



# Making Sense of the Stories of Experience

## Methodology for Research and Teaching

Jinx Stapleton Watson

In order to understand the work experience of information professionals, one must ask questions of meaning. This paper explores one way of learning to do qualitative research by exploring the meaning of school media specialists' work through narrative analysis of their stories of experience. The phenomenological method of collecting and reading others' and one's own stories of experience offers one way to go beyond learning the standard set of skills and values that characterize the profession. To make sense of one's work suggests beginning a stance of reflective practice.

The work of library and information sciences presents both professional and informal landscapes for practitioners and their users. Whether in schools, publishing, archives, universities, public libraries, or business, one's experience may differ from another's because of purpose, skill level, and beliefs. To understand the everyday work of information professionals and of those who benefit from their services, researchers must ask questions of meaning. Schon writes, "We are in need of inquiry into the epistemology of practice. What is the kind of knowing in which . . . practitioners engage?"<sup>1</sup> This paper explores one way of exploring the meaning of school media specialists' work through narrative analysis. It introduces the underlying assumptions of a qualitative research method, followed by a general description of the approach. It concludes with one example of current research—examining novice school media specialists' perceptions of their

own learning—that employs a method of making sense of stories from practice.

### Researching Questions of Meaning

In order to research the meaning of practice, one must make sense of the lived worlds of those involved in work. Dervin suggests that "the methodological approach that is called sense-making is an approach to studying the constructing that humans do to make sense of their experiences."<sup>2</sup> In order to begin to understand what practitioners know, one may draw on a phenomenological perspective "to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings."<sup>3</sup> Phenomenologists seek to explore that which is often unobservable in human lives and interactions. Contrary to positivism that seeks to establish laws or truths of some objec-

### About the Author

Jinx Stapleton Watson is Assistant Professor, School of Information Sciences, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

---

tive reality, phenomenology is openly interpretive, based on the assumption that knowledge may be socially constructed. It "does not treat experience as knowledge, but as a place to begin inquiry."<sup>4</sup> Representative of qualitative rather than quantitative methods of inquiry, phenomenologists seek to be open, interrogating and reflecting upon phenomena without conscious preconceived notions or expectations. Thus they strive to bring no preset hypotheses to their examination but rather wait for the phenomenon to represent itself to the examiners. Theory evolves and develops as an emergent process of making sense, driven by the data.<sup>5</sup> Glazier suggests that the strength of such qualitative data reside in its rich description. "Researchers strive to capture the essence of a subject by using description that yields generalizations documented by specific examples of data . . . [including] a description of what activities were going on around the phenomenon."<sup>6</sup>

Examining phenomena includes talking to people and inquiring of their actual and ongoing practices as they go forward in their everyday worlds.<sup>7</sup> The process of talking about one's life and work presumes some level of attention to the experience by wondering about or puzzling through real issues or problems. This "act of attention . . . is of major importance for the study of meaning."<sup>8</sup> Schutz suggests that what we take for granted, what appears not to require further inquiry, often provides a rich area for examination or a "zone of relevance"<sup>9</sup> precisely because we do not have insight and lack understanding of its ordinariness, its structure. In attending to particular experiences, we high-

light qualities that make one moment distinctive or unique from another. With this level of attention, we may begin to appreciate a particular stance or relationship to the problem at hand.

### Why Seek Meaning?

One might care about the meaning that information professionals and users of information assign to their work for practical reasons: many teach graduate students in professional schools; many inspire young people who learn information literacy; and all ultimately serve the public as helping professionals. As a result, the profession requires more than lists of skills, attitudes, and values that characterize the field or typify a process of information use. One must go beyond formal mission statements, goals, and objectives to know how an "individual member of a group define(s) his private situation within the . . . terms of which the group defines its situation."<sup>10</sup> Both the ordinary and critical moments in which school media specialists and their users make decisions or find solutions can illuminate issues of problem solving. The notions with which individuals wrestle as they engage in making sense of their efforts offer others context of a real human being in a real-life setting. Going beyond the overt and the descriptive, this kind of knowing about work includes perceptions, hunches, and intuitions—the "swampy lowlands"<sup>11</sup> that defy standard and technical solutions to professional problems.

Learning about one's work may be a lifelong process including formal education, professional workshops, collegial

interaction, personal readings, contemplation, and both personal and professional experience. As researchers, we may document the objective information and capture the subjective aspects of the experience in order to create a rich portrait of work. And because it is subjective, difficult to measure and document, the often tacit knowledge that both characterizes and distinguishes one's work must be explored in new ways. Schon writes that:

When we go about the spontaneous, intuitive performance of the actions of everyday life, we show ourselves to be knowledgeable in a special way. . . . Our knowing is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing. It seems right to say that our knowing is in our action. Similarly, the workday life of the professional depends on tacit knowing-in-action . . . the conscious use of research-based theories and techniques [but] dependent on tacit recognition, judgments, and skillful performances.<sup>12</sup>

Many claim that they learn from experience but find it difficult to articulate what has inspired the learning. Delineating the parameters of experience that either inform or serve no useful prompts at all for understanding requires a reflective mode.<sup>13</sup> Becoming reflective in this way suggests delving into the enigmatic and puzzling conditions of real practice. Questioning ordinary work may uncover surprising meanings and inspire unexpected insights. Research that approaches uncovering notions of meaning may benefit scholars and practitioners by raising new questions or changing old assumptions about practice and the lived experience. Because our ordinary repertoire rarely calls upon us to reflect, we must learn to focus and question that

which we often take for granted. As a personal response to self-selected experiences, reflective practitioners learn to capture, examine, and respond to their own issues. But with no formula or easy steps for reflecting, some may find reflecting on practice problematic. How may one acquire such a mode for thinking about work?

### **Capturing Stories of Experience to Make Meaning**

As human experiences demand thought or reflection, narrative is most often employed to make sense.<sup>14</sup> In thinking through events and activities, one may shape a story to make meaning of the experience. Thus story or narrative presents itself as one vehicle to investigate the phenomena of experience. Such narratives or first-person accounts from research respondents offer rich material to the tellers themselves, to the listeners, researchers, novice professionals, and students who read about the lived lives. The personal narratives selected as significant enough to tell invite continued reflection and the possibility for new interpretations about the experiences.

Phenomenological research resulting in narratives of experience examines what is ordinary and familiar in a situated life<sup>15</sup> and also offers the possibility of recognizing universal meanings. The point is not to reduce or translate others' experiences into quantifiable concepts but rather to appreciate and become more aware of multiple narratives of experience that reveal varied perspectives of practice.<sup>16</sup> Such perspectives inform students, novices, and other practitioners about real—not hypothetical—work in its natural setting.

To learn about and understand the experiences of librarians, information scientists, and users of their work, one may frame questions to elicit percep-

tions, attitudes, and beliefs about their ordinary activities. Such information is often embedded within a small narrative. For example, one may ask teens, "What does it mean when you and others say that you use technology?"<sup>17</sup> The questioner probes, then, for the students' real experiences, their slant and stance on using the Internet (specifically, the Web) for their personal use and for school assignments. Students typically state their evidence and examples as narrative: "I was looking for something and it had like 12,000 matching topics . . . But . . ." <sup>18</sup> In this small example, we read of a problem—a complication—and proceed to a response to that problem, a resolution. Bruner would suggest that "trouble is the engine of story" and that stories are told when one tries to make sense of the problematic, the unexpected, rather than the smooth or successful experience.<sup>19</sup> Thus stories come from the experiences that have caught one's imagination, one's attention, and require focus.

## A Phenomenological Method

### *Listening to, Reading and Writing Stories*

The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at that moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself without losing any time. A story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time.<sup>20</sup>

"Got a minute? I've got a story to tell you," emerges as a familiar refrain<sup>21</sup> as helping professionals try to make sense of their practice. Because some problems and solutions do not present themselves as well-formed structures, one

must name and frame problematic situations in order to understand them.<sup>22</sup> "Naming and framing" help shape a narrative wherein one uses technical knowledge but also calls on hunches and improvisation to make sense. Such stories are often told spontaneously, on the fly, as busy practitioners work through a day of challenges. Bruner maintains that questions, quandaries, the unexpected, or unfamiliar demand narrative as a cognitive response.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, stories or narrative abound naturally and spontaneously in our lives as one way to make sense of the problematic. The phenomenological method requires us to attend to the stories of experience rather than to the *information* or *explanation of* experience in order to understand the phenomena in their fullest. Benjamin reminds us that one wants a story free from explanation to allow readers (or listeners) to interpret things the way they understand them. "Thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks."<sup>24</sup> Some literary scholars have argued that the goal of reading is to "make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text" by interpreting and appreciating the many and varied meanings within a text.<sup>25</sup> As a result, when one reads or listens to a story, one's own construction of another's meaning comes into play. It is as if we, the readers, make our own sense of another's sense-making.

### **Soliciting and Recognizing the Stories**

After volunteers agree to talk to researchers about questions of meaning in their work, they must be made to feel comfortable about sharing their own words and finding their own entry points into the conversation. In order to feel that comfort, they need to understand the full picture of the inquiry, for

example: "People say that they learn from experience. What have you learned from the experiences of your first year as a school media specialist?"<sup>26</sup> Prompts often include, "Tell me some stories of moments, problems, memories you won't forget."<sup>27</sup> Additional prompts should reveal that the researcher cares about real-life events, not hypothetical or theoretical knowledge, in order to convince interviewees that they need not impress or influence their listener.

After tape recording the interview, with the participant's permission, one transcribes the interview, reads, and rereads the text. It is important to select excerpts that describe what a respondent does or thinks rather than words that comment upon, philosophize, or analyze situations generally. Several stories might surface as full entities or stunning excerpts that call attention for the potential contribution to what we may want to know about the research question. The stories often bring forth a provocative question that needs closer examination. Gadamer might call that question a "truth."<sup>28</sup> For him, a truth is an "aspect of human experience [that] has been separated out from others, given an emphasis of its own, and thus illuminated for all. It marks an uncovering of some aspect of the world . . . that was previously occluded."<sup>29</sup> Thus in a transcribed text of a one-hour interview, one might encounter one or two or more stories or points worthy of continued consideration. And it is these few stories that one reads closely in order to make sense and meaning.

Throughout these readings, one's own knowledge, understandings, beliefs, and assumptions take hold of the phenomena.<sup>30</sup> In selecting and shaping a story from an interview, one's personal values or perspectives recreate the experience, thus transcending the original story. The very nature of constructing knowledge suggests that many indefinite

interpretations can be offered to make sense of a single phenomenon. As Carini writes,

There can of course be no final resolution or explanation of a phenomenon through descriptive research. That is not its function. Rather its function . . . is to verify the extent and limits of the currently available meanings of a phenomenon and to share those meanings in thinkable form with other inquirers, who in turn will further illuminate the text and limits of the phenomenal meaning of the event [or experience] through their observation.<sup>31</sup>

Thus interviewing, selecting a focus, reading, and interpreting a respondent's focus presumes a very personal voice. To maintain the understanding that indeed researchers are constructing their own knowledge, one employs, quite naturally, the first-person voice in reporting the findings. It is also appropriate in describing one's own process of reading closely. By reading and rereading, we may understand a phenomenon for the first time or in new ways. As we wrestle with ideas that we believe to be so familiar, we note that by reading first with an intensive focus, and then a wider lens, we begin to gain understanding of another's story. And in so doing, we may gain insight into our own story. Engaging in close and broad readings and zooming in and out, quite often offer far more questions to pursue than answers. This fluid and open look at experience invites others to reflect as well.

### Reading Closely

In probing the roots or essence of participants' stories, one makes many passes within and throughout the text by listening to the text, playing with it, and entering into a conversation with it. One must trust responding to and questioning the

text rather than projecting one's self onto someone else's story. In effect, one opens one's self "to . . . allowing [the story] to 'speak.'"<sup>32</sup> In order to read, listen to, and hear the text, one may structure three readings: "a quick reading," "a close reading," and "insights."

In the "quick reading," the story stands alone in the respondent's own words as shaped from the interview. Unjudged, it invites us all to read and respond. A quick reading will leave one with an impression of the complication of the event and its resolution. It may inspire points of recognition or puzzlement. But in order to gain a greater understanding of both the teller's meaning in the episode and one's own response to it, the text must be read more closely.

How does one read closely to gain understanding? The tradition of hermeneutics has been long established in religious study. More recently it has become influential in the interpretation of literary texts. Contrary to imposing a clear, analytical, or logical frame from outside the text, the process of interpreting internally seems oblique and indirect. One reads between the lines. Such reading invites reflection with interpretations and questions by the teller, writer, and reader in order to "get at the roots" of each story.<sup>33</sup> One can imagine zooming in to study closely the words, syntax, and even tone of the interviewee's story. In the second reading—a hermeneutic reading—one offers an interrupted or "close reading" of the teacher's story to interpret what is being said on a sentence-by-sentence and word-by-word basis. Barthes admits that the "cutting up [of text] will be arbitrary in the extreme. The lexia will include sometimes a few words, sometimes several sentences . . . [It] will be the best possible space in which we can observe meanings."<sup>34</sup> An audacious process: readers assume professional risks, for

they use particular lenses—their own—to see what they can. They come to construct meaning based on their prior experience and their own learnings.

And finally, the third kind of reading, "insights," represents one's "peripheral vision" or "bird's eye view,"<sup>35</sup> threading new understandings of the experience told in the story with knowledge of the worlds of librarians, information scientists, teachers, and students. This final reading results in a broad commentary of insights or one's own story about the original story, by zooming out in order to gain new perspectives. Bateson suggests that in doing so, we make metaphors and connections in new and spontaneous ways.<sup>36</sup> This final reading offers a wider lens against which to understand another's story. It represents one reader's response to that story and attempts to make meaning that will ignite responses from others. Van Manen reminds us,

The demanding work within the phenomenological approach remains in the shaping of a text for others to read, for the phenomenological inquiry is not unlike an artistic endeavor, a creative attempt to somehow capture a certain phenomenon of life in a linguistic description that is both holistic and analytical . . . unique and universal.<sup>37</sup>

### Reading Respondent Text Closely

The following represents a sample response to a story from a school media specialist's interview. The umbrella question was to probe: "People say that you learn from experience. What have you learned in this first year in the school media center?" In the following section, the interviewee's text will appear in italics. The researcher's commentary will appear in regular font. Ellipses suggest comments not germane to the narrative.

### **A Question of Self as Professional (K. S.)**

#### **A quick reading**

*A lot of times I don't know if what I'm doing is what I should be doing . . . I want everything to be perfect, and I want it to be correct. And it's been hard for me to accept help because I want to be the person helping. So that's been difficult to admit—I don't know all of this, and I need help . . . you start a job with your own ideas of how things are going to be, and this is what you want to be. The situation you're put in determines what kind of librarian you're going to be. If you really look at everything, you decide which changes are important to make the first year and which changes are not important to make. You see what's important to the community, and you don't make big changes. You see what's important to the school as far as the school goal, and you work towards that. And that's what I've done with the technology [books have become secondary, technology is up front . . . that's where this school is] . . . I could balance that out more in the years to come . . . because I love books and I've not been able to do that part of my job, it's not getting justice. You can't be your own person yet, your first year.*

#### **A close reading**

*A lot of times I don't know if what I'm doing is what I should be doing. I want everything to be perfect, and I want it to be correct.*

In this short piece, K. S. uses three strong words to convey her standards as a professional: *should*, *perfect*, and *correct*. Such consummate ideals sound as if she carries a template in her head of some transcendent professional that she may never fit. Such images offer frustration to the novice who has so much to learn beyond her formal education. One wonders if she carries such a template

for her life as a mother, a friend, and a citizen in this world? Such statements cause us to ponder in what ways or walks of life do we choose to wrap such standards for our life?

*And it's been hard for me to accept help because I want to be the person helping. So that's been difficult to admit—I don't know all of this, and I need help . . .*

Rare to hear such honesty in acknowledging descriptors and characteristics of oneself. Talking about values, beliefs, and perceptions one holds is not easy work. But as K. S. paints a portrait of herself as a helping person, she admits that she, in this setting, requires help. To become a helping person presumes some level of expertise or knowledge. Thus, how can one "help" another if one perceives oneself as a novice with little experience and lack of wisdom?

*You start a job with your own ideas of how things are going to be, and this is what you want to be.*

Of course, in order to become somebody or something, we must know the parameters and conditions to which to aspire. And K. S., who has painted a portrait of a "perfect" and "correct" school media specialist with dreams and goals for her program, begins to sound a bit as if she had been tricked in this first year's demands. She alludes to the importance of one's development, ownership, and appraisal of professional and personal pride. Schools engage in external evaluations, but the ongoing self-assessment may often assume far more importance and power whether others agree with it or not.

*The situation you're put in determines what kind of librarian you're going to be. If you really look at everything, you decide which changes are important to make the first year and which changes are not important to make. You see what's important to the community, and you don't make big*

*changes. You see what's important to the school as far as the school goal, and you work towards that.*

With this statement, K. S. assumes a new direction in the quest for shaping herself as a professional. She states that the location or assignment helps shape one's growth but only if one *really looks at everything*. Thus in agreement that one's position may reflect and be influenced by the environment and needs of the users, she rejects blueprint notions of the job and maps a new professional model for herself. She begins to assess needs and wants of the community and school and advises making few changes, only ones important to the constituents.

*And that's what I've done with the technology [books have become secondary, technology is up front . . . that's where this school is]. I could balance that out more in the years to come . . . because I love books and I've not been able to do that part of my job, it's not getting justice.*

K. S. has shaped some job scope by talking about the perceived focus of the school. By honoring the school's stated needs and objectives, she shows herself a helper (perhaps even a leader) and colleague in the technology endeavor. She has also named a professional strategy—balance—and illustrates a beginning understanding of the kind of time and pace one requires in creating a professional self and program. Because she *loves books*, she will not neglect them in her program but she will have to live with a level of personal disappointment that she will not focus on this particular love during the first year.

*You can't be your own person yet, your first year.*

K. S. needs to hear another point of view here. She claims that she cannot be who she perceives herself to be. In truth, she has met her original self-standard of the *helper* by becoming a listener, a facilitator of what the school program

desires. She meets both her own need to be a helper and the need of the school to grow in technology uses. She will grow as a professional as her program develops. In developing and maintaining all the aspects that are asked of her, she, in turn, will influence and inspire her users in ways that she loves and that make sense to her. One of those ways will include sharing her love of literature and books. Her description of this new professional portrait is *balance*.

### Insights

What meaning can we make of this story? No matter the level and extent of the formal preparation for a profession, one must grapple with questions of meaning. What does it mean for K. S. to be a school media specialist? What does it mean to be the new librarian? What does it mean to be a novice? What does it mean to be a helper yet require help? What does it mean to balance issues of programming? Jersild suggests,

The search for meaning is not a search for an abstract body of knowledge, or even for a concrete body of knowledge. It is a distinctly personal search. The one who makes it raises intimate personal questions: "What really counts, for me? What values am I seeking? What, in my existence as a person, in my relations with others . . . is of real concern to me, perhaps of ultimate concern to me?"<sup>38</sup>

We hear K. S. wrestling with her own questions of meaning as she pieces together a philosophy or self-portrait of her work. One senses her movement on a continuum from what previously sounded like a blueprint of the professional ideal to one where she has seized the creation or definition of herself in a particular setting. Rather than having rigid notions of what is correct or perfect, her language suggests that she is



comfortable in this more fluid space of responding to the school and wider community, with a sense of time in which to grow. No one can do it for another. Deeply personal, reflective, and often intense, novices especially must build their repertoire of strategies with “the materials of a situation.”<sup>39</sup> Just one of many narratives that K. S. shared in her interview, this particular refrain of what it means to be a professional showed up in many ways throughout her text.

By reading her own interview and the story shaped from the text, K. S. gained insight into her essential narrative, the issues that drive her reflection on work. She appreciated reading between the lines in order to gain new perspectives about her conflicts. Those preparing graduate students to enter the world of work may want to raise the difficult questions of acknowledging and examining beliefs, values, fears, and hopes about what it means to be a professional. By illuminating them, one may note how particular perspectives change and grow.

### Strengths and Limitations of the Method

Mellon's work suggests that naturalistic research provides perspectives of how insiders, users, and inquirers view real-life situations.<sup>40</sup> Such research may precede large, statistical studies, may create new categories of research interests, or raise questions for further study. In examining how people think about and use information, how they go about the practices of work and study in the field of library and information sciences, naturalistic inquiry offers one method for illuminating perspectives and, therefore, the meaning of such endeavors.

Guba and Lincoln write that naturalistic inquiry calls forth a set of assump-

tions about the social/behavioral world. First, the nature of perspectives and perception in representing reality is that “each inquiry raises more questions than it answers.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, in making sense of others' sense-making, researchers may come to understand and therefore question in new ways rather than culminate in conclusions. The results of such practical inquiry may suggest “new ways of looking at the context and problem and/or possibilities for changes in practice.”<sup>42</sup> The notion of noting and framing new questions to consider comes from the phenomenological tradition, inviting continued inquiry from future readers. As Bruner has remarked, “Great stories open us to new questions.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, listening to stories of experience may inspire others' stories and questions, offering rich terrain for students and novices to consider in creating their own notions of the profession.

A second assumption in this kind of naturalistic research suggests that the inquirer and respondent “interact to influence one another,”<sup>44</sup> suggesting that such inquiry is value-bound in the choice and framing of a problem. To study the content and dynamic of practitioners' lives by inviting them to “tell me about your work” presumes that someone cares about them, their work, and their perspectives on work; the method of open-ended interviews may suggest that researchers appear willing to learn from the practitioner-participant. Receptive to respondents' news, with no prepared response offered to individuals' stories, one might ask, does phenomenological study offer more than a simple rendering of one person's musings on another's experience? One's attention to individuals, through the process of closely studying their stories, results in personal and professional gain. This knowledge, or sense of self, is defined as *Bildung*, translated as a sense—a spirit—of striving for and

getting beyond one's own particular frame of reference.<sup>45</sup> One's immersion into another's life story helps to "keep oneself open to . . . other, more universal points of view."<sup>46</sup> And so in the final result, the efforts of this kind of labor assist the researcher's own thinking and understanding of particular phenomena.

The tellers of stories, the interviewees, or research respondents, grow from both telling their story as well as from reading the text of their story. Narrative offers the process and the form that best captures one's understandings of experience, for it is "the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful."<sup>47</sup> After capturing and transcribing interviews and stories, participants review them. Typical responses include expressions of gratitude for being listened to and interest when one's musings fit into a theoretical framework. Often respondents are prompted to discuss their story further after reading what they had reported previously. In this way, one sees how interviewer and respondent might interact with each other.

And third, Guba and Lincoln suggest that inquirers assess the data—the tellers' story and perceptions—holistically rather than in parts or variables.<sup>48</sup> Thus, the research process and product may offer narrative as a vehicle for both respondents' sense-making and researchers' reflections on stories of experience. The experience of responding to and writing up others' stories offers a rich source for continued learning. As one engages with the participants of research studies, one reflects on their experiences. In trying to make sense of what one hears, one creates a narrative. What lies within the narrative represents the beginning of one's own understanding of the respondents' stories. And, finally, by reflecting on the researcher's narrative of participants' stories, new readers may begin to ask themselves,

"What is it that calls on us to think?" Or readers of such research might query, "What sense does this make for my own thinking and work?"<sup>49</sup>

Because "experience is fragmented and diverse . . . it is precisely the multiplicity of experience and perspective among people that is a necessary condition of truth."<sup>50</sup> Thus in this qualitative method of examining the phenomena of experience, one's attempts to make meaning do not cease. Narrative products of inquiry invite new and ongoing questioning, thus revealing or affirming new truths and meanings. Meaning-making cannot be seen as a "one-time-through event."<sup>51</sup> And research perspectives may shift from a lifetime of reflecting about one's own work and lived experiences; one must choose the lenses by which one reads and interprets phenomena. Ezra Pound would offer no apology for this kind of bias, for

Natural phenomena . . . serve as measuring rods, or instruments. For no two people are these measures identical. The critic who doesn't make a personal statement in regard to measurements he himself has made, is merely an unreliable critic. He is not a measurer but a repeater of other men's results.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, one's own stance in examining the lived experience of practitioners, about their work and practice, reflects care to make meaning of the dynamics that we often take for granted. As professors in the field of library and information science, we care about others' experiences in the field and what their work means to them. From this, we inform our own practice of teaching.

## Conclusion

The method of phenomenological inquiry in the field of library and information science offers new ways to examine

the human aspects of the practitioner and user of information. Efforts at interpretation on the parts of both inquirer and respondent of such research may be seen as complex, creative, and collaborative, distanced from positivists' aspirations of neutrality and authority. But it is the inherent subjective nature that may offer new levels of questions and richness of data. The informal and real-life settings necessary for examination may suggest that practitioners themselves might engage in such inquiry of their own work. And further, schools of library and information sciences may consider not only reading such research of practitioners but also inviting students to capture and reflect upon their own stories of experience from practice and internships. Such attention to the small and ordinary moments and feelings about work efforts begins to teach a reflective mode. Reflective practice presumes knowing how to attend to one's own stories of experience. In order to understand the dynamics of everyday practice, we may learn to question, listen to, and read our own and others' stories of experience.

### References

1. D. Schon, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), viii.
2. B. Dervin, "From the Mind's Eye of the User: The Sense-Making Qualitative-Quantitative Method," in *Qualitative Research in Information Management*. Ed. by J. Glazier and R. Powell (Englewood, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 1992), 67.
3. M. Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (New York: SUNY Pr., 1990), 5.
4. D. Smith, *Writing the Social: Critique, Theory and Investigations* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Pr., 1999), 96.
5. E. Guba and Y. Lincoln, "Epistemological and Methodological Bases of Naturalistic Inquiry," *Educational Communication Technology Journal of Theory, Research and Development* 30, no. 4 (1982): 233-52.
6. J. Glazier, "Qualitative Research Methodologies for Library and Information Science: An Introduction," in *Qualitative Research in Information Management* 2, J. Glazier and R. Powell, eds. (Englewood, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 1992), 6-7.
7. Smith, *Writing the Social*.
8. A. Schutz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Pr., 1970), 63.
9. *Ibid.*, 111.
10. *Ibid.*, 83.
11. Schon, *The Reflective Practitioner*, 42.
12. *Ibid.*, 50.
13. M. Buchman and R. Floden, *Detachment and Concern: Conversations in the Philosophy of Teaching and Teacher Education* (New York: Teachers' College Pr., 1993); J. Dewey, *How We Think* (New York: D.C. Heath & Co., 1933).
14. J. Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Pr., 1990).
15. Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*.
16. Smith, *Writing the Social*.
17. J. S. Watson, "'If You Don't Have It, You Can't Find It.' A Close Look at Students' Perceptions of Using Technology," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 49, no. 11 (1998): 1024-36; J. S. Watson, "Students and the World Wide Web: Issues of Confidence and Competence," in *Proceedings of the Third International Forum on Research in School Librarianship, Unleash the Power! Held in Birmingham, Alabama 12-13 November 1999*. Ed. by Lynne Lighthall and Eleanor Howe (Seattle: International Assn. of School Librarianship, 1999).
18. Watson, "'If You Don't Have It,'" 1034.
19. J. Bruner, "Four Ways to Make a Meaning," speech, American Educational Research Assn., 1994, audiocassette.
20. W. Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 90.
21. J. S. Watson, "Transforming 'Got a Minute?' Stories into Reflective

- Narrative," in *Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices, Conversations in Community Held in Herstmonceux, England 16-20 August 1998*. Ed. by Ardra Cole and Susan Finley [Kingston, Ontario: Self Study of Teacher Education Practices (S-STEP) Special Interest Group of the American Educational Research Association, 1998], 182-85.
22. D. Schon, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner: Toward a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Professions* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987).
  23. Bruner, "Four Ways to Make a Meaning."
  24. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 89.
  25. R. Barthes, *S/Z* (New York: The Noonday Pr., 1974), 4.
  26. J. S. Watson, "School Media Specialists in Reflective Practice," forthcoming.
  27. Ibid.
  28. H. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: The Seabury Pr., 1975).
  29. G. Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Pr., 1984), 57-58.
  30. Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 47.
  31. P. Carini, *Observation and Description: An Alternative Method for the Investigation of Human Phenomena* (Grand Forks, N.D.: Center for Teaching and Learning, University of North Dakota, 1975), ERIC, ED 127 277.
  32. R. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Univ. of Pa. Pr., 1983), 137.
  33. Ibid., 118.
  34. Barthes, *S/Z*, 13.
  35. M. C. Bateson, *Peripheral Visions* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994).
  36. Ibid.
  37. Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 39.
  38. A. Jersild, *When Teachers Face Themselves* (New York: Teachers College Pr., 1955), 4.
  39. Schon, *The Reflective Practitioner*, 172.
  40. C. Mellon, *Naturalistic Inquiry for Library Science: Methods and Applications for Research, Evaluation and Teaching* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1990).
  41. Guba and Lincoln, "Epistemological and Methodological Bases of Naturalistic Inquiry," 238.
  42. V. Richardson, "Conducting Research on Practice," *Educational Researcher* 23, no. 5 (1994): 5-10.
  43. Bruner, "Four Ways to Make a Meaning."
  44. Guba and Lincoln, "Epistemological and Methodological Bases of Naturalistic Inquiry," 238.
  45. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 15.
  46. Ibid., 17.
  47. D. Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (Albany: SUNY Pr., 1988), 1.
  48. Guba and Lincoln, "Epistemological and Methodological Bases of Naturalistic Inquiry," 239.
  49. M. Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?* (New York: Harper, 1968), 188.
  50. Smith, *Writing the Social*, 128.
  51. Ibid., 124.
  52. Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Pr., 1934), 30.