Potentials and Possibilities of Collaborative Research

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For many years now I (Jean)[2] have engaged in collaborative research. In this paper we[3] explore the potentials and possibilities in Jean's experiences over many years of engaging in what she has, often without thinking deeply about the term, called collaborative research. In this inquiry process, we share how Jean has slowly come to understand collaborative research

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1   While this manuscript was initially prepared as a keynote address for a conference at the MOFET Institute in December, 2009, it was developed during a series of works-in-progress writing sessions in the fall, 2009. Every two weeks the co-authors, Jean, Florence, Vera, Sean, Lee and Simmee, met to read their writing and to receive response to their developing ideas. Jean Clandinin chose to prepare her talk for the Israel conference during these sessions. What it means to engage in collaborative research has long puzzled Jean and this group of co-authors. This group of six co-authors agreed to collaboratively "puzzle" over their experiences with her. This paper is the result. We are all co-authors. While there is some of Jean's narrative beginnings in this paper, the other co-authors' experiences are not described. Florence and Vera both did their doctoral studies alongside Jean in the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development. They now are both faculty members at the University of Alberta and are adjunct professors in the Centre. Sean, Lee, and Simmee have all completed their masters degrees alongside Jean and are now all currently doctoral students in the Centre.

2   It is difficult to write collaboratively as the "we" of the writing is sometimes problematic. In this paper we refer to I (Jean) when Jean is speaking and to the other co-authors by name when their voices are included. In part, this is a result of the way the paper was written, that is, as a keynote that Jean was presenting. When "we" is used we are speaking for all of us in one voice.

3   We in this sense refers to the six co-authors of the paper.

from those early days of engaging in research to more recent work. We share something of the process of collaborative research but, even more importantly, we highlight how coming to understand collaborative research as distinct from research undertaken collaboratively or as a research collaborative has shifted not only Jean's but all of our understandings of collaborative research. We are now more wakeful to the tensions and challenges as well as to the potentials and possibilities of collaborative research. To foreshadow the argument of this paper, we now understand collaborative research as research lived out in borderland spaces, spaces that live at the edges between disciplines, institutions, people and places. This understanding of collaborative research as research engaged within borderlands comes from understandings of collaborative research as a practice that calls researchers to attend to multiple, nested relationships. Collaborative research is a relational practice. In our view, this way of thinking about collaborative research creates new understandings of the potentials and possibilities for engaging in collaborative research.

To give us some sense of a shared ground, we begin with a brief story fragment of ongoing research[4]. We return to Jean's experiences in this research throughout the paper, revisiting it to illustrate the layers of complexity that are now apparent from this vantage point of understanding collaborative research as research in the borderlands, research that is deeply relational.

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4   The research project we draw on is a narrative inquiry into the experiences of youth who left school early. Jean, Vera and Sean were part of the project. For the final report manuscript on the project see Composing Lives: A Narrative Account into the Experiences of Youth Who Left School Early (Clandinin, D. J. et al, 2010). The field texts we (the 6 co-authors of this paper) are from Jean's journals of her experiences in the narrative inquiry with the youth. The journal entries are included in four story fragments in this paper.

Story Fragment One

A small group of us[5] gather in the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development. One study is coming to an end in the sense that the funding is depleted, the report written, the graduate student dissertations completed (Murphy, 2004; Murray Orr, 2005; Pearce, 2005) and a book (Clandinin et al, 2006) almost written. Some of us are excited about how we are ending the book. In the ending, we see the possibility for new beginnings, new narrative inquiries into puzzles shaped out of the stories and wonders bubbling up as we wrote, talked and read. We see our research and our lives as intricately interwoven (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Because we think narratively, we think about the ongoingness, the ways our lives and work are composed over time. Lives continue and because our research is part of our lives, research continues. We find new puzzles in the stories we tell and live out.

Marilyn Huber, Pam Steeves, Vera Caine and I are excitedly talking about trying to engage in narrative inquiry that would allow us to attend to the experiences of the young people who disengage from school before reaching high school graduation, youth who are labelled as drop outs or early school leavers. The four of us worked closely on the earlier work with children, teachers and youth in one elementary school and we had wondered together about the ways the children's stories would unfold into their futures. The research literature and the media were filled with statistical patterns reporting the high numbers of youth who were leaving high school without graduating. Seeing small in Maxine Greene's (1995) sense of seeing small caused us to stop and wonder. Would the lives of the children we had come to know be reduced to statistical patterns? What gaps and silences lived in those spaces between, behind and under those patterns? Could we engage in a narrative inquiry alongside youth

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5 The "us" in the story fragments refers to some or all of the researchers who engaged in the research project (footnote 4). At first the we/us is a small group but, as the research project continued, the number of collaborators grew to 11.

who have left school early? Who would fund it? Who would come to the project as researchers? Who would come as participants?

Joy Ruth Mickelson and Yi Li came by and joined what was quickly becoming a research design conversation. They were interested and wanted to be part. Who else? I mentioned George Buck, a colleague from Educational Psychology and someone else mentioned another colleague who worked in Educational Policy. There was excitement as we imagined up a research group and as we began to imagine how such a study might look. And, of course, we were all thinking of our own stories of school or school leaving and how we were positioned in relation to the inquiry (Jean's Research Journal from the 2007-2010 narrative inquiry into the experiences of youth who left school early, January, 2007)

My (Jean's) research journal allows the six co-authors of this paper a starting point for thinking about how the term collaborative is taken up in common everyday understandings. When I (Jean) shared this opening fragment with the works-in-progress group, Florence reminded the six of us to think about the meaning of the term collaboration. I smiled as she emphasized the words, working with, as she spoke of collaboration. Working collaboratively means people working together to produce something. The dictionary reminded me that the ideas built into the meaning of collaborative include more than one person working, or taking action, toward some agreed upon shared end or purpose with something or some result being produced at the end. These were ideas with which we all resonated. After all, our works-in-progress group seemed built around this idea of collaboration. Works-in-progress groups are central to the life of those of us who work in the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development. We all speak of them frequently and collaboration seemed an easy comfortable way to think of what we were doing.

However, Florence's words in our works-in-progress group reminded me that there is also research into what the term collaborative means when it is taken up in various contexts or settings. The way collaboration is lived out has been researched. For example, Margaret Baguley (2007) in Australia studied what made arts groups collaborative. From her study

she highlighted ten features which illustrate the powerful features of collaboration in arts groups.

1. Because collaboration is a process of human dynamics, there is a need for some kind of leadership in a collaborative arts group.

2. Participants are the most important asset in any collaboration and they must be willing to engage for collaboration to be successful.

3. Participants must be aware of their responsibilities within the collaboration, particularly as it pertains to building an understanding of each other's behaviours and cultures.

4. While there must be a purpose that brings participants together, the overriding factor must be that participants wish to be part of a group. They need to feel secure and that they belong to the group. Without this, there will be impacts on the group's motivation and their sense of community.

5. There are contradictions in how artists need to work together in arts collaboratives, "sometimes the democracy of group decision making can initially work against the sensibilities of professional artists" (Gude, 1989, p. 322). Artists who come to work in collaboratives need to consider whether collaboration, with its emphasis on group identity, is what they want.

6. There needs to be a sense of personal connection to help artists feel confident to voice their opinions.

7. Personal agendas amongst artists in a collaborative can sabotage the primary purpose of the collaboration.

8. A collaborative group needs to have a social identity as well as a shared sense of purpose. Leaders need to recognize participants' skills and expertise and what support they require to complete their tasks.

9. Communication needs to be constant, clear and regular to avoid issues that may disrupt or detour the project.

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   At project's end, the work itself is seen as a 'third entity', and often takes priority. There should be enough security amongst participants for them to become more flexible in their roles, depending on the overall needs of the group. The outcome, named by Baguley as a 'third entity', is seen by group members as a reflection of their group identity.

Baguley's research with its ten key features helped the six of us name some things about collaboratives and collaboration. When I (Jean) inquired

into the opening story fragment from my research journal, I found I could describe the early school leaving research group using terms and features that Baguley found in her study of what makes arts collaboratives collaborative. I saw features such as people's willingness to collaborate, a sense of commitment, shared purpose, freedom to voice individual opinions and a sense of shared purpose and group identity. I reminded myself that Baguley was studying the processes of collaboration.

However, as I realized this, I noted that what Baguley highlights is often the tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1958) people embody when they place the term collaborative in front of the term research and speak of collaborative research. In a common sense way, it feels right and gives a commonsense meaning to collaborative research. However, such a commonsense meaning is insufficient to describe the complexity of collaborative research as we six were beginning to understand it.

I (Jean) want to stay with the idea of collaboration rather than collaborative research for a moment. When I take a reflective turn on my experiential knowledge of collaboration, I see how much of the meaning I take to collaborative research is narratively grounded in my experiences in a Western Canadian farming community in the 1950's. There was a shared sense of community among the farming families in the area where my parents farmed as well as within my immediate and extended family. I learned early how everyone needed to work together to ensure that the crops would be planted and harvested in a timely way if everyone was to survive in the harsh climate. I learned early that my family watched out for our neighbours so that when they needed help to achieve their purposes, it was my family's responsibility to help. While no one in my family called this collaborative, when I think about it now, I was learning to live collaboratively.

When I became a teacher and school counselor I saw myself as working collaboratively in schools with teachers, parents, administrators and others. I saw us working together toward shared ends. I encouraged children to work cooperatively in cooperative learning groups and, perhaps sometimes, I even helped them work collaboratively. This

was the tacit knowledge I embodied when I first began to engage in collaborative research more than 30 years ago. My knowing was knowing of collaboration. Drawing on the results of Baguley's (2007) work, I can now name some of the features I tried to live out when I first began to work collaboratively in my doctoral research with other members of a research team and with participants. I was engaging in my research collaboratively and fell easily and unproblematically into naming what I was doing as collaborative research.

In the works in progress group of the six co-authors of this paper, when I (Jean) shared these insights, Vera and I realized the need to problematize the distinctions between collaboration, working collaboratively on research and collaborative research. Problematizing these distinctions sets the puzzle for this paper. Through work alongside others in collaborative research situations, the six of us gradually awakened to new understandings. It is these new understandings that we are struggling now to name and to understand their complexity.

Collaborative Research: Distinct from Research Undertaken Collaboratively

Adding the concept of research to collaborative, adds layers of complexity. There are epistemological, ontological and methodological understandings at work within the meaning of research. Research, as all researchers know, is a contested and complex undertaking. It is no surprise then when the two terms are unproblematically put together, the meanings of collaborative research are diverse and are not frequently enough unpacked or inquired into. Too often people mean research that they are working on collaboratively, living out the ideas of collaboration that Baguley (2007) offered. Unfortunately this unquestioned use of the term collaborative research means that collaborative research has come to mean almost anything from people working on a project in common to people cooperating to achieve a research end. Sometimes it means that everyone did something for, or on, a research project and, in so doing, named it collaborative research. Because the term collaborative research is used almost synonymously with research worked on collaboratively,

the distinctions are blurred. Increasingly, however, when people say the words collaborative research, we, the six co-authors of this paper, stop and wonder, "What is it that they mean by those words? What makes this collaborative research in the ways they engage and live out the research?"

Explicitly attending to naming research as collaborative research offers a way to think about both research and collaboration differently. What does it mean to engage in re-search, searching again but searching with others, sharing the search with others?

Our interest, that is, the interest of the six of us, is to explore those questions of what it means to live out collaborative research at a time when our university and other universities are pushing for more interdisciplinary, inter-professional, interagency, cross-institutional, cross-community research which is often labelled collaborative research. What is meant by the term when it is used in policy directives is even less clear. And, yet, those of us who worked on the narrative inquiry into the experiences of youth who left school early named that research collaborative research. What meaning am I (Jean) trying to convey when I say this? What do those who hear about this research understand about what makes the research, collaborative research?

A Gradual Shift to Understanding Collaborative Research as Borderland Research

Understandings of research, and therefore the meanings each person brings to collaborative research, are deeply grounded in each individual's own epistemological and ontological commitments. What we, the six of us, say here comes from our own research commitments, which may be quite different from those held by others. Our account of our journeys, however, may help others to begin a journey of their own toward understanding collaborative research.

In my (Jean's) early work with Michael Connelly, following on from his work with Freema Elbaz, we wrote of "what it means to work collaboratively with schools" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 271) in terms of seven working principles.

1. Negotiation of entry and exit
2. Reconstructing meaning vs judgement of practice
3. Participant as knower
4. Participants as collaborative researchers
5. Openness of purpose
6. Openness of judgment and interpretation
7. Multiple interpretations of text
8. Ethical quality of the co-participant relationship.

For the most part, these working principles are still a useful guide for working collaboratively with those who live in schools. However, it is the conclusion of the paper, after Michael and I detailed those principles, that creates an ongoing sense of the need for more inquiry. We wrote, Collaborative research constitutes a relationship. In everyday life, the idea of friendship implies a sharing, an interpenetration of two or more persons' spheres of experience. Mere contact is acquaintanceship, not friendship. The same may be said for collaborative research which requires a close relationship akin to friendship. Relationships are joined, as McIntyre implies, by the narrative unities of our lives. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 281)

Now some 20 years later, our works in progress group of 6 revisit what collaborative research might mean when we understand it as a deeply relational practice, a relational practice situated in the borderland spaces of between. In those long ago days I (Jean) and Michael were already highlighting the relational and it is the relational situated within borderland spaces that interests the six of us now.

Narrative Inquiry as a Relational Practice Story Fragment Two[6]
Months later, we have moved forward. We have funding for the work from the Alberta Centre for Community, Family and Child Research.

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6   Again this is the field text from Jean's research journal from the 2007-2010 narrative inquiry into the experiences of youth who left school early. The we that is referred to in this story fragment is the group of 11 researchers.

Many people, 11 of us, have come to work with youth, to hear their stories and to come alongside them as their lives continue to unfold. We are in the midst of the narrative inquiry into the experiences of youth who leave school early. We want to understand how leaving school early shaped the lives of the youth who left and how their lives shaped their leaving of school. Each of us agreed to talk to one or two or three young people over an extended period of time to hear them tell their life stories, stories in which leaving school was a part of who they were and were becoming.

There is excitement but many challenges in engaging in this work. There are tensions in the group as distance and changed life circumstances make it hard for people to meet in person. We have some meetings but we do not all meet together. The conversations are difficult, a bit strained, and I find myself positioned more as a leader, making sure all voices are heard when we do talk via a mix of in-person and telephone meetings. I am puzzled but we are in the midst and there is little time to stop and wonder about the relational.

We are all excited about finding youth who want us to come alongside to create spaces into which they can tell their stories. Sean has helped many of us connect with youth through beginning conversations with the youth and then slowly and carefully bringing a youth to talk with one of us over pizza or coffee. Claire has also located interested youth and she, too, helps some of us connect. A few youth have responded to our posters and notices.

We begin to drift apart as a group as we spend our time with the youth with whom we are working, getting to know them and they us, telling and hearing stories, composing interim narrative accounts and negotiating them with the youth. When we meet in informal, chance encounters, we are filled with what we are beginning to understand about the lives of the youth and about our own lives in relation with them. Our focus is on our individual research relationships with the youth we are each working with.

We come together as a whole group in January but it is difficult to hear across what now seem to be too many stories, too many experiences. We all have a sense of needing to reconnect as a research group. We decide

to form small works in progress groups of 3 or 4 so we can share and respond to our writing of narrative accounts (Jean's Research Journal, January, 2009).

Narrative inquiry is a way of thinking about the phenomena under study and the methodology for undertaking that study. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) wrote that narrative inquiry is both phenomenon and methodology. Narrative inquirers explore individual's experiences as they are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted within social, cultural, linguistic, familial and institutional narratives (Clandinin et al, 2006). Narrative inquirers study an individual's experience in the world and, through the study, seek ways of enriching and transforming that experience for themselves and others (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiries begin and end in the storied lives of the people, both researchers and participants, involved. The narrative inquiry with the early school leavers was intentionally designed with these ideas in mind. Connelly and Clandinin have always described narrative inquiry as relational inquiry. Recently Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, and Murray Orr (2009) pointed to the following aspects that characterize narrative inquiry as relational inquiry:

a. Research puzzles emerge in relation with life experiences, that is, in relation with the lives of each of us, our own and our participants' lives.
b. Narrative inquirers live alongside participants and, for a time, we compose and co-compose field texts in relation with participants.
c. Through negotiation narrative inquirers co-compose research texts in relation with participants.
d. Narrative inquirers are always attentive to ourselves as part of, and under study in, the inquiry. We live out a relational form of ethics with ourselves, with our participants and with those who live in our own and our participants' stories.

Clandinin, Murphy, Huber and Murray Orr (2009) developed these points as part of a recent narrative inquiry into curriculum making in in- and out-of-school places. They unpacked the interwoven narrative threads entailed within the living out of narrative inquiry as a methodology,

from composing research puzzles, from being in the midst with research participants, and from composing field and research texts. In so doing, they made evident the centrality of relational narrative ethics as they lived in the midst of tensions in narrative inquiry.

In this paper, the six of us bring forward these ideas on narrative inquiry as relational inquiry to our work on considering the meanings we hold for collaborative research. The six of us see our struggle to show collaborative research as borderland research, as a deeply complex relational practice, runs deeper to touch issues of epistemology and ontology. We turn to other writings to help us.

Narrative inquiry proceeds from a Deweyan view of experience that allows for the study of experience that acknowledges the embodiment of the person living in the world (Johnson, 1987). Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) imagined places where narrative inquiry bumped up against other research methodologies when researchers worked from, and held constant, a Deweyan theory of experience. In their work, this constant view of experience understood from a Deweyan perspective and of narrative inquiry as the study of experience understood in this way allowed them to understand borders and possible borderlands with other research methodologies. As they composed a map of narrative inquiry that lives at the borderlands with other research methodologies, they paid close attention to questions of epistemology and ontology. The six co-authors of this paper draw on their writing to make more complex the meanings of collaborative research as borderland research, as a relational practice.

Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) made the following argument. Narrative inquiry begins from a conception of reality as relational, temporal, and continuous. Following Dewey, the narrative inquirer takes the sphere of immediate human experience as the first and most fundamental reality researchers have. Building on Dewey, the narrative inquirer focuses on the way the relational, temporal, and continuous features of a pragmatic ontology of experience can manifest in narrative form, both in retrospective representations of human experience as well as in the lived immediacy of that experience. The narrative inquirer seeks knowledge

of human experience that remains within the stream of human lives. In other words, narrative inquiry does not merely describe this or that feature of someone's experience. It is simultaneously a description of, and intervention into, human experience; it acknowledges that descriptions add meaning to experience, thus changing the content and quality of the experience for both researcher and participant. In this understanding, it is the relational that is highlighted.

In this paper, we recap these understandings of narrative inquiry in order to build on the ideas of borderlands as a way of coming to understand collaborative research as a deeply relational practice. It allows the six of us to see that collaborative research is far more complex than working collaboratively. Borderlands is a way of thinking about the spaces where understanding collaborative research as relational practice can deepen understandings of the potentials and possibilities of collaborative research.

Borders and Borderlands

Borderlands are spaces that exist around borders where one lives within the possibility of the multiplicity of different experiences. Anzaldúa (1987) describes a borderland as a "vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary...a constant state of transition. Los atravesados live here. . . those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the "normal."(p. 3). Although Anzaldúa is writing of individuals' experiences as they compose who they are, their identities, in crossing cultural and national boundaries, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) borrowed the idea of a borderland to understand the philosophical borderlands between research methodologies. Borderlands as a way of understanding spaces around the philosophical borders of different methodologies fits with a view of a knowledge landscape that does not have sharp divides that mark where one leaves one way of making sense for another. They argued that researchers, including narrative inquirers, frequently find themselves crossing cultural discourses, ideologies, and institutional boundaries. We six realized we often encounter both deep similarities and profound differences between

our own experiences and those with whom we work, neither of which can be reduced to the other. Clandinin and Rosiek argued that this resulted in an expanded understanding of the tensions and conflicted possibilities in the stories people live. Clandinin and Rosiek imagined the possibility for understanding the tensions between methodologies as borderland spaces, spaces of tension and struggle and uncertainty. They saw these borderland spaces as spaces where there is a constant call for ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions to be seen as in relation with each other.

The concept of borderland research provides a lens to help the six co-authors of this paper to deepen understandings of collaborative research as a way to attend to its complex relational nature.

Story Fragment Three

We[7] gather at the table in the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development. It is after lunch on a Friday afternoon and, as I look around the table, I am struck with how tired everyone looks but how committed they are to this work. Pam and Yi Li have flown in to Edmonton for this meeting and Marion has driven up from Calgary. People, there are 11 of us, have left other commitments to spend this Friday afternoon, evening and a good chunk of Saturday to work together. We have not all gathered together face to face since January. I sense the excitement and care each person feels and know that something brings them to this space to do this work.

We have all engaged in conversations with young people and most of us are in the midst of completing narrative accounts of our work with the young people. As I sit and look around at my colleagues, some of whom I know well while others are not so familiar, I wonder again about the

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7   The we that Jean refers to here in this journal entry refers to the 11 researchers who worked on the narrative inquiry into the experiences of youth who left school early.

potentials and possibilities of collaborative research. Somehow, despite what are clearly challenges, I know I would have it no other way.

The afternoon begins to unfold. I have tried to step back as leader letting multiple voices share the leadership until together we have a plan of how to proceed. We have brought multiple draft copies of most of the narrative accounts. At first we try to talk but no one knows the relationships, the stories, each of us have been living with the youth. We hesitate. What makes sense? We agree to take a couple of hours to read each account silently, writing responses in the margins and trying to learn about where we have each been on the journeys with the youth. We each take an account and head for a quiet spot to read. In two hours we will sit again at the table, together, but knowing something of the journeys we have had alongside one or two or three youth. I take some pages and with a worried feeling about what we will do later this afternoon, I begin to read. (Reflective journal, March, 2009)

Borderlands and Borderland Spaces in Collaborative Research

As we six took understandings of collaborative research as borderland research, that is, as a deeply relational practice to inquire into my (Jean's) experience in the narrative inquiry into the experiences of youth who left school early, we saw multiple borderlands. In this paper, we discuss just a few of them in order to try out this metaphor for understanding collaborative research. There is much yet to understand.

Borderlands Between Disciplines

As Pam Steeves, Marilyn Huber, Vera Caine and Jean Clandinin began the conversation of whose lives might become entwined in the research team to engage in the narrative inquiry into the experiences of youth who leave school early, I (Jean) saw the four of them as intentionally trying to bring together people from different disciplines in order to have different disciplinary vantage points. It seemed important to include disciplines in the broad sense such as education and nursing but it was also important to include disciplines within education such as educational psychology,

curriculum studies, and teacher education. All of these disciplines might allow new insights into the complexities of early school leavers.

The six co-authors of this paper realized what was being created were what we now see as borderland spaces, spaces where there could well be tensions as the researchers' disciplinary knowledge came into relation. For example, from the disciplinary vantage point of nursing, knowledge in terms of health outcomes might be foregrounded. From the vantage point of policy, new policy mandates or directives might be foregrounded. From the vantage point of teacher education, insights for preservice teacher education and professional development might be foregrounded. Both in the living and telling of stories of experiences, I (Jean) and she imagines the others who were part of the narrative inquiry into the experiences of youth who left school early had learned to be watchful and attend to what might create tensions. I (Jean) and the others, she imagines, did not do this with an intent to either smooth over or to resolve the tensions but to highlight the ways that researchers lived through the tensions, knowing that deeper understandings about the youth's lives would result from keeping the tensions in view. Now as we six look back on my (Jean's) account of my experiences, we realize we can understand that we were living in the tensions and struggles of the metaphoric borderlands between disciplines.

Borderlands Between Researchers

As we[8] learned to work together to engage in the research we realized that, even though it was difficult to make spaces for a large group of researchers, the research would be richer if we included diversity, that is, multiple vantage points, differing knowledge gained from diverse experiences. For example, we wanted researchers whose life experiences involved immigrating from other countries like Vera Caine, Joy Ruth Mickelson and Yi Li. We wanted researchers whose lives involved close up experiences with learning and teaching English as an Additional Language like Yi Li and Claire Desrochers. We wanted researchers whose lives involved close connections with children and youth with developmental

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8   We refers to the 11 person research team.

delays like Joy Ruth Mickelson and Pam Steeves. We wanted researchers whose lives involved close up experiences with the experiences of children and youth of Aboriginal heritage like Sean Lessard and Vera Caine. We wanted researchers who were parents. We wanted researchers who were positioned in different professional roles such as university teachers like Jean Clandinin, Claire Desrochers, Pam Steeves, Marilyn Huber and George Buck, counseling like Marion Stewart, social work and psychology like Joy Ruth Mickelson, teaching like Sean Lessard, nursing like Vera Caine and policy making like Marni Pearce. We realized many of us lived positioned in multiple ways. As we[9] inquired into my (Jean's) experiences, we now see some of the struggles of the borderlands lived between us as researchers and even within ourselves as researchers. We now see, in our reflective turn, that the research group was intentionally shaped, through bringing together this diversity in the research group, to create borderlands among researchers where there could be struggle to honor the richness of diversity rather than to wash out differences in the search for a unified voice. Simmee Chung reminds us, as Greene (1995) also does, to reach past ourselves as we consider the borderlands in collaborative research.

Borderlands Between Researchers and Participants

When I (Jean) first shared some of the story fragments with the works-in-progress group, Sean drew attention to all of the people who participate in a collaborative research. He noted it was not only the researchers who are part of the collaborative research but also the participants, the youth and their families who came alongside the researchers in this study of the experiences of early school leavers. As we inquired into my (Jean's) experiences in the narrative inquiry into the experiences of youth who left school early, we now more clearly see that researchers and participants were inhabiting a relational borderland space, sometimes easily and sometimes less easily. Thinking of researchers and participants as inhabiting a relational borderland space allows the possibility of reconsidering who

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9   We refers to the six co-authors of this paper.

people are, and are becoming, as part of the collaborative research. As Sean noticed, when we think about collaborative research as a deeply relational practice, we are in the midst of honouring the lives of everyone who is part of the research. We six now more easily recognize this is not easy work, this research in the borderlands. Our university context does not easily create spaces where we honour each other's knowing. As we six acknowledge this move to the borderlands with our participants in our other projects, we realize we lose our privileged place as researchers and move alongside participants. Sean noted that in collaborative research in these metaphorical borderlands we see participants as people, not as they are often seen through current discourse as "assets". We do not see our work as collaborative researchers as managing assets or resources but as people in relation studying people in relation.

Borderlands Between Different Understandings of Research Ethics

We realize that many people are thinking hard about collaborative research but not everyone is thinking about collaborative research as relational research, research guided by a relational ethics. The different understandings collaborative researchers hold of ethics can create other borderland spaces. As Michele McIntosh (2009) argues, if we live out a utilitarian research ethics it creates a disjuncture, a borderland space, with those who live out a relational ethic or an ethic of care. While ethics did not become a central issue in my (Jean's) experience as represented in my research journal, we can imagine it may have become an issue if different ethical stances were present among the research group. As researchers come alongside each other in collaborative research, we now realize how important it is to learn to attend closely to each other within the borderlands being created.

Borderlands Between Lives in Relation

At another moment when I (Jean) shared one of the story fragments, Lee entered into the conversation. "It's not really only about the projects

though. We need to think about the lives and the living. It's there that the collaborative research really lives in the work that we do here in the Centre." Lives and the living out, the composing and recomposing of those lives. These borderlands are central to understanding collaborative research as a deeply relational practice. It is the unfolding lives of participants and of each of us as researchers that matter in collaborative research. Collaborative research is about attending to the lives, the living of those lives, in process, in the making.

In our works in progress conversation, we six spoke of how seeing collaborative research as borderland research, as a deeply relational practice, puts lives in relation at the heart of collaborative research. In this way, understanding collaborative research as borderland research is a way of working against the dominant university narratives of research, research which values single authorship, competition, and ownership. Too often from within the dominant narrative, collaborative research is seen as dividing up tasks and taking responsibility for individual tasks, perhaps coming together to weave together a final research text that answers the research question but does not attend to the lives in relation, to the ways that participating in the collaborative research changes all of us. The dominant narrative of research in too many places in education is that research is a series of projects, projects that are completed and finished. Collaborative research as borderland research, as a deeply relational practice, sees research as an unfolding of lives in relation. New people join in and others drift away in the spirit of "for now" knowing that their lives can always become part of the collaborative research again.

Collaborative research is not a way of living in relation that allows each of us to walk away unchanged from our experiences alongside each other and alongside our participants. Nor is collaborative research an easy smooth way to undertake research. Collaborative research understood from within an embodied metaphor of borderlands is tension-filled, challenging, a kind of research that brings struggles to the work and knows that struggles are part of it.

Story Fragment Four

Before we[10] left on Friday night, we sat at the small table and ate sandwiches and fruit. We drank some tea and we talked. We were exhausted but we had once more gathered at the table and talked about what we were learning from reading each other's narrative accounts. As we talked, we began to notice resonances and we began excitedly to write them down as threads that cut across the accounts. We had a list of some twenty threads and Marni volunteered large sheets of paper that we could tack up in the hallways, one for each thread.

And now it was Saturday morning and here we were with 20 large sheets of paper in the hallway, each one labeled with the name of a possible thread or resonance that cut across the accounts. We each took markers and thoughtfully moved slowly up and down the hallway, adding stories or ideas from the work with our youth if it fit with the thread. There was a buzz of talk as we read what others wrote and as we wrote on the charts. The clock was ticking on the day. There were flights to catch back to homes, long drives for some and other responsibilities for others.

We gathered the large sheets and moved back to the table and began to think about each thread and to read what people had written. We listened, we responded and we added. We planned a website where the threads would be posted with the material from the charts on the site. Each of us took responsibility for one or two threads. We were moving forward again into new spaces. Exhausted we called it a day (Jean's Research Journal, March, 2009).

Epilogue

The project report is now finished and can be found on the Centre website (http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/elementaryed/CRTED.cfm). However, the stories of this complex project have much yet to teach all of us and perhaps others about engaging in collaborative research.

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10 This we refers to the 11 researchers in the narrative inquiry into the experiences of youth who left school early.

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