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'Togetherness' and its discontents
Connectivity as well as belonging, cooperation, conflict and separation) in
biographical narratives of adult education and learning**

Dr. Susie Mossman Riva
su.riva@bluewin.ch
+41 79 299 39 65
TAOS Institute Associate

DAS/CAS in Mediation
University of Geneva, Valais Campus

Linkedness: Relational Transformation and Narrative Conflict Resolution

Introduction

Family relational systems offer our first learning experiences, generating learning blueprints or patterns. Giving value to childhood stories can enhance adult learning, offering a way to access these formative moments. These learning narratives could provide the basis for experiential learning processes. How can we develop learning models that connect different phases of life experience, recognizing a kind of fluid continuity? As we separate from our family and choose a field of study, the individuation process is furthered. The learning continues, expanding out from family to mandatory schooling, and then further expands, encompassing academic achievements within recognized institutions where diplomas and certifications open up professional pathways of practice.

In the case of mediation certifications, transformational practices are learned within accredited institutions. The connection between individual and collective conflict narratives becomes apparent when adult learners seek to master practices in conflict resolution. Personal narratives are intertwined with professional aspirations and practice. This is especially relevant when mediation is defined as 'linkedness'. Adult educators can enhance experiential learning in environments that give value to biographic approaches, tying them to narrative mediation and conflict resolution practices. Narrative methods contribute to the enhancement of democratic processes and social justice, both central themes in mediation.

Relational transformation occurs within our learning encounters. Professional practices like mediation require reflexivity, allowing mediators to embrace self-knowledge in relation to their professional role. Giving value to these dimensions, contributes to the transformation of individual life trajectories and even possibly societal transformation. How can we better integrate these aspects into adult learning contexts, reinforcing a sense of connectedness and celebrating we-ness?

Allowing time for storytelling can be a way to generate the good life, and a just society, engaging citizens in community action. Formal certification processes interact with professional associations, giving legitimization to professional practices in the field of mediation. Using an autobiographical approach, I will connect my family history with my mediation practice and my academic work in narrative mediation. I will further discuss the pedagogical framework used in the DAS/CAS in mediation at the University of Geneva's Bramois Campus where I teach narrative mediation and narrative conflict resolution.

In this paper, I hope to enkindle a shared awe for the beauty of our unique storylines, showing how this aesthetic approach contributes to the configuring of our pedagogical frameworks. Biographical research can be used as a theoretical support in relation to narrative conflict resolution. A theoretical bridge between biographical methods and narrative mediation can reinforce practice and pedagogy. I propose to investigate how transformational processes can be generated when adult learners enter into continuing education such as mediation trainings and certifications. Also, I would like to explore how adult educators can better model this transformative continuity within formal learning settings and research. How can we use our own stories to reinforce our teaching methods? How can my teaching story be integrated into a model or template capable of fostering shared understanding?

Honoring Knowledge Transmitted Through Family Lines

Nel Noddings is one of the most well-known scholars that gives recognition to the knowledge we gain within our families in relation to care. As professional learning has become the most recognized form of life-long learning, knowledge gained within the home environment has been marginalized. Caring for family members is often modeled and taught within the family circle. Traditionally, care has been performed by women family members. Nel Noddings writes about *ethics of care*, bringing recognition to women's contributions to education. Mediation is a form of conflict resolution that is often used within family and community settings. There have traditionally been designated family and community members that served the role as the peacemaker or peacekeeper, accompanying conflictual situations and seeking conflict resolution for the involved parties. Elise Boulding's scholarship stands out in her descriptions of women working from within the home to teach their children peacemaking and peacekeeping skills. Her life's work conveyed how families are the foundation for peace.

In my doctoral thesis, *Conflict Narratives: Mediation Case Studies in an Intercultural Context* (S. K. Riva-Mossman, 2009), I discuss the skills I used in my first mediation on a helicopter accident site, questioning where my skills and ability to intervene was learned. How were the skills that I learned from my parents interwoven with the professional skills I learned during my European Master's Degree in Mediation? As I was not formally trained to intervene in emergency situations, I improvised, combining both formal training and intuitive responses that configured the mediation process. The helicopter crash event initiated me, offering me the opportunity to prove my worthiness as a mediator while serving the greater needs of the accident victims as well as the authorities who had called me to work with the emergency intervention team. Abraham Joshua Heschel, a rabbi, scholar and social activist that walked next to Martin Luther King in protest wrote, "To speak of events is to imply that there are happenings in the world that are beyond the reach of our explanations" (A. Heschel, 1955, p. 210).

Narrative mediation provides a template that values storying processes. My own story of becoming a mediator on the accident site is a way for me to teach adult learners about mediation practice. Using my story as a teaching story is a useful pedagogical tool. However, when I tell my tale, I honestly add that the know-how I employed was not all gathered from my professional training. I acknowledge that some of my skills were learned from my family and community, growing up in Omaha, Nebraska. I built upon that foundation during my different mediation trainings that included professional training with role playing as well as academic training during the Master's degree. As a doctoral fellow, I was given the opportunity to analyze these various influences. I do my best to be authentic, re-membering these different aspects of my becomingness that have sensitized me to appreciate the becomingness of others and the co-construction of our lifeworlds. In *Unfinished*, the authors explain their approach to the anthropology of becomingness:

"We tell stories that are as much material and political-economic as personal and ethical. We are always working outward: pulling into line with our subjects, moving sideways to follow them, getting out of their way, returning and sitting with them, drawing out characters, probing philosophical questions, bringing certain concepts into focus, and letting others emerge only partially, but meaningfully so" (J. Biehl, P. Locke, p. xii).

Linking Narrative Conflict Resolution and Social Change

John Winslade, Gerald Monk, and Sara Cobb are scholar practitioners that have written extensively about the narrative model in mediation and conflict resolution. Their books and teachings have influenced both the practice and the theoretical framework of mediation by proposing an alternative approach, stemming from social constructionist theories and models. Their contributions create new lines of flight, opening pathways for transformative practices that englobe scholarship, practice, and social transformation.

The TAOS Institute recently created Worldshare Books that offer free access to scientific publications from affiliated scholars. I contributed in the book "*Education as Social Construction*" edited by K. Gergen, S. McNamee, and E. Tseliou, writing a chapter entitled "*Culture Change in Educational Contexts*" (S. Riva-Mossman, 2015). In my contribution, I recount the transformative process that I initiated at the Lausanne school for hearing impaired children. Learning processes are oriented by how we determine what is valuable. We can look at evaluation in a traditional way or we can understand evaluation in a new light by focusing on e-valuation "Here we see that not only do multiple inter-relations become central but so too does the move from evaluation to valuation. Evaluation is, as we have said, a question of value" (S. McNamee and D. Hosking, 2012 p. 94).

There is an institutional culture change when evaluation is implemented within the social constructionist framework. Ways of evaluating students in mediation trainings requires a congruent approach, aligned with social constructionist theories that are relevant guideposts. The evaluation process should serve the experiential learning process and be transparently explicated beforehand. The practice of narrative mediation implies a culture change in conflict resolution. This social change is reinforced by utilizing new forms of evaluation. Only an integral approach can maintain the transformational process.

The authors stress valuing over evaluating by asking organizations what they value. By questioning the different professional groups, that represent the various practices within an organization, they shift from a relational focus rather than an individual focus. The transformative processes cultivated within the learning experience can be transferred to the way professionals position themselves as they perform their practices. Ways of "e-valuating" in reference to social constructionist positioning, influence narrative mediation trainings for adult learners. In the case study involving the special education department, developing a culture of care became a unifying goal for the educational and therapeutic professionals facing new challenges in relation to multi-handicapped children.

When teaching mediation, it is important to establish a coherency between learning and practice, reinforced through shared values as well as shared academic orientations and research ethics. Teaching narrative mediation requires a coherent integration of the theoretical foundations that are implied in the literature throughout the pedagogical program. "For us, social construction is not a theory that proposes particular techniques or methods for practice, but is more of a general orientation or thought style-a way of engaging with the world that centers on dialogue and multiplicity-an orientation that gives new meaning and value to ongoing and open dialogues" (Hosking and McNamee, 2006, p. 23).

Mediation Defined as Linkedness

I have previously defined mediation as *linkedness* in my thesis (S.K. Riva-Mossman, 2009). Linkedness, is a way of being linked to or in relation to the other. Linkedness is opposed to de-linkedness a form of ‘delinquency’ that implies that the relationship has been broken. Johan Decklerck’s lectures at the Institute Universitaire Kürt Bösch in 1998 familiarized me with this terminology. Decklerck’s work in prisons allowed him to look at mediation from the lens of delinquency. Imagine a chain with links. When one of the links in a chain breaks, reparation is required. Linkedness is similar to connectivity. As a mediator, I actively make links, weaving together a relational fabric capable of sustaining the transformational process inherent in conflict resolution settings. One of the *American Heritage Dictionary* definitions for mediation is “being in the middle”. My posture in mediation can be described as offering myself as a connecting, relational force or relational glue, permeating the process.

There are ways of being in the world that reinforce the transformational processes that we partake in. As both teacher and mediator, I am relating, narrating, and making sense of the world in which I live. I offer my mediation knowledge and services, taking responsibility for my thoughts and actions. The narrative approach offers scholar practitioners the opportunity to give value to the aesthetic dimensions of Self and life history. Our family memoirs also configure our becomingness. They are the backdrop on the stage of our life’s performance. In the anthropology of becoming social scientists look at the unfolding social processes as unfinished paintings that show the etched outlines containing the forms and colors that will be painted on the canvas (J. Biehl, D. Locke, 2017).

Building on the unfinished painting metaphor, may I suggest that we are all writing our life story within an outline or story arc. There may be a foreword, chapters in the middle, and even possibly an afterword. It is our *authorship* that contains the process, floating on a sea of stories. The way we narrate our stories and the flyways that we imagine, in the storytelling process, offer the framework for transformation. Our intention to ethically participate sets the course of our journey. By consulting historical maps that have pinpointed the good life that may have existed before us, our journey is accompanied by descriptions of imagined castled cities like Camelot where the Knights of the Round Table convened and chivalry reigned. Navigating historical cartographies, we travel forward, using their inspiration to map our own trajectories in the quest for the Holy Grail that may shapeshift over the centuries, as humanity finds its way forward. Our illnesses and conflicts can be seen as chalices, holding transformational potential. In reference to Arthur Kleinman’s *Illness Narratives*, my thesis looks into conflict narratives, using the eight questions that Kleinman proposes to better understand the meaning of illness in a patient’s life (A. Kleinman, 1989).

Our relationship to both illness and conflict carries an inherent *viriditas*, or greenness that can empower, allowing future relationships to bud and bloom. Hildegard von Bingen’s visions contribute to the understanding of greenness and the essence of life transforming practices. She lived and wrote in the 1200’s.

Hildegard Von Bingen wrote:

*“O most honored Greening Force,
You who roots in the Sun;
You who lights up, in shining serenity, within a wheel
That earthly excellence fails to comprehend.*

*You are enfolded
In the weaving of divine mysteries.
You redden like the dawn
and you burn: flame of the Sun.”*
Hildegard von Bingen, Causae et Curae

Often times historical facts are transposed as we recount our legends. Just like the Arthurian Legends that have been re-written and reinterpreted through time depending on the lens of the teller. We may not be able to change the events in our life; however, we can transform our perception of those events. The theoretical development of the Narrative Mediation Model underscores this aspect, “Taking stories seriously, to us, means treating them as having the power to shape experiences, influence mind-sets, and construct relationships. It also means seeing them as having a life of their own, as embarking on a mission that sometimes seems to drag people along behind.” (J. Winslade, G. Monk, 2008, p.1) In a chain of events, our legends capture our imagination and connect us through time. Much in the same way, our search for a culture of peace continues to evade and hearten us, in a kind of historical connectedness valuing the questing process. So do our family lines of inheritance and filiation bind us. Our linkedness is interlaced in an archetypical and holographic continuum.

*“So do our minutes hasten to their end;
Each changing place with that which goes before,
In sequent toil all forwards do contend,
Nativity, once in the main of light,
Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crown'd,
Crooked eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,
And Time that gave doth now his gift confound”*
(Shakespeare's Sonnet LX)

Politics and Poetics: Underscoring The Aesthetic Quality of Narrative

Sara Cobb's reference to Hannah Arendt's theories of natality provide a central placeholder, marking the fragility of human dignity. She defends a solid position, grounded in birthright, stating that because we are born into the world, we deserve to be treated with dignity. Each unique way of being born elicits a kind of awe for the beauty of individual self-expression.

“Arendt argues that people are human because they were born. And I would add that because they are born, they are legitimate as human beings. The dimensions of that legitimacy and its relation to its own underbelly are constructions that can be created in interaction, at any time. But love is not just a moment within a narrative transformation process. It is the practice of continually, persistently, appreciating the complexity and the beauty of people, and continually and persistently constructing them so, with them, about them, with others. It is, in fact, an artistic project, one that calls for new “lines of flight”, new configurations of meanings, and the social construction of a relationship through which complexity emerges without destroying legitimacy” (S. Cobb, 2013 p. 284).

It is through the artistic project that we can reinforce new “lines of flight”. New meanings and relationships are generated by engaging in the narrative mediation process. When beauty and complexity are valued, each life story elicits a form of radical amazement that calls forth wonder for the ineffable as Abraham Heschel explains:

“Concepts, words must not become screens; they must be regarded as windows. The roots of ultimate insights are found, as said above, not on the level of discursive thinking, but on the level of wonder and radical amazement, in the depth of awe, in our sensitivity to the mystery, in our awareness of the ineffable. It is the level on which the great things happen to the soul, where the unique insights of art, religion, and philosophy come into being” (A. J. Heschel, 1955, p.117).

The aesthetic nature of our narratives and becomingness is indeed a wonderful art form. Narrative conflict resolution places the aesthetic at the heart of the transformative process. The beauty of each life story when met with wonder, awe, and radical amazement, enkindles transfiguration. Here, new relational possibilities arise, opening into previously unimagined flyways. It is through our appreciation for the ineffable in life stories that we are transported to relational encounters capable of engendering transformation.

Much like our narratives expressed in mediation sessions, our auto-biographies are written testimonies that often include our descriptions of injustices as well as our triumphs and hopes for a better life. Hannah Arendt’s coverage of the Nuremburg trials allowed her to witness Adolph Eichmann’s testimony, developing theories that continue to guide scholars in their pursuit of defining the good life in contrast to the horrors committed during World War II. Eichmann’s testimony and Arendt’s analysis of the court proceedings during the hearings transformed our collective understanding of “the banality of evil”. Arendt underscores the importance of thinking and taking responsibility for one’s actions in opposition to following orders that can lead, as in Eichmann’s case, to Nazi War Crimes and genocide (H. Arendt, 1963).

Sara Cobb asks a fundamental question in *Speaking of Violence, The Politics and Poetics of Narrative Conflict Resolution*. She goes beyond her previous theories in relation to narrative conflict resolution, insisting that we must have a way to evaluate the storylines or ‘lines of flight’ that are co-constructed during the mediation process. She asks this compelling question: How can we develop criteria that allows us to distinguish which story is a better story?

“The better formed-story is one that requires this destabilization of the main storylines, so that closure and narrative compression are forestalled—if the subject positions could be more complex (legitimacy and its underbelly), the storylines would remain open, slightly destabilized, and the implicit connections to subordinate storylines would multiply (S. Cobb, 2003 p. 271).

Narrative mediation and conflict resolution imply that we can transform our narratives and therefore our perceptions of the conflict that we are participating in. Yet, how do we know that the new emerging story, our co-constructed becomingness, is truly a better storyline? Even more so, how can public ‘hearings’ like the Nuremburg trials sensitize us, rendering us conscious of our responsibility to think and act appropriately, with dignity and reverence for life? When we truly hear the other, embracing their complexity, there is a multiplication of new possibilities that can emerge. Through processes where parties are encouraged to maintain enriched dialogues, new flyways are mapped, and better stories are told.

Language constitutes our lifeworlds. Words are vessels that carry transformative potential within their meaning. This is where the aesthetic dimension comes in to *play*, giving rise to the poetics of narrative. During this dance of words, we *play* with dialogues that link us to our

environment, relating us to and constituting our social worlds. “Although the labor of men and women to improve their world is rooted in the material conditions of their era, it is also affected by their capacity to learn from the past, to imagine, and to plan for the future” (L.S. Vygotsky, 1978, p. 129).

Vygotsky’s work gives importance to both play and speech in human developmental processes. Narrative conflict resolution builds upon Vygotsky’s findings. “These observations lead me to the conclusion that *children solve practical tasks with the help of their speech, as well as their eyes and hands*” (L.S. Vygotsky, 1978 p. 26). His observations can help us to better understand how speech, and the narrating process, contribute to problem solving and therefore conflict resolution. Dialogical practices support problem solving processes. We use our words to find ways to resolve the dilemmas and problematics we are confronted with, just as we use other tools. Narrative mediation recognizes how our speaking of violence and of our hopes is in fact and intricate part of our developmental process; our evolutionary way.

Narrative models in mediation and conflict resolution are also grounded in theories that explicitly refer to power. John Winslade and Gerlad Monk refer specifically to Michel Foucault’s work in *Narrative Mediation* (J. Winslade, G. Monk, 2000). Sara Cobb’s references to Hannah Arendt solidify her own theoretical groundings, adding yet another important layer to the development of narrative models by giving a considerable place to philosophical references. These scholar practitioners have chosen to accord a central place to philosophers seeking to expose social injustice. The analytical deconstruction of conflict, both individual and collective, can ultimately serve to foster more flourishing ways of relating, by shedding light on the factors that can be shown to sustain oppression.

Our connectedness and belonging is often enhanced through the mediation process when the mediator is positioned in-between, to separate that which is linked, in an attempt to bring together parties in a transformed way of relating. Narrative mediation elicits social change through the enactment of its methodology. Narrative approaches can be applied to a variety of conflict resolution situations, generating relational practices that foster social transformation.

By accessing stories of hope, people are invited to construct bright and hopeful futures. However, stories of indignation and despair, speaking of violence, are also an integral part of the narrative model in conflict resolution. Narrative practices are used for restorative conferencing and mediation in organizations, schools, health care, divorce cases, employer and employee problems, and civil and international conflicts. The narrative model’s contribution to post-modern conflict resolution analysis and practice supplements scholar practitioners and their practices, as they generate new ways to go forward within emerging social and political contexts. In reference to Jacques Derrida’s *démocratie à l’avenir*, or in English “democracy to come”, practitioners seek to demonstrate how narrative practices can reinforce democratic principles, safeguarding social justice.

While teaching narrative practices in the field, offering engaged scholar practitioners a reflexive space to learn more about narrative mediation and social change practices, teachers must be sensitive to the life trajectories of their lifelong learners. While speaking about human rights, mediation, and conflict resolution within educational and international contexts, teachers not only outline analytical frameworks, but also teach their practices in small group settings, modeling what it is to be ‘in between’. Role playing is often used as part of the experiential learning process. But despite all the focus on theory, models and role playing, charisma may also play an important role in the transformative process.

While presenting a course on narrative mediation, referring to charisma as a characteristic that can influence mediation outcomes, a student recently asked me, “So are mediators gurus?”. Historically, the word charisma is rooted in the Christian religion. The Church writings underscore the downpour of charismatic gifts that happen the moment one goes through Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Jesus is frequently represented as both a healer and mediator. As mediators strive to embody Jesus’s example it is important to cultivate a kind of reflexivity that can assure a healthy balance.

The influence of today’s media that portrays certain outstanding individuals as possessing powers greater than life, requires us to cultivate humility. There may be a risk of becoming a mediation ‘guru’ in the present when the healing gifts are not kept in check with a dose of humility. Mediators must seek a healthy balance between confidence in their practice and humility in their ability to perform even when they are not affiliated with a particular religion. Post-modern implications might be understood in the following way:

“In order for Charismatics to continue shaping their image in the ‘likeness of Jesus’, they need to recall the values of pride as well as saintly humility. This means a withdrawal from the world of fame to safeguard the boundaries of religiosity threatened by media popularity” (Z. D’abreu, 2002, p. 240).

Furthermore, the methods that allow mediation participants to co-construct meaning, uphold a more egalitarian posture, positioning the mediator as a facilitator and not an expert like a psychiatrist, psychologist, lawyer or judge. This aspect is reinforced by the multi-partial positioning of the mediator within the process, that further acts to safeguard the mediator from becoming a modern guru. The embodiment of humility contributes to the flattening of hierarchical power structures that seek to place charismatic leaders on a pedestal, uprooted from grounded and proven methods. The mediators posturing is not only a central defining issue, but an ongoing balancing act. As mediators, we are challenged to not *know for* but to *know with*, an expression of we-ness in the process of co-constructing resolutions.

Enacting a Pedagogy of Radical Democratic Hope

The University of Geneva has a program designed to bring together scholar practitioners working to promote social justice through narrative approaches as well as other mediation models, crafting a bridge of transdisciplinary understanding. Social suffering is addressed through the lens of the social sciences by speaking of conflict narratives presented through case studies. The aim is to allow participants to have experiential learning encounters. The pedagogical focus on learning conversations is designed to inform participants through close relational encounters within narrative learning circles.

By integrating these experiential teaching methods in the mediation training, the certification process offers a coherent pedagogical approach. As learners become mediators, they enter into a socializing process designed to foster individual and societal transformation. Following the certification, mediators can choose to belong to professional organizations that are actively involved in the promotion of mediation as an officially recognized form of conflict resolution, accessible to all citizens. As more and more professionals go through the experiential learning process, the social fabric is progressively transformed, when mediators become active participants in their communities, organizations, and legal systems. As mediators engage in reforming their judicial processes, by including mediation as an official

and recognized option for citizens facing conflicts, democracy is upheld. Mediation as a form of participative governance gives voice to citizens, by allowing them to be active participants in the resolution of their conflicts.

Schools and other state institutions are also integrating mediation as part of their officially recognized procedures. For instance, teaching methods have been transformed using cooperative educational methods introduced by Johnson and Johnson (D. Johnson, R. Johnson, 2009). Their work has helped to change the game from competition to cooperation in classrooms during the formative years of young children. Peer mediation has also been introduced in schools to foster cooperation, empowering young leaders with conflict resolution skills. Finally, states like Nebraska have incorporated mediation in special education in relation to individual curriculums that are defined yearly for special needs children. Another example of innovative practice and legislation is *The Nebraska Parenting Act* that outlines mediation procedures for families with children that are separating and divorcing.

Nebraska's legislation is citizen centered, placing children's rights at the forefront of legal proceedings. Nebraska transformed legislation, offering mediation and collaborative practices that are founded on a culture of cooperation. Omaha first initiated a pilot project for the State of Nebraska that offered a course entitled, "What About the Children", educating parents before they enter into the mediation process concerning custody issues. Omaha is one of those castled cities where mediation is a legitimate conflict resolution practice integrated into state legislation and also where the license plates read, "Nebraska The Good Life".

However, there is often a resistance to mediation practices that may be seen as subversively undermining hierarchical power structures by giving voice to the marginalized. In my own practice with political asylum seekers in Valais, Switzerland, creating an open mediation service was perceived to threaten both social workers and psychologists. The introduction of the mediation service within the professional landscape was challenged by other more established professionals. Mediation gave voice to political asylum seekers that were allowed to co-construct meaning with their hosts. They also were permitted to participate actively in the conflict resolution process as more equal partners among decision makers. Eventually, political pressure forced the Social Action Service to stop providing mediation services to political asylum seekers, costing me my full-time job. My own destiny meshed with the political asylum seekers that I was serving, in what may be comprehended as an entangled fight for social justice.

Participative governance can be interpreted as a threat to traditional power structures. Mediation practices do not always align with organizational or institutional objectives. The core principles of mediation aim to uphold democracy. Giving voice to those who are not heard, by bringing them into the decision-making circle, can often elicit a defense mechanism in the recognized circles of influence and power. Entering into cooperative processes may appear risky for certain stakeholders. The future of democracy depends upon our ability to innovate, creating participative processes that can engender new forms of group mind that serve the greater good.

Needs assessment processes within institutions can engender this form of organizational intelligence, using *Appreciative Inquiry* as a tool for organizational transformation (D. Cooperrider, D. Whitney, J. Stavros, 2008). There is a collaborative continuum that can be implemented within organizations that coherently incorporates various participatory methods,

reinforcing dialogical and collaborative practices. Conversations and processes can be designed to fit the needs of the organization. Organizational intelligence is fostered through dialogues that generate efficient self-organizing systems.

Narrative Mediation and Narrative Conflict Resolution are methodological tools that can be used for social transformation in conjunction with other methods. Social change processes can require the use of a plurality of methods at different moments, depending upon the agreed upon goal of the intervention and the rhythm of the participants. The spectrum that can be targeted ranges from the individual to the communal, and even global, generating an integral transformation inclusive of the multi-levels existing in society. Still, what happens when stories clash? “Good faith efforts to resolve conflict rest upon the desire to move past the entanglements, frustrations, and ragged circumstances that occur when conversations get stuck” (J. Winslade, G. Monk, 2013, p. 122). In this way, the mediator models conflict resolution leadership in the field. The charisma that the mediator brings into the mediation process, reinforces the methods inherent in the narrative mediation model. Embodying a certain confidence in the process is a way of exemplifying good faith and eliciting participants to engage in a concordant manner.

Autoethnography is yet another tool, engendering self-transformation. It can also be seen as a narrative practice. My own autoethnographic process has allowed me to express my perceptions about adoption, reunion, and belonging. By telling my story and using my manuscript to elicit healing conversations within my family and social networks, I have co-constructed a transformative process that has incorporated my parents, siblings, and dearest friends and mentors in a special kind of kinship. I am currently playing with the title: “The Book of Susan: A Story of Adoption, Reunion, and Belonging”. By remembering our family stories and sharing our letters that lead to my reunion with my birth family, I created a dialogical space. This ongoing process has offered a form of narrative conflict resolution, opening up new relational possibilities and flyways stemming from the complexity that I faced as an adopted child who found her birth family. The writing process has been a form of ‘manumitting’ that I have understood as an emancipatory process. I have used my *penmanship* and *authorship* as tools to more freely act and create ‘lines of flight’. As the storyline has unfolded, relational trajectories have been simultaneously transformed through a portal of creativity. The bondages of the past are undone, as new relational bonds are fostered. Synchronicity revealed new configurations of time and space that sustained my families’ relational processes, allowing us to move beyond undesired entanglements. My hands wrote me free from enslaving patterns, confining memes, and painful perceptions, allowing us all to share in more empowered and fulfilling relationships, despite our original relational brokenness. What was delinked, became relinked, in an ongoing relational linkedness.

When I refer to my autoethnographic work, I allow students to embrace their own stories and writing processes. By sharing my stories, I give value to narrative. In giving value to narrative, I facilitate the inclusion of the narrative model of conflict resolution within the curriculum at the University of Geneva. In this way, I belong to the Narrative Mediation school of practice, as both a scholar practitioner and social constructionist and affiliate with the TAOS Institute. My thesis as well as my qualitative research reports have incorporated narrative methods and approaches. More recently, I have been inspired by autoethnography methods (T. Adams, S. H. Jones, C. Ellis, 2015). Qualitative research methods and research designs that further reinforce the narrative model within learning environments, buttress and ground my research tools, adding more transformational options to my personal tool box. This form of qualitative research gives voice to individual experience, “the micro, the singular, and

partial, which requires a different more fine-grained, and humble logic than that of a generality subsuming all things into aggregates, repetitions, and models” (J. Biehl, P. Locke, 2017, p. xi). But it is also what Kenneth Gergen calls, “future forming”. When we face pressing contemporary problematics, we must not forget the aesthetic relevance of our narratives and how they play into our shared becomingness. In our connectedness, we are charting the course of “*Earthship*” through *fellowship*; both are vessels of transportation.

Referring to a *pedagogy of hope*; “It blends intentions with consequences” and “enacts a performance pedagogy of radical democratic hope” (N. Denzin, 2014, p. 80). Teaching Narrative Conflict Resolution is one way for me to participate in a performance pedagogy in a space where I can co-construct a hopeful democratic future. Still, the question remains. What constitutes a better story? Subsequently, how can we continue to foster lifelong learning experiences that reinforce the good life; the life we hope to live and share?

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