

The Narrative Turn in Engineering Education Research: Theory and Method

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This *full-length, theory/methods paper* contributes to theoretical, methodological, and methods-based conversations about narrative research currently occurring within the engineering education research (EER) community. For almost 40 years, narrative approaches to qualitative research have evolved and migrated from their origins in the humanities, establishing themselves within social science fields such as psychology, anthropology, and education [1, 2]. Recently, narrative research has garnered interest within EER as an approach for (a) understanding engineering student and faculty experience and (b) critiquing structures that constrain and obstruct these experiences. Growing acceptance of narrative research in engineering education is highlighted by the recent publication of the first systematic literature review (SLR) on the topic in 2023 [3]. While SLRs are also theory/methods papers, this paper differs in its attempt to compare, contrast, and connect (i.e., extend and critique) current narrative research practice in engineering education with broader narrative research traditions.

While all narrative research “...revolves around an interest in life experiences as narrated by those that live them” [1], how stories and storytelling—the essence of narrative research—“show up” within the EER literature varies; these variations manifest in the ways and extent to which EER research designs espouse and implement narrative-compatible worldviews, theories, processes, and concepts. Thus, to expand and deepen engagement of the EER community with the foundations of narrative research, this theory/methods paper is organized into six sections: 1) the narrative turn; 2) “narrative” definitions; 3) narrative worldviews and theory; 4) narrative methodologies; 5) narrative methods; and 6) key takeaways about narrative research in engineering education. In doing so, this paper adds to EER’s richer understandings and implementation of the “still flourishing ...still evolving” [1] philosophical commitments, theoretical underpinnings, and methods for “making and handling” [4] narrative data that cohere with broader perspectives about understanding human experience and advancing personal and social change through narrative.

The Narrative Turn

The “narrative turn” describes an epistemic shift that occurred within social science disciplines nearly 40 years ago. The turn signifies “a time” when social science researchers wrested their work away from objectivist, scientific, experimental approaches that dominated social science research throughout much of the 20th century. Simultaneously, they embraced more subjective, contextualized, postmodernist approaches affording prominence to human experience and social critique [5]. Lieblich and colleagues [6] refer to the turn as a “narrative revolution” that signaled the end of radical allegiance to post/positivism and objectivity within social science research communities.

The Narrative Turn in EER

As Raine [5] explains, growing adoption of narrative research within new interdisciplinary fields helps scholars recognize the narrative turn “... more as a re-emergent interest or ongoing process ... than a distinct point in time.” Importantly, this perspective enables EER scholars to situate the current field of engineering education—with its decidedly post/positivist roots—within its own narrative turn. EER scholars [7], in fact, point to Dr. Karan Watson’s 2013 annual American

Society of Engineering Education Conference plenary presentation [8], which highlighted the power of stories to accelerate cultural and institutional change, as inspiration for a personal turn to narrative in their work. Consequently, EER scholars, together, can (and should?) consider how the present moment provides us a collective opportunity to realize new narrative research approaches, methodologies, and methods that can help address the complex contextual and social issues of great importance within EER today.

Key Terms: Narrative, Narrative Research, and Narrative Inquiry

The individualistic nature of the narrative turns occurring within and across social science research disciplines has helped produce a complex array of narrative research terms, many with imprecise, overlapping, or multiple discordant meanings. To fully engage as a narrative researcher, it is imperative to develop understandings about how key terms, including the most basic terms such as ‘narrative’, ‘narrative research’, and ‘narrative inquiry’, are defined and, alternatively, how they may be used within the broader research literature.

Narrative

Critiques of/within the broader narrative research literature emphasize conflicting use of the term ‘narrative’ [2]. Polkinghorne [9] explains that “in the most inclusive sense of the word,” the term ‘*narrative*’ can be used to describe any oral or written “prosaic” [10] discourse or text; this may be the reason scholars may colloquially (and confusingly) refer to qualitative (i.e., textual data) as “narrative data” [6]. *Narratives* as used in narrative research, however, differ from other types of narrative (qualitative) data in that narratives describe events “drawn together and integrated into a temporally organized whole” [10]. When organized temporally, prosaic text is said to be “emplotted” and is considered, theoretically, to be imbued with a particular type of meaning— “narrative meaning”— that is inherent to the narrative form [10].

Narrative Research

Within literary studies (wherein *narratology*, the science of narratives [11], originates), a *narrative* (or *story*) represents a particular type of discourse production that communicates “human experience as lived” through a plot of human action and events [9,10]. Using Bruner’s [12] foundational work on a narrative mode of knowing, social scientists continue to theorize a uniquely human ability to generate meaning and knowledge of experience from storied discourse [9, 10]. As Kim [13] explains, we (humans) can understand the actions and experiences of others through their stories because we “...understand our own lives through the narratives we live out and share... .” *Thus, narrative research is broadly defined as a form of qualitative research that, in some meaningful way, uses stories or storytelling within the research process.*

Narrative Inquiry

‘Narrative inquiry’ is another term that signals varied and conflicting meanings within the narrative research literature, broadly and within EER. Many scholars use the term ‘narrative inquiry’ interchangeably with ‘narrative research’ [see e.g., 1, 2, 10, 14, 15]. Chase [2], for example, defines narrative inquiry as a “... subtype of qualitative inquiry...” comprising an “...amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both

traditional and innovative methods—all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them.” Similarly, Goodson and Gill [14] define narrative inquiry as “a loose frame of reference for a subset of qualitative research that uses personal narratives as the basis of research.” Notably, Kim [15] felt need to provide readers with an explanation of the distinction between narrative research and narrative inquiry, stating in an endnote: “In this article, the term, narrative research, is interchangeably used with the term, narrative inquiry.” Kim’s [15] endnote suggests there are times when ‘narrative research’ cannot be used interchangeably with ‘narrative inquiry.’ Anecdotally, use of the term ‘narrative inquiry’ in EER seems to align most often with a “loos[e]” definition of ‘narrative research’ [see e.g., 3].

Clandinin [16] has called for more “careful delineation of terms and assumptions” across narrative research fields. To that end (and otherwise in response to Lieblich and colleagues’ [5] call for methodological activism), Clandinin and colleagues [16-19] developed *narrative inquiry as a methodology*. *Narrative inquiry methodology*, which is grounded in a relational ontology and Deweyan view of experience [20], was developed for use in the field of teacher education wherein Clandinin and colleagues [16-19] theorize teachers and students leading storied lives.

Alternatively, Webster and Mertova [21] defined *narrative inquiry as a research method* that adopts the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of narrative inquiry methodology but adapts its analytic approach. Specifically, Webster and Mertova [21] employ “critical event narrative analysis” to paradigmatically analyze stories of experience collected in educational settings. Noting how their narrative research was often “delayed and confused” due to the dispersed nature of the narrative research literature, Webster and Mertova [21] describe their impetus for developing their own narrative method as the lack of a “single source that would comprehensively explain how researchers should use narrative as a research method.”

Narrative Worldviews and Theories

Along with general critiques of being dispersed [21] and imprecise [14], the narrative research literature has also received criticism for being “...not theoretical enough” [17] and failing to adequately engage with narrative philosophical tenets (i.e., worldviews or theoretical perspectives) and narrative theory [15]. Kim [15] describes this condition as needing more narratology — more narrative science—in narrative research.

Kim [13] explains that narrative researchers must, just as qualitative researchers must, thoughtfully engage with theory to better “understand, analyze and evaluate” [13] storied data across three levels of the research process: *macro*, *meso*, and *micro*. At the macro or “holistic” level, narrative researchers situate themselves and their work within an overarching theoretical perspective (i.e., research paradigm) to ground the study in narrative-compatible philosophical beliefs about the nature of reality (ontology), knowledge (epistemology), and values (axiology) and align the parts of the study together [22]. Narrative-compatible theoretical perspectives support a subjective reality, consider narrative cognition a “valid” form of knowing, and place value in personal stories and oral and written traditions of storytelling. Theoretical perspectives that can support narrative research include the interpretive/phenomenology, critical/transformational, or postmodern/post structural paradigms [13, see also 22]. At the macro level, Bruner’s [12] work on paradigmatic and narrative cognition establishes narrative knowing (narrative epistemology) as a valid mode of meaning making about human experience.

At the meso or methodological level, narrative researchers engage with theories that support the design and articulation of their narrative research methodology and methods [13]. For example, Clandinin and colleagues [16-19] use Dewey's theory of experience [20] to link secondary education teacher stories to (the phenomenon of) their experience in narrative inquiry methodology. Alternatively, Webster and Mertova [21] employ Critical Incident Technique [23] with Polkinghorne's narrative analysis approach [9,10] to support 'making and handling' storied data within large, training settings. In each example, theory is used at the meso level to shape narrative research methodology and methods.

At the micro level, narrative researchers engage with theories pertaining to the specific topic and context of their research to help examine the stories generated there [13]. In the context of educational research, for example, micro theories may include learning theories, theories about motivation or self-regulation, or theories about technology-based learning. Importantly, while Kim [13] supports the use of micro-level theory for narrative interpretation, Kim [13] reminds us that narrative research is meant to *privilege participants' stories above all*; she cautions about the dangers of "chopping off" parts of still developing stories to make them fit the theories we consult in efforts to better understand the data. As Kim [13] offers, "theories should inform or guide us to understand a story but not to diminish our ability to listen."

Use of Theory in Narrative Research in EER

Jackson and Bodnar [3] note that researchers in engineering education frequently engaged with critical theories, such as Critical Feminism, Critical Race Theory, and Intersectionality theory, to support narrative research at the meso and micro levels. This trend toward critical theories in engineering education stems from a disciplinary focus on broadening participation and understanding of the experiences of marginalized and underserved student populations in engineering [3] and supports use of narrative research approaches to promote social justice in engineering education and the engineering field. For example, critical theories can be used in narrative research at the meso level to underpin development of participant stories in the form of counter stories that can be used to weaken dominant narratives by showing them to be biased and deficit-based through an alternative explanation of events. At the micro level, critical theories can be used to help identify dominant narratives, oppression, and constraining or oppressive structures that marginalize non-dominant student and faculty groups that are present within the developed participants stories.

Narrative Research Methodology(ies?)

Within the literature for documented narrative research methodologies, there exists an interesting contradiction: despite what may be considered as a (near) endless array of theoretical perspectives, approaches, lenses, and methods available for use in developing narrative research methodologies and methods [2], there is (as far as I and Webster and Mertova [21] have found) only one narrative research methodology formally documented in the literature— Clandinin and colleagues' [e.g., 16-19] *narrative inquiry methodology*.

For scholars and practitioners in the field of teacher education, narrative inquiry methodology was developed and is used as an approach for framing narrative research wherein narrative is both phenomenon (i.e., the 'object' being studied) and method (i.e., the approach for gathering and examining data about the 'object' being studied) [19]. Clandinin and colleagues' [e.g., 16-

19] use Bruner's [12] narrative cognition to theorize how student and faculty narratives of curriculum and curriculum making *are their experiences* of curriculum and curriculum making because teachers live storied lives. Therefore, by collecting and examining teacher narratives (method), they are studying teacher experiences (phenomenon). The theoretical equivalence of narrative *as phenomenon and method* lies at the heart of narrative inquiry methodology.

Ontologically, narrative inquiry methodology is rooted within the Deweyian view of experience [20], which theorizes that experience encompasses situation, continuity, and interaction. As such, Clandinin and colleagues [17] theorize a "3-dimensional narrative inquiry (theoretical) space" wherein all narrative inquiry studies are conducted. Within *3D narrative inquiry space*, stories of experience are collected and constructed with participants and examined in terms of place (situation), time (continuity), and personal/social milieus (interaction) [17].

Due to the time-dependent, situated, and interactive nature of experience [20], Clandinin [17] theorizes narrative inquiry methodology as a way of understanding experience through sustained "collaboration between researcher and participant, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus." While narrative inquiry methodology is anti-positivist, it is rooted in a relational ontology and is free of other (besides anti-positivist) paradigmatic commitments. (Alternatively, other forms of narrative research could make use of other narrative-compatible research paradigms, including interpretivism, critical paradigm, postmodernism, transformative paradigm.) While participant and researcher stories are developed within the 3D narrative inquiry (theoretical) space, narrative inquiry research texts [24] (i.e., finalized stories) are suitable for "thinking with theory" [25] (i.e., at the micro level).

Narrative Research Methodolog(ies?) in EER

Ongoing observations of the narrative EER literature [see e.g., 3] suggest that it is common for EER scholars to (a) label or name their work as "narrative inquiry" (without the word "methodology" attached) —such as in the title, abstract, introduction and methodology sections— and simultaneously (b) reference research literature from Clandinin's narrative inquiry (methodology) corpus. Fewer EER scholars explicitly unpack the ontological, epistemological, and theoretical underpinnings of their narrative research studies at the macro and meso levels (This observation aligns with earlier generalized critiques of qualitative research in EER [26]) or explicitly implement story as both phenomenon and method. Thus, it is difficult to (a) discern the extent to which narrative inquiry methodology is being implemented within EER, and (b) connect between narrative inquiry studies within and outside of the field of engineering education. Clear articulation of theoretical underpinnings at the macro and meso levels, as well greater attention to the commitments of narrative inquiry methodology (if it is being used), is needed within EER literature to support development of stronger claims about student and faculty experience and structural oppression in engineering that can (more easily) connect within and across narrative studies in other disciplines.

Narrative Methods

Data/Data Generation

Stories lived and told comprise the primary source of data, or “field texts” [24], generated and examined in narrative research. Stories are generated and communicated through a variety of ways and in many forms [27]. Chase [2] describes how narrative researchers encounter narratives “... elicited or heard during fieldwork, an interview, or a naturally occurring conversation” and how narratives can present themselves as a short anecdote of an everyday event, an extended accounting of an important period in one’s life, or a complete life history “...from birth to the present.” Kim [13] likens narrative data generation to a process of “excavating stories,” wherein narrative researchers uncover stories that may be hidden or have been forgotten over time.

Among narrative researchers, the most common narrative data generation technique is in-depth, narrative interviewing [2]. Narrative interviewing practice differs from standard interviewing practice because narrative researchers are more interested in listening than in questioning [2, 13]. Chase [2] explains that because “... the stories people tell *constitute* the empirical material [narrative] interviewers need.... [narrative interviewers] make a conceptual shift away from the idea that interviewees have answers to researchers’ questions and toward the idea that interviewees are narrators with stories to tell....” Because of their more conversational tone, narrative interviews may last longer than traditional interviews, and/or they may be conducted longitudinally to enable researchers to meet with participants multiple times, and/or in phases, to support development of the researcher-participant relationship.

While most used, interviews are not the only approach for generating data for narrative research. Other methods include written or recorded observations/conversations occurring during field work, written or recorded journals, prompted written or recorded reflections, or physical or digital artifacts (i.e., objects, photographs, mementos, digital files, images, videos, or recordings, etc.) that may be used participants as props when telling and sharing stories orally [13].

Narrative Methods in EER

As Jackson and Bodnar [3] indicate, narrative researchers in engineering education most often employ participant interviews—many times a single interview—for collecting narrative data. Because scholars [28] critique the (sole) use of “big stories” generated during interviews that may silence the “small stories” of everyday life [1], narrative researchers in engineering education should consider use of alternative/additional data generation methods beyond interviewing—and beyond single interviews, in particular. For those researchers conducting narrative interviews, employing longitudinal or even a few multiple interviews in person and at different community locations, can be beneficial for capturing small stories that result from developing researcher-participant relationships.

Data Analysis

Analysis of Narratives

In his seminal work on narrative configuration, Polkinghorne [10] introduced two approaches for analyzing storied data (i.e., emplotted narratives): analysis of narratives and narrative analysis. Two modes of analysis were theorized from Bruner’s [12] two modes of cognition: paradigmatic (i.e., logico-scientific) and narrative. *Analysis of narratives* uses Bruner’s [12] paradigmatic mode of cognition. During analysis of narratives, researchers use established qualitative research techniques (i.e., coding, categorizing, and theming) [cf. 29] to derive meaning across a single

(large) story or set of stories. Analysis of narratives can be conducted deductively, using constructs from theory, codes and categories from prior analyses, or ideas from the topic focus, as analytical structures. Analysis of narratives can alternatively be conducted inductively; an inductive analysis of narratives approach has been likened [13] to constant comparative analysis techniques in Grounded Theory approaches.

The analysis of narratives approach “aims to produce general knowledge from a set of evidence or particulars found in a collection of stories, hence underplays the unique aspects of each story” [13]. Webster and Mertova’s [21] Critical Event Narrative Analysis Method is one example of a narrative analysis approach designed for generating useful generalized knowledge about the emergence and nature of critical events across a wide storied data set. Using this method, Webster and Mertova [21] were able to distill four volumes of storied interview transcripts into a manageable form of critical, like, and other events. This approach is a good example of how researchers may develop their own analytic approach, within one of Polkinghorne’s frameworks, to suit their narrative research needs.

Narrative Analysis

Narrative Analysis follows Bruner’s [11] narrative mode of cognition. During narrative analysis, researchers work to configure storied data into a “coherent whole” [10] while “sustaining the metaphoric richness of the story” [13]. The purpose of narrative analysis is to “help the reader understand why and how things happened the way they did, and why and how our participants acted the way they did” [13]. While narrative analysis approaches can vary, narrative analysis for many is a collaborative and constructive process, requiring “...a recursive movement from parts to whole and whole to parts” during analysis. Importantly, narrative analysis “...is not merely a transcription of the data, but a means of showing the significance of the lived experience in the final story” [13]. Thus, while narrative analysis often requires transcription, it is more than just transcription. As Barone [30] points out, the development of the narrative analysis method catalyzed growing “...experimentation with a variety of literary genres...” to develop innovative approaches for representing final stories. Thus, narrative analysis can provide a bridge between narrative research and arts-based and critical arts-based research.

Analytic Concepts in Narrative Analysis

According to Polkinghorne [10], the process of narrative analysis cannot “impose just any emplotted order on the data ... the final story must fit the data while at the same time bringing an order and meaningfulness that is not apparent in the data themselves.” To help researchers assess their attainment of this goal, Polkinghorne [10] presents seven criteria (adapted from Dollard’s [31] criteria for judging a life history method) for evaluating narrative products of narrative analysis.

According to Polkinghorne [10], the final narrative product of narrative analysis should (adapted by Pawley and Phillips [32]):

1. Give “cultural context in which storied case study takes place”;
2. “Attend to the embodied nature of the protagonist;”
3. Consider “the general cultural environment and person as embodied, but also importance of significant other people affecting actions and goals of protagonist;”

4. outline a “story [...] about central character and movement towards outcome;”
5. “Consider historical continuity of characters;”
6. “Generate a story in a bounded temporal period,” with “a beginning middle and end;”
7. “Must make generation of the researched occurrence plausible and understandable”

Narrative inquiry methodology relies on a narrative analysis approach; Connelly and Clandinin [33] provide three analytic tools for “seem[ing] together” [13] narrative products from the data generated in narrative inquiry studies: broadening, burrowing, and storying/restorying.

1. *Broadening* involves expanding the context of the produced story from what is implied in the told story. Broadening includes a description of the protagonist’s character and values, and of the larger cultural, historical, and social situations of the story [13, 33] Broadening helps fulfill Polkinghorne’s [10] narrative analysis criteria 1, 3 and 5.
2. *Burrowing* requires researchers to remain attentive to the details experienced by the protagonist in the told story. To burrow is to pay attention to the thoughts, feelings, and concerns of the protagonist and to ask questions about why and how events influenced their lived experience. Burrowing results in concentrating on a certain phenomenon/a that the protagonist is experiencing [13, 33]. Burrowing helps fulfill Polkinghorne’s [10] criteria 2 and 4.
3. *Storying and restorying* is the iterative process of telling/writing a complete story(ies) (i.e., narrative analysis) so that the lived experience of the protagonist is center stage [13, 323]. Storying and restorying helps fulfill Polkinghorne’s [10] criteria 5-7.

Narrative Methods in EER

While Jackson and Bodnar [3] indicated that analysis of narratives (i.e., coding and theming storied data) is used most frequently in EER narrative research, it is also important to consider how narrative analysis is gaining in popularity in EER [34]. One reason that use of narrative analysis is increasing, as reported by Kellam and colleagues [34] and Pawley [7], is a feeling among researchers that there is something lost— “we were missing the story” [30] and “the stories were larger than the sum of the codes applied to them” [7]—when analyzing stories of experience through deconstructive analysis of narratives approaches. Another reason, expressed by Kellam and colleagues [34]—and likely shared among other narrative researchers—is the strong desire to develop stories, rather than categories or themes, that can achieve intellectual as well as emotional resonance with diverse audiences.

Kellam and colleagues [34-35] experimented with several elements of constructionist narrative analysis, including choice of narrator (researcher or participants), voice, narrative smoothing, structure (i.e., Campbell’s monomyth), and use of direct quotations, to understand the methodological and representational implications of their analytic choices during narrative analysis. Based on their findings, they chose to use different approaches for differing purposes/data/studies. Alternatively, Pawley [4, 7, 32] reported on the development of a (meso/micro level) theory-infused, narrative methodology able to identify institutional ruling relations within undergraduate engineering student stories. Pawley [4] reported grounding the research question and interview-based methodology in the critically focused theory of ruling

relations to understand marginalization of white women and people of color in engineering education.

Critiques of Narrative Research

Generally, critiques of narrative research in education center on four perceived tendencies of narrative researchers: (a) a tendency toward researcher narcissism, b) a tendency to “romance the protagonist,” c) a tendency to not be (explicitly) theoretical (enough), and d) a tendency towards art at the expense of research [15]. Perceptions of researcher narcissism can be credited to instances when researchers appear to over-emphasize their own prominence, or the prominence of the participant’s personal meaning-making, in the text. An example is provided in Barone’s [36] question “Is anyone’s story just as worth as anyone else’s?” Additionally, researcher narcissism can be perceived when researchers appear to exaggerate the authenticity, or genuineness, of the participants’ experience [15].

Romancing the protagonist can occur when researchers fail to communicate the subjective, layered, contextual, and complex nature of experience [15]. Kim [15] describes the ultimate outcome of romancing the protagonist as “reifying notions of a unitary subject/hero ...notions of subjectivity as unitary, essential and universal... [and notions of] a positivist view of knowledge.”

Critiques of narrative research as “...not theoretical enough” [17] can manifest when researchers fail to articulate their philosophical, theoretical, and methodological approaches to the extent audiences need to understand how researchers reached conclusions from the stories collected [15]. These critiques further highlight existing tensions across narrative research communities that come from some perceiving the outputs (i.e., stories) of narrative research as art.

Key Takeaways: Narrative Research in EER

This theory/methods paper contributes to ongoing conversations about narrative research in engineering education. It introduces the key characteristics and commitments that make narrative research what it is: the narrative turn, the state of the narrative research literature, its philosophical, theoretical, methodological commitments, and interdisciplinary critiques of narrative work. Key takes away synthesized from the discussion are:

- Narrative research outcomes exhibit strong potential to further EER goals to better understand the complexities of human experience (*narrative cognition potential*) within the engineering context and to foster institutional and structural changes within engineering education via the power of stories to invigorate emotional responses in readers (*narrative representational potential*)
- The still evolving, dispersed nature of narrative research (broadly and within EER) presents challenges for narrative researchers in EER:
 - The narrative research base of literature is characterized by imprecise use of critical terms, which extends ramp up time for new narrative researchers and impedes connections across narrative outcomes of disparate studies. Narrative researchers,

regardless of experience, may benefit from engagement in narrative research -focused communities of practice and recurring workshops and trainings.

- Narrative researchers in EER are encouraged to engage in precise use and definition of key terms in their narrative research publications to build a common narrative language within EER.
- Explicit articulation of philosophical and theoretical grounding at the macro, meso, and micro levels of the research design are hallmarks of high-quality qualitative research [4, 15] and support the transfer of narrative research outcomes across disciplinary boundaries. Doing so will help to answer critiques of narrative research that imply it lacks in “professional respectability” [15].
- Narrative research remains time and human resource intensive. Questions related to if/how narrative research “counts” for tenure and promotion (in some engineering disciplines and institutions) may linger. Some argue against committing to a narrative research agenda as an assistant professor on tenure track [13].
- On the one hand, freedom to creatively experiment with narrative representational form positions narrative research as gateway to critical/arts-based education and education research. On the other hand, this freedom to experiment with artistic forms may work to weaken perceptions of narrative research as being rigorous, and thus must be undergirded by strong and explicitly communicated philosophical, theoretical, and methodological foundations.

Concluding Remarks

In summary, while “still evolving,” narrative research holds remarkable promise for generating new knowledge and innovating new representational forms to support engineering education’s own evolution into an inclusive and empathic educational system. While its human-centered nature and focus on reading and writing stories can be overtly enticing in a numbers dominant discipline, engineering education researchers are cautioned *not to assume* that narrative research is light work simply because its medium is stories. On the contrary, narrative research requires ongoing and explicit commitments to the philosophical, theoretical, and methodological foundations needed to ethically render trustworthy accounts of human experience. The field of engineering education can, perhaps, benefit most from the promise of narrative research through a community approach to innovate new narrative methodologies and methods that cohere with broader narrative research traditions while, at the same time, uniquely support inquiries of experience in the engineering education context.

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