

# Narrative Research Designs

*People live storied lives. They tell stories to share their lives with others and to provide their personal accounts about classrooms, schools, educational issues, and the settings in which they work. When people tell stories to researchers, they feel listened to, and their information brings researchers closer to the actual practice of education. Thus, stories reported in qualitative narrative research enrich the lives of both the researcher and the participant. This chapter defines narrative research, identifies when you use it, assesses the key characteristics of it, and advances the steps in conducting and evaluating this design.*

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- Describe narrative research, and describe when to use it, and how it developed.
- Identify the types of narrative designs.
- Describe the key characteristics of narrative designs.
- Identify some potential ethical issues in gathering stories.
- Understand the steps used in conducting narrative research.
- List criteria for evaluating a narrative study.

Maria chooses a narrative design for her research project studying the possession of weapons by high school students. Maria's teacher friend Millie has a story to tell about how she encountered a student in the high school who was hiding a weapon in his locker. Maria studies this question: "What is the story of a teacher who found a student hiding a weapon in her high school?" Maria interviews Millie and listens to her stories about her experiences with the student, with other teachers, and with the school principal. The story falls into an easy chronology from the initial incident to the follow-up discussions. To make the account as accurate as possible, Maria collaborates with Millie in writing up the story, and she shares the written report as it unfolds. Maria engages in narrative research.

## WHAT IS NARRATIVE RESEARCH AND HOW DID IT DEVELOP?

The term *narrative* comes from the Greek word *narrate*. Researchers (Erickson, Flexner, Carruth, & Hawkins) describe the lives of individuals and write narratives of individual experiences as a distinct form of qualitative research. In narrative research, the researcher, person, gathering data through the process of listening and discussing the meaning of the experience, and its popularity and interest, national and international journals have written about it, and educational journals have written about it. New books are written about the process of conducting narrative research.

### When Do You Use Narrative Research?

You use narrative research when you want to report their stories. In school settings, narrative research studies, researchers establish a common held perception that reduces a commonly held perception from practice and has little difficulty sharing their stories may make heard. When they tell a story, they are heard (McEwan & Egan, 1995). Tell their stories about their experiences in everyday, normal form of data.

You use narrative research when you want to report their stories. Narrative research is a literary form and it provides a qualitative picture of cultural norms, as well as a research. As an example of research on individuals with a major mental illness and spent 2-3 years in an apartment and reconnect with their families.

### How Did Narrative Research Develop?

Dewey's (1938) theory of experience and future experiences are central to narrative research (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999). In the 1980s. Researchers have written about narrative research. Clandinin and Connelly's (1999) research has shown that researchers have substantial understanding of experience in all the human sciences and in the specific field of study. Writing about the process of conducting narrative research.

## WHAT IS NARRATIVE RESEARCH, WHEN DO YOU USE IT, AND HOW DID IT DEVELOP?

The term *narrative* comes from the verb “to narrate” or “to tell (as a story) in detail” (Ehrlich, Flexner, Carruth, & Hawkins, 1980, p. 442). In **narrative research designs**, researchers describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about people’s lives, and write narratives of individual experiences (Clandinin, 2013; Riessman, 2008). As a distinct form of qualitative research, a narrative typically focuses on studying a single person, gathering data through the collection of stories, reporting individual experiences, and discussing the meaning of those experiences for the individual. With its growth in popularity and interest, national research conferences have devoted sessions and papers to it, and educational journals have published stories reported by teachers, students, and other educators. New books are now available from publishers that provide essential information about the process of conducting this form of qualitative inquiry.

### When Do You Use Narrative Research?

You use narrative research when you have individuals willing to tell their stories and you want to report their stories. For educators looking for personal experiences in actual school settings, narrative research offers practical, specific insights. By conducting narrative studies, researchers establish a close bond with the participants. This may help reduce a commonly held perception by practitioners in the field that research is distinct from practice and has little direct application. Additionally, for participants in a study, sharing their stories may make them feel that their stories are important and that they are heard. When they tell a story, it helps them understand topics that they need to process (McEwan & Egan, 1995). Telling stories is a natural part of life, and individuals all have stories about their experiences to tell others. In this way, narrative research captures an everyday, normal form of data that is familiar to individuals.

You use narrative research when the stories told to you follow a chronology of events. Narrative research is a literary form of qualitative research with strong ties to literature, and it provides a qualitative approach in which you can write in a persuasive, literary form. It focuses on the microanalytic picture—individual stories—rather than the broader picture of cultural norms, as in ethnography, or abstract theories, as in grounded theory research. As an example of this micropicture, consider the detailed stories presented of individuals with a major mental illness moving on from homelessness (Kirkpatrick & Byrne, 2009). For example, after running a successful business, Shawna developed a mental illness and spent 2–3 years living without a home. A program helped her find an apartment and reconnect with her family (Kirkpatrick & Byrne, 2009).

### How Did Narrative Research Develop?

Dewey’s (1938) theory of experience based on the principles of continuity of past, present, and future experiences and interactions within situations provides the philosophical roots for narrative research (Clandinin, 2013). Narrative research has been used since at least the 1980s. Researchers have increasingly used narrative research, particularly since Connelly and Clandinin’s (1990) article introduced narrative inquiry to educational researchers. They have substantially developed narrative inquiry as a methodology focused on understanding experiences. The “narrative turn,” as Riessman (2008) called it, embraces all the human sciences so that this form of research is not the province of any specific field of study. Writers in literature, history, anthropology, sociology, sociolinguistics,

and education all lay claim to narrative and have developed discipline-specific procedures. Like the art and science of portraiture discussed recently in the social sciences, design involves drawing portraits of individuals and documenting their voices and their visions within a social and cultural context (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

However, a comprehensive overview of this design of research in education emerged in 1990. Educators D. Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly provided the first overview of narrative research for the field of education. In their informative, classic article “Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry,” published in the *Educational Researcher* (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), they cited many social science applications of narrative, elaborated on the process of collecting narrative field notes, and discussed the writing and structure of a narrative study. This article expanded their earlier discussion about narrative within the context of teaching and learning in classrooms (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). These two authors expounded their ideas in a book titled *Narrative Inquiry* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), which openly espoused “what narrative researchers do” (p. 48). Clandinin (2013) updated these ideas based on over 10 years of development of the methodology.

Within the field of education, several trends have influenced the development of narrative research. Cortazzi (1993) suggested three factors. First, there is currently an increased emphasis on teacher reflection. Second, more emphasis is being placed on teachers’ knowledge—what they know, how they think, how they develop professionally, and how they make decisions in the classroom. Third, educators seek to bring teachers’ voices to the forefront by empowering teachers to talk about their experiences. For example, Craig (2009) presented the lived stories of teachers in Yeager School. She used stories to understand knowledge and professional learning communities among teachers in schools during a 3-year period of reform. For women in general, as well as for female teachers, their stories to children, to adolescent girls, and to their own female associates often take on a feminine repertoire to serve their female audiences (Degh, 1995). Hearing these stories has encouraged educational studies using the narrative approach. In fact, in education, a special interest group in the American Educational Research Association has been formed to create an ongoing discussion about narrative research.

A growing number of interdisciplinary social scientists outside education have offered procedural guidance for narrative reports as a form of qualitative research (e.g., see Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998 [psychology]; Cortazzi, 1993 [sociology]; Holloway & Freshwater, 2009 [nursing]; Riessman, 2008 [medical sociology]). Interdisciplinary efforts at narrative research have also been encouraged by the *Narrative Study of Lives* annual series, which began in 1993 (e.g., Josselson & Lieblich, 1993).

#### MyLab Education Self-Check 15.1

## WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF NARRATIVE DESIGNS?

Narrative research assumes multiple forms. If you plan to conduct a narrative study, you need to consider what *type* of narrative study to conduct. Narrative research is an overarching category for a variety of research practices (see Casey, 1995/1996), as shown in Figure 15.1. For individuals planning a narrative study, each type of narrative provides a structure for conducting the study and references for how to conduct the project that faculty, journal reviewers, and book publishers will recognize. For those reading narrative studies, it is less important to know what type of narrative is being used and more important to recognize the essential *characteristics* of the types. The five questions discussed in the following subsections are helpful in determining your type of narrative study.

FIGURE 15.1

## Examples of Types of Narrative Research Forms

- Autobiographies
- Biographies
- Life writing
- Personal accounts
- Personal narratives
- Narrative interviews
- Personal documents
- Documents of life
- Life stories and life histories
- Oral histories
- Ethnohistories
- Ethnobiographies
- Autoethnographies
- Ethnopsychologies
- Person-centered ethnographies
- Popular memories
- Latin American *testimonios*
- Polish memoirs

Source: Adapted from Casey (1995/1996).

### Who Writes or Records the Story?

Determining who will write and record the individual's story is a basic distinction in narrative research. A **biography** is a form of narrative study in which the researcher writes and records the experiences of another person's life. Typically, researchers construct biographies from records and archives (Angrosino, 1989), although researchers sometimes use other sources of information, such as interviews and photographs. In an **autobiography**, the individual who is the subject of the study writes the account. As a growing and expanding approach to qualitative research, you can find reports of autobiographical accounts of teachers as professionals (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) and methodological insight in books such as Ellis (2004) and Muncey (2010).

### How Much of a Life Is Recorded and Presented?

This question introduces a second distinction among narrative studies. In anthropology, numerous examples exist of stories of an individual's entire life. A **life history** is a narrative story of the entire life experiences of a person. Anthropologists, for example, engage in life history research to learn about an individual's life within the context of a culture-sharing group. Often, the focus includes turning points or significant events in the life of an individual (Angrosino, 1989). However, in education, narrative studies typically do not involve the account of an entire life, but instead focus on an episode or a single event in the individual's life. A **personal experience story** is a narrative study of an individual's personal experience found in single or multiple episodes, private situations, or communal folklore (Denzin, 2014). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) broadened the personal experience story to be both personal and social and conveyed this stance as the essence of the experiences reported about teachers and teaching in schools.

### Who Provides the Story?

A third approach for identifying the type of narrative is to examine closely who provides the story. This factor is especially relevant in education, where types of educators or learners have been the focus of many narrative studies. For example, **teachers' stories** are personal accounts by teachers of their own personal classroom experiences. As a popular form of narrative in education, researchers report teachers' stories to capture the lives of teachers as professionals and to examine learning in classrooms (e.g., Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). Other narrative studies focus on students in the classroom. In **children's stories**, narrative researchers ask the children in classrooms to present orally or in writing



## Chronology of the Experiences

Understanding the individual's past as well as the present and future is another key element in narrative research. Narrative researchers analyze and report a chronology of an individual's experiences. When researchers focus on understanding these experiences, they elicit information about a participant's past, present, and future. **Chronology** in narrative designs means that the researcher analyzes and writes about an individual life using a time sequence or chronology of events. Cortazzi (1993) suggested that the chronology of narrative research emphasizes a sequence, which sets narrative apart from other genres of research. For example, in a study about a teacher's use of tablets in a high school classroom, the inquirer would include information about the teacher's introduction to tablets, current tablet use, and future goals and aspirations. The story reported by the researcher would include a discussion about the sequence of events for this teacher.

## Collecting Individual Stories

To develop this chronological perspective of individual experiences, the narrative researcher asks the participant to tell a story (or stories) about his or her experiences. Narrative researchers place emphasis on collecting the stories told to them by individuals or gathered from a wide variety of field texts. These accounts might arise during informal group conversations or from one-on-one interviews. A **story** in narrative research is a first-person oral telling or retelling of an individual. Often, these stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Similar to basic elements found in good novels, these aspects involve a predicament, conflict, or struggle; a protagonist or character; and a sequence with implied causality (a plot) during which the predicament is resolved in some fashion (Carter, 1993). In a more general sense, the story might include the elements typically found in novels, such as time, place, plot, and scene (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). For those relating to narrative from a literary perspective, the sequence might be the development of the plot as it unfolds, the emergence of a crisis or turning point, and the conclusion or denouement. Narrative researchers hope to capture this story line as they listen to individuals tell their stories.

Narrative researchers collect stories from several data sources. **Field texts** represent information from different sources collected by researchers in a narrative design. Up to this point, our examples have illustrated collecting stories by using discussions, conversations, or interviews between a researcher and one individual. However, the stories might be autobiographical, with the researcher reflecting on his or her story and interweaving that story with those of others. Often, the researcher's role in the inquiry process may be central, in which they find themselves in a "nested set of stories" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 63). Journals are another form used for collecting stories, as are field notes written by either the researcher or the participant. Letters provide useful data. These letters may be written back and forth between participants, between research collaborators, or between the researchers and participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Family stories, photographs, and memory boxes—collections of items that trigger our memories—are other forms used for collecting stories in narrative research.

## Restorying

After individuals tell a story about their experiences, narrative researchers retell (or restory or remap) the story in their own words. They do this to provide order and sequence to a story that may have been told out of sequence. **Restorying** is the process in which the researcher gathers stories, analyzes them for key elements of the story (e.g., time, place, plot, and scene), and then rewrites the story to place it in a chronological sequence.

**TABLE 15.2**  
Retranscribing and Restorying a Transcript

Transcription of Audio Recording (Raw Data)	Retranscription by the Researcher*	Restory by the Researcher
<p>"Well, I know it wasn't the first time but I remember this one most vividly. Almost . . . about a year ago, I had been trying to quit and I hadn't smoked for about, I'd say about a month or more, I think I just didn't want to do it anymore. There was this guy that I liked at McDonald's, but he didn't like me, he liked my best friend. We all worked at McDonald's after school until close. Oh, wow, I had nicotine fits a lot. Sometimes you get shaky. You get really high, you know, just like you need to go get some fresh air. You need to get a cigarette, just like, you know, you just get really hyper and start bouncing off the walls. I calmed down after a little bit, but . . . I was tempted to start again during the month I quit. Uhm, well my friends would be smoking outside by the tree, so it was like you know, you look at it and you're just like, it kind of looks like a cupcake or something good, you know. Just like you want, but then they ask you, 'Hey, do you want to drive or something?' Just say, 'No.' So I'm trying to quit but I can't do it. They understand but then it's just like, 'Okay. I gotta go home now' and I get to go to bed. Sometimes I just go back inside the school cause you can't smoke inside there so . . . I might have slipped maybe one or two but I mean I was upset, tense. This guy I liked started going out with my best friend and so then I got really upset and started just smoking again just like you know. That's the one that I really remember . . . me and her were best friends no more."</p>	<p>about a year ago, [s] I [c] had been trying to quit and I hadn't smoked for about, I just didn't want to do it anymore [p] was this guy [c], that I liked [a] at McDonald's [s], but he didn't like me, he liked my best friend [c]. I had nicotine fits [a] a lot. You get shaky [a]. You get really high [a] You need to go get some fresh air. You need to get a cigarette [a]. You just get really hyper and start bouncing off the walls [a]. I calmed down after a little bit [a], friends [c] would be smoking outside by the tree [s]. It looks like a cupcake or something good [a]. Hey, do you want to drive or something? [a] "No. I'm trying to quit [a]." I'd go to bed [a]. Sometimes I just go back inside the school [s] cause you can't smoke inside there, [a] I slipped maybe one or two but [a], I was upset, tense [a]. This guy I liked started going out with my best friend [a]. I got really upset and started just smoking again [a]. That's the one that I really remember . . . me and her were best friends no more [r].</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A year ago, I worked at McDonald's and I didn't buy cigarettes for about a month.</li> <li>• I had nicotine fits.</li> <li>• I got shaky.</li> <li>• I got high.</li> <li>• I got hyper.</li> <li>• I started bouncing off the walls.</li> <li>• I needed air.</li> <li>• I went outside.</li> <li>• Friends were smoking by the tree.</li> <li>• I wanted a cigarette because they looked good.</li> <li>• I wanted to drive.</li> <li>• I went inside the school.</li> <li>• I went home to bed.</li> <li>• I calmed down.</li> <li>• The guy I liked from McDonald's started dating my friend.</li> <li>• I got upset and tense.</li> <li>• I slipped one or two cigarettes.</li> <li>• I started smoking again.</li> <li>• We're not friends any more.</li> </ul>

\*Key to codes in the retranscription: setting [s], characters [c], actions [a], problem [p], and resolution [r].  
Source: Adapted from Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2000).

When individuals tell a story, this sequence is often missing or not logically developed. By restorying, the researcher provides a chronological sequence and a causal link among ideas. There are several ways to restory the narrative.

Examine the transcript, shown in Table 15.2, from a narrative project addressing adolescent smoking behavior (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2000). This table displays the process of restorying interview data for a high school student who is attempting to quit smoking. The process involves three stages:

1. The researcher conducts the interview and transcribes the conversation from an audio recording. This transcription is shown in the first column as raw data.
2. Next, the narrative researcher retranscribes the raw data by identifying the key elements of the story. This is shown in the second column. The key at the bottom of the table indicates the codes used by the researcher to identify the setting [s], characters [c], actions [a], problem [p], and resolution [r] in the student's transcript.

**TABLE 15.3**  
Organizing the Story Elements into the Problem Solution Narrative Structure

Setting	Characters	Actions	Problem	Resolution
Context, environment, conditions, place, time, locale, year, and era	Individuals in the story described as archetypes, personalities, their behaviors, style, and patterns	Movements of individuals through the story illustrating the character's thinking or behaviors	Questions to be answered or phenomena to be described or explained	Answers to questions and explanations about what caused the character to change

Source: Adapted from Ollerenshaw (1998).

- Finally, the narrative researcher restories the student's account by organizing the key codes into a sequence. The sequence presented in this passage is setting, characters, actions, problem, and resolution, although another narrative researcher might report these elements in another order. This restorying begins with the place (McDonald's), the characters (the student), and then the events (behaviors, such as "shaky" and "hyper"). The researcher reworks the transcription to identify the elements of the story and restories the elements into a logical sequence of activities.

To clearly identify these elements, the researcher might organize them into a table similar to Table 15.3. This table describes five elements used in restorying (Ollerenshaw, 1998). The setting is the specific situation of the story, illustrated by such factors as time, locale, or year. The researcher may discuss characters in a story as archetypes or portray them through their personalities, behaviors, styles, or patterns. The actions are the movements of the individuals in the story, such as the specific thinking or behaving that occurs during the story. The problem represents the questions or concerns that arise during the story or the phenomena that need to be described or explained. The resolution is the outcome of addressing the problem: the answer to a question or the conclusion reached in the story. It may involve an explanation about what caused the character to change in the story.

The elements of setting, characters, actions, problem, and resolution illustrate only one example of the elements that narrative researchers look for as they restory an individual's experiences. They might also use the elements of the three-dimensional-space narrative structure advanced by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). As shown in Table 15.4, the

**TABLE 15.4**  
Three-Dimensional-Space Narrative Structure

Interaction		Continuity			Situation
Personal	Social	Past	Present	Future	Place
Look inward to internal conditions, feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral dispositions	Look outward to existential conditions in the environment with other people and their intentions, purposes, assumptions, and points of view	Look backward to remembered stories and experiences from earlier times	Look at current stories and experiences relating to actions of an event	Look forward to implied and possible experiences and plotlines	Look at context, time, and place situated in a physical landscape or in a setting bounded by characters' intentions, purposes, and different points of view

Source: Adapted from Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Copyright © 2000. Reproduced with permission of John Wiley & Sons Inc.



## WHAT ARE SOME POTENTIAL ETHICAL ISSUES IN GATHERING STORIES?

When gathering stories, narrative researchers need to be cautious about the stories. Is the story authentic? The participant may “fake the data” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 10), providing a Pollyanna story or a story with a typical Hollywood ending, where the good guy or girl always wins. This distortion of the data may occur in any research study, and it presents an issue for narrative researchers in particular because they rely heavily on self-reported information from participants. The collection of multiple field texts, the triangulation of data, and member checking can help ensure that good data are collected.

Participants may not be able to tell the *real* story. This inability may arise when experiences are simply too horrific to report or too raw to recall (e.g., Holocaust or disaster victims). It may also occur when individuals fear sanctions against them if they report their story, such as in sexual harassment cases. The real story may also not emerge because individuals simply cannot recall it—the story is buried too deeply in the subconscious. It may also occur because individuals base their stories on events that happened years ago, leading to early memories that may distort events and provide inventions of past actions (Lieblich et al., 1998). Although distortion, fear of reprisal, and inability to tell may plague storytellers, narrative researchers remind us that stories are truthful experiences and that any story told has an element of truth in it (Riessman, 2008).

Narrative inquiry involves engaging with participants and working together closely to develop a narrative. That relationship requires attention and brings special considerations, such as ensuring that participation is voluntary and protecting the rights of participants. Institutional review boards may also need information and education on the procedures if they are unfamiliar with narrative inquiry. Clandinin, Caine, Lessard, and Huber (2016) note the importance of “relational ethics” (p. 199) throughout the research process, from planning the study, to obtaining institutional review board approval, to working with participants ethically, and finally to maintaining the relationship in reporting while ensuring its rigor.

### Ethical Dilemma

#### When Narrative Researchers Report about Tensions

Ethics spans the entire research process. What happens ethically after the researcher concludes the study? Clandinin (2006) wrote that responsibilities may not end and that they may linger and reappear and “in some sense haunt us” (p. 5). This is especially so when the narratives focus on tensions and the writer creates “counterstories” that are read by others, creating vulnerabilities for individuals, such as teachers, who talk about tension in their schools and classrooms. One strategy for shielding individuals who provide narrative stories is the use of “fictionalized interim research texts” (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2010). These texts are composed from multiple field texts based on various research experiences. This composite type of story thus protects individuals who may feel vulnerable to having their stories told. Narrative researchers need to be “awake” to these vulnerabilities when they tell counterstories.

As you consider your narrative research study, assuming that your narrative might create conflict for your participant after the study is completed and shared, what strategies will you use to shield the individual?

The telling of the story by the participant also raises the issue of who owns the story. In reporting stories of individuals marginalized in our society, narrative researchers run the risk of reporting stories that they do not have permission to tell. At the minimum, narrative inquirers can obtain permission to report stories and inform individuals of the purposes and use of the stories at the beginning of the project.

Along with the potential problem of ownership is also the issue of whether the participant's *voice is lost* in the final narrative report. For example, when restorying is involved, it is possible for the report to reflect the researcher's story and not the participant's story. Using extensive participant quotes and the precise language of the participant and carefully constructing the time and place for the story may help to ameliorate this problem. A related issue is whether the researcher *gains* in the study at the expense of the participant. Careful attention to reciprocity or giving back to participants, such as serving as a volunteer in a classroom or providing an award for participating in the study, will maintain gains for both the researcher and the participant. A final issue is whether the story told has long-lasting negative implications for the participant. As discussed in "Ethical Dilemma: When Narrative Researchers Report about Tensions," one strategy is to tell a composite story based on various research experiences.

MyLab Education Self-Check 15.4

MyLab Education Application Exercise 15.3: Thinking Like a Researcher: Ethics and Narrative Research

## WHAT ARE THE STEPS IN CONDUCTING NARRATIVE RESEARCH?

Regardless of the type or form of narrative research, educators who conduct a narrative study proceed through similar steps, as shown in Figure 15.3. Seven major steps make up the process typically undertaken during a narrative study. A visualization of the process as a circle shows that all steps are interconnected and not necessarily linear. The use of arrows to show the direction of steps is only a suggestion and is not prescriptive of a process that you might use.

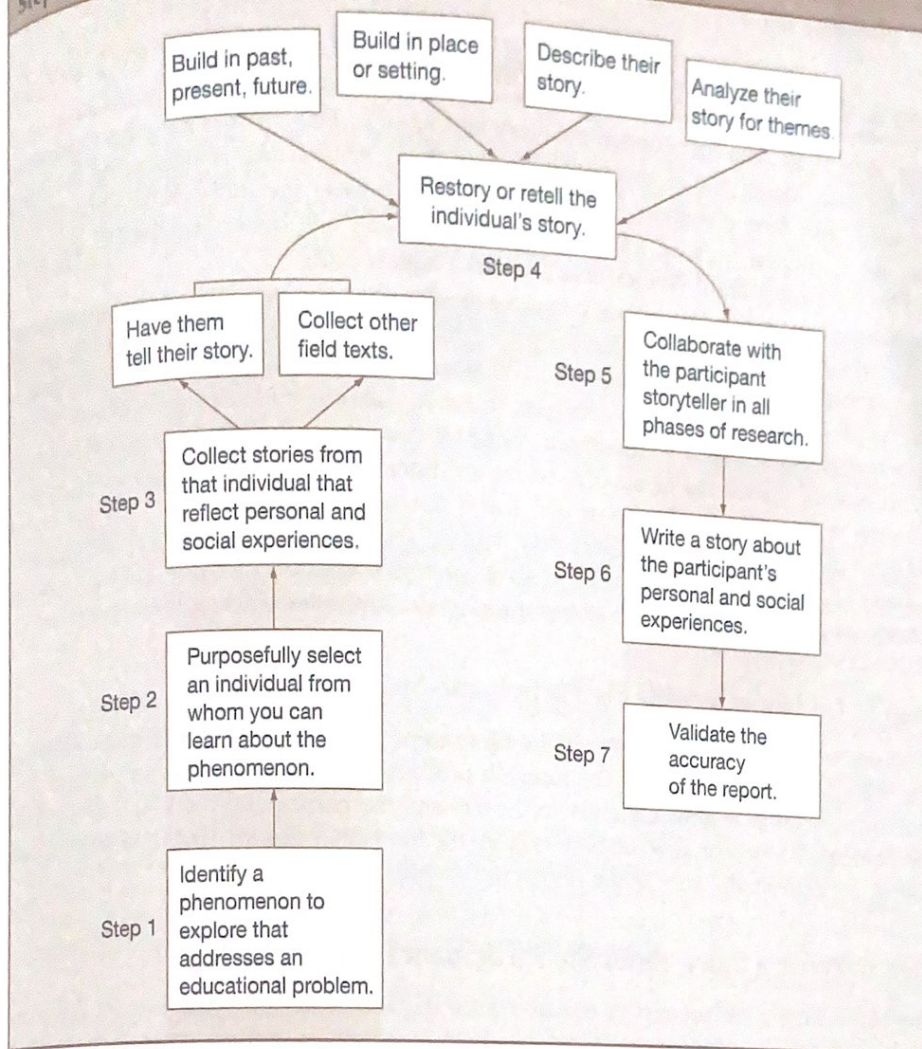
### Step 1. Identify a Phenomenon to Explore That Addresses an Educational Problem

As with all research projects, the process begins by focusing on a research problem to study and identifying, in qualitative research, a central phenomenon to explore. Although the phenomenon of interest in narrative is the story (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), you need to identify an issue or a concern. For example, the issue for Huber (1999), in a narrative study of children in a classroom, consisted of stories about the difficulties that she and her student teacher Shaun had meeting the diverse needs of students. This included children excluding other children, using hurtful words with each other, and persistently using anger and aggression to solve problems. When exploring issues such as these, you seek to understand the personal or social experiences of an individual or individuals in an educational setting.

### Step 2. Purposefully Select an Individual from Whom You Can Learn about the Phenomenon

You next find an individual or individuals who can provide an understanding of the phenomenon. The participant may be someone who is typical or someone who is critical to study because he or she has experienced a specific issue or situation. Other options

**FIGURE 15.3**  
Steps in Conducting Narrative Research



for sampling are also available. Although many narrative studies examine only a single individual, you may study several individuals in a project, each with a different story that may conflict with or be supportive of each other.

### Step 3. Collect the Story from that Individual

Your intent is to collect field texts that will provide the story of an individual's experiences. Perhaps the best way to gather the story is to have the individual tell about his or her experiences through personal conversations or interviews. You can gather other field texts as well, such as these:

- Have the individual record his or her story in a journal or diary
- Observe the individual and record field notes
- Collect letters sent by the individual
- Assemble stories about the individual from family members

- Gather documents, such as memos or official correspondence, about the individual.
- Obtain photographs, memory boxes, and other personal/family/social artifacts.
- Record the individual's life experiences (e.g., dance, theater, music, film, art, and tourism). (Clandinin, 2013)

#### Step 4. Restory or Retell the Individual's Story

Next, review the data that contain the story and retell it. This process includes examining the raw data, identifying elements of a story in them, sequencing or organizing the story elements, and then presenting a retold story that conveys the individual's experiences. You use restorying because the listener and the reader will better understand the story told by the participant if you sequence it into a logical order.

What elements do you identify in the raw data for your story? How do you arrange these elements in *your* story? Narrative researchers differ about the elements to select, although in general, you might mention the narrative elements found in a literary analysis of a novel. For example, time, place, plot, and scene are major elements located in stories by researchers (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Focusing on the plot, you might identify an abstract of the events or actions, orient the listener, convey the complicating action, evaluate its meaning, and resolve the action (Cortazzi, 1993). Another inquirer might examine the story for setting, characters, actions, problem, and resolution (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2000). Although several analytic strategies exist for locating and sequencing a story, all procedures order the story for the reader and listener using literary elements.

#### Step 5. Collaborate with the Participant–Storyteller

This step is one that interacts with all the other steps in the process. You actively collaborate with the participant during the research process. This collaboration can assume several forms, such as negotiating entry to the site and the participant, working closely with the participant to obtain field texts to capture the individual experiences, and writing and telling the individual's story in the researcher's words.

#### Step 6. Write a Story about the Participant's Experiences

The major step in the process of research is for the author to write and present the story of the individual's experiences. Although there is no single way to write the narrative report, it is helpful to include several features of narrative. Your restory certainly claims a central place in the narrative report. In addition, you might include an analysis to highlight specific themes that emerged during the story.

Typically, you do not include a specific literature section; instead, you incorporate the literature and research studies about the problem into the final sections of the study. Because readers are often not familiar with narrative, you might write a section about the importance of narrative research and the procedures involved in it so that you can inform readers about narrative research. As with all qualitative research, you are present in the narrative report, and you use the first-person pronoun to refer to yourself.

#### Step 7. Validate the Accuracy of the Report

You also need to validate the accuracy of your narrative account. When collaboration exists with participants, this validation may occur throughout the project. Several validation practices, such as member checking, triangulating among data sources, and searching for disconfirming evidence, are useful to determine the accuracy and credibility of a narrative account.

MyLab Education Self-Check 15.5  
MyLab Education Application Exercise

### HOW DO YOU EVALUATE?

As a form of qualitative research, good qualitative study. In addition, and evaluating a study might be in Table 15.5, build on suggestions.

TABLE 15.5  
Evaluating the Quality of

#### Quality Criteria

##### The Key Elements

The narrative study focuses on a single individual or two.

The researcher reports the life experience of the individual through his or her stories.

The researcher reports the individual's and restories, possibly to determine chronology.

The final description of the setting, and involve

The the of

MyLab Education Self-Check 15.5  
MyLab Education Application Exercise 15.4: Reading Research: A Narrative Research Study

## HOW DO YOU EVALUATE NARRATIVE RESEARCH?

As a form of qualitative research, narrative needs to be consistent with the criteria for a good qualitative study. In addition, there are specific narrative aspects that people reading and evaluating a study might consider. The criteria for a high-quality narrative study, shown in Table 15.5, build on suggestions by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Riessman (2008).

**TABLE 15.5**  
Evaluating the Quality of a Narrative Study

Quality Criteria	Indicators of Higher Quality	Indicators of Lower Quality
<b>The Key Elements</b> The narrative study focuses on a single individual or two.	The researcher focuses on a single individual (or a couple of individuals) and provides a rationale for why these individuals were chosen for the narrative portrait.	The researcher studies more than two individuals, and thus the stories told are more of a collective story than a detailed story of the lived experiences of an individual. Furthermore, the multiple stories as told dilute the narrative story of any one individual.
The researcher reports the life experiences of the individual through his or her stories.	The researcher gives the reader a sense of an individual's life through vivid details of his or her experiences.	The researcher goes into little detail about the life experiences of an individual. Thus, the reader does not really gain an understanding of an individual's experiences through life.
The researcher takes the individual's stories and restories them, possibly to develop a chronology of events.	The researcher threads together the many stories of the individual's story line, often told in a chronology but not necessarily in a linear chronology of his or her lived experiences. The researcher embeds key events in this story.	The researcher presents random events not tied together in a story line about the individual's life. Alternatively, the researcher might focus on themes about the person's life, rather than on a description of his or her life and experiences (e.g., significant events or epiphanies in the person's life).
The final report describes the context of the story, its setting, and the people involved.	The researcher describes the broader context of the individual's life, such as his or her home, friends, work, activities, interests, hobbies, and so forth. This information is gathered through interviews, observations, and documents that go beyond the individual.	The researcher reports only the stories of the individual without setting his or her life in the context of work, families, and so forth. In this type of narrative, we do not understand the broader setting in which the individual experiences exist.
The researcher reports themes that arise out of the story.	The researcher, after describing the individual and his or her context, advances some important themes to emerge from his or her stories. These themes may be organized chronologically or presented to illustrate significant events in the life of the individual.	The researcher confines the narrative to the individual's stories and does not analyze the data to pull out themes that present the major events or ideas contained in the stories.
The narrative researcher closely collaborates with participants providing the stories.	The researcher invites the participant to look over the data being collected and may possibly involve the participant in shaping the final story to be told in the narrative.	The researcher tells an objective account of the story without checking back with the participant about the accuracy of the story or how it might be best told.

correspondence, about the individual personal/family/social artifacts theater, music, film, art, and literature.

This process includes examining sequencing or organizing the story as the individual's experiences, will better understand the story.

er story? How do you arrange about the elements to select, s found in a literary analysis elements located in stories e plot, you might identify the complicating action. Another inquirer might resolution (Ollerenshaw locating and sequencing using literary elements

You actively collabora- tion can assume sev- orking closely with es, and writing and

resent the story e the narrative ainly claims a ysis to high-

incorporate f the study, about the an inform nt in the

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**MyLab Education Self-Check 15.6**

MyLab Education Application Exercise 15.5: Reading Research: Evaluating a Narrative Research Study

**KEY IDEAS IN THE CHAPTER****What Is Narrative Research, When Is It Used, and How Did It Develop?**

Narrative research has emerged as a popular form of qualitative research. It has become a viable way to study teachers, students, and educators in educational settings. All these individuals have stories to tell about their experiences. Narrative inquirers describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about people's lives, and write narratives of individual experiences. These qualitative studies focus on identifying the experiences of a single individual or several individuals and understanding their past, present, and future experiences. A researcher uses narrative designs when individuals are willing to provide their stories and when their stories follow a chronology.

**The Types of Narrative Designs**

Narrative research is an overarching category for a variety of types of narrative studies. These may be autobiographies, biographies, life histories, and personal narratives of teachers or students. The specific type of narrative study depends on who writes or records the story, how much of a life is recorded and presented, who provides the story, and whether a theory is used by the researcher.

**The Key Characteristics of Narrative Designs**

Narrative researchers collect stories from individuals and retell or restory the participants' stories into a framework, such as a chronology of the characters, the setting, the problem, the actions, and a resolution of those actions. In addition, the inquirer may probe field texts and form them into themes or categories and describe, in detail, the setting or context in which the stories are told. Throughout the research process, the researcher emphasizes collaboration between the researcher and the participant.

**Potential Ethical Issues in Gathering Stories**

Ethical issues may arise at many stages in the process of conducting a narrative study. At the data collection stage, the researcher needs to question whether the story is authentic; determine whether the participants can tell (or recall) the real story; assess who owns the story told; determine whether the participant's voice is included in the final story; stage the project so that the participant, not the researcher, gains as a result of the research; consider the relationship of participants and researchers; and be cognizant of the lasting impact of the story that is told.

**Steps in Conducting a Narrative Study**

The steps in conducting a narrative study are to identify a problem suited for narrative research and to select one or more participants to study. Researchers then collect stories from the participant about his or her life experiences and retell the story to form a chronology of events that may include the characters, setting, problem, actions, and resolution. Throughout this process, collaboration occurs with the participant, and the story composed by the researcher tells of the participant's life experiences.

**Evaluating a Narrative Study**

A good narrative study reports the stories it tells, situates them into a chronology, addresses themes that the stories address, and demonstrates the relationship between the researcher and the participant.

**USEFUL INFORMATION FOR PRODUCTION**

- Individuals planning or conducting a process identified in this chapter.
- Consider the type of narrative design questions: Who writes or records the story? Who provides the story? How are the forms combined?
- The three steps used in restorying and developing a retelling of the story.
- As you listen to a participant's story, consider whether the story is one that individuals can tell the story, and

**USEFUL INFORMATION FOR CONSUMERS**

- Consumers can review the steps to determine how narrative inquirers conduct a narrative study.
- The evaluation criteria discussed in this chapter.
- When narrative researchers check the accuracy of the member checking, or provide a narrative journal article to model the composition of a narrative study.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

A major book to consult is Clandinin and Connelly (2000). This text captures all the steps to constructing a story, including the relationship between the researcher and the participant, and using the

Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, J. M. (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Sage.

Clandinin (2013) wrote an excellent research methodology. The text includes a personal model, and writing useful exemplars of narrative research.

Clandinin, D. J. (2013). *Ethnographic research*. Sage.

### Evaluating a Narrative Study

A good narrative study reports the stories of lived experiences of an individual, organizes them into a chronology, situates them within the setting or context, derives several themes that the stories address, and demonstrates a close collaboration in the narrative project between the researcher and the participant.

### USEFUL INFORMATION FOR PRODUCERS OF RESEARCH

- Individuals planning or conducting a narrative study can employ the steps in the process identified in this chapter.
- Consider the type of narrative design you plan to use. Ask yourself the following questions: Who writes or records the story? How much of a life is recorded and presented? Who provides the story? Is a theoretical lens being used? Can narrative forms be combined?
- The three steps used in restorying provide a structure for processing a transcript and developing a retelling of the participant's story.
- As you listen to a participant's story, consider some of the potential issues that may arise, such as whether the story is authentic, whether data are distorted, whether individuals can tell the story, and who owns the story.

### USEFUL INFORMATION FOR CONSUMERS OF RESEARCH

- Consumers can review the steps in the research process in this chapter to determine how narrative inquirers conduct a study.
- The evaluation criteria discussed in this chapter can be used to assess the quality of a narrative study.
- When narrative researchers conduct an inquiry, they need to report that they have checked the accuracy of their findings. Look for reports about triangulating data, member checking, or providing disconfirming evidence for themes.
- The narrative journal article reported in this study provides one example of narrative research. It is used to identify the major characteristics of a narrative study and to model the composition of a narrative study.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES YOU MIGHT EXAMINE

A major book to consult is the text on narrative inquiry by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). This text captures all aspects of narrative designs from learning to think narratively, to constructing a story using the three-dimensional model, to the types of field texts that narrative researchers collect. It also includes information about composing a narrative text and using the forms available in dissertations and books.

Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Clandinin (2013) wrote an updated text that reflects more current thinking on narrative research methodology. The text also covers aspects of narrative designs, the three-dimensional model, and writing narrative dissertations and books. Clandinin (2013) provides useful exemplars of narrative research throughout the text.

Clandinin, D. J. (2013). *Engaging in narrative inquiry*. New York: Taylor & Francis.