

Qualitative Inquiry

<http://qix.sagepub.com>

Writing Our Way Into Shared Understanding: Collaborative Autobiographical Writing in the Qualitative Methods Class

Judith C. Lapadat

Qualitative Inquiry 2009; 15; 955 originally published online May 1, 2009;
DOI: 10.1177/1077800409334185

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://qix.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/15/6/955>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Qualitative Inquiry* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://qix.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://qix.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations <http://qix.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/15/6/955>

Writing Our Way Into Shared Understanding

Collaborative Autobiographical Writing in the Qualitative Methods Class

Judith C. Lapadat

University of Northern British Columbia, Prince George, Canada

From her experience as an instructor, the author finds that it is valuable to engage graduate students in conducting a study within their qualitative methods course. In this article, the author discusses how she used a collaborative autobiographical research approach. Class members generate autobiographical writing to be shared with the group, and then the group collaboratively analyzes and interprets the set of autobiographical materials. The author goes on to describe two examples of collaborative autobiographical projects grounded, respectively, in memory-work and narrative inquiry frameworks. The complexity of autobiographical writing and the value of collaboration are discussed, along with ethical issues relating to role blurring, coresearcher relationships, anonymity, Research Ethics Board timelines, and cycles of consent.

Graduate students taking a qualitative methods course bring with them a wealth of professional and life experience but may have little familiarity with qualitative methodologies and limited direct research experience. Along with reading and discussing excellent qualitative studies and texts on methodology, I like to engage class members in conducting a qualitative research study—there is nothing like learning by doing. In this

Author's Note: A preliminary version of this article was presented at the Eighth International Advances in Qualitative Methods conference, Banff, Alberta, Canada, September 2007. I thank Jean Alexander, Nancy E. Black, Lonni Bryant, Philip G. Clark, Susan Greenlees, Richard M. Gremm, Niels Hansen, Anne B. Hill, Diana Hoffman, Lucy W. Karanja, Naseeb Marcil, Miss Mieke, Lorna Jean Nelson, Louise Ormerod, Loriann Quinlan, Deborah Rendell, Lisa Schmidt, Susan Viveiros, and unnamed others who have contributed to this work. Please address correspondence to Judith C. Lapadat, Northwest Regional Chair and Professor of Education, University of Northern British Columbia: Terrace Campus, 4837 Keith Avenue, Terrace, British Columbia, Canada, V8G 1K7; e-mail: lapadat@unbc.ca.

article, I present as examples two collaborative research projects conducted within memory-work and narrative inquiry frameworks respectively. Both involved class members generating autobiographical writing to be shared with the group and both also employed collaborative decision-making and reflexive analysis processes, alternative genres of qualitative writing, and cycles of ethical confirmation of coresearcher/coauthorship agreements. In both experiences, the rich knowledge shared through interactive writing and the organic nature of the collaborative processes have resulted in multivoiced texts that have contributed to personal and professional praxis.

Design of the Methods Course

The perspective that learning is a process of social and cognitive construction has shaped my university work over many years. Individuals bring different things to learning; they learn from each other and also through reflection, and they are more likely to make large leaps of understanding if they care deeply about a topic. I have observed that graduate students in social and health sciences care deeply about praxis, about ethics and power issues in human relationships, and about big ideas. Almost every one I have met is passionate about making a difference. So this is my starting point when planning a course in qualitative methods. Providing an opportunity for class members to work together collaboratively on a real qualitative study on a topic of interest to them and me allowed us to experience together the dilemmas of data collection, analysis, interpretation, epistemology, voice, reflexivity, writing, ethics, and power, while concurrently reading and reflecting on other researchers' discussions of epistemological and methodological issues in qualitative research and published examples of qualitative studies.

Engagement in an actual research study within a qualitative methods course provides an opportunity for beginning researchers to make the leap from "learning about" to "learning to" in a low-risk setting, with mentorship. Learning by doing is an immediate, powerful way to learn, and it demystifies processes of qualitative research. Concepts and terminology that seem unfamiliar and abstract take on a new relevance when one is up to the elbows in data and trying to make sense of them. The same is true of research relationships. By working collaboratively with others, researchers experience leaps of insight that come from negotiating roles, purposes, processes, and meanings; they learn from each other. The experience of research engagement assists practitioners to reflect, come to new understandings, and develop identities as researchers.

Triumvirate of Methodology Instruction

My introductory qualitative methods class has three main strands: learning what, learning how, and doing it. I call this the triumvirate of methodology instruction. Learning what qualitative research is involves building declarative or content knowledge. Familiarity with the language, concepts, theories, paradigms, history, approaches, and debates within the field of qualitative inquiry provides basic building blocks for thinking meaningfully about research. Learning how involves developing procedural knowledge about conducting the steps of research—how to focus a study, conduct an interview, transcribe a tape, sort text thematically, and so forth, and to do so conscious of theoretical stances, disciplinary traditions, political/paradigmatic perspectives, and ethical issues. The how and the what of research are inextricably intertwined, and this becomes clear when doing research. Doing it is engagement; it is action. One cannot remain untouched, passive, or uncommitted once engaged in a study because real people, along with one's own values, emotions, identity, and ways of knowing the world are at stake. The what and the how of research become meaningful and personal through doing it.

To introduce beginning researchers to core topics, approaches, and issues in qualitative research, I assign overview articles or chapters about qualitative inquiry (e.g., Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) and about selected core topics (e.g., research ethics; reflexivity). Furthermore, students individually select specific topics and approaches for deeper study, then share what they have learned with class members. Key to this is providing opportunities to read, view, hear about, and reflect on exemplars of qualitative research. There is a great deal of choice within the class structure; therefore, we make up each course as we go along depending on class members' interests and also being sure to address certain core topics.

Qualitative research methods are nested in and inextricable from epistemology, theory, culture, context, and history. Learning how, therefore, involves not only learning about tools and mastering strategies for doing a research study but also reasoning critically to determine when to select certain tools, strategies, or frameworks. Learning how involves reading about, discussing, trying out, and defending the choice of methodological tools and stepwise processes as well as learning and applying qualitative software analysis tools.

For both learning what and learning how, I use a class sharing process that involves multivocal class discussion in which class members present, express their opinions, and pose their questions to each other rather than to

me. Each class member chooses to read a different book-length research study and selection of chapters or journal articles, and each investigates a different qualitative approach, then presents to the class. Also, each class member generates data and conducts independent analyses. Therefore, each person becomes the expert on the topic or article he or she has chosen and the research work he or she has done. In the lively discussions that ensue, we critique, problematize, and politicize. Especially, we share personal and professional stories that relate to the topic at hand. As the course instructor, I am relieved of my “sage on the stage” status for these stretches of time. As a member of the audience, I am free to learn from the others or to slip into the role of moderator by posing questions that fire discussion or nudge it in particular directions.

Doing a study is where the what and the how of learning qualitative research come together. By conducting research, class members move beyond learning about what and how, to action. In the experience they recognize that they are generating knowledge, not just receiving it. Although this can be done in many different ways, in this article I describe the collaborative autobiographical research approach, drawing on two examples. Both involved implementing a whole-class collaborative research project from conception through to completion within the time span of a one-semester introductory qualitative research course. Consistent with the multivocal class sharing approach we used for discussions, I wanted to participate fully in the study as a coresearcher rather than lurking as judge. However, given that I could not in fact erase the power differential or eliminate my responsibility to evaluate, in practice I coparticipated as much as I could and strove to minimize markers of power. I will introduce some considerations about autobiographical narrative, then describe the first collaborative autobiographical study, a memory-work project about “A Life Challenge.” The second is a narrative inquiry project on identity—the “Who am I?” project.

Autobiographical Narrative

In collaborative autobiography, coresearchers cycle through sequences of oral and written interaction to express, witness, understand, and ultimately act on their own and others’ autobiographical narratives. Through a recursive dialectic of collectively gazing inward and then outward, the aim is that we as coresearchers will not only reach deeper understanding of ourselves, but also will attain a vantage point for interpreting and influencing culture (Neumann, 1996).

Scholars now recognize narrative, or stories, as a primary form of human knowledge (Bruner, 1986; Frank, 1997). Narrative inquiry has developed as a major qualitative research approach (Chase, 2005). Practitioners, too, have turned to narrative as a process for interviewing and intervening with patients, students, or clients, as a way to conceptualize professional identity (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) and as a strategy to reflect on and extend practice (Lessem & Trafford, 2006). Lyons and LaBoskey (2002) described narrative as “fundamentally an activity of mind, a way of gathering up knowledge of practice, simply, a way of knowing, and of knowing that one knew” (p. 3). Clandinin and Connelly said, “Narrative is both the phenomenon and the method of the social sciences” (2000, p. 18).

Autobiography is a particular kind of narrative. Simply stated, it is “a story, or part of it that refers in one way or another to one’s life history” (Brockmeier, 2001, p. 247). It is “how people give an account of themselves” (Bruner, 2001, p. 25), which seems straightforward enough, yet in the telling a temporal self is made and placed in relation to a world that is also constructed in the telling (Brockmeier, 2001; Bruner, 2001). The teller selects, relates, and gives interpretive force to specific memories, me in my world then as seen by me now. Autobiographical narratives are complicated by the context of their telling—for whom or with whom the story is being constructed, the time and situation of the telling, and the purpose of the telling (Burgos, 1989; Ellis & Berger, 2002). People not only represent but also construct their identities through autobiographical narratives (Bruner, 2001), for once told, the stories take on a psychological force that shapes a person’s subsequent thoughts and acts (Eiseley, 1996) as well as how others relate to him or her. The audience, whether present or imagined, active or passive, colludes in this construction (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997). Researchers, as interviewers and writers, are particularly powerful in the coconstruction, interpretation, and retelling of the autobiographical story (Lincoln, 1997; Tierney, 2002).

Pollock et al. (2005a) explained that the performative aspect of oral history is why it is effective both as an analytic approach and as a means of initiating social transformation. She writes that the intersection of “orality, dialogue, life stories, and community-building . . . [is] *living* history, . . . the process of materializing historical reflection in live representation as both a form (a container) and a means (a catalyst) of social action” (p. 1). Telling our stories creates a reflexive space for bringing life histories into awareness by “making history in dialogue” (p. 2). By expressing one’s own and witnessing others’ visions of the world, possibilities for the future open up: “The interviewer is her/himself a symbolic presence, standing in for other

unseen audiences and invoking a social compact: a tacit agreement that what is heard will be integrated into public memory and social knowledge . . . [to] make a material difference" (p. 3).

In discussing performance and oral history, Pollock and the contributors to the volume that she has edited (Pollock, 2005b) predominantly examine two performative contexts: the researcher interviewing the other, and performance as a means to express and interpret the experience of the other. In contrast, in the two collaborative autobiography projects I describe below, we wrote autobiographical narratives thus making ourselves both subject and object (Haug, 1987) and sidestepping interviews, and we did not generate a performance as our final product or means of dissemination. We cycled through phases of private writing and reflection, oral interaction (performance and discussion), and written interaction. In doing so, we drew upon the transformative power of orality and dialogue, while also benefiting from the effects of written interaction as a catalyst for conceptual change (Lapadat, 2002, 2004a). Although our method was different, our experience was congruent with the themes described by Pollock and her colleagues, as summarized by Hall (2005):

the challenge of speaking for others; the dialectic of identity and difference; the danger of dualisms that create fictitious unities and secure power relations; the conviction that meaning emerges in dialogue, that identity itself is performative—cocreated, coproduced in relationship to others; the ethical imperative to "pass it on," to make the stories entrusted to you a part of public memory; the desire for a history that explodes into the present. p. 187

Memory-Work Project: A Life Challenge

Memory-Work Approach

Memory-work is a feminist methodology based on a hermeneutic social constructivist epistemology. The approach grounds theory in collectively recollected experience, is consensual and nonhierarchical, and has an explicit aim of empowering the coresearchers. Developed in Germany by Frigga Haug (1987) and her colleagues, the methodology has been further elaborated by Australian groups of researchers. Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, and Benton (1992) described memory-work as follows: "The underlying theory is that subjectively significant events, events which are remembered, and the way they are subsequently constructed, play an important part in the construction of self" (p. 37). Memory-work

method involves collectively analyzing memories written out by group members. Each coresearcher is both research subject and object. Common elements emerge during subsequent analysis and appraisal because members of the collective share a social context and appropriate from it depending on its constraints and affordances (Crawford et al., 1992). Haug describes the goal of this research approach as “identifying the ways in which individuals construct themselves into existing structures, and are thereby themselves formed; the way in which they reconstruct social structures; [and] the points at which change is possible” (p. 41).

Methods

Haug (1987) and her collective outlined a general methodological process for memory-work studies, but emphasized that there is no one correct method; the complex heterogeneity of human lives calls for heterogeneity of method. Following Haug, Crawford et al. (1992) established explicit methodological guidelines for the memory-work research they conducted on emotion and gender and these have been adopted by several subsequent groups of memory-work researchers. In the project we conducted in our graduate research class, we employed Crawford et al.’s three memory-work research phases as succinctly summarized by Onyx and Small (2001).

Our process was as follows. We discussed the proposed class research assignment, ethics, and the possibility of future research collaboration using materials generated in the class. After the class unanimously agreed to proceed,¹ our first step was to discuss and come to consensus on a focus for our memory-work project. We decided to write memories about “a life challenge.” Phase 1 of the research involved each class member, including me, writing out a description of a trigger memory of a life challenge. Specific guidelines were as follows: (a) write 250-500 words, (b) use third person (he or she); (c) use detailed description, (d) avoid interpreting or evaluating the experience, (e) use an expressive style of writing, and (f) provide a hard copy for all class members (class handout, adapted from Onyx & Small, 2001).

In Phase 2, we engaged in a collective examination of the written pieces through class discussion. Class members shared their own writing and offered respectful commentary on other members’ writing and the focus topic. We addressed each memory in turn, then compared across memories, looking for commonalities and differences. Our aim was to offer broad interpretations, drawing on our theoretical and cultural knowledge (Crawford et al., 1992; Haug, 1987; Onyx & Small, 2001).

Phase 3 involved rewriting and further theorizing by each individual, and then by the group. Following the Phase 2 discussion, each of us wrote interpretive reflections on our own trigger memory as well as on the group set of memories. These reflections were comparative, theoretical, and interpretive. Although rewriting the original memory was an option, none of us did so. We brought the written reflections to a class meeting for further sharing and discussion. Throughout, all written materials were provided in hard copy to all members of the group. Also, we took turns recording key points during the discussions using a media projector, and these notes were retained.

Afterwards, we revisited the topic of whether to proceed to coauthor a paper based on the written pieces and collaborative analyses we had conducted. This further step of coauthorship was voluntary, subsequent to the course, and beyond the course expectations. All participants still wished to write a paper for scholarly dissemination, have their material included, and participate as coauthors.

Profile of Participants

Eight people participated—seven graduate students and the course instructor (me). Our group included mature men and women representative of diverse cultural backgrounds. Class members were at various stages of a range of graduate programs, including education, counseling, psychology, community health, social work, and library science. All had taken a prior methods course, either an introduction to research methodology or quantitative analysis.

Life Challenge Experiences

We each wrote about a life challenge, as reflected by a memory of one specific representative event or crystallizing experience. These included: losing one's job, struggling with body weight, battling insomnia, coping with isolation in foreign country, leaving home, surviving a near-death experience, trying to understand the unspoken subtext of a relationship, and moving in with a difficult parent. Each piece was carefully crafted, and, although written in third-person voice, movingly conveyed the anguish, loneliness, fear, anger, sense of personal growth, and other emotions felt by each of us as we experienced and tried to come to terms with the life challenge about which we wrote. As an example, I will discuss one story, tracing it through each of the phases.

The job loss piece written by Ruby² is included in Appendix A. In the Phase 2 discussion,³ we identified a number of themes in this memory story, including *moving on/through* and coming to a *resolution*: “It was a very negative challenge, but eventually led to a positive result”; “good things can come out of negative experiences”; and it was a “triumphant tale of overcoming.” Another theme was the use of *ritual*: “throwing the rocks was a way of healing”; “involvement of object and actions of body in throwing rocks”; and the parallel to a “grief group example of extinguishing a candle flame as a symbol of letting go of a loved one.” We discussed the notion of *agency*: “numb, in shock—yet still was thinking ahead to collecting things; seeing a lawyer,” and lack of agency: “What kind of ‘choice’?” We also talked about *cultural scripts*: “pressure of being the breadwinner; is this especially problematic for women?” Other themes for this story included *process*, *writing*, *healing*, *body*, *external source of challenge*, *turning point*, *commonality*, *nature of memory*, and *emotions*.

In her Phase 3 written reflection, Ruby further developed the themes of body and emotions, and introduced a discussion of time. She wrote,

When she is fired, time slows down for Ruby. . . . When confronted with a life trial [d]o we depend upon our memories to sustain us until such time that we can tell our experience to someone that can help us? In this, time serves Ruby as a survival tool, and as a source of healing.

On bodies and change, she wrote,

Often we will not immediately see, understand or interpret what is going on around us, even though our bodies and minds may be sending us signals. We are caught up in responsibilities . . . and perhaps we do not see a solution until some outside action becomes the catalyst for change.

On the nature of memory, she said, “Various experiences or memories shape us and carry us through life challenges. This in turn contributes to our maturity, confidence, and ability to adapt to situations, events or emergencies.” Memories function as “touchstones.” Her conclusion centered on faith: “Things do have a way of working out the way they are supposed to.”

The Phase 3 discussion elaborated these points and led to additional questions. The group commented that “challenges turn out to be good things once you get some distance” and that people have a “fear of changing the circumstance because even if they are not happy, the future can look too scary to change” and that “the things that hurt us are what teach us.” We wondered, “Why does healing only happen later, not in the moment?” and

considered the need for time and distance. The “aha” moment cannot be forced because one “needs to be in balance to have it” and also because one has a “blind spot for one’s present position.”

During the three research phases, we went through a similar process of writing, discussing, and theorizing each of the eight memory stories. The subsequent collaborative writing-up process is yielding additional synthesis and theoretical insights.

Personal, Social, and Learning Outcomes

The process of doing this study using autobiographical writing had an impact on each of us as members of the collaborative group. Each written piece was a moving personal account of a past life-changing experience or moment of insight that had a formative role in that individual’s sense of self. The stories we wrote were not just about specific events, but about the event as a symbol of one’s own existential dilemmas—the fat nonconforming self, the out-of-control self dominated by the body’s insomniac whims, the lonely socially outcast self, the self caught between personal desire and family demands, the self separating from the originating family to begin the long march toward mortality. They were stories of battles with the self, trying to make a place in the world for oneself, and tapping one’s inner resilience in the face of almost losing it all.

We each chose the story we would tell knowing that it was a story to be shared with a group of former strangers, thrown together simply by reason of taking the same course, who had agreed to this brief collaborative research engagement. I, for example, chose not to write about deaths and other losses in my life that would have been painful to share. Sarah wrote, “Trying to decide what to write was painstaking. While perfectly able to think about memories . . . it was quite another to imagine sharing a story with classmates.” Somehow, despite our reservations, the stories told were ones that needed to be told. Emotions were powerfully present and as we went around the room taking turns reading our pieces aloud (a performance step that I had not anticipated), there were tears and shaking voices. It was a social witnessing of the self and its struggles that felt deeply therapeutic and positive. “There is something raw and pure about listening to those stories, those memories” (Sarah).

Along with the personal insights that came from writing out these memories, reading them to the group, and discussing them, the group developed a bond. I, for example, felt honored to have been included in this personal sharing and a sense of empathy and caring for each of the seven

others. It was risky, yes, stepping out from behind the masks of our roles. In some degree, for each of us, it was also personally, socially, and intellectually transformative.

For me, this collaborative research project yielded new insights about power, voice, coresearcher relationships, and reflexivity. In subsequent research, I have gone on to investigate and write about each of these topics. What I learned through the memory-work project also has influenced my teaching and how I mentor graduate students.⁴

Teaching and Research Challenges

This was a satisfying, productive research and learning experience, yet it also presented a number of challenges. As most of us did not know each other, we had to build a relationship first before deciding we could trust each other to embark on autobiographical research collaboratively. The time frame was a complicating factor. The course was scheduled over 13 weeks, which did not leave much time to get to know each other. In combining research with the other components of the course, including a software analysis lab, we were trying to accomplish too much in too little time.

The research ethics approval process also slowed us down. Due to the potentially sensitive nature of autobiographical work, the blurring between to what extent this was a group class "assignment" and to what extent it was "research," the proposed use of material beyond the class, and my double role as both instructor and coresearcher, I did not feel I could develop and submit a proposal to the Research Ethics Board (REB) until we had discussed the idea for this research as a class group and I had a clear mandate from them as to whether they wished to go ahead with this collaboration and under what conditions (see Ellis, 2007, on the dilemmas of relational ethics). Therefore, early in the semester, when they expressed enthusiasm about the idea for the memory-work project, I developed and submitted a draft REB proposal for class review and discussion. As REB members were unsure how to evaluate this unfamiliar type of request, they required elaborations and revisions before granting approval. We were finally cleared to proceed 4 weeks before the end of the course.

Although we spent several hours in those final classes listening, discussing, seeking commonalities, and theorizing, as well as reflecting independently between the group sessions, we did not uncover clear overarching common understandings nor did we agree on a single theoretical interpretative model. I believe that the compressed time frame was partly responsible for this. Also, we each came from different disciplinary backgrounds

informed by different theoretical stances, and it was hard to reconcile them. Furthermore, the initial written pieces seemed to stand on their own, perfect in themselves, resistant to analytical fracturing or collaborative resynthesis.

As a result, our analysis, interpretation, and writing ended up incomplete at the end of the course. Moreover, we experienced loss of contact and momentum after the semester ended. Although we all had agreed to continue working on a paper, we became busy with other things. To date, the write-up has not been completed, even though the course occurred a few years ago. I accept much of the responsibility for this, as I had agreed to write a draft from our notes and reflections as a starting point for further collaborative writing, but then felt overwhelmed and unable to move forward once the group dissipated (see Gannon, 2001). Now we are working on it again, and I see a way forward, having taken time to ponder issues relating to reflexivity, research ethics, autobiographical writing, and collaborative processes.

Narrative Inquiry Project: Who Am I?

In her overview of narrative inquiry, Chase (2005) described five analytic lenses through which researchers from a range of disciplines and traditions apprehend biographical narratives. First, narratives make meaning by looking back retrospectively. Second, narratives themselves are a form of verbal action. Third, the social conditions in which we live constrain and enable the stories we tell. These include the narrator's community, social and organizational contexts, culture, and historical time. Fourth, narratives are interactive performances situated within a particular social circumstance or event. Finally, researchers themselves are narrators, and, therefore, must negotiate matters of voice, reflexivity, representation, and the power to name.

Within narrative inquiry, autoethnography is an approach in which "researchers . . . turn the analytic lens on themselves and their interactions with others, but here researchers write, interpret, and/or perform their own narratives about culturally significant experiences" (Chase, 2005, p. 660). Holman Jones (2005) further defined autoethnography as "a radical democratic politics . . . committed to creating space for dialogue and debate that instigates and shapes social change" (p. 763). In contrast to ethnographic approaches or interview studies that study the "other," in autoethnography researchers study their own self-generated narratives.

The memory-work life challenge study described above is autoethnographic in that we each wrote out memories and these constituted the data for subsequent analyses. In the narrative inquiry Who am I study that I will

present next, we also generated autobiographical writing and analyzed it. I call the method of these autoethnographic studies more specifically *collaborative autobiography* because group members analyzed and interpreted the group's collection of autobiographical writing as well as their own. Whereas each individual's insights about his or her own story were autoethnographic, in analyzing the collection of writing, each of us also was engaged in interpreting the other, as well as the place of each autobiographical story within the set. Ellis (2007) used the term *coconstructed autoethnography*, which seems to imply a greater final coherence than *collaborative autobiography*. Onyx and Small (2001) commented that the term *collective biography* is used by some Australian researchers, although *collective* suggests a certain homogeneity among group members, and *biography* doesn't capture the self-study aspect of the method as we have employed it.

In memory-work, Haug (1987) said that the method of writing memories should not be autobiographical, "the writing of history as a pathway to the present" (p. 46), because autobiography is causal and deterministic, imposes an interpretation, makes it harder to unpack implicit beliefs, turns attention away from the particular, and is biased toward the notion of continuous progress (pp. 46-49). Crawford et al. (1992) concurred and advocated simply describing a specific remembered event without imposing "the coherence of the reinterpretation of past events as antecedents of what follows" (p. 47). Imposition of coherence may be easier to avoid when narratives recount memory fragments rather than a full life story. But, however descriptively written, memory narratives are inherently interpretive in the episodes chosen, the way they are sequenced, and the vocabulary and style of the telling (Liebowitz, 1991). Because they tell about one's own life, the written memories in memory-work as in other autoethnographic approaches, necessarily are autobiographical.

The Who am I project focused explicitly on identity construction. I was interested in the identity work people that engage in as they negotiate their personal and professional identities. Specifically, I wondered how a group of professional practitioners might construct and interpret these tensions. Josselson (1996) said, "Identity is the ultimate act of creativity—it is what we make of ourselves. In forming and sustaining our identity, we build a bridge between who we feel ourselves to be internally and who we are recognized as being by our social world" (p. 27).

I chose identity as a focus for several reasons. Identity themes were salient in the memory-work findings, thus warrant more examination. By its nature, autobiographical work lends itself well to exploring identity: "Through voicing and interpreting the identity themes that thread their stories, individuals

will be empowered to deeply understand their own life, and perhaps make changes to alter its course” (Lapadat, 2004b, p. 116). Another reason stems from my own experience, that it is challenging to negotiate personal and professional identity as a university administrator living in a small city, and I speculated that other professionals living in the same region might experience similar dilemmas. Finally, the graduate group involved in this next project were in the process of acquiring a master of counseling degree. Identity issues are a common theme in therapeutic encounters and call for reflexive awareness on the part of the counselor.

Profile of Participants

The group included 18 people of culturally diverse backgrounds, all women except one, and all graduate counseling students except for two of us. This was a tightly knit counseling cohort midway through their program who had taken all of their coursework together. (An interdisciplinary master’s student, who knew and had worked professionally with several of the others, and I, the professor, were the two exceptions.) In addition to being mature students, they all were professional practitioners in social work, education, or health fields. Some already were practicing as counselors. They lived in communities throughout the region and traveled to the campus for Saturday classes. None of the 17 students had taken a graduate-level research methods course previously. I discovered on the first Saturday that the majority of them were dreading the course, thought it would involve using statistics, and believed that it would have little relevance to their counseling program.⁵

Methods

Our purpose was to conduct a collaborative qualitative research study using a narrative inquiry approach; this constituted the “doing it” strand in the triumvirate of methodology instruction. As in the memory-work study, we each generated a piece of autobiographical writing and shared it with the group. However, we then conducted thematic analyses of these data using *NVivo 7* qualitative data analysis software, discussed and compared analyses, then derived and wrote up preliminary interpretations. At the beginning of the semester, prior to starting the Who am I project, I proposed the possibility of later coauthoring a manuscript based on the autobiographical material, analyses, and interpretations generated in the course. This idea was greeted with enthusiasm, and all of the class members said

they wanted their materials to be included, and most also wished to participate subsequently as coauthors. With unanimous consent from class members, I initiated the REB ethics review process.

The first step of the research was to generate autobiographical writing focused on identity as related to professional role as a counselor, educator, or helping professional. The instructions were (a) Write two to three pages, (b) Write in any genre (e.g., essay, journal, poetry, or play), and (c) Only include content you feel comfortable sharing with the class. Also, participants were asked to address three components in their written piece: (a) Who am I? (b) How am I contributing to (or changing) something in the world as a counselor (or educator)? (c) How is my role as counselor (or educator) related to who I am? Participants were instructed to use pseudonyms for themselves and any others mentioned in their writing. Before making the files available electronically, I prescreened them and altered place names and uniquely identifying information.

Step 2 involved thematic analysis of the pooled autobiographical data. The 18 "Who am I" written pieces constituted the data. Each person completed a first-level thematic coding of the 18 texts using *NVivo 7*. Furthermore, each member kept a memo file of coding decisions and a memo file of ideas—questions, insights, and emerging interpretations.

Step 3 involved sharing of analyses and interpretive discussion. I selected two full *NVivo 7* analyses plus three additional ideas memos and, with their creators' permission, made them accessible to the class group. Each group member independently reviewed them, and this was followed by a whole-class discussion focused on comparative analysis and broader interpretations. Each group member then individually wrote five to six pages of interpretation and discussion. All of these writings and the *NVivo 7* projects were contributed to the coauthors for further theorizing and writing up.

Investigations of Identity: Who Am I?

Through this process we generated rich, emotionally open autobiographical pieces. Group members wrote in a range of written genres, including life story essay, memoir, short story, expressive stream of consciousness prose, letter to mom, poem, and tribute. For example, gumdrop introduced her piece this way:

Dear Mom,

Wow! So much has happened in the twelve years since you have passed away. I feel your presence in my life on a daily basis, and am so blessed to

have had you as my mom, my friend, and my confidant. . . . I sense that you know exactly where I am in my life at this time, but I would like to tell you the journey I have been on for the past twelve years.

Gumdrop's letter to mom contrasts with Starr's introduction:

Who am I? Once upon a time I had a dream that showed me who I was, but the memory of it only proved true for a little while. It was good for that time though, because for so long before that I had struggled with the question of who I was. What I did not know then was that I would change again, and have to discover myself all over next year, and the year after that. . . . I remember that who I am now is who I wanted to be six months ago. Why is it that now that I am there, I do not want to be that person anymore? I want to be better.

Several combined more than one genre in their autobiographical piece. People organized their pieces differently, with some writing a separate section for each of the three trigger questions about identity, contributions to the world, and the relationship of professional role to identity, others integrating the three, and still others focusing mostly on just one of the three components. For example, mossy toes wrote a poem titled "A Knowingness." This stanza expresses aspects of the relationship between professional role, contributions, and identity:

A gift?

Not healing, simply grand per se . . . but an easing the way, a "hearing" of unspoken things . . .

Giving some light to help another choose a path, a way . . . and yet another way

Along the tortuous trail of life

She described the contexts of her professional helping roles chronologically, weaving in personal identity themes. In a section of the poem in which she recounted working in the field of Mental Health, she wrote,

Psychosis is a dreadful place, where freedom's not an option

To fill out forms and look for work and be told that you're "crazy"

Souls are smashed, and people laugh, and leave you on a mattress

Which me is me? And who am I, and what is *just* the Madness?

The *NVivo* 7 analyses were similarly diverse, and each provided a fascinating thematization of a complex data set. Over all, the analyses and subsequent preliminary interpretations provided a deep look into identity and self. For example, Zelda addressed the importance of turning points, drawing on a transformative theory of adult learning:

I decided to focus on the personal transformations that most of the participants experienced as a result of a crisis in their lives. In eleven of the eighteen narratives, the authors either alluded to, or described in detail, transformations that grew out of disorienting dilemmas like death, divorce, isolation, or depression. These transformations did not seem earth shattering at the time they took place; they seemed like logical steppingstones. In fact, they are often mentioned so perfunctorily that they could be missed. These critical turning points occur because we are listening to an inner voice that tells us to shift direction. It is through this listening and changing that we develop wisdom, strength, and self-awareness.

Several of us wrote about the difficulty of pinning down the concept of identity. For example, Oreo used the metaphor of crystals separating beams of light into colors, and aphex1 likened identity to etch-a-sketch drawings—difficult to produce and to interpret, yet ephemeral. Also, a number of metaphors characterizing the collaborative autobiographical research process emerged during this interpretive phase. For example, AnnaBlue used the analogy of a potluck dinner, offering up and tasting the dishes, to describe the process of sharing our autobiographical writings with each other. Get4way wrote a humorous yet pointed account of thematic analysis, describing it as sorting the dirty laundry. She observed,

NVivo has shown us that the data are interpretative, confusing and exhausting. I had to caution myself not to go off in too many directions. As noted in Dirty Laundry, be careful not to let the laundry pile up and get out of hand. The pile can become overwhelming.

Despite the richness of the meanings that have emerged, thus far we have taken a relatively thin look at professional role dilemmas (Lapadat et al., 2009).

Teaching and Research Challenges

By far, the most significant challenges arose from technical and logistical problems related to the computer lab component. The lab we used for the course was in a new campus building, and this was the first lab course that had been taught in it. The lab was managed and supported remotely from a

central campus located 600 kilometers away. Unfortunately, just as the semester began, the university began a process of reorganizing the computer department, which involved reallocating lab support responsibilities. Weekend support was not funded, aside from a helpline staffed by student assistants who were trained only to handle routine requests. Moreover, a virus breached lab security requiring reimaging all of the student labs, which led to downtime, and later it was discovered that *NVivo 7* was unstable in the new lab setup. Furthermore, the weather caused several power outages that interrupted Internet service to our region and also created unsafe road conditions preventing travel to two of the Saturday classes, which had to be rescheduled. All of this was extremely frustrating for the students, some of whom lost hours of work on their analyses when the lab environment instability and power outages caused the software to shut down unexpectedly without saving. It was among the most stressful teaching experiences I have ever had.

Mainly due to these technical difficulties, both in the lab and when trying to access the program remotely, learning to use qualitative data analysis software within the research study proved quite overwhelming for some of the students, especially those few who had limited computer proficiency. Technical access issues and learning technical skills took time away from learning to think qualitatively about the texts and their meanings. Although one reason that I had integrated the software lab with the collaborative research was to use class time more efficiently, the lab component was more time consuming than I had anticipated. This was due in part to the problems described but also because the autobiographical pieces were so rich and complex. They resisted any straightforward thematic sorting and seductively drew many of us into more complex analyses than we had time to complete in the time span of the course.

I discovered that my role was difficult to negotiate in this collaborative project. I had intended that I would participate fully as a coresearcher and aimed to foster a group dynamic that was as egalitarian as possible within the course and research project, much as in the memory-work project. However, unlike the graduate group that participated in memory-work project, this counseling cohort was already a cohesive group, and I was a stranger joining it. Or more accurately, to me they were mostly strangers, but they already had some knowledge and assumptions about me. They knew me not as just the course instructor (as I had been for the memory-work group) but as the administrator of the local campus and the university figurehead in the region. I believe that this role authority engendered caution on their part, and for me, it compounded my sense of frustration and shame that the university could not provide a well-functioning computer

lab for their course.⁶ Furthermore, my decision to predefine the focus for the study rather than to arrive at it by consensus, which I made for pragmatic reasons in order to start the study early in the semester to give it more time, and because of the difficulty of achieving true consensus with such a large group, probably also affected the extent to which I could de-emphasize my power and privilege within this group.

As in the previous project, I used cycles of consent and layered consent forms to address matters of research ethics. In the first class, I outlined the proposed project, and the class expressed unanimous support for the idea of contributing materials generated in the course assignment for coauthorship of a paper subsequent to the course. In the second class, I provided them with a detailed written description of the parameters of the project and obtained written consent from each, specifying whether they wanted their materials included in any subsequent write-up (they all did) and whether they wished to participate as coauthor (most did). At the end of the course, we repeated the written consent process. All still wanted to go ahead with writing up a paper, all agreed to inclusion of all of their materials, and two thirds wished to participate as coauthors. Several months after the course ended, the coauthors met again to move forward with the writing process, and I repeated the written consent process once again.

Another ethical issue that needs mention is that of anonymity. In the memory-work life challenge project, although all the memories were written using pseudonyms, we as group members chose to reveal our authorship identity to each other by reading our own piece aloud. In the narrative inquiry *Who am I* project, theoretically authorship remained anonymous. However, in fact, these individuals knew each other well and already had developed a strong sense of trust through previous counseling practice activities such as conducting counseling interviews with each other. Many of them openly identified their authorship status to each other in conversation, by choosing a well-known "nickname" as a pseudonym, or by providing details about their background or workplace context in the written text. Whatever the original intent, anonymity is only possible if participants choose not to self-identify, and when coresearchers engage in collaborative autobiography, it might not be possible, at least within the research group.

A final challenge was that this was a required course rather than one that the students chose to take. They acknowledged that they began it with little awareness of qualitative research approaches or, in some cases, of research methods in general. Moreover, several had negative preconceptions about the course and initially did not seem to value research as an important component of their program.

Personal, Social, and Learning Outcomes

Perhaps surprisingly, given the troubles we faced, student feedback after the course was highly positive. Class members said that they felt that they had come to understand what qualitative research is and expressed excitement about its breadth and creative possibilities. The process of doing the study demystified research and provided a sense of ownership. Several talked of how they might apply a qualitative research approach to doing a study in their workplace. Also, the majority committed to continue their involvement by writing up the *Who am I* study following the end of the course. The collaborative autobiographical approach resulted in powerful, insightful, written pieces, a complex range of analyses, and multi-voiced interpretations. The sharing process enhanced an already supportive class community and facilitated professional networking among members of the cohort. I am not sure, however, whether all class members saw the relevance of this identity work to counseling, and I will be interested to see whether such understandings emerge through our ongoing work together as coauthors.

As for me with my roles as the instructor, a coresearcher, and also (I see in hindsight) the campus administrator, the most salient initial outcome was burnout. This project, as conceived, was modest in scope, but it mushroomed, as qualitative studies so often do. I think now that perhaps autobiographical data may be particularly resistant to a light first-pass analysis. I found that participating fully as a coresearcher involved a large time commitment, and this, together with teaching, my usual administrative work, and working to resolve the technical issues was too much to deal with.

Nevertheless, the study itself surpassed all expectations. The autobiographical writings provided a fascinating data set, and the collaborative work was satisfying interpersonally and productive as a research method. The experience fired my intellectual creativity, and took me in new directions of investigation pertaining to identity, ethics, and autobiographical writing—especially as related to narrative time and written genre.

Why Collaborative Autobiographical Class Research?

In summary, there are a number of reasons for conducting collaborative autobiographical research in a qualitative methods class. Autobiographical data are accessible, personally meaningful, and provide a sense of agency. Sharing autobiographical writing within a collaborative group can lead to insights about the place of the self within social structures. The role of writing itself in telling an autobiographical narrative, and then subsequent

cycles of verbal discussion paired with collaborative writing may be critical in this process because of the capacity of writing, especially written interaction, to scaffold cognitive leaps of understanding (Lapadat, 2002, 2004a).

Through collaborating, we can learn from each other and coconstruct knowledge. This approach to learning engages every class member. As students conduct the research, they come to see themselves as researchers, rather than seeing research as something that experts do and that they read. Collaborative autobiographical research disrupts modernist assumptions that knowledge is something held by experts and transmitted to docile recipients (Frank, 1997). It taps the knowledge of graduate class members, who are mature individuals and practicing professionals with insights to share. Collaboration builds community—a sense that we are all in it together. It engenders a process of empowerment that extends beyond the research study itself. By participating as a coresearcher, the instructor gains an opportunity to learn from the others, models “being a researcher,” and honors social constructivist principles of teaching.

From a practical perspective, collaborative autobiographical research is feasible within the time frame of a graduate course—maybe. Using autobiographical materials may sidestep some ethical concerns related to studying the Other and thus streamline the REB timelines (Ellis, 2007), although REBs also might find these sorts of proposals unfamiliar, resulting in delays. Also, new ethical dilemmas arise from the blurring of roles and purposes in autoethnographic work. It is essential to preserve the rights of students to decide whether to participate and to choose what to share, and to ensure that the sharing process is sensitive and respectful. In a hierarchical setting like a classroom, there can be a fine line between collaboration and exploitation. It is the instructor’s responsibility, under the guidance of the REB, to make sure that line is not crossed.

Collaborative Autobiographical Research as an Extraordinarily Complex Act

One reason the collaborative autobiographical method is such a productive research approach is because writing and then collaboratively analyzing autobiographical material makes visible multiple points of view of the experienced historicity of culture. In writing an autobiographical piece, there is the “I” who narrates. There is the “me” whom I, the narrator, tells about. Then there is the “you” to whom I, the narrator, is telling the story. This includes the nominal “you,” or the person to whom the piece is addressed (e.g., Mom, in a letter to mom, the instructor who sets the assignment, or the reflective self), and the wide audience of potential “you’s”—all

those others who might or should read it (e.g., coresearchers, family members, a boss, or members of the local community).

In writing an autobiographical tale, the self is subject, object, and audience and is seen in past, present, and future time. There is the “I” in the present, whose life is a culmination of the experiences of that past “I,” colored by expectations for a future “I,” as crystallized in the writing at this moment. There is the story about “me,” then until now, which becomes an object I reflect on, interpret, and act upon, thus setting a path for a projected future “me.” In collaborative research, this story about “me” also becomes a story for them—class members turned researchers—to reflect on, act upon, and interpret. The status of class members is further complicated in that many of them may be colleagues, friends, or residents in the same small community.

As complicated as autobiographical writing is itself, the process of collaborative autobiographical research is even more complex. There are the stories about “them” that I, in a later now, reflect on, act upon, and interpret. The set of stories about and by all of us contextualize my story about me and illuminate shared themes, social conditions, and metaphors. By reading the autobiographical accounts aloud in a performative twist, or by discussing and quoting, I, they, and we add new layers of context, story, and meaning to my story, their stories, and our stories. The stories cycle through performance, discussion, analysis, and interpretive writing.

Via autobiographical collaboration, class members live the understanding of reflexivity and voice, data collection, the dilemmas and joys of analysis, intellectual creativity, the participant experience, the researcher experience, ethics, interpretation, writing, and the nature of knowledge. At a practical level, each person develops tools for research, learns from the others, and owns a project from start to finish. The experience can be deeply personal and life changing. In changing our lives, we take a small step toward changing the world.

Appendix A

Life Challenge

When she arrived at work that summer morning, she saw her boss. It flashed through her mind that it was odd for her boss to be at work when she was supposed to be on vacation, but she was too weary to ponder this. Instead she consciously avoided her boss and tried to quietly slip upstairs to her office.

But her boss had been purposefully waiting for her. Her boss called to her, I need to talk with you, she said. They walked towards the meeting room. Her boss held a file. This is going to be bad, said her boss. She heard this and thought I’m so tired

(continued)

Appendix A (continued)

of hearing that, if I never have to hear that again, I will be so happy. They were in the room, the door was shut, they sat at the table, her boss opened the file and read: effective immediately your employment is terminated.

Her boss looked up, give me your keys, she said. She gave the keys to her boss. Her boss continued reading. You have lost the confidence of the management team. She heard those words and thought, well, the management team has lost my confidence, too. Her boss was still reading. You may choose to be fired, or you may choose to resign and I will accept your letter of resignation.

A choice, she thought, a choice? This is no choice. Everything was unreal, dream like. Time had frozen. Her body had frozen, her blood had frozen. She had concentrated very closely on everything her boss had said. She had shut everything else out and concentrated very hard. Every word was committed to memory. She told herself that when she got home, she would write every word down so that later, when she saw a lawyer, the lawyer would help her.

They left the room, Jane met them by the stairs, they went upstairs and Jane helped her pack her office things. Jane will drive you home, said her boss. First she was frozen, but now she was steel, I will drive myself home, she said.

Jane helped load her car. Another staff member, Sue, arrived at work. Jane held up her arms to form a cage, preventing her from from what, she wondered, from *infecting* Sue?

When she arrived home, she collapsed against her husband, and sobbed.

Later, after the lawyer did help her, after she could sleep and eat again, when she could talk about it without the tremour shaking her body and time did not seem so frozen and her mind was less numb, her friend called her. We'll go to the river to perform a ritual, her friend said, we'll write things on rocks and throw the rocks into the river. They went to the river and wrote things on rocks. The little rocks were best; she could throw them further. It took a long time to write everything she needed to say.

And later still, when she spoke at a conference about surviving job loss, she explained that she was the breadwinner and she was afraid of losing everything. There is no shame in being fired, she said. She described how her career had taken a new, exciting direction that she had not previously imagined.

It is over now. It happened a long time ago, but not so long ago. Sometimes she even forgets that it happened at all.

Notes

1. I used an ethics process that involved cycles of confirmation of consent. At various stages of the class project and the research, I returned to the group to check whether they still wished to proceed with the research, and in what capacity.

2. All names are pseudonyms.

3. Quotations are from the discussion notes. Theme labels are italicized.

4. More details about this study, and outcomes following from our analysis and interpretations will be available in the coauthored paper currently in preparation.

5. After I taught the qualitative methods course to the memory-work group, the School of Education restructured the graduate curriculum making this course required rather than optional, and increasing it to four credits from three. The first time I taught it at the larger central campus, and the second time I taught it at a small regional campus.

6. During and subsequent to the course, university Information Technology Services staff and administrators have been responsive in seeking solutions to the technical and support issues we experienced, although because of their nature, some problems of distance education technology remain intractable.

References

- Atkinson, P., & Silverman, D. (1997). Kundera's immortality: The interview society and the invention of the self. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3, 304-325.
- Brockmeier, J. (2001). From the end to the beginning: Retrospective teleology in autobiography. In J. Brockmeier & D. Cargbaugh (Eds.), *Narrative and identity: Studies in autobiography, self, and culture* (pp. 247-280). Netherlands: John Benjamins.
- Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bruner, J. (2001). Self-making and world-making. In J. Brockmeier & D. Cargbaugh (Eds.), *Narrative and identity: Studies in autobiography, self, and culture* (pp. 25-37). Netherlands: John Benjamins.
- Burgos, M. (1989). Life stories, narrativity, and the search for the self. *Life Stories [Récits de vie]*, 5, 27-38.
- Chase, S. E. (2005). Narrative inquiry: Multiple lenses, approaches, voices. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 651-679). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1999). Knowledge, context, and identity. In F. M. Connelly & D. J. Clandinin (Eds.), *Shaping a professional identity: Stories of educational practice* (pp. 1-5). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Crawford, J., Kippax, S., Onyx, J., Gault, U., & Benton, P. (1992). *Emotion and gender: Constructing meaning from memory*. London: Sage.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 1-32). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Eiseley, L. (1996). The brown wasps. In J. McConkey (Ed.), *The anatomy of memory: An anthology* (pp. 115-121). New York: Oxford. (Reprinted from *The night country* by L. Eiseley, 1971, New York: Scribner)
- Ellis, C. (2007). Telling secrets, revealing lives: Relational ethics in research with intimate others. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13, 3-29.
- Ellis, C., & Berger, L. (2002). Their story/my story/our story: Including the researcher's experience in interview research. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp. 849-875). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Frank, A. W. (1997). *The wounded storyteller: Body, illness, and ethics*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

- Gannon, S. (2001). (Re)presenting the collective girl: A poetic approach to a methodological dilemma. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7, 787-800.
- Hall, J. D. (2005). Afterword: Reverberations. In D. Pollock (Ed.), *Remembering: Oral history performance* (pp. 186-198). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Haug, F. (1987). *Female sexualization: A collective work of memory* (E. Carter, Trans.). London: Verso.
- Holman Jones, S. (2005). Autoethnography: Making the personal political. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 763-791). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Josselson, R. (1996). *Revising herself: The story of women's identity from college to midlife*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lapadat, J. C. (2002). Written interaction: A key component in online learning. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 7(4). Retrieved August 19, 2002, from <http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol7/issue4/lapadat.html>
- Lapadat, J. C. (2004a). Online teaching: Creating text-based environments for collaborative thinking. *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 50, 236-251.
- Lapadat, J. C. (2004b). Autobiographical memories of early language and literacy development. *Narrative Inquiry*, 14, 113-140.
- Lapadat, J. C., Bryant, L., Burrows, M., Greenlees, S., Hill, A. S., Alexander, J., Marcil, N., Nelson, L. J., Ormerod, L., Rendell, D., Schmidt, L., Viveiros, S., Hansen, N., & Sousa, C. (2009). An identity montage using collaborative autobiography: Eighteen ways to bend the light. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 1(4), 495-520.
- Leibowitz, H. (1991). *Fabricating lives: Explorations in American autobiography*. New York: New Directions.
- Lessem, S., & Trafford, V. N. (2006). Stories as mirrors: Reflective practice in teaching and learning. *Reflective Practice*, 7(1), 9-27.
- Lyons, N., & LaBoskey, V. K. (2002). Introduction. In N. Lyons & V. K. LaBoskey (Eds.), *Narrative inquiry in practice: Advancing the knowledge of teaching* (pp. 1-10). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Neumann, M. (1996). Collecting ourselves at the end of the century. In C. Ellis & A. P. Bochner (Eds.), *Composing ethnography: Alternative forms of qualitative writing* (pp. 172-198). Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira.
- NVivo 7 (1999-2007). QSR International Pty. Ltd. <http://www.qsrinternational.com>
- Onyx, J., & Small, J. (2001). Memory-work: The method. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7, 773-786.
- Pollock, D. (2005a). Introduction: Remembering. In D. Pollock (Ed.), *Remembering: Oral history performance* (pp. 1-17). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Pollock, D. (Ed.) (2005b). *Remembering: Oral history performance*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Tierney, W. G. (2002). Get real: Representing reality. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 15, 385-398.

Judith C. Lapadat, Northwest Regional Chair for the University of Northern British Columbia and Professor of Education, publishes in both scholarly and literary realms. Her academic work focused on language, literacy, technology, and qualitative research methods. Her work has been published in a variety of journals, including *Journal of Distance Education*, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, and *Narrative Inquiry*. Current interests include autobiographical writing and multimodal literacies in electronic environments. The latter is funded by a 3-year grant awarded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.