Caring Culture and Leadership Revealed: Narrative Non-Fiction Story Method and the Crystallization Process

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Narrative non-fiction story is a qualitative research method that attempts to capture the voice of human experience (Barone, 1992). Hinchman and Hinchman (1997) suggested that a story begins and ends with everyday life; the very expressions through speech as people tell stories about themselves (p.xvi). It is our stories that give light to the most insignificant experiences in our lives (Bakan, 1996).

Basic human qualities framed in terms of human desire call our attention to the need to tell stories of personal experience, the need for reciprocity in storytelling, and the need for reflection throughout telling and retelling stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). It is storytelling and the relationship between storyteller and audience (singular or plural) that give rise to professional knowledge and offer educational leaders the opportunity for creation and re-creation of the professional culture. Stories are a source of knowledge, efficacious for research, and serve as a catalyst for change.

Cooper (1991) reminded us that "listening to stories is an ancient form of nurturance…a long standing tribal ritual" (p.104). Telling and listening to our own stories encourages us and allows us to frame and reframe our thinking about our professional practice and the context in which it is realized. It allows us to examine ourselves and to clarify our thinking about our personal and professional experiences. Our own stories can serve as intense self-reflection as we seek to

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reconstruct the past, integrate it with the present, and envision a desired future (Cooper).

The authors of *Stories Lives Tell: Narratives and Dialogue in Education* reminded the reader that "adults, like children, are natural storytellers, though they have often learned to suppress their urge to tell stories as a way of knowing" (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p.3). Storytelling serves as a form of self-research, a way to clarify and encourage, and to move thought into language and action. Stories contribute to the understanding of self and of self in relation to others, giving voice to the innermost feeling and thinking. As one's story is combined with stories from other members of the same context, it adds to the collective voice of that culture (Cooper, 1991). MacIntyre (1997) asserted that we can only understand a community or culture if we know their stories as they have told them.

Clandinin and Connelly (1995, 2000) are known foremost in the field of educational research for their use of narrative story method. They declare that it is a method that illuminates the "continuity and wholeness of an individual's life experiences" (2000, p.17). As storytellers, we recreate our journeys through life, examining who we are and who we have been. Our stories serve to deepen our awareness of who we are within the context of our practice as well as enhance our understanding of the context and culture to which we belong.

Introduction to the Research

Although substantial data for the research could have provided a quantitative description of certain elements of the school, the researcher knew that the culture could be more clearly defined if stories of the people within that setting were told. It would not be a truth that was sought, but rather that unique perspective of care evidenced in the school and through the leadership there. The principal's story would give insight into the guiding principles, organizational policies, and operational procedures of the school, as well as reveal the principal's distinct leadership behaviors that create and sustain an ethic of care. As the study progressed, the principal of the school offered an exceptional story told in a common everyday language to enlighten the researcher with a perspective as unique as the principal himself. Not only the principal's story, but those told by others gave evidence of the very essence of caring power as care and power intersect (Sernak, 1998) to create a dynamic that molds the school culture by its provisions for equity and inclusiveness.

As answers to the research questions were sought and obtained purposefully or vicariously through the stories told, there was no single answer or definitive response for which the research begged. This study, situated within a specific context, tells the story of the individual and collective lives of the people in that setting. As this story is told, an understanding of the caring culture of this school is revealed. The story, examined critically through a lens focused on care (Jenlink & Kinnucan-Welsch, 1999, 2001), allowed the researcher to identify specific leadership practices, driven by an ethic of care, that promote personal and organizational excellence. Thus it was revealed that through such leadership practices, each member of the school, in pursuit of excellence, has equitable access to the organization's most powerful opportunities and resources.

This study contributes to the literature in at least three specific ways. First, it provides practitioners evidence of a caring culture in a highly successful school and insight into the quality and characteristics of the heart and mind of caring leadership. The contextually rich detail of the individual stories enhances the understanding of structures, procedures, and patterns of relationships and interactions in this school where care is practiced. Secondly, since few previous studies specifically highlighted the relationship of care and power in schools, this study is significant in that it examined the leadership practices in regard to the use of power situated in contexts that

exemplify an ethic of care. The current base of literature has little to offer about care and power exercised in the school to provide equity and inclusiveness and used to enhance the growth and improvement of each individual and the school as a whole. Revealing evidence of community and commitment among members as fostered by caring leadership, these stories provide a description of a school in which care and power drive the decision-making processes that determine the policies and practices. Lastly, the study contributes to the belief that stories from the field offer not only valid data, but more intimate data, which educators may utilize to inform their practice. For that reason, this research aided in the confirmation that narrative non-fiction story method research can and should be an integral part of scholarly practice.

The Research Design

Narrative non-fiction story method will likely rely on several forms of data including current and historical artifacts, field notes, and observations. Data recorded most frequently however, are derived from interviews with primary members of the context under study (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). For this study, the stories were collected through face-to-face, one-on-one interviews with the principal and other members of the school with the intent to allow participants' stories to be told in their most natural voice.

Participant Selection. For this study, one school site was selected where its principal and five teachers were interviewed. The principal had served on the campus for twenty-five years, seventeen of those as principal and the first eight years as fifth grade teacher. He was the only full time male staff member at the school; therefore all of the teachers who were interviewed were female. Two of the teachers were African-American; three were White/Other than Hispanic. Their years of service at this school ranged from four to twenty-six. Four of the teachers were serving as regular education teachers in grades one, three, four, and five, and one was the gym teacher. There was no design in excluding grade two from the interview process; rather neither teacher at that level volunteered or was designated for interview. All participation was voluntary, and pseudonyms were assigned for the district, the school, and each of the interviewees as well as any person they referenced in their conversations.

The school selected for the research met the criteria as an academically successful public school situated in East Texas. Three criteria governed school selection: the school had to have been rated as "Exemplary" or "Recognized" by the Texas Education Agency within the two previous years, have a student minority population of at least 35%, and have an economically disadvantaged student population of at least 50%. The school selected had been assigned those ratings as well as having been given other academic awards. The student population of the school was recorded as 75% African-American, 18% Hispanic, and 7% White/Other than Hispanic origin. The number of students receiving free or reduced meals constituted 78% of the school enrollment.

Two additional criteria related to the school leader: 1) the principal must have been in the position at the school a minimum of five years and 2) the principal must have evidenced in his/her practice an ethic care according to the literature base. The literature examined as the foundation of this research indicated that principals practicing an ethic of care place students at the center of their practice, desiring that every student reach full potential. These educational leaders value strong relational bonds among the many members of the school community, and implement organizational policies and procedures that provide for inclusion of all stakeholders in decision-making and various school improvement processes. The only criterion for teacher selection was to have been in the school at

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least three of the past five years. The researcher had determined the need for a minimum of five teacher participants to constitute a representative sample.

A purposive sampling technique was used to identify the principal and school. To assist in the sampling process, educational consultants on the School Support Staff at the Education Service Center were contacted to assist in identifying possible sites for study. These consultants worked closely with districts and individual campuses and consequently, they knew the schools and their principals well. They also had an understanding of the schools' organizational structures as well as in-depth and unique perspectives on the various schools' cultures. A list of criteria relative to care and caring cultures, as well as an abstract of the study, were given to the consultants to aid them in understanding the elements of care and caring leadership revealed in the literature and sought in the school community. Any of the region's schools in which both principal and school met the criteria outlined were to be included in their list. Service Center consultants provided the researcher a list of the names of schools and their principals meeting the criteria.

The design stated that an attempt would be made to secure for the research the first principal on the list. If that principal was unable or unwilling to participate in the study, the researcher would move on to the second principal on the list, and so on until a principal from the list was secured for the study. The principal of this study was contacted by telephone and generally informed about the research. He was the first principal contacted and indicated a desire to participate in the research, therefore no other principals were contacted.

To secure secondary participants for the study, the principal was asked to offer the names of two teachers who had been in the school at least three of the past five years who might agree to participate. A snowball sampling technique was to be used with these two initial participants to suggest at least three more teachers who might agree to participate. The staff at this school was small, thus, the principal was reluctant to offer specific teachers, but rather suggested that the researcher interview any of the members who would volunteer. When asked if he knew of two teachers who might have a particularly unique story, the principal suggested the teacher who had been at the school longer than his twenty-five years and another teacher who was the only one on staff who had attended the school as a student. After this introduction to the study in a scheduled faculty meeting, these two teachers agreed to participate and recommended a third. Two additional teachers volunteered to participate.

Establishing Protocol. The teachers were given an overview of the study, informed that any participation would be voluntary, and told that any participant would be allowed to withdraw from the research project at any time should there be a need or desire to do so. They were advised that anyone deciding to participate would be asked to sign a consent form granting the researcher permission to interview, to audio-tape record the interview, and to use the interview for reporting the research. It was explained as well, that the school and each of the participants would be assigned pseudonyms. All names representing persons, the school, and the district that appear throughout the research reports are pseudonyms.

Data Collection. As the instrument for qualitative research, the researcher served as interviewer and personally collected the stories of the principal as the primary source and teachers in the school as the secondary sources. Once the participants were secured for the study, a time for each interview was scheduled. They were advised that note-taking might be used in addition to audio-recording. As stated in interview protocol, the participants were asked to sign informed participant consent forms for interviewing and audio-taping.

Guided by a set of interview questions, each participant was asked to tell his/her own story or personal experiences relative to care, caring relationships, and the evidence of care in the school. As the participants were asked to tell stories of care in their school, the interview questions were used as a tool for maintaining focus on the research questions concerning the characteristics of a caring school culture, caring leadership, and the evidence of caring power.

As the participants and interviewer engaged in the research process, the dialogue became an on-going shared exploration (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The researcher responded to their conversations to encourage extension or further exploration of the experiences and memories being shared. The participants occasionally asked questions of the researcher or prompted input as well, resulting in a strong rapport.

To maintain confidentially and for the purpose of clarity, the researcher personally transcribed the interviews. The transcriptions were written in narrative text, just as events and experiences were told by the individual teachers. The text included the interactions between interviewee and interviewer. Copies of the transcriptions were returned to the respective participants as a form of member check, with an opportunity for additions, deletions, or clarifying comments. Participants noted any revisions they desired on their individual transcripts and returned them to the researcher. Following a period of one week for reflections on the transcriptions, further dialogue between participants and researcher was offered.

Data Analysis

The researcher was responsible for data analysis and reporting. The individual stories, as they were analyzed, combined to develop a composite profile of the school and the school leadership in relation to a practiced ethic of care. The story of each participant was worthy in its uniqueness. The researcher noted in reflections at the close of each story those elements which were believed to contribute to its uniqueness as well as how that particular story related to the foundational literature of this research.

Analysis of Narrative. It was, however, the interrelatedness of the several stories that became the object of the analysis of narrative. Mindful of the topic of the research, the researcher gave credence to the common elements and/or evidence of care, the leadership practices found common throughout the many stories, and any discussion of policies and procedures that gave evidence of caring power. This analysis of the data collected, because of its coherence, allowed the researcher to interpret and integrate the individual stories into an emplotted story (Polkinghorne, 1995) that profiles the reality of caring culture.

An analysis of narrative is accomplished as the researcher explores such a collection of several stories and any accompanying data collected, searching for common themes and connections (Polkinghorne, 1995; Richardson, 1994). Patterns of consistency in each story, across stories, and through several stories gave witness of a strong coherent message. In this sense, the data were examined in their totality so that patterns or themes of the whole emerged. The coherence of meaning, which is hoped for in an analysis of narrative, emerged from the connections and consistencies of the stories shared by the principal and teachers.

Crystallization. Paramount in understanding the creation of narrative from multiple stories collected, and in providing a degree of trustworthiness, is recognition of the phenomenal process of crystallization (Richardson, 1994, 1997). The many experiences relative to care as told in the stories of various members of the school present myriad perspectives. When examining the stories, rather than

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searching for one truth or a "fixed point" of understanding (Richardson, 1997, p. 92), the researcher knew that there were multiple facets to be explored.

In offering an explanation of crystallization, Richardson pointed to the crystal as it "combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multi-dimensionalities, and angles of approach" (1997, p. 92). Disposing of the notion that one should attempt to "triangulate" qualitative research, Richardson suggested that we submit to what we know about crystals. Crystals "grow, change, alter but are not amorphous" (p. 92). They "reflect externalities and refract within themselves …" offering a "…deepened, complex, thoroughly partial understanding of the topic" (p. 92). As the stories are told and retold, and the narrative is created, we can understand that new thinking is stimulated, alternate theories are developed, and different ways of knowing are created (Richardson, 1997). Such was the case for this researcher and the storytellers represented in the study.

Trustworthiness. Narrative non-fiction story method research is frequently questioned for its trustworthiness and truthfulness (Richardson, 1997). Audio-taping the dialogic engagements along with note-taking allowed for greater accuracy in recording the story, however, the researcher provided for trustworthiness through collaborative examination of the transcribed stories and reflection of the interpretations. Common themes and connections were sought, also as a means of offering coherence and validity to the greater story (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Knowing that truth in the story lies in the perception of the one offering the story, the researcher trusted that the interviewees were offering true experiences remembered and told with accuracy.

Accuracy in recording and reporting the story then fell into the hands of the researcher. The intent from the onset of the study was to collect data using the most accurate methods and to record and report that data with precision so that trustworthiness was further ensured.

According to Horn (2000), trustworthiness is also established when the participant agrees to the accuracy of the story and the researcher's interpretation of it. Each of the participants took the opportunity to examine the transcription of the interview in which he or she participated. Each one gave feedback, and appropriate changes were made as requested. One must understand again that the researcher was not seeking a truth through the stories, but rather the real life experiences of those within this context and the recurring themes represented in their stories.

Passages from *The Narrative of Care at Frances Burtyn Elementary*

[Italics indicate exact words of the participants. Pseudonyms are used for the school and each participant. Passages are not necessarily sequenced as in the original research.]

It was a beautiful clear winter afternoon, cool, but not too cool; warm but not too warm. Just the week or two previous, we had been blessed with spring-like showers followed by several unseasonably warm days. As I entered the driveway, I noticed that little patches of green had already sprung up on the grounds of Frances Burtyn Elementary. Children were moving about, some without jackets or sweaters. They were ready for sunny days and dry playgrounds. They were anxious to be outside, just like the grass waiting to spring forth from its winter hideaway (p. 137).

I was anxious to "spring forth" into my newness as well, and with only the restraints of no prior relationship, I began the work of field research. Lunch was over, and only a few students and adults were still transitioning. Everyone appeared to be settling back in for

the routine afternoon activities. I wanted to go visit classrooms and watch some of what happens here at Burtyn Elementary, but that was not my mission for today. As one of the more widely used methods of creating field notes is that of personal interview (Mishler, 1986), I was here to interview the principal, Mr. Steve Barron. I was here to listen to the first story of care and power at this very successful school.

Mr. Barron's story would be one of six that I would be told through personal interview over the next two weeks. As all stories are, these would be molded by both internal and external conditions, internal being the feelings, dispositions, and beliefs of the person involved, and the external being the surrounding environment (Polkinghorne, 1995). My search for understanding of narrative non-fiction story method research had indicated that I would be able to create a narrative from the accumulation of stories told by those most intimate with the subject, the persons at Burtyn Elementary who had experienced care in the school. Once completed, this analysis of narrative would offer the reader insight and understanding (Polkinghorne, 1995) into these issues of care and power at Burtyn.

As my inquiry began to categorize and qualify and "put little things where they fit," I found that each story was all about loving and caring for children. They told of the decisions educators have to make to ensure that what is done is that which is good and right for children. Each story was about how they have found meaning in the vicarious twists and turns of their personal and professional lives and all that they have experienced.

As the six individuals shared their stories of care, my inquiry intensified and a larger story that is now called "A Narrative of Care at Frances Burtyn Elementary" began to come into focus. This narrative is expressed through a common language of care that the participants used to describe their way of being in relation to one another, to describe the leadership at the school, and to elaborate on the various ways that they have chosen to provide the best education and environment for their children.

As an outsider, if I wanted to understand the culture at Burtyn Elementary, I knew that it was crucial for me to understand the common language spoken there. In each of the interviews, I asked the participant to begin with an introduction to Burtyn or just to give me a list of words they might use to describe their school. I wanted a "word wall", a thesaurus of what could be said about this place and these people. Although we occasionally discussed particulars of the physical being of the school to offer some contextual reference, the intended focus was on the human element, both adults and children, their relationships and interactions, their ways of being with and for one another.

Although each story had its uniqueness due to the varied experiences of the people there and the particular details of life at the school they chose to highlight, the common language was quite evident. These first responses would allow me a glimpse of the language that this group of people shares and would help me start my word wall.

As the questions were posed and the answers thoughtfully given, words typically associated with care surfaced, and a picture of care began to emerge. The words that were repeated throughout the interviews were *caring, nurturing, loving, family, community, warm, safe,* and *supportive*. These words were used in a variety of contexts, sometimes when describing the school staff and teachers, sometimes when describing the parents and the students, and always when describing the principal and his leadership. These words were used not only as referents for the present, but the past as well. Because of the contextual variations-time, place, people-the picture of care became

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holographic in nature. When "positioned" one way, care had a certain appearance, but when re-examined at another angle, the picture of care took on a different appearance. I found the same to be true of other terms in their common vocabulary.

Beyond the vocabulary expressing their common language, another way of understanding the culture of this school was to examine their belief system (Polkinghorne, 1988). This was easy to accomplish since, while telling their stories, they each spoke so readily and consistently of their beliefs and gave evidence through their actions. As the stories were told, Polkinghorne's (1988) claim came to mind: our individual stories reveal who we are; our collective story exposes our belief system, our values, and who we are as a community or culture.

First of all I feel that Burtyn is one of the most caring schools I've ever worked (with). Ellen smiled as she offered her first thoughts, but it was in her eyes that I saw truth was being told. *This place has a warm, nurturing environment. The students are aware of the care we give them…they feel safe, loved, important, successful* (Kozol, 2000; Mitchell, 1990; Noddings, 1992; Pellicer, 1999; Scheurich, 1998; Sernak, 1998). *It's a perfect place for a child to learn…it's my favorite place to be.*

Carrie never hesitated when offering the words *compassion* and *respect. There is a great deal of respect here. We look out for the children and their families. We look out for each other and our families.* Her understanding of compassion is that it always reaches out to others and takes on some form of action. *If we know someone's having a really hard time, (we do) little things to help make things better.*

As I pulled these comments from their stories, I began to put some of their terminology into context or frames of reference. This added meaning to the words on the wall. The story began to develop that essence of time as well, as Mr. Barron and Lauraleigh added their experiences with principal leadership previously at Burtyn.

Mr. Barron gave witness that *the caring has always been a part of Burtyn…the principal who was here before me…that was the absolute expectation she had. She was loving, kind…when I became principal, all I had to do was keep that ball rolling.*

Lauraleigh agreed with Mr. Barron about previous principals who set in place a strong ethic of care before she complimented the current one. *When I first came to Burtyn, the principal was very helpful and compassionate. He always had that helpful attitude. And then, she (the next principal) carried on that tradition…very caring, very thoughtful. When they passed the mantle (to Mr. Barron), someone somewhere must have said, 'When you send a leader to Burtyn, you better send someone who loves children.' I have been fortunate to work for principals who care…I have never entertained the thought of leaving.*

Alexandria has been at Burtyn just six years, a short time compared to Lauraleigh, but she recognizes the scope of Mr. Barron's caring leadership. *He really does make this school…the climate, and what it is* (Beck, 1994; Bjorum, 1999; Pellicer, 1999). *He has made it where the kids want to come to school…they feel safe. He has such a personal relationship* (Barth, 1990; Bulach, Brown, & Potter, 1994)*…he knows every child here, knows them by name, knows what they've been doing. He comes in (the classrooms) every morning. They know he's here and that he cares about them.*

It is important to see Mr. Barron's leadership is not just a model of caring behaviors…his ways of caring beyond that to establishing this vision of excellence that drives their work there (Barth, 1990; Bennis, 1984; Pellicer, 1999; Sergiovanni, 1987, 1992, 1996). He told of the blurring and refocusing of the vision of the school. People in the community and on the staff had long thought of too

little of these children's academic abilities. It was as if they thought only the smiling and the hugging and the positive environment was enough. *As far as academic achievement, we were falling short. The caring part had always been a part of Burtyn. What we had to add was the academic part….we're going to prepare them to be winners.*

The change in focus did not come without birth pains, Mr. Barron remembered (Beck, 1994; Brown & Moffett, 1999; Pellicer, 1999). *The first realization we had to come to …was that our children are capable. It was an almost in-your-face thing for some teachers. Yes, he may be from a single-parent home, he may be African-American, he may be poor…but there's no reason he can't learn. Our conversations are not about weaknesses now; they're about strengths…about what they can do.*

The community that serves Burtyn has always been an important consideration the staff at this school. Mr. Barron has sought to serve the community well by involving them at school in the decision-making process and the many activities that are a regular part of the school schedule (Boyer, 1995; Kelts, 1998; Sergiovanni, 1992; Sernak, 1998). *My base of support is in this community. I work for this community, he stressed to me. In order to provide for parent discussion and input of this greater academic focus…*he and the teachers presented to small groups of parents the idea of a very demanding and rigorous academic emphasis at Burtyn. The bottom line of this new way of thinking…was…*do you want to be …just passing kids through the grades? That's the worst kind of discrimination you can have. You know…if we just pass them through…they're not going to graduate from high school.*

Many of the community members and parents know what not graduating from high school means. Not giving these children the best education possible, not demanding of them their best effort, and simply providing social promotion would eventually doom them to a life diminished (Kozol, 1991, 2000; Mitchell, 1990; Scheurich, 1998; Voss, 1993). Although not every parent believed in the new plan, the large majority of the parents have supported the school in this endeavor (Sergiovanni, 1992). Since many of the parents and grandparents of children at Burtyn were students there during their elementary years, selling the new way of thinking to this community was not difficult. Continuity of people had resulted in a strong trust factor… (and as Noddings argues) "…the school cannot achieve its academic goals without providing caring and continuity for students." (1992, p. 14). The building and sustaining of relationships for the span of two and three generations has had profound effect on all the stakeholder groups of Burtyn.

Conclusion

Similar to journal writing, story telling serves as a form of self-reflection and self-analysis (Cooper, 1991). In like manner, the stories of others give voice to the listener's own experiences as well. The process of telling, discussing, and retelling the stories afforded an opportunity for the members of Burtyn to deepen their understanding of their roles in developing and sustaining a culture of care. This new meaning and heightened awareness of caring and its relation to power may inform future actions in the shared decision-making efforts of the school as a whole.

As the school opened its doors to the study, the principal and teachers opened their hearts and minds to give voice about the work they do to care for children. The climate and environment at Frances Burtyn Elementary School is warm and nurturing, loving and caring, safe and trustworthy. The caring culture is evident through the coherence of the spoken word, the physical touch, the academic challenges, and the relational bonds of this school and community. The language at Burtyn is a caring language. It teaches children that they are cared for, as well as teaching them to care. The language is not superficial, but has the depth of a consistent practice of care.

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The leadership has been established as a caring leadership, as the principal is seen as the primary care-giver and role model in caring for the children and in protecting the community's interests in the welfare of the children. The community and staff participate in sharing the vision that the principal has established, as well as in the decision-making processes of the school.

The principal's leadership has promoted the core beliefs of the school in regard to the children's right to a safe and nurturing environment, pursuing the talents and gifts of all children, the professional growth of all adults to improve instruction, and the commitment to high standards of academic achievement. His leadership has realized power through these shared core beliefs and through ongoing accomplishment of their goals.

The power of this principal is shared as it is used to re-energize and revitalize the plans for their immediate work and ways of being with one another. It is *caring power* as it used to create hope in all children and to assist them in preparing for a brighter and more accomplished future. Though not actually spoken, I believe I could safely say that their greatest hope for these children would be that in the midst of accomplishing their life's goals and dreams, through their vocation and avocation, they in turn become great care-givers.

Polkinghorne (1988) explained, that as individuals we story our existence to confirm personal essence, whereas "at the cultural level, narratives serve to give cohesion to shared beliefs and to transmit values" (p. 14). This analysis of narrative must serve to accomplish both perspectives. As an analysis of narrative is conducted, it becomes apparent that narrative non-fiction story method allows the individual voices to remain as they contextualize the unique events and details of each story and become embedded in the greater narrative of a shared existence (Chase, 1996). Once examined, the accumulation of stories told through the voices of those closest to the events offers that more holistic narrative. Recursively examining the stories and the relevant data, focused on time, personal experience and knowledge, and reflection (Clandinin & Connelly, 1991), the narrative emerges. The real life experiences of those within the context and the researcher's ability to identify recurring themes represented in the stories meet to provide depth of understanding concerning the individuals and the greater community or culture.

Closely aligned with the thinking of Richardson (1994), I attempted to disallow fragmentation or isolation of the stories by examining them in totality so that themes and patterns of the whole could emerge. Employing this technique associated with the theory of crystallization (Richardson), I could allow the individual stories and expressions of care to remain intact while observing the multi-faceted and multi-dimensional themes of care come forth, similar to observing the natural development of crystals as they "reflect externalities and refract within themselves" (p. 92).

This narrative of care, revealed through the several stories told by Burtyn's principal and teachers, however, is but one story. It is bound by time and people and other contextual elements. There are surely other stories "out there" waiting to be told and heard. Regardless of the topic of consideration, hearing the stories of personal experience of others in a given context may cause the listeners to reflect and find themselves and their own experiences in those stories. Narrative inquiry as a personal experience method (Barone, 1992; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 1995: Richardson, 1994) is an opportunity for educational leaders to more closely examine and inform their own practice as well as the practice of others. Through contextually rich details, narrative non-fiction story method offers powerful voice to daily practice in schools and provides greater understanding of the culture of the school. The careful analysis employed in this

methodology, combined with the knowledge of the crystallization process, can produce a powerful catalyst for individual and school improvement.

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