside them made me a co-author of their stories. This is supported by my presence in the interviews as part of our dialogue, asking back and using RP aspects myself along with them as we explored our experiences. MG and WD both mention in their interviews and journals that my presence as inquirer impacted their experience of RP, efforts to practice RP and awareness of the impact it was having.

Implications for Further Study

New Beginnings

My inquiry, as one would expect of any story, suggests many untold stories to come. MG and WD narrated their experiences of RP and its impact in a very narrow framework of their home and work lives, the roles they played in the lives of their families and colleagues, and the women they wanted to be in those settings. While it is an exciting idea that participants in RP may find their lives impacted in such a way that they see themselves or others as better for it (and I believe this is the case with WD and MG, along with myself), no study and least of all this one can establish with any certainty that this will be the case with others.

More research on the long term impact that participants perceive would, however, assist in identifying what aspects of RP training or RP overall resonate with participants or become embedded in their practice and help shape how we teach students or train professionals to be reflective practitioners. Additionally, further examination of the possibility that RP training with

subsequent practice is transformative in the lives of adult learners could give us a new perspective on transformative learning outside of the classroom and how it is experienced by learners over time, helping to further clarify what transformative means to educators and learners. The experience of WD and MG opens up a line of questioning about transformative experiences and whether TL is an outcome of these experiences or if TL is actually a process that can continue throughout life, such as may happen with ongoing reflection, framing, and theorizing using the aspects of RP.

There is a broader context for further study of participants' stories of RP, and arguably more pertinent. In action research, we are in the midst of the experiences of our participants. Examination of the impact on our own practices as teachers, trainers, and administrators of experiencing RP with others rather than observing it in others could provide valuable insights into our own authentic reflective practices.

And, finally, there is value in looking closely at the possibility that a process for improving practice may actually improve the lives of human beings. This study opens up for questioning and consideration that participants may experience themselves as better human beings, practicing better ways of being and focusing on others, when they are practicing RP. In other words, can people's lives improve for having had this experience? This question is what drives my own practice and academic goals. It is my hope that this inquiry could begin a larger conversation in the field of educational psychology that moves beyond our outcomes as educators in the classroom or training room to what real differences we can make for those whose lives we touch.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – Informed Consent Form**Office of Research****Research Compliance Services**

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT**The Rest of the Story: Reflective Practice in the Lives of RP Training Participants****INTRODUCTION**

You are invited to participate in a doctoral dissertation research study. The purpose of this study is to investigate what meaning participants in reflective practice (RP) training give the experience after the training, in their day-to-day lives. This research promises to add to the related literature and practice of RP.

Each participant agrees to undergo a minimum of four interviews and provide bi-weekly journal entries from April 1, 2015 to December 30, 2015.

By volunteering to participate in this study, you consent to having your interview audio recorded and transcribed, and along with excerpts from your electronic journal, used as sources of data. Your interviews will be transcribed so that the researcher may look for themes that address her research questions. The files will be deleted immediately upon completion of the dissertation project. Relevant excerpts from volunteer participant journals will be used to highlight interview data.

RISKS

To protect your privacy and confidentiality, real names or other identifying information within data will be replaced with pseudonyms for purposes of transcribing audio files and reporting findings. You will be given an opportunity to review the findings and offer feedback to the researcher. Summaries of the dissertation resulting from this research will be shared with all participants.

BENEFITS

Results from this study will contribute to the literature of collaborative learning and reflective practice and lead to a greater understanding of reflective practice training and if and how reflective practice skills may influence the lives of participants. You, as participants, stand to gain a fuller perspective on their own ongoing narratives of themselves as developing reflective practitioners.

CONFIDENTIALITY

No identifying personal reference will be made in oral or written reports of this research that could link volunteer participants to this study. However, as participants, you will know the identity of other participants in the study, as they will know your identity. And, because this study only has two participants, you and the other participant will know whose experiences are being shared in the final report.

Your data, and all participants' data including audio files, transcripts and journals will be stored in password protected electronic files or in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's private office at 27 Aquifer Brae Lane, Waynesville, NC. The transcriptionist will be required to sign a Confidentiality Form before transcribing audio files. If others assist in analyzing a transcript, pseudonyms will replace actual names and any personal reference or reference to other people will be deleted from the transcript. All audio files that are transcribed will be deleted immediately after the dissertation is published. At the completion of the dissertation project, volunteer participant electronic journals will be deleted.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study), you may contact the researcher, Patricia Long, at 27 Aquifer Brae Lane, Waynesville, NC 28786 or by phone at (828) 508-2256. If you have questions about your rights as a volunteer participant, contact University of Tennessee Research Compliance Services of the Office of Research at (865) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data analysis is completed your data will be destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Researcher's signature _____ Date _____

Initials:

Participant _____

Researcher _____

APPENDIX B – Transcriptionist Confidentiality Form**The Rest of the Story: Reflective Practice in the Lives of RP Training Participants****Transcriber's Pledge of Confidentiality**

As a transcribing typist of this research project, I understand that I will be hearing tapes of confidential interviews. The information on these tapes has been revealed by research participants who participated in this project in good faith that their interviews would remain strictly confidential. I understand that I have a responsibility to honor this confidential agreement. I hereby agree not to share any information on these tapes with anyone except the primary researcher of this project. Any violation of this agreement would constitute a serious breach of ethical standards, and I pledge not to do so.

Transcribing Typist

Date

Researcher

Date

APPENDIX C - IRB Approval Letter

THE UNIVERSITY of TENNESSEE 
KNOXVILLE
Office of Research & Engagement
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)

1534 White Ave.
Knoxville, TN 37996-1529
865-974-7697
fax 865-974-7400

March 27, 2015

Patricia Randall Long,

UTK - Educational Psychology & Counseling

Re: UTK IRB-15-02185-XP

Study Title: The Rest of the Story: Reflective Practice in the Lives of RP Training Participants

Dear Ms. Long:

The Administrative Section of the UTK Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed your **application** for the above referenced project. It determined that your application is eligible for **expedited** review under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1), categories (6) and (7). The IRB has reviewed these materials and determined that they do comply with proper consideration for the rights and welfare of human subjects and the regulatory requirements for the protection of human subjects. Therefore, this letter constitutes full approval by the IRB of your application as submitted, including the use of the stamped-IRB-approved, dated informed consent form. Approval of this study will be valid from March 27, 2015 to March 26, 2016.

In the event that subjects are to be recruited using solicitation materials, such as brochures, posters, web-based advertisements, etc., these materials must receive prior approval of the IRB. Any revisions in the approved application must also be submitted to and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. In addition, you are responsible for reporting any unanticipated serious adverse events or other problems involving risks to subjects or others in the manner required by the local IRB policy.

Finally, **re-approval** of your project is required by the IRB in accord with the conditions specified above. You may not continue the research study beyond the time or other limits specified unless you obtain prior written approval of the IRB.

Sincerely,



Colleen P. Gilrane,
Ph.D. Chair

VITA

Patricia R. Long is currently owner and president of Shared Vision Consulting, LLC. Ms. Long provides overall leadership and coordination of system improvement projects. Her extensive experience with juvenile justice, child welfare and school systems and training in collaborative processes, multi-agency coordination, results based accountability, and systems improvement make her uniquely suited to the creation and management of integrated service projects involving government, Tribal and private entities serving at risk populations. To support such projects, Ms. Long has successfully written for private, state and federal grants. She has presented at state and national conferences on collaborative integrative solutions for systems and internationally on collaborative learning processes.

Patricia is a fellow with the Georgetown Center for Juvenile Justice Reform and holds a Master's degree in English Literature. Upon acceptance of this dissertation, she will have graduated with the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Psychology and Research from University of Tennessee.