David Patrick Slater, candidate for the degree of Master of Science in Kinesiology & Health Studies, has presented a thesis titled, *Reimagining Recreation Spaces to Establish Belonging*, in an oral examination held on December 17, 2019. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

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ABSTRACT

There are six paradigms which have framed the supports and services available to people living with disability over the last 100 years. These paradigms (facilities-, services-, supports-, empowerment, resistance-based, and personal coherence) have composed people’s lives in institutions, schools, workshops, and community. Each paradigm, defined by practice and policy, is rooted in a particular view, or way of thinking, that is shared by society. This way of thinking, has either empowered or created dependency for people that experience disability. The literature presents the paradigms as mutually exclusive, each seamlessly transitioning into the next, leaving antiquated infrastructure, social policy, and ‘best practice’ to be cleaned up by the next. In fact, we are led to believe that the troubling actions, practices, and behavior’s that accompany past paradigms have been resolved, leaving behind a history of ignorance, institutional-based attitudes, and segregation that was directed towards people that experience disability.

Reimagining Recreation Spaces to Establish Belonging is an autobiographical narrative inquiry into my lived experiences of walking alongside members of the disability community as an inclusive recreation professional. When conceptualizing my research puzzle, I imagined the metaphor of a parade; an ever-changing life space where I have become awakened to the storied lives of people living with disabilities. My tensions come from questions of ‘belonging’... As an inclusive recreation professional, where do I belong in the parade? Using narrative inquiry methodology (as conceptualized by Clandinin & Connelly), I hope to not only come to an understanding of how my time in the parade has impacted me, but also how my presence within the community has storied the lives of people living in mutually existing disability paradigms. I see my role as
creating spaces for belonging, and carrying this out by living alongside others in a relational way through the professional knowledge landscape.
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To my supervisor, Dr. Brenda Rossow-Kimball, thank you for always creating a space for me to think, and of course, write. I am grateful for the years that I have been able to position myself alongside your guidance, wisdom, mentorship, and friendship. In moments of uncertainty, and there were many, I always knew that your words would inspire me to be thoughtful in my thinking and writing. Thank you for your patience as I came to know and appreciate narrative inquiry, not only as a methodology for my graduate studies research, but also as a way of living. Many years ago, in my first semester as an undergraduate student, I had many uncertainties about my future and the career path that I would follow. It was your passion, care, and dedication to the disability field, and those that experience disability, that ultimately started my journey. I am forever grateful and privileged for the moments that I spent learning alongside you.

To my advisory committee, Doug Cripps, Dr. Rebecca Genoe, and Dr. Tristan Hopper, thank you for your guidance and wisdom, and for accepting the invitation to walk alongside me as I came to my research puzzle. Your feedback, questions, and comments have pushed me to become more thoughtful and patient in my journey.
Post Defense Acknowledgments

To my external committee member, Dr. Lee Schaefer, thank you for your guidance and mentorship as I came to know narrative inquiry methodology. I continue to learn from you, and appreciate the overwhelming moments of trying to grasp the many new concepts that are imbedded within this special methodology. It was an honor to have you as a part of my graduate studies committee. Thank you for your thoughtful and constructive feedback, and your overall commitment and care for my work.
Dedication

For my mother, Isabell Mae Slater…The one thing I could never imagine was a life without you in it. I am, however, forever grateful of the moments and stories that we shared together. You continue to inspire me in my personal and professional journey.

To my dad, you are my hero. Thank you for your ongoing, unconditional love and support. My continued education, whether it be my undergraduate degree, or my graduate studies journey, was always important to you. The moments of telling me just how proud you are of me never went unnoticed, and they mean more than you can ever know. My dedication, hard work, and commitment to my field of study and profession comes as a result of my parents, and the ongoing love and care that you always provided, and continue to provide to me.

To my wife, Rayann, I thank you for your patience. Undertaking graduate studies while starting our family together was very challenging for the both of us, and I am forever grateful for your support and understanding during the many hours that I spent away from you, Norah and Oliver. I love you.

To my loves, Norah and Oliver, I often smile when I think of the moments of sitting in our basement, working on my thesis, and having you both crash through the door to invite me to play. These moments reminded me of how lucky I am to have you both in my life, and in the high stress days of trying to meet a deadline, it brought things into perspective. When you read this, you may not remember waiting around for daddy while I was away at a coffee shop, or at the University, but I would be remiss if I didn’t thank you both for your patience. And most importantly, I thank you for the constant joy you bring to my life. I love you both.
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A Narrative Beginning

Like many children growing up, my school had the ‘Special Education’ class, a space dedicated to children with physical and intellectual disabilities. Being in a mainstream classroom, I didn’t see the children from the special education classes very often. In my school, the special education classroom was located at the far end of the building, somewhat isolated, next to the boot room. We would pass by this room at recess, lunchtime, and at the end of the day.

I remember one young child who required the use of a wheelchair. The young boy, who was always wearing a red helmet, would continuously hit his head onto the back of his wheelchair. He did not speak, but would constantly make noises, seemingly angry at times. I didn’t understand why he made these noises and couldn’t imagine why he would always hit the back of his head on his wheelchair, but I assumed this is why he wore the helmet. As a child myself, just over 10 years old, I could only stare awkwardly and uncomfortably as I witnessed these moments.

At this time in my life, I was not having deep thoughts of why these students were separated from the rest of us, nor was I questioning why a segregated room existed for some but not others. All I knew, at this stage in my life, was that something was ‘wrong’ with these students, and imagined this is why they had special treatment, in a special classroom. At times, we were asked to spend a portion of our days with these students. I recall our teachers handing around a sign-up sheet for us to volunteer our time with the special education class. The expectation was to stay inside during recess and lunch to spend time with the children who used wheelchairs. During this time is where I came to know the boy with the red helmet. I wondered if he understood what he was doing. Was
he angry? Was he trying to tell us something? Was he frustrated with his care, or just his overall situation? I never found out.

Since graduating from the University of Regina, with a Bachelor’s degree in Kinesiology and Health Studies in 2009, I have held several different roles within the adaptive recreation and leisure field, working specifically with the disability community. Through roles in health services, government, and non-profit organizations, I have gathered a great amount of experience working with individuals who experience disability. I have worked with these individuals in institutions, facilities, workshops, and in community. Within these spaces, I have created, coordinated, supervised, and facilitated recreation and leisure programs; some programs focused on inclusion, while others were purposefully designed to segregate. Currently, I hold a role within the recreation and leisure field that allows me to influence policy, strategy, and most importantly, lives within the community. I have always enjoyed what I do, as the possibility to improve people’s recreational experiences always exists. It wasn’t until a few years ago that I decided to return to academia to pursue graduate studies to help me think more deeply about my work in the community.

The narrative that I shared about the boy in the red helmet is somewhat special to me. It was the earliest recollection I have of ‘disability.’ It wasn’t necessarily one of those moments that taught me an important life lesson, or ultimately shifted my career path, but it does have importance for me, because I remember it today. It could be said that this was a forgotten memory, one that came back to me when trying to sort through the stories I have lived in relation to people living with disabilities. While the memory
itself is faint and required me to think quite hard to piece it together, I realize it holds with it more meaning today than it did when I was a young child.

In the following pages, I will share more stories (in italics) of my experiences walking alongside people with disabilities and how these moments have shaped me personally, but perhaps more importantly my identity as a professional. You will also learn, in detail, how the methodology of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) has enabled me to realize that people live storied lives, that story as experience matters, and how this has ultimately shaped my thesis journey.
“Remember only this one thing. The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive. That is why we put these stories in each other’s memory. This is how people care for themselves.”

Lopez (as cited in Clandinin, 2013, p. 183)

Walking up to work on a cool, brisk morning, I anxiously ponder the day that lies ahead. Today is the day that I have agreed to spend the morning in a wheelchair. The Chair Day event is a one-day program that is established by a local disability-serving organization. The event challenges people to use a wheelchair for a half day in order to bring awareness to work place accessibility. The goal is to approach the day as you would any other day, with added tasks to try out while sitting in a wheelchair. Tasks, such as using the washroom, riding the elevator, and general navigation through the workplace would typically be more challenging in a wheelchair, bringing light to the need for accessible work places. My day, including meetings and other responsibilities, will carry on as usual, however, today I will ‘experience disability,’ albeit for a very brief moment in time. My interest in this event is two-fold: First, I have always supported the idea of raising awareness to issues of accessibility and inclusion. I feel it is important to understand the barriers that exist each day to people who experience disability; Second, I am interested in the experience itself, and what I may learn from this. I wonder what it will be like to experience, although for a short period, the challenges of the environment that we live in.

Walking through the front door of work, the chair is waiting for me just inside the lobby. As I sit down in my wheelchair, I immediately begin to wheel towards the elevator, pressing the button to head up to my office on the 9th floor. Waiting patiently, I try my best to feel ‘normal’ while individuals have a double take on their way by. Some wait quietly beside me, and others head to the stairs, an option I don’t have this morning. To
be honest, I feel a bit uncomfortable, and am trying hard to not feel out of place, as it feels that everyone is focused on my current appearance. As people continue to pass by, I’m greeted with an initial smile from most, but wonder about the sincerity of those smiles. Perhaps the reason I am feeling this sudden awkwardness is because of the assumptions I have that others will look at me oddly, and wonder about my differences. As the elevator arrives, I calmly wheel in and set my destination for the 9th floor. The elevator begins to move, and I feel something that I don’t feel every day, the feeling of gravity as my body slightly pulls up from my chair. Where have I felt this before? Of course, the feeling we get on a plane, strapped into our seats, taking off for the first time. And, even further back in my memories, to the days as a youngster on the rides at the local fair.

As my mind returns to the elevator, it stops on the 3rd floor. A gentleman has entered and stands quietly in the corner. He seems uninterested in my presence. As we move closer to the 9th floor, we stop, again. Another gentleman enters, and stands in front of me. Before this fellow presses the button for his destination, he glances back at me, with a half smile, he says, “Hello.”

Saying hello is the polite thing to do. A simple gesture of kindness, which most of us are taught at a young age, “Hello,” can go a long way in making someone feel welcome. For just a moment, I reflect on my parents, and the lessons they taught me at a young age to always be polite, be friendly, but essentially be myself. I don’t recall a specific explanation of why we were to be friendly, but just that it was the nice thing to do, and they wanted to raise me as a “nice boy.”

I look up to my new elevator mate with a “Hello, how are you?” The fellow quickly responds with “I’m good.”. I notice an uncertainty in his voice, and sense he is uneasy, as he awkwardly glances at me. I assumed this was because I was in a wheelchair. I was, at this moment, different than him. The gentleman proceeded to ask me, “So, how are you doing?” I could sense a tone of pity, and perhaps reluctance in his voice as he asked. It came off as condescending, like I was inferior to him. The way he asked me how I was doing reminded me of being a youngster, greeted by a teacher or adult after I had fallen off my bike. It wasn’t quite an unconditional feeling of empathy, like I remember receiving from my mom and dad, but more of a check-in, because he felt
obliged in that moment. I responded to the man, “I’m good, thanks,” but before I had the opportunity to say another word, the gentleman proceeded to say, “I bet you could be better.”

As the words left his mouth, I was hit with a variety of emotions, a sense of discomfort, and I was scrambling to craft a response. At first, I was angry; I wanted to respond with some choice words. However, I made a decision not to. I wondered though, was I presenting a story that said, “I have a disability, I am struggling, and please show me pity?” I responded, with arrogance in my voice, and a subtle chuckle to shake off the tension, “No, I’m great, thanks.” My abrupt response was not because I wanted him to know that I did not have a disability, and that I could ultimately rise from my chair at the end of the day. Rather, it was because I was disappointed, as it seemed he had a perception that being in a wheelchair was not a favourable life experience.

Wheeling out of the elevator onto the 9th floor, I can’t shake what just happened. Coming through the doors arriving at my ultimate destination, I couldn’t wait to share this story. I was angry. Throughout the morning, I shared the story with three or four different people, all of whom were surprised to hear of the tale, but not as emotionally connected, nor invested as I was. Some suggested that maybe he knew me and thought I had an injury, perhaps short term. I disagreed, as I had no clue who this fellow was. In fact, I had never seen him before in my life. As I wheeled to my office, I continued to reflect on this experience and tried to understand my feelings. I wonder if the reaction I got was actually ‘normal.’ Maybe I was overreacting, and our interaction wasn’t that big of a deal. Could I have been wrong to become so upset by this? Surely not all humans have this assumption of people who have a disability... or do they? And why?

**Thinking With the Story**

I reflect on this story that I have told, and retold to others, several times. I share this story in different settings, to different people, for different reasons. I recall telling the story of Chair Day to students in a graduate class. This particular graduate course was housed in the Faculty of Education. Almost all of the students enrolled in the course were
educators; I felt uncomfortable sharing my story of ‘recreation’ with math teachers, physical education teachers, and elementary grade educators. But as I spoke, the anticipation in the room grew. I realized the story must be of significance not only to me, but also to others as they could all sense that ‘something’ was about to happen. They were attentive and engaged in my narrative right until the end. When I finished, I literally heard gasps in the room. One fellow student said, “Oh my gawd.” What followed was a lively discussion and my sense-making of why this story resonated with me and how it continued to trouble my thoughts.

Reflecting on Chair Day, I remind myself that I participated in the event to bring awareness to inclusion, and promote accessibility in my workplace. First and foremost, I know that inclusion and accessibility are dependent on the physical space, or built environment. In anticipation for the Chair Day event, I rearranged my office to ensure I could fit into the physical space while using the wheelchair. Doing this beforehand eliminated the physical barriers that I presumed would present issues in navigating the space. On the other hand, inclusion and accessibility are also about bringing awareness, as perceptions and attitudes are possibly the most limiting for people that experience disability (Thompson, 2016). A negative thought or perception about someone could be enough to exclude an individual from an opportunity, an activity, or from entering a specific space. And, as I realized on Chair Day, it was more about my perception of feeling accepted, as the power of someone else’s thoughts about me were stronger and more ‘disabling’ than the physical barriers that stood in my way. If something was in my way, I was confident I could move it, yet I struggled with the thoughts, perceptions, and assumptions that I perceived others to have about me. Specifically, it was the behaviors
of the fellow in the elevator that created my discomfort on Chair Day. Seemingly rooted in ignorance, I have come to assume that his behaviors were as a result of his attitudes regarding people who experience disability.

While I continue to ponder the tensions that still linger from reliving this story, I consider for a moment the unlikely reunion with the fellow on the elevator. What would I ask him? What would I tell him? Would I truly tell him how I was feeling? And, wouldn’t it be interesting to hear his story on why he responded to me the way that he did? As I ponder the improbable chance of a meeting with this fellow again, I place myself in his shoes. What stories has he lived in his life that ultimately led to the comment he made to me in that elevator? I wonder, is he uncomfortable with people? Is he uncomfortable with people who experience disability? I need to be open to the idea that he and I have both lived different stories, and perhaps these stories and experiences have shaped the way we perceive the experience of disability. I often wonder about how he felt after our interaction that day. Or, did he leave feeling anything at all? As I move forward, it will be important to create space to ask questions that consider the experiences and stories of the people that I come alongside day to day.
“Narrative inquiry begins and ends with a respect for ordinary lived experience.”

(Clandinin, 2013, p. 18)

**What is Narrative Inquiry?**

Narrative inquiry (as conceptualized by Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), the study of experience as story…. is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience, and is both a phenomena and a method of study (Clandinin, 2013). To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007). Using this approach to studying human experience is a way of honoring lived experiences as a source of important knowledge and understanding (Clandinin, 2013). In narrative inquiry, experience is a key term, and the nature of experiences, as written by Dewey (as cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), remains the conceptual, imaginative backdrop for narrative inquiry research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). “Experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences” (p. 2). John Dewey, a prominent influence on narrative inquiry methodology and a preeminent thinker in education, helped Clandinin and Connelly to see that experience is both personal and social:

Both the personal and the social are always present. People are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood only as individuals. They are always in relation, always in social context. The term experience helps us to think through such matters as an individual child’s learning while also understanding that learning takes place with other children, with a teacher, in a classroom, in a community, and so on. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2)
In narrative inquiry, it is important to always try to understand people, places, and events as in process, as always in transition (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007). In doing this, we are “thinking narratively” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 38) which “entails inquiring within the three common places of narrative inquiry – temporality, sociality, and place” (p. 38). Thinking narratively about people’s experiences highlights the shifting, changing, personal, and social nature of the phenomenon that we are studying (Clandinin, 2013). This is what distinguishes narrative inquiry from other qualitative methodologies; the three commonplaces (temporality, sociality, and place) specify the dimensions of an inquiry and comprise the conceptual framework for narrative inquiry methodology (Clandinin, 2013).

**The Three Commonplaces of Narrative Inquiry**

**Sociality**

Narrative inquirers attend to both the social conditions and, simultaneously, personal conditions (Clandinin, 2013). Personal conditions are the feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic, reactions, and moral dispositions, whereas the social conditions are the existential conditions, the environment, surrounding factors and forces, and people (Clandinin, et al., 2007). Within this dimension, the inquirer will reflect on their own internal personal feelings (i.e. happiness, sadness, anger, confusion) while simultaneously considering the external environment, such as the social milieu, politics at the time, and attitudes within society.

**Temporality**

The temporality commonplace refers to the learning about these experiences, and realizing that these experiences grow out of other experiences, and lead to new
experiences (Ollersenshaw & Creswell, 2002). These experiences, or events, are always in temporal transition, and attending in temporal ways points the researcher(s) toward the past, present, and future of people, places, things, and events (Clandinin, 2013). It is important in narrative inquiry that we understand that these people, places, and events are always in process and transition (Clandinin, et al., 2007). When inquiring, the researcher must attend to the information about past experiences of the storyteller (specifically, in this inquiry, my own stories). The researcher must also inquire into present experiences and of course the potential future experiences that come as a result of current and past experiences (Ollersenshaw & Creswell, 2002). For example, a new experience in a community program setting, whether positive or negative, may result in similar memories from our childhood. Perhaps, moments of playing catch with our parents, or first learning how to skate. We would need to dig deeper into those memories, and reflect on them in relation to our present, and potential future experiences.

**Place**

These interactions, or experiences, occur in a place or context (Ollersenshaw & Creswell, 2002). As described by Connelly and Clandinin (2013), the place is “the specific concrete, physical, and topological boundary where the interaction or experiences takes place” (p. 41). We must recognize, of course, that all events, interactions, or experiences take place in some place (Clandinin et al., 2007). This place, or sequences of places, must be analyzed, and the researcher must look for specific situations in the storyteller’s landscape (Ollersenshaw & Creswell, 2002). This place, or situation, may of course, change throughout the inquiry, as researchers assess the temporality of the event or occurrence (Clandinin et al., 2007). For example, a specific
physical setting, such as a school, a hockey rink, a community centre, or a park, may hold a different meaning or story from our childhood. It is that ‘difference’ that we must reflect on, defining what each place means in relation to one and other.

**What Do Narrative Inquirers Do?**

Narrative inquiry is a collaboration between the researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus (Clandinin, 2013). In narrative inquiry, the work we do with the participants (or co-inquirers, collaborators) can be rephrased as “coming alongside” (p. 34). The co-inquirers become a part of our life, and we become a part of theirs:

…We intentionally come into relation with participants, and we, as inquirers, think narratively about our experiences, about our participants experiences, and about those experiences that become visible as we live alongside, telling our own stories, hearing an other’s stories, moving in and acting in the places-the contexts-in which our lives meet. We intentionally put our lives alongside an other’s life. In that intentionally we are attending in relation to our own life and to others’ lives… (Clandinin, 2013, p. 23)

By conducting research this way, we are able to highlight the temporal, personal, and social nature of the phenomenon under study. The researcher becomes more attentive to their unfolding storied life, and the lives of the people we engage with, within the three-dimensional space. The researcher becomes changed, and we begin to retell our stories, and ultimately relive our stories (Clandinin, 2013). There is a reflexive relationship between *living* a life story, *telling* a life story, *retelling* a life story, and *reliving* a life story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In the inquiry process, the telling and re-telling of stories is referred to as “unpacking” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 34). During this process, the researcher can become vulnerable, as our own lived stories, sometimes secret, become public (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Due to this consequence, Clandinin (2013) refers to narrative inquiry as risky business.
CHAPTER 3

The Dominant Narrative of Services: Disability Paradigms

“Events under study are in temporal transition, that is, events and people always have a past, present, and a future.”

(Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007, p. 21)

It was necessary to preface this proposal with a narrative beginning; the situating of the researcher (hereafter also referred to as the inquirer) within the study (Clandinin, et al., 2007), as it identifies the “researcher’s relationship to, and interest in, the inquiry” (p. 25). I do understand, however, that the Chair Day story and the story about my young classmate in elementary school are only two narratives that have led me to my research puzzle. The research puzzle in narrative inquiry is a particular wonder that carries with it a sense of a search and re-search (Clandinin, 2013). As an inclusive recreation professional¹, I am constantly reflecting on my lived stories, previous practices and services, and disability paradigms that compose the lives of people living with disabilities. Disability paradigms describe the support and services available to people living with disability over the last 100 years. They have composed people’s lives in institutions, schools, workshops, and community. My profession invites me to improve upon current opportunities available to people with disabilities, specifically in the community, according to the paradigm we are living in today. To date, the literature presents six paradigms of disability.

¹I am employed by a city in Western Canada to identify the need for, and address the gaps in, inclusive recreation and leisure.
Dominant Narratives of Disability

Early conceptualization viewed disability as something a person has, such as a disease, a negative trait, or a deficit (Soresi, Nota, & Wehmeyer, 2011). Further understandings have seen disability characterized as an undesirable difference, a shameful thing, and something that could potentially be fixed or cured with a goal of creating normalcy (Connor & Gabel, 2013). Consistent with a medical model viewpoint, disabilities were limitations that rested with the person. The individual was thought of as a victim or patient, requiring a cure (Steadward, Wheeler, & Watkinson, 2003). Over time, as these understandings gradually shifted, a greater understanding of disability became evident, as emphasis was placed on the capabilities of people with disabilities with respect to participation, inclusion, and performance (Soresi et al., 2011). As understandings continued to develop, there were shifts in public attitudes, ultimately resulting in the provision of services and supports for people experiencing disability (Polloway, Smith, Patton, & Smith, 1996). Currently, literature presents six paradigms (facility-, services-, supports-based, resistance, empowerment, and personal coherence) that reflect the societal response to disability (Arai, 1997; Connor & Gabel, 2013; Gabel & Peters, 2004; Peters, Gabel, & Symeonidou, 2009; Polloway et al., 1996; Reid, 2003; Rossow-Kimball & Goodwin, 2018; Smith & Polloway, 1995; Soresi et al., 2011). Each paradigm (way of thinking) provides us with an understanding of the evolution of beliefs, values, and general viewpoints associated with people experiencing disability (Reid, 2003).
Facility-Based

The early 1900s showed evidence of a facility-based paradigm, as persons experiencing disability were housed in institutions and residential programs (Polloway et al., 1996). Separate spaces were created for children, youth, and adults with disabilities to be housed, reinforcing the notion that they do not belong with the rest of society (Connor & Gabel, 2013). A common practice for physicians was to recommend to parents that their child with a disability should be placed in an institution to manage the behavior (Reid, 2003).

The label of disability alone has led to further impairments on individuals experiencing disability, creating unnecessary isolation and oppressive social arrangements (Connor, Gabel, Gallagher, & Morton, 2008). The idea, and guiding motivation for the practice of institutionalization of people experiencing disability, began as an effort to cure. As professionals realized that a cure was not effective, individuals were placed in institutions as a safe guard against society (Smith & Polloway, 1995). The consensus was that the needs of people experiencing disability could best be served if they were brought to an isolated facility for differential treatment (Polloway et al., 1996). At this point in time, the likelihood of education, recreation, physical activity, and physical education was minimal, as the overall belief was that individuals experiencing disability would not benefit from these services (Reid, 2003).

Services-Based

In the 1950s, questions arose around the treatment of individuals segregated to institutions, as advocates of community integration began to place emphasis on recognition of equal rights (Smith & Polloway, 1995). During the 1960s, the facility-
based era began to break down and a services-based paradigm emerged, characterized by special services as a preparation for individuals to integrate into the community (Polloway et al., 1996). This community integration priority, also known as mainstreaming, was later associated with the unsuccessful placement of individuals into regular education classes without support (Reid, 2003). Due to the shortcomings of the approach to integration, individuals experiencing disability would remain in special classes, and become permanent residents of the sheltered workshops (Polloway et al., 1996). Programs that were initially created to address the needs of people experiencing disability, in turn led to further grouping of individuals, as services were prescribed based on impairment and disability (Soresi et al., 2011). Programming and services in this time were developed according to disability label, rather than needs of the individual (Steadward et al., 2003).

**Supports-Based**

While meaningful participation and inclusion in the community did not just naturally occur, it became society’s lot to bear some responsibility and take action to decrease segregation and isolation (Soresi et al., 2011). This action seemed to create a commitment to the success of individuals experiencing disability. Thus, a supports-based, inclusion-focused paradigm in the 1980s and into the 21st Century emerged. This paradigm highlighted the importance of personal supports, natural supports, support services, and technical supports to encourage success across environments (Polloway et al., 1996). To achieve full participation, including inclusion in community settings, it was recognized that individuals experiencing disability would require supports varying in type, duration, and frequency (Soresi et al., 2011). These supports, along with
accommodations and adaptations, led not only to the operationalization of inclusion (Hutzler & Sherrill, 2007), but also a call for greater respect for diversity, and recognition of equal rights among all citizens (Soresi et al., 2011). Furthermore, successful learning and work experiences became apparent, as individuals were supported in inclusive settings (Polloway et al., 1996). Rather than individuals having to demonstrate skill in order to gain access to recreation programs, inclusion was now the starting point, as it was recognized that everyone belongs, contributes, and develops (Reid, 2003).

**Empowerment & Self-Determination**

A subsequent paradigm, empowerment, which emerged in the late 1990s and into the 2000s, harnesses self-efficacy, a sense of personal control, self-esteem, a sense of belonging to a group, and self-determination (Polloway et al., 1996). Self-determination, specifically, has been linked to positive outcomes, such as community inclusion for people experiencing disability, as individuals make their own choices regarding quality of life (Soresi et al., 2011). The World Health Organization’s inception of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health in 2002, asks that disability be viewed as a normal part of human experience. The ICF reinforces the idea that individuals experiencing disability have the right to live independently, enjoy self-determination, make choices, contribute to society, and experience full integration and inclusion (Polloway et al., 1996).

Rather than being dependent on the expert, self-determination reinforces personal power over one’s life to make choices, engage in decision-making, assume responsibilities, take risks, and live independently (Reid, 2013; Rossow-Kimball & Goodwin, 2009). The opportunity to make choices in one’s own life, experience a sense
of inclusion, and a sense of strengthened abilities, is essential in creating happiness, positive emotions, and development of strengths for people experiencing disability (Soresi et al., 2011). Personal empowerment, thus, is an essential need when considering the programs, services, and supports for people experiencing disability (Polloway et al., 1996). For empowerment to occur though, the environment must be responsive, in that the community is truly accepting, and supportive of people that experience disability (Arai, 1997).

**Resistance**

The barriers that exist for people experiencing disability, whether attitudinal or physical, have resulted in restricted participation and discrimination (Soresi et al., 2011). As a result of this exclusion from participation, people experiencing disability are therefore seen as an oppressed group in society (Connor et al., 2008). The acknowledgment of these social forces that oppose people experiencing disability is known as resistance theory (Gabel & Peters, 2004). Resistance begins with a simple recognition of oppression, a desire to change, and is fueled by a collective banding that raises consciousness, leading to empowerment, action, and societal change (Peters, Gabel, & Symeonidou, 2009). Resistance theory recognizes the circulation of power through social relations, where power is seen as an invisible force creating a struggle between theories and ideas that bump up against traditional practices (Gabel & Peters, 2004). Through theories of resistance, the goal is to not only offer hope and possibilities, but to overcome the struggles of oppression for people experiencing disability (Peters et al., 2009).
**Personal Coherence**

A newly proposed paradigm of personal coherence (Rossow-Kimball & Goodwin, 2018) is rooted in a strengths perspective (Saleebey, 2009). The paradigm of personal coherence suggests that people experiencing disability are experts in their own lives and that professional support should be focused on the person’s “talents, resourcefulness, possibility, meaningful history, and strengths” (p. 13). Furthermore, the authors state:

In a paradigm of personal coherence, programs are not developed, prescribed, assessed, nor bounded by expert opinion, but rather programs are questioned, optional, dignifying, and potentially dissolved. Experts do not lead, restrict, determine, nor dictate, but rather relinquish, wait, observe, and ask. This is not to suggest that all programs and services should be ‘undone’ or ‘disassembled’, however, we imagine that people experiencing disabilities live storied lives that need to be acknowledged, dignified, meaningful, self-determined, and perhaps of most importance, narrated from a perspective of strengths. (Rossow-Kimball & Goodwin, 2018, p. 13)
“A landscape metaphor...allows us to talk about space, place, and time. Furthermore, it has a sense of expressiveness and the possibility of being filled with diverse people, things, and events in different relationships.”

(Clandinin, 2013, p. 163)

During my time working in the field of disability services, I have experienced feelings of unease and ‘tensions’ in my work. In narrative inquiry research, tensions are understood in a relational way...

… [we] understand tensions in a more relational way, that is, tensions that live between people, events, or things, and are a way of creating a between space, a space which can exist in educative ways. (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2009, p. 82)

My tensions in my profession arise from the ‘bumping’ I experience on the professional knowledge landscape. My professional knowledge landscape, the context in which theory and practice merge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996) is a space that consists of other people’s vision of what is right for others; the experts (i.e. researchers, policy makers, senior administrators, and myself) determine what should be done for people experiencing disability. As Clandinin (1999) discusses the concept of a metaphorical landscape space, she suggests that as we enter into the professional knowledge landscape we also enter into a place of story (Clandinin, 1999). The researchers, policy makers, and senior administrators introduce research findings, statements, plans and programs which in turn shapes what we see as being the ‘right’ way, and perhaps how we practice this theory in a community setting (Clandinin, 1999). For example, within my professional knowledge landscape, I carry out my duties based on the idea that services offered need
to be based on the assumptions of the paradigm in which they currently exist. Thus, current services offered to people living with disabilities are situated in the paradigm of empowerment, and may be progressing into a paradigm of personal coherence.

Conversely, I have personal practical knowledge; the stories I have lived (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996), which are “found in the person’s practice” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p. 150). This knowledge stems from my experiences, or practice, while working in the community. Personal practical knowledge, a concept defined to capture the idea of experience, is in our past practices, our present mind and body, and our future plans and actions. The knowledge we have can be seen as storied life compositions which both reflects our personal life history and the social context (Clandinin, 1999). My practical knowledge tells me that services have not transitioned into more progressive paradigms, which is what is narrated in the literature. It is apparent to me that constraining attitudes and practices of past paradigms still exist today, in many forms, and in different places. As such, the stories I have been told, the stories I have lived, and the narrative I am trying to compose as a recreation professional have created an ‘epistemological dilemma’ (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996) for me. I contemplate what is truly ‘right’ for people with disabilities. It is quite clear to me, that my identity has been/is being shaped by my time living with the tensions I experience when the professional knowledge landscape bumps against my practical, lived experiences.

**Puzzled on the Borderlands of Disability Paradigms**

I imagine my walking alongside people with disabilities as a participant in a ‘parade’ (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007). At times, I am the leader, developing innovative programming and advocating for the rights of people with disabilities in
inclusive recreation and leisure. At other times, I am a follower, taking on the tasks set out to me by the community members or simply observing from afar. The parade is a concept in narrative inquiry, and can be defined as an ever-shifting space:

Each participant in the landscape, in the parade, has a particular place and a particular set of stories being lived out at any particular time. Our influence in the landscape, in the parade, is uncertain. We cannot easily anticipate how our presence, our innovations, our stories, will influence other stories. The parade proceeds whether we wish it to or not. (Clandinin et al., 2007, p. 27)

As we enter this metaphorical ever-shifting space, we understand that we are meeting in the midst of people’s lives; our lives and the individuals or community’s lives that we come alongside. During this time, inquirers and participants continue to live their own stories alongside each other, and as one life touches another, the parade shifts in known and unknown ways (Clandinin et al., 2007). I think about this concept in relation to the stories that I have lived, and the experiences I have had over the years while coming alongside individuals experiencing disability. At times, I purposefully came alongside individuals, as it was my job to do so. At other times, experiences and relationships naturally occurred within the midst of each other’s storied lives. For me, the parade encompasses the individuals that I come alongside in the stories that I have told within this thesis, and the stories I continue to live today. This includes those living with disability, family members, co-workers, students, teachers, health care workers, recreation program developers, any many more. At one point or another, I have come alongside all these individuals within the ever-shifting parade.

As mentioned earlier, the literature presents the disability paradigms as mutually exclusive; each seamlessly transitions into the next leaving antiquated infrastructure, social policy, and ‘best practice’ to be improved upon by the next. But during my
professional career I have observed that paradigms do not exist in mutual exclusivity. Through the daily walking alongside of community members who are experiencing disability, I have become awakened to their storied lives; lives that are influenced in multiple ways through multiple paradigms on a weekly, sometimes daily basis. It is almost as though people are living their stories in the borderlands of disability paradigms. I would like to offer an example.

For a moment, consider the life experiences of a young adult living with a complex physical disability. This young person is at the mercy of the limited array of services and supports available. They might spend the day in an institutional, day-program setting where there is ‘isolat[ion], segregat[ion], and/or congregat[ion]” of a group of people, based on a label they have been assigned through a diagnosis (People First of Canada, 2018). Once the facility closes for the day, the young adult might attend a supports-based recreational or leisure-based program in the community in which they are supported to engage in pre-planned activities. Finally, on their arrival home, they may very well find themselves situated in the empowerment paradigm where they are encouraged to self-direct meaningful experiences; choosing what to have for dinner, with whom to spend the evening, and what time to go to bed. Observing people with disabilities navigate services that exist throughout multiple paradigms has me feeling as though I am walking through a “tension-filled midst” (Clandinin et al., 2009, p. 82). This tension is the result of the ‘bumping’ of stories as they are lived between paradigms, stories I have lived alongside others in the parade. Clandinin (2013) has me wondering how these experiences in the parade have impacted my identity as a recreation practitioner and leaves me asking, ‘Where do I belong?’. I wonder how my recreational
practice in the community has narrated the lives of people with disabilities and influenced the shifting of, or mutual inclusivity of, disability paradigms.

**Research Puzzle**

To continue within this parade, I imagined I would find value in seeking out and learning from the bumping places that have/continue to create tensions for me. I imagined that inquiring into my lived stories would enable me to: (1) live with the tensions in an educative way, (2) develop a deeper understanding of the impact these moments have on me as a professional, and (3) become awakened to my influence on the parade, or community of people living with disabilities. Reflecting on these hopeful outcomes, my research puzzle asked: **How have tension-filled moments shaped my identity, practice, and belongingness as a professional on the landscape of inclusive recreation services?**
CHAPTER 5

Autobiographical Narrative Inquiry: A Methodology

“...a form of critical narrative inquiry, that would lie at the intersection of art and science and that would support not only the epistemological aim of increasing knowledge and understanding human realm but also the ethical aim of increasing sympathy and compassion.”

(Freeman, 2007, p.142)

Today, in a narrative inquiry class, we’ve been asked to walk the halls of the University of Regina. While doing this, we are to reflect on this experience, but more importantly, we are to think about ‘place’ while documenting our account. So, what does this ‘place’ mean to us? What memories emerge as a result of this exercise? And, how is this place perhaps significant to us? This exercise is a way to think about the places we have been, the experiences we have had, the stories we have lived, and how returning to this physical space would translate into a new story. I am struggling to put my thoughts to paper, as I only have so much time to produce the ‘story’ that we will likely be asked to share in class. As I casually walk the hallways, I reminisce on my first steps through the Faculty of Kinesiology, the experiences that I have had, and how they contributed to my current knowledge, and ways of thinking. I think about the people, and the personal and social connections I have shared. I think of my first days as a young student, and my early experiences in a University classroom setting...

One of my first classes, Kinesiology 190, an Introduction to Adapted Physical Activity, was the key starting point for the direction of my career, and likely a key beginning to my current tensions. The experience of that first lecture in Kin 190 is still so real, as I have a vivid recollection of where I sat that day, who I sat by, and of course, the stories that I was told. A young instructor walked in to the class that morning, prepared to begin our semester and introduce us to physical activity, as it relates to individuals/people experiencing disability.

As the instructor began the first lecture of the year, she welcomed us, introduced herself, and gave us a quick summary of what the semester would entail. As she wrapped
up the formality of introductions and housekeeping, the class awaited the beginning of the lecture. As we began, the instructor presented us with an exercise, a task for us as a class to create a list of all the terms that are commonly used when referring to an individual with a disability. Of course, there was a greater meaning attached to this exercise, something deeper than we realized in that initial moment. The instructor had purposefully created a space for us to share our stories, as we came to understand how people living with disabilities are represented in society. I could sense the hesitation in the room, but once the initial shyness had passed, the names started to fly from the lips of my classmates. I heard phrases such as “retarded” and “window licker.” While I am aware that at one point in my life I myself had used a fair amount of these words without hesitation, the feelings of guilt and shame were real on this day as I squirmed uncomfortably in my seat. I didn’t contribute to this exercise in any way, maybe because of my lack of overall confidence in a group setting, or maybe because this exercise simply made me feel uncomfortable, and even shameful.

What is Autobiographical Narrative Inquiry?

As I retell the previous story, I can appreciate how much the experience truly resonated with me and, I wonder if this is where ‘it’ all began for me. This was a key moment, or perhaps a moment of tension, that contributed significantly to my current interests in the everyday experiences of people experiencing disability.

When beginning the process of narrative inquiry, it is important that we return to our earlier landscapes to inquire into the stories that we are living and telling of who we are and are becoming (Clandinin, 2013). By doing this, we come to deeply understand the complexities of understanding our experiences narratively. As a part of our narrative beginnings, narrative inquirers carefully engage in intensive autobiographical narrative inquiries in order to make sense of how our lived stories have shaped our identity.
Inspired by Cardinal’s (2011) research in which she questioned her own responsibilities as an Aboriginal graduate student choosing to engage in research with Aboriginal peoples in ethically responsible ways (Clandinin, 2013), the author was the one and only inquirer throughout the entire narrative inquiry journey. She made sense of her need for autobiographical narrative inquiry this way:

It was [these] intense moments that I needed to understand. It was [this] unease that needed to be restored if I was able to continue as a researcher. I needed to achieve a narrative coherence; I needed to make sense of my lived experiences to find a way to see possibilities of continued research. (Cardinal, 2011, p. 49)

It is the making sense of my own lived stories and moments of tension that I also needed to attend to. Just as Cardinal, I imagined that inquiring into my own lived stories would help me make sense of tension-filled moments on my professional identity and belongingness within the disability community, to help me rethink these moments of tension, and the educative promise that exists.

Autobiographical writing in narrative inquiry is a way to write about the whole context of a life (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000):

It is unquestionably a document about life, and the historian has a perfect right to check out its testimony and verify its accuracy. But it is also a work of art, and the literary devotee, for his part, will be aware of its stylistic harmony and the beauty of its images. (Freeman, 2007, p. 134)

The process of undertaking an autobiography as a methodology is quite unique, and is regarded as a special form of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013). Similar to autoethnography, a qualitative research method that allows the author to write in a highly personalized style drawing on his or her experience to extend understanding (Wall, 2006), the autobiographical narrative inquiry is special through its attention to the commonplaces of narrative inquiry (temporality, sociality, place) (Clandinin, 2013). It is
through the attending to these three commonplaces of temporality, sociality, and place that distinguishes narrative inquiry from other qualitative methodologies (Clandinin, 2013). Where qualitative research methodologies such as ethnography and autoethnography purposefully frame a research question in order to search for data, narrative inquirers frame a research puzzle that is composed around a particular wonder. This shift from research question to research puzzle is another aspect that allows narrative inquirers to mark the difference from other methodologies (Clandinin, 2013).

**Methodology and Design Considerations**

As a part of this autobiographical narrative inquiry process, I have unpacked my lived stories within the three-dimensional space. This framework has guided me when thinking with the stories and other texts that I have used to engage in this inquiry (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). In my study, similarly to Cardinal (2011), I tell and retell stories from a present vantage point while “situating the experiences of the past in relation to what has happened since, as understood, and re-understood, from the present, via hindsight” (Freeman, 2010, p. 60). I have also reflected on my writing and experiences as a graduate student over the past number of years; this time is of particular importance to my inquiry as I wrote many field texts, had many conversations with my advisor, and wrote stories as I attempted to arrive at my research puzzle. This exercise, similar to Cardinal, enabled me to move forward in my work. Cardinal recounts her autobiographical inquiry process in All My Relations (2011):

I inquired into my lived experiences through the various writings I engaged in over the two years: final papers, response journals, assignments and personal life writings and I sought out those tensions, and those bumping places so that I could develop a deeper understanding of the impact of these moments on my identity in the making as researcher and my feelings of belonging. (p. 39)
Throughout this inquiry, I have looked deeper into my lived stories, locating the key tension points, or common threads amongst the stories. This has better helped me to come to an understanding of how I am affected as a professional and how my presence in the community parade has storied the lives of people living with disabilities and potentially influenced the disability narrative. For the purpose of this inquiry, the ‘field’ of inquiry was the three-dimensional space; sociality, temporality, and place as I considered their influence within and upon the varying disability paradigms. Seeing the three-dimensional space as the field of study enabled me to become awakened to the relationship between my lived stories, both past and present, and those I anticipate in the future, as paradigms shift.

**From Field to Field Texts**

In narrative inquiry, the data that is collected is referred to as field texts. “Field texts are the records, including, for example, field notes, transcripts of conversations, and artifacts, such as photographs and writings by participants and researchers” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 46). According to Clandinin (2013), field texts are compositions, or co-compositions that are reflective of the experiences of the researchers and participants, and they need to be understood as such – that is, as telling and showing those aspects of experience that the relationship allows (Clandinin, 2013). The field texts for this inquiry were the documents that were created during my time as a graduate student (e.g., annals/timelines of significant events, narrative writing, email correspondence, notes taken during meetings with my supervisor) and compositions of my past and present time in the parade (e.g., reflections of my time as a recreation practitioner, writing of lived stories). Throughout this process, I remained attentive to the three-dimensional space, as
it is here that I carefully began to shape my field texts (writings/stories) into interim research texts (Clandinin, 2013).

Specific to this autobiographical narrative inquiry, the move from field to field texts did not follow a chronological sequence (Sarris, 1993), as the personal lived stories and experiences are not linear; not moving from ‘point A’ to ‘point B’ (Hooks, 1998). As this is an autobiographical piece, it remained focused on my stories, and as new lived experiences and moments of tensions continued to unfold in the field, I would ‘update’ my writings, adding to the field texts. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) summarized the experience in the field as shifting and changing, as we are constantly negotiating, constantly reevaluating, and maintaining flexibility and openness to the ever-changing landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

For me, the initial collection of field texts began in my first year of graduate studies, writing mock thesis proposals, being reflective and reflexive, as I attempted to frame my research interests. As I moved along in my graduate studies journey, the writings became more focused, as my research puzzle became more evident. During narrative inquiry coursework, I was introduced to the idea of creating annals/timelines as a way of highlighting the key stories in [my] the researcher’s life. For me, this process focused on the stories that brought about the greatest tensions for me, and primarily revolved around my professional experiences. It was after the plotting of these stories on my timeline where my advisor urged me to ‘write about them.’

The stories in this thesis are the moments that I feel had the greatest impact on me. It was difficult though, moving from the field to field texts, but even more challenging as I prepared to ‘settle’ on these key writings, navigating the three-
dimensional narrative inquiry space, and beginning to shape field texts to interim
research texts (Clandinin, 2013). At this point, I wondered about the significance of
these stories, how my place within these stories impacted others, and how these stories
impacted me as a professional. As I continued to ‘write about them,’ and reflect on life
experiences, more stories came to me, inviting me to expand on my previous writings. As
Clandinin and Connelly point out (2000), the consequences of this fluidity for making
field texts is that there is virtually an endless list of life experiences that are frequently
turned into field texts of value to the inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). An important
next step, the move from field texts (my written stories/experiences), is another difficult
and complex transition where we make meaning of the experience.

From Field Texts to Interim Research Texts

The move from field texts to interim research texts was a time marked by tension
and uncertainty (Clandinin, 2013). My focus of unpacking stories, as discussed in the
previous section, shifted here to the interpretation of these stories as I moved into the
creation of interim research texts. During this time, I continued to think narratively, in
that I positioned these texts within the three-dimensional space (Clandinin, 2013), also
using tensions and bumping points as key analytic concepts (Cardinal, 2011). Creating
interim research texts often results in partial texts that are open to allow researchers (and
participants, when relevant) opportunities to further compose (or co-compose) storied
interpretations, and to negotiate the multiplicity of possible meanings (Clandinin, 2013).
It is in this shift from field texts to interim research texts that Clandinin notes the need to
make visible the multiplicity of the lived stories, as well as the coherence (or lack
thereof) between the stories lived within the parade. As I worked to uncover threads (the
particular plotlines or resonances that appear over time and place throughout the stories) (Clandinin, 2013), I stayed attentive to the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space.

During this phase, and as I continued living stories that were unfolding in the three-dimensional space, I sought responses from others to invite multiple interpretations of the narratives (Herbison, 2017). My hope was that this exercise might offer insight and identify awakenings for me within the commonplaces of narrative inquiry methodology.

For example, I often discussed my writing and interpretations with my advisor, as well as a narrative inquiry ‘works-in-progress’ group comprised of other graduate students who have an understanding of narrative inquiry methodology. Another form of response that I considered useful was the ‘trouble-shooting’ and reflective conversations I had with colleagues who also engage in recreational practice. These conversations with colleagues took place in the midst of tension-filled moments that were experienced in day-to-day life. These organic, natural conversations are an important component of our professional knowledge landscape and have helped create space for me to think with stories.

For me, this phase of my research was primarily ‘thinking,’ as opposed to writing. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state, each topic (or for me, life experience), has its place as we move from field texts to research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). So, I continued thinking with each of my stories, paying particular attention to the moments of tensions, as I worked to discover and construct meaning in my stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This was, in fact, the most challenging moments of my research journey, as I looked back on the stories you will read in the next chapter about Cal, Martin, the mother, and the student. At times, I would think to myself, wondering if I could just stop at this point, as I felt these stories, and the way I had written them, could speak for
themselves (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). After all, wouldn’t those who read the stories be just as troubled as me? However, I knew this was not enough; my first experience with narrative inquiry methodology made for a unique, yet taxing next step.

As I sat in a coffee shop near the University of Regina, I decided to lay out my stories alongside each other in a spreadsheet. This moment, too, was challenging as the spreadsheet felt very fixed; it isolated the stories into sections (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). However, I proceeded. As I placed the stories into a separate document, I constructed a chart with titles for each story running vertical on the left-hand side of the spreadsheet. Along the top, horizontally, I placed the key concepts of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space; personal/social, temporality, and place. After rereading my advisor’s dissertation, and learning how she negotiated this process, I added in another column, titled with the question, “What has changed?’ This question nudged me to consider if anything has actually changed since the initial event that I had documented.

Upon creation of this ‘3D Space Working Paper,’ I started to look across the stories, adding to my spreadsheet another column, titled “Similar Tensions, Resonations, Threads.” As the stories were now positioned alongside each other, literally and metaphorically, I remained attentive to the personal dimension; how I felt during these moments, and why I felt this way. As my research is underpinned by my tensions around the disability paradigms, I placed each story in a particular paradigm to represent the social conditions, culture, and beliefs. For example, my story of the parent seeking out recreation services catered to her son’s needs felt multi-faceted. As discussed later in this thesis, I imagined the mother living out a resistance narrative, challenging the status quo,
and pressing against the people in ‘power positions,’ which, in my story at this time, was me. Further, I considered her request for a program that would enable inclusive participation for her son, and I wondered about the placement of a program in a services-based paradigm, or perhaps, an empowerment or strengths-based paradigm. The partial texts that I composed at this stage created the space for me to further compose storied interpretations and negotiate the multiplicity possible meanings (Clandinin, 2013).

**From Interim Research Texts to Research Texts**

Restorying a transcript in narrative inquiry does not have an ideal reordering process, in that this method does not rely on a structured routine (Ollersenshaw & Creswell, 2002). We can understand this by referring to a metaphor of “shattered glass” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 47) moving in a way that is “full of twists and turns” (p. 49). There is no linear unfolding of data gathering to data analysis to publishing research texts (research findings) in narrative inquiry. As I engaged with the documents, writings, and partial texts that I created, I became wakeful to how my experiences were/are woven together, making new wonders become visible (Clandinin, 2013). As it was in the interim research texts to final research texts phase of the inquiry where I made my writing available to others, I needed to move deeper into the multiple meanings of my stories and experiences (Clandinin, 2013).

What comes out of this somewhat final phase of the inquiry is what those who are unfamiliar to narrative inquiry may refer to as the ‘findings’. As I continued to navigate the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, I was well aware that at this point I would be sharing my final texts with public audiences; this includes unknown audiences who are far removed from my lived and told experiences that I share throughout this thesis. As
this narrative inquiry is autobiographical, it is first and foremost a process to help me understand my lived experiences, and how the moments of tension have shaped my identity, practices, and belongingness as a professional on the landscape of recreation services. In doing this, I also hoped to honor the individuals whose stories I retold from my perspective with the intent to show the complexities in navigating a space of multiple paradigms, and the impact this has on those living with disability. At this point, I returned to the personal, practical, and social justifications – which now have shifted to implications of this work- where I wondered again, how have these moments shaped me personally as a recreation professional? What impact does the telling of these stories, while navigating the three-dimensional space, have on the reader, and how may it shift current and future practices? And, what does this mean for the inclusion of people experiencing disability?

**Ethical Considerations**

In narrative inquiry, ethical matters shift and change throughout the inquiry (Clandinin, 2013). While research is bound by institutional ethics, narrative inquiry research considers ethics beyond traditional practice. In her book, *Engaging in Narrative Inquiry* (2013), Jean Clandinin discusses ethical considerations specific to narrative inquiry:

> Ethical matters need to be narrated over the entire narrative inquiry process, they are not dealt with once and for all, as might seem to happen, when ethical review forms are filled out and university approval is sought for our inquiries. Ethical matters shift and changes as we move through an inquiry. They are never far from our heart of our inquiries no matter where we are in the inquiry process. (p. 197)

To help me with understanding ethics in narrative inquiry, I looked to my experiences within the community, with daily walking alongside of community members. On the
professional knowledge landscape, I am required to follow institutional ethics whereby I sign an oath of confidentiality, I follow policy, and represent myself - and my workplace – positively. As I walk in the parade I listen with compassion and empathy; I act respectfully and kindly; I maintain a standard to offer others humanity and dignity.

Throughout my inquiry, it was necessary to respect and practice both institutional and relational ethics:

In narrative inquiry, inquirers must deepen the sense of what it means to live in relation in an ethical way…Ethical considerations permeate narrative inquirers from start to finish: at the outset as ends-in-view are imagined; as inquirer-participant relationships unfold, and as participants are represented in research texts. (Clandinin, 2013, p. 198)

As narrative inquiry researchers, we must step outside of the normal institutional narrative of ‘do not harm’ to learn attitudes of empathic listening and of not being judgmental (Clandinin, 2013). We “understand that a person’s lived and told stories are who they are, and who they are becoming, and that a person’s stories sustain them” (p. 200).

I submitted an ethics application to the University of Regina Research Ethics Board, however, I was informed that because my work was autobiographical I did not require a certificate of ethics. Regardless, I ensured that I:

1. Remained attentive to the stories I am currently living,

2. Situated the retelling of stories I have lived alongside others through my own point of view to minimize the risk of making assumptions about others,

3. Used pseudonyms for any characters I have written about while retelling my lived stories,
4. Whenever possible, I have eliminated any personally identifying features of story characters and locations of where I have lived out my stories,

5. Interpreted the field texts and research texts from my own point of view,

6. Protected the well-being of others,

7. Adopted an ethical stance that will honor and protect individuals throughout the entire inquiry

The ethical stance, or ethical attitude I have adopted here, is what naturally guides me in honoring and protecting the individuals that I [have and will] come alongside in the community (Josselson, 2007).
“In everyday life, the idea of friendship implies a sharing, an interpretation of two or more persons’ spheres of experience. Mere contact is acquaintanceship, not friendship. The same may be said for collaborative research, which requires a close relationship akin to friendship. Relationships are joined by the narrative unities of our lives.”

(Clandinin, 2013, p. 197)

In this chapter, I will share stories. Stories I have lived on the professional knowledge landscape. Each story represents a moment of tension for me, challenging my paradigmatic positioning. In addition to A Narrative Beginning and The Chair Day Story, I offer the following vignettes to engage the reader in my ‘living in the midst’…

Golfing with Ben

Coming Alongside Martin

On the Outside Looking In: A Mother’s Request

A Teaching Story

Golfing with Ben

I recall a time, early in my journey as a new student, searching to find an appropriate place to gain practical experience. This practical experience, called Fieldwork, takes place in the fourth, and final year of an undergraduate degree program. It can be an important stepping-stone to making connections and finding a career in the field. Keeping this in mind, I sought out an organization that could benefit me moving forward, and perhaps hire me as a part of their team. I selected a local rehabilitation centre that was well known and respected in the community for the multidisciplinary services that it provides to individuals that experience disability. For me, I was interested in an area that was more relevant to my field of study, so I applied to complete my fieldwork within the recreation department of this institution. Specifically, this area was
responsible for providing recreation and leisure opportunities for the individuals that called this facility their home. These opportunities included ‘in-house’ recreational activities, as well as community-based activities that supported, and sometimes challenged, the individual to (re)integrate into the community.

Within the first week, I was presented with a wealth of materials, from protocols to policies, and ‘best practice’ professional standards. I was introduced to the rules of the facility, or ‘codes’ as this was the term used by my superiors. Frequently, I was reminded that the information I learned about individuals in this facility was confidential, and I must not speak of the people I meet, as it is their right to have privacy protected. Continuously, I was reminded that it would be unethical to share information about the people I met, including their names, diagnosis, medical history, and so forth. Initially, I completely understood that sharing information about others was an unethical act. After all, it wasn’t my right to share information about someone else’s health, as that is very personal information. I quite clearly understood that. But I found this to be difficult, however, as I wanted to so badly share my experiences and what I was learning with my friends who were posted at other organizations. This created tensions for me as I progressed through my fieldwork.

Being part of the recreation team at the rehabilitation centre invited frequent interactions with the residents, as programming was scheduled throughout the day. Hardly a week into my fieldwork, I began to form relationships with the individuals that I walked alongside on a daily basis. The recreation and leisure activities were very popular amongst the residents, as they offered a change of scenery from the institutionally-driven schedule that was imposed on so many of them. Each day that passed by, I was invited into a new parade with/by the residents, coming to know many of them by the stories they shared. Once comfortable, I began to share my own stories with the residents, and this is how our relationships began to form. I was concerned about allowing friendships to develop, as I had been asked to commit to the institutional code, and was under the impression that it may be unethical to do so. Regardless, I carried on in my journey, continuing to progress in my understanding of the field, coming into the midst of many different lives.
Part of my field work experience required me to complete a ‘special project’. It was during this time that I was introduced to Ben. Ben, in his fifties, had been a resident of this facility for some time. He had undergone surgery to remove a tumor from his spinal cord, but a subtle mistake by the surgeon left him paralyzed from the waist down. Because of this, Ben required the use of a wheelchair, and was committed to spend the remainder of his life living in the institution. I was told that Ben was ready to get back in to the community; my job was to connect with him, and determine his interests and needs.

When our stories came together, Ben and I were both ‘living in the midst’, at different places in our life. I was a student, working through the formality of a practicum experience, hopeful of attaining a job after my short time at this organization. I knew my ‘special project’ was a requirement for completing the practical experience. I wanted to do a good job. Ben, on the other hand, seemingly lived day to day, following the institutionally imposed narrative: scheduled meals, scheduled baths, scheduled recreation, getting out of bed when the aid arrived in the morning and being put back to bed when the evening staff began their shift. I had daily conversations with Ben over the next few weeks. Sometimes, it was hard to make a connection with Ben. I cannot explain why some of our conversations were strained, but we just didn’t ‘click’ right away. Finally, we found an experience we could share and enjoy with one and other: golf.

There was a lot of planning to get Ben back to golfing. We had to ensure the accessible bus was available to transport him to the par 3 golf course. Once there, we had to meet with a city official to orientate us to the accessible golf cart. The cart, a one-seater, allows the person with a disability to transfer himself from his wheelchair to the golf cart seat. The golfer is then securely strapped in to the seat which can be raised and lowered by the player; the hydraulic system also allows the seat to swing outwards for the golfer to set up to hit the ball. Once we got the hang of the equipment, we were off.

He drove, I walked

The golf course created space for Ben and I to connect. While we navigated the golf course, Ben told me stories of his friends and family. He told me stories of his upbringing and stories of his life on his reserve. I learned that he valued his culture and was proud to be Indigenous. He spoke freely and openly of his life stories. And, he shared stories of his love for golf. As I shared similar stories of my family, my history, and my
love for golf, we connected in this space. I was happy to share this experience with Ben, as golf was a meaningful part of his life, a past love, at a different time. As our past stories continued to align, our relationship naturally grew. This was one of the first moments where our conversations were not strained. We had finally ‘clicked’. Ben was starting to become someone I would call a friend. On the golf course, I forgot about the institution that we would both return to at the end of the day. We were just buddies on the golf course and ignored the code of ethics that I was asked to lord over our friendship.

At the end of the day, I noted the following institutional tension as a story fragment:

Today was a fun day with Ben. We spent the afternoon at the golf course, which went very well. He seems to be having a lot of fun, as he spoke of booking another golf time for next week.

When I got home today, I noticed a Facebook friend request from Ben. For a moment, I sat and wondered if I should accept this request. Initially, I worried about the perception that may exist if I were to be ‘friends’ with a resident that I met during my fieldwork. I wondered if this would be breaking the code of ethics that existed to protect the privacy of someone living in an institution. In my mind, it seemed like this was harmless, as Ben was the one that reached out to me over Facebook. He likely doesn’t care about privacy and anonymity.

And now a second story fragment, which takes place the following day in the recreation office at the centre:

Coming to work today, I was eager to hear what my work mates would think of my dilemma, and what their advice may be. Walking up to the office, I was a little nervous, as perhaps I had already went too far with my relationship. What if I had already broken the rules? I anxiously wondered if this incident may affect my place within the fieldwork, and even worse, my desires to continue to work in this profession. As I entered the recreation office, and began to settle in, my co-
workers gradually arrived at the office. Eager to share my story, I took one of my colleagues aside. “Good morning, can I ask you a question?” My co-worker responded, “Sure you can.” I nervously shared my experience with her, and proceeded to ask. “One of the residents has sent me a friend request on Facebook, and I am wondering if it would be ok if I accepted?” My co-worker responded, “No, we can’t be friends with the patients.” Of course, this wasn’t the response I was anticipating, and my dilemma became even more complicated...

Coming Alongside Martin

As my time continued at the rehabilitation centre, I certainly had several opportunities to meet more of the residents. I spent my days walking closely alongside the recreation therapists meeting members of centre’s community. As I felt more comfortable, I became more confident and open to the development of a relationship between some of the patients, despite the advice I received to ‘not friend Ben’.

In the direct service-provider role, there seemed to be more one-to-one activities, trips into community for lunch or supper, and naturally-occurring conversations about life. Often times, if residents had family spending time alongside them in this space, these conversations involved partners, children, grandchildren, and more. For some residents and their families, the trips out of the institutional space and into community spaces were special moments. Almost a way to relive/regain their familial narrative. When I came along, too, I was proud for the families to witness my passion for my work and how I came alongside their family member in a supportive and relational way. At times, I felt as though they considered me part of their family.

During some of our outings, however, I did notice tension lived by the residents, as they would be greeted with awkward stares upon entering the community setting. It was hard to miss us, if I tell the truth. Large wheelchairs had to be loaded and unloaded, slowly, one at a time, on and off the accessible bus. Many of the spaces we entered were not accessible, and we were crowding others and ourselves. I wondered if the stares from the community were more disabling than the physical impairments that the residents lived with on a daily basis. The stares bothered me too. It was in these moments that I
developed a deeper understanding of dignity - you don’t notice dignity until it is being threatened.

One of the residents of the rehabilitation centre was Martin. Martin was a fellow in his seventies. I met him one afternoon during one of the ‘rounds’ I made with the recreation therapist. My connection with Martin was immediate, a bit easier than when I was connecting with Ben. I’m not sure why. Perhaps it was a keen interest in sports that Martin and I shared; something just ‘clicked’ between us. I didn’t know much about his diagnosis, only that he had a terminal illness. But I had a sense his prognosis was not good. He wouldn’t come to many functions within the walls of the institution, nor take the opportunity to leave to explore or reconnect with the community outside of the rehabilitation centre.

I guess Martin felt our connection, too, as he invited me several times to his room to share stories about sports, speaking of his love for football and golf. His wife spent her days at his bedside and would listen to us visit, and sometimes jump in to share her own perspective. Despite his prognosis, Martin always had a positive outlook. Martin’s wife always shared her hope – their hope - that they could eventually leave the rehabilitation centre, together.

Nearly two months after our initial meeting, Martin passed away from complications of his illness. I will never forget that day. Martin’s wife made her way to my office. She was crying so hard, she was struggling to catch her breath. Through her tears, “He’s gone,” she said. Her words took my breath away, too. My heart sunk. I immediately wrapped my arms around her and apologized. I wondered how one saying ‘sorry’ offered any comfort. I tried to keep my emotions in check. I tried to make sense of who I was in her life, in Martin’s life. I hadn’t known them for very long. A part of me wondered why she had sought me out. Maybe because she saw the meaningful moments I shared with Martin… with her, too. Maybe she could see how much I cared about my work and the people I came alongside in the institutional space. Maybe she thought I would be affected by this loss, too. She was right. In the days ahead, I attended Martin’s funeral. It was difficult, but something that I thought I needed to do for myself, for Martin, and for his wife. I thought I might see some of the other staff from the recreation department there, too, and I wondered if they would think it was weird that I attended the
service, especially because I only knew Martin for a short while and I was, after all, just a student. To my surprise, I was the only one from ‘recreation’ that attended….

A Mother’s Request

As a recreation professional with a municipality, I am required to respond to queries and concerns offered by community members. I recall one particular request that still creates tension for me today…

It was lunchtime, and rather than heading out for a food break, I continued to plug away at the emails that I received that morning. Several messages I receive are forwarded from a ‘central’ office when community members fill out an online form. The form, found on the city website, provides the opportunity for citizens to offer feedback or share concerns about programs and services. Once submitted, the message is then directed to the appropriate department. Anything ‘disability’ is sent my way. On this particular day, one of the forwarded messages really grabbed my attention. It was written by a mother who presented a concern about a lack of adapted programming options for her son who was living with autism.

Although brief, the tone of the message was clear: this mother was upset. The mother was disappointed that a program that was previously offered was no longer available. Immediately, I knew which program she was referring to. The program, an adapted leisure swim program, was created specifically for children and youth that experience disability and their families. I was aware that it was no longer available due to scheduling conflicts. In its current state, the program didn’t reside under the inclusion services area, but likely would if it was offered again.

Although feeling a bit anxious, I decided it was best to respond to the mother with a phone call. I thought it would be good customer service and I could answer follow-up questions she might pose. She answered the phone, and I introduced myself. I quickly found out how frustrated she was. She was curt and cold. She shared how angry she was that this program didn’t exist, speaking to me as if it was my fault. I tried to explain that I understood her situation, but her anger only intensified.
She continued to express her displeasure in the unavailability of the adapted leisure swim program, questioning how we could have come to the decision to cancel it. I explained that there was already discussion about how we could reinstate this program, but at the current time, there wasn’t available time nor space. I felt discomfort in this moment, as I was unable to help her. Her tone communicated to me that she felt I couldn’t be bothered with her situation, and that I couldn’t possibly care about her particular concern. I was now hurt and frustrated, too.

In this moment, I wanted to share with her my stories and experiences, and how much tension I, too, carry about situations similar to hers. I wanted to tell her of my education and professional experiences to reassure her that the disability services field was my true passion. I wanted to tell her that I wouldn’t let her down. I wanted to make it known that the role I held was not taken for granted, and that I felt privileged to work in the profession that I do. In the end, I didn’t share these thoughts with her. I guess I wasn’t sure what value my perspective would offer. Rather, I listened, and I apologized for the lack of options for her son, and ensured her that it would be my priority moving forward to create more inclusive options.

The conversation didn’t play out the way that I had hoped. I could tell by the mother’s voice, emotional and increasingly angered at times, that she wasn’t convinced of my commitment to address her concerns, and my overall generosity and empathy to her situation. And although I stated many times that I had full intentions in fulfilling her request, I could sense the hesitation in her voice to trust me. I wondered why. Perhaps it was because she had been in this situation many times before, noting excuses and listening to promises, offered by the institutional narrative...

A Teaching Story

My time on the professional knowledge landscape, along with my practical knowledge, has created many opportunities for me. As discussed earlier, our practical knowledge comes from our life narratives and our past experiences (Clandinin, 1999). For me, this came from the variety of positions I have held that allowed me to work
alongside the disability community. While in these positions, I came to know of stories from many individuals who experience disability. While alongside them, I learned from them, gathering practical knowledge of the barriers that they faced on a daily occurrence. Coupled with this practical knowledge, I have navigated the professional knowledge landscape; a space consisting of other’s stories about what is ‘right’ for others.

A place that is considered to be ‘filled’ with knowledge about what is ‘right’ is a university classroom. It was in this particular space, or landscape of learning, that knowledge is used as a way to challenge our assumptions and ways of knowing (Clandinin, 1999). Moving throughout my university career, I navigated throughout the professional knowledge landscape, coming away with new terminology and ideas about adapted physical activity.

Because of my experiences, both practical life experiences, and knowledge passed on to me within the professional knowledge landscapes, an opportunity arose for me to apply for a sessional instructor position in the Faculty of Kinesiology and Health Studies. The Undergraduate Associate Dean, along with my advisor, had confidence that I had a lot to offer the students enrolled in the introduction class to adapted physical activity. I was excited for the opportunity, and felt valued by the academic unit.

The course itself is quite content heavy. It covers complex concepts of adapted physical activity principles, instruction and assessment, the history of disability paradigms, perspectives on inclusion, ethics in care and support, and the medical classification and diagnosis of some disabilities. Former students have reported that this class, KIN/SRS 120, was the most difficult course in their academic program. The class also offers a unique practical learning opportunity whereby school-children and youth
with disabilities spend six hours a semester on campus with the students enrolled in the course. The role of the university students is to identify the physical activity interests and capabilities of the school students and plan activities that are meaningful and challenging, all the while ensuring their success. This experience is a delicate dance between theory and practical application. It is this experience that literally makes or breaks some university students. After the six hours in the gymnasium, some students know that this is the field they want to work in; for others, the experience completely shifts their career path. For me, the practicum confirmed the course of my professional path – to work in the field of adapted physical activity.

As I spoke of the practicum component to the students, I could sense some anxiety in the room, and in all honestly, I could relate. For someone who also didn’t have a lot of experience working directly with people with disabilities as an undergraduate student, this part of the semester was extremely challenging.

Below, I share one of my teaching experiences…

*As I walked through the doors into the theatre style classroom, I did so with a bit of nervousness and anxiety, as I typically did before I spoke to a class size just north of 100 students. My routine before class consisted of a few things. When I arrived at the university I would sit just outside the theatre, reading and re-reading my PowerPoint presentation for the evening, and making notes to help me keep the conversation with students moving during class. After this, and prior to entering the classroom, I would typically phone my dad and tell him what I planned to teach. He was always supportive, wishing me luck each and every time I would call. Sometimes he would chuckle to himself, and remind me of how much I didn’t like public speaking when I was going to school. After this, he would say, “Good for you, I’m so proud of you.” Those conversations would always calm me before going into the classroom setting.*
Through the lecture theatre doors, I would walk down the stairs to the front of the classroom, saying “Hello” to the students that were already in their seats for the evening. I would greet the physics professor who was in the midst of packing up his lecture materials so I could begin. I would watch as he cleaned off the physics calculations from the board. To lighten the mood before my own lecture, I would sometimes make a joke about the content that was erased from the board, reminding the students that physics calculations wouldn’t be concepts that we would be digging into that night.

We were just over half-way through the semester and had already completed two practicum sessions. Tonight, and on every night since the start of the practicum, I would ask how everyone felt their practicum experience went that day. The practicum was scheduled for Monday afternoons, and the lecture was scheduled on Monday evenings. This was convenient, because the stories were always fresh in the students’ minds. I thought it was important to create space for the students to unpack their experiences so we could learn together, as a class. And as usual, when asked to share, no one shot their hand up to be the first to open their mouth. A subtle nudge always helped, so I reminded them of the safe space that we created for one and other. The students reminded me a lot of myself as an undergraduate, too shy to speak up out of fear of saying something awkward.

Finally, one student nervously raised his hand, and said “I have a question...” Excitedly, I responded, “Thank-you, let’s hear it!” The student began to speak about the child that he was working alongside. He was very honest about the behavioral ‘challenges’ that he had encountered during his first two weeks of the practicum. The student was worried about his practicum performance because he couldn’t get the child’s full attention, and that the child was constantly running around, unfocused and not listening to instructions. He went on to explain that he had asked for the help of one of the school teachers that accompanied the students on their trip to the university. ‘This is great,’ I thought. I had explained prior to the onset of the practicum that the teachers are a great resource for the university students, for they have already established relationships with the school students and knew them the best in this context. “That’s
great," I said. “The teachers can be a lot of help, and I would expect that you ask them questions if you are ever uncertain about something.”

The student continued to share his story from the practicum that afternoon. He revealed that today was a bit harder than previous practicums, and that today one of the teachers actually pulled him aside, and offered some suggestions. He said, “[The teacher] told me that when my student gets to be like that, like really aggressive and not listening, that I need to grab him, and physically discipline him.” He continued, “Is this what I should be doing in these situations?”

I was stunned. I tried to quickly gather my thoughts while being sure to hide my anger, and not respond with intense frustration towards the teacher and her ‘advice’. Quite frankly, this pissed me off. Composed, I responded, “My short answer to this is no. No, we do not discipline the students, or restrain them in any way.” I turned to address the entire class. “We should be honored, and privileged to have these moments where we can learn from these children and youth. Our role in this practicum is to create a fun environment for these students, where we enable, and afford them to have meaningful play experiences.” I finished by saying, “Our role is not to discipline, or physically restrain them in any way.”
“I know that if I look very narrowly and hard at anything I am likely to see something new – like the life between the grass stems that only becomes visible after moments of staring.”

Bateson (as cited in Clandinin, 2013, p. 57)

Now I have the opportunity to think more about these moments, and to think with them to help me understand the lives being lived, who I am in these moments, who I am in relation to others, and my positioning on the landscape of disability services.

Challenging myself to consider the three commonplaces of narrative inquiry, highlighting the shifting, changing, personal, and social nature of these moments or experiences, I can begin to think differently about these moments, living with them in an educative way, and become awake to how they have impacted me as a professional. (Clandinin, 2013).

**Unpacking Stories With Ben**

Thinking with the story of Ben, I cannot help but to reflect on Clandinin’s understanding of relational ethics. In narrative inquiry,

Ethical matters need to be narrated over the entire narrative inquiry process, they are not dealt with once and for all, as might seem to happen, when ethical review forms are filled out and university approval is sought for our inquiries. Ethical matters shift and changes as we move through an inquiry. They are never far from our heart of our inquiries no matter where we are in the inquiry process. (Clandinin, 2013, p. 197)

While Clandinin writes about relational ethics in research, I imagine a parallel world of professional practice. I return to my tensions, specifically feelings of guilt, for questioning the possibility of beginning a friendship with Ben. In some instances, I feel Ben and I worked hard to make a connection. Perhaps it was because I was imposed on
him by the institutional narrative which did not create space for a natural, organic connection. Our initial introduction was nothing more than for a ‘project’, positioning me as a student – and an expert – to have him re-engage with community recreation. And finally, when we did start to ‘click’, I rejected him for the sake of institutional rules and policy. Deep down inside, however, I knew that my values, and internal ethics, my relational ethics, did not quite match up with the institutional code of practice. This is the point when the professional knowledge landscape bumped up against my practical knowledge, leading to an ethical conundrum:

The essence of the ethical conundrum [in narrative research] derives from the fact that the narrative researcher is in a dual role-in an intimate relationship with the participant (normally initiated by the researcher) and in a professionally responsible role in the scholarly community. Interpersonal ethics demand responsibility to the dignity, privacy, and well being of those who are studied, and these often conflict with the scholarly obligation to accuracy, authenticity, and interpretation. (Josselson, 2007, p. 538)

In practice, my ethical conundrum derives from the fact that I became friends with Ben while I was professionally responsible for his recreation. While I ensured he was treated with dignity and his well-being was protected, I cannot help but to think that I rejected facets of his well-being, specifically denying him a social aspect that would be met by my own agreement to befriend him, based on an institutional narrative. Listening to the co-worker who explained that becoming Ben’s Facebook friend was not allowed went against my own relational ethics, resorting to me to practice in an era of facility-based attitudes (Polloway, Smith, Patton, & Smith, 1996). There is a need to find a balance between professional ethics and relational ethics in an institutional setting, so as to honor the lives of those we live alongside.
Narrative researchers do their work by (politely) intruding on people in the course of living real lives [and asking them to help us learn something] (Josselson, 2007). This is not unlike the practice of recreation services. My fieldwork project invited me to come alongside Ben, even though I may not have been his first choice of a ‘professional’ to provide assistance. The institutional narrative imposed me upon him, and within the walls of the institution, we struggled. But once we changed our place – from the institution to a recreation space on the golf course - we changed our positioning towards one and other. No longer was I the expert-in-charge, but rather one half of a twosome, hitting balls on a par three.

Unpacking Stories With Martín

As I think more carefully, and more clearly, about relational spaces I cannot help but wonder if the relational space is sometimes more important than the professional work we must engage in as a recreation professional. I am not at all suggesting that recreational professionals do not already act in a relational way, for I believe it is expected of us. Nor do I suggest that we do not befriend the people we serve, but I wonder about our focus, my own focus, and positioning in people’s lives. I am reminded of a story my advisor recently told me, when she shared what she had learned from mothers of young adults living with complex disabilities. To my recollection, she said:

These two mothers were speaking to my class of students. What I love about inviting them in is that they don’t talk just about their struggles or frustration with the system. They give good, easy advice to the students. The best one yet: Be kind. That’s a lesson they gave to the students. The moms said that some days when they were going to [Rehabilitation Centre] with their girls when they were just small, the best days of therapy were the days that a therapist asked, ‘How are you doing?’ because sometimes, those days, just trying to get to the appointment were the worst. And they just talked. Therapist talked to the moms, talked to their girls, like they were human, and not just some case file. And if they left with only one new exercise or one new activity to do, those were the best days for them.
They actually said, ‘Sometimes, conversation was more important than recreation or therapy.’ (Remembered personal transaction, 2019)

Despite my role as a student, learning to be a professional in the rehabilitation centre, my focus of work shifted to relationship building, unbeknownst to me. In Martin’s life, I was not the direct recreation service-provider, assisting him to take part in the in-house activities or venture out to community. I lived alongside Martin and his wife in a relational way, creating space for Martin to retell his lived stories; providing comfort and reassurance to Martin’s wife when his death led to her re-composing a life.

In narrative inquiry, inquirers must deepen the sense of what it means to live in relation in an ethical way… (Clandinin, 2013, p. 198). Is there a way that recreation professionals could live in a more relational way with the people that our programs serve? Certainly, to me, this seems like a more natural way of living out a life alongside others. Perhaps it is not just about creating space for the relational aspects of lives to unfold, but to allow time for these relationships to develop, too.

**Unpacking A Mother’s Story**

I think of this conversation, and this family, often. I assume that the mother of this young boy had likely had similar conversations with other service providers before she and I spoke that afternoon; she seemed prepared for a fight. Davis (2004) reminds me that recreation professionals are the ‘gate-keepers’ to disability service programs, programs that we have designed for ‘the other’. This ‘other’ has been created through ableism, a form of prejudice that often goes unrecognized as a barrier to inclusion for people living with disability (Storey, 2007):

From an ableist perspective, the devaluation of disability results in societal attitudes that uncritically assert that it is better for a child to walk than roll, speak
that sign, read print than Braille, spell independently than use a spell-check, and hang out with nondisabled kids as opposed to other disabled kids, etc. (p. 56)

I do not see myself as ‘ableist’, but I can understand how others might. I am viewed as the ‘able-bodied’ recreation professional, creating and cutting disability service programs based on community need, available space, attainable funding, and adequate staffing. I imagine this is how I have been storied by some. I wonder how this mother and her son had been composed by the professionals who came before me. I imagine she situated me, at one time, in a service-based paradigm, as my role was to offer specialized programming for her child. She, situated in the resistance paradigm, insisted that the people in positions of power – recreation professionals – were not meeting her child’s and family’s needs. And so, we have the ‘bumping up’ against differing paradigms. As I think of her/their lived stories in relation to the disability paradigms, I wonder how much their narrative has fluctuated over time. How many of their lived stories have been imposed upon them by others? I question my own actions and how I have storied this mother as angry and cold. I imagine she has storied me as uncaring, ignorant, and bureaucratic. Finally, I wonder how I might be able to show her the story of who I am trying to be: thoughtful, caring, informed, educated, and relational.

Being in a leadership role requires me to have difficult conversations with members of the community who are displeased by experiences that they have had. Instances like this phone conversation with the mother are not unique to me by any means, as I am sure other service providers have their fair share of difficult conversations, yet the frequency of these moments does not lessen the impact that they have had, and continue to have, upon me. It is these experiences that have me questioning my place, and belonging, in the parade.
I committed to re-establish the adapted leisure swim program and initiated a plan to offer it again within the next year. When the day came that I had carried through on my commitment, and the program was posted again, I made sure I sent her an email to inform her of the news. I thought she might reply with excitement and gratitude. Instead, she sent no response at all. This, too, created tension for me.

At times, I wonder why I have not heard from her. Perhaps she moved on, found another program that met the needs of her son. Maybe she was just too busy, meaning to reply but hasn’t got around to it. Or perhaps she is managing the multiple demands that are placed on families who live alongside a child with a disability (Goodwin & Ebert, 2018; Smith & Oliver, 2001). Or, maybe, the revitalized program has met her son’s needs and she is satisfied with city programs. Regardless, I keep this moment with me as I move forward in my professional and personal journey. As I further reflect on this story, I think again about my place in the parade.

**Unpacking a Teaching Story**

As I came alongside the university students in the undergraduate Kinesiology class, I came to appreciate their struggles, anxiety, and frustration resulting from their practical experience. Some would take these special moments as a way to grow, professionally and personally, and others would aim to just get by, and collect the three credits that awaited them at the end of the semester. I could tell that the university student was unsure of how to respond, or to whom to respond, when the school student he was partnered with started ‘acting out’. I was not sure, either.

The teacher, from what I can tell, had imposed an institutional narrative upon this student, relying on practice that was historically situated in a facility-based paradigm. Her
actions bumped up against the narrative I had hoped to compose for the university students, that the physical activity environment created space for meaningful movement. I was relying on the undergraduate students to frame the physical activity experience within a personal coherence paradigm, whereby the school students could showcase their strengths, and apply them in new activities and contexts.

While I think about this tension, I wonder what my role is in this teaching space. How do I respond to the teacher who clearly contradicts the lessons I am teaching? And what is my responsibility within that space, and the responsibility of the university students? Had we considered that the school teacher knew the school student best? Was physicality the best way to respond to his acting out? Was this his preferred way to ‘handled? Did he have sensory processing challenges that could only be addressed by deep pressure and forceful touch?

I ‘world-travel’ (Lugones, 1987) to the life experiences of the school student, who on that day, seemingly experienced multiple paradigms. I wonder about the school setting, and if the same approach for ‘reigning him in’ is used there, too. Is his school environment similar to a specialized classroom, as it emerged from a services-based paradigm? Is he being ‘trained’ to step into a community setting, as a practice of normalization? I am reminded of Wolfensberger’s (1982) notion of normalization, and that normalization refers to offering marginalized people the same life experiences and opportunities as everyone else. While the idea of normalization is agreeable, the means used to achieve normalization are, at times, contentious. For example, it is agreeable that this school student should be in his community, spending time on campus, exercising
social skills, enhancing his physical abilities; but to ‘behaviour manage’ him in a way that is undignifying and physically restraining, is not.

And so, I wonder how the school student feels when he enters a relational space where he is to be respected and dignified. Does he notice a shift in relational practice? Does he notice that there are two different paradigms imposing on his lived story? What stories are working on him throughout the day? What becomes clear to me when thinking with this story, that is, by thinking inward and outward, backward and forward, is that this boy is asked to be responsive to varying paradigms through his day, throughout his life. These services, situated in a particular paradigm, ultimately story this young boy’s life on the school landscape. I return to the time in my life living alongside the boy in the red helmet, and I wonder where he is now. How has his life been composed?

It is interesting to me, too, that the school student wears two hats during practicum day: he is a student and he is the teacher. As he shifts to the university space from his elementary school, he becomes the teacher for the undergraduate students, and ultimately, they/we learn more from him than he learns from us. I imagine a forward-moving story in a future place. On the school landscape, this fellow now negotiates curriculum and friendships within his high school. And he may be presented with two options: join a classroom space with others of his similar ability, or be supported by a teaching assistant in a mainstream classroom. Both scenarios impose a narrative on him, telling others a story about who he is, and who he is able to become.
“Each of us needs to belong, not just to one person but to a family, friends, a group, and culture… Belonging is important for growth to independence; even further, it is important for our growth to inner freedom and maturity.”

Vanier (as cited in Thompson, 2016, p. 1434)

During my time on the professional knowledge landscape, I have lived with tensions. In this inquiry, I have purposefully come alongside those tensions, attempting to better understand how they affect me as I live alongside others in the parade. The telling and retelling of the stories in this thesis were done so purposefully, not necessarily with the goal to find answers, but more so to create a space for uneasiness… to learn from and live with the tensions in an educative way (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2009).

In this chapter, I focus on the common threads, resonations, and narrative intersections that surface from inquiring into the stories and experiences that shared throughout this thesis. I also offer implications of this research, attending to the important question: ‘So what?’ To respond to this question, I will discuss personal implications (what this research means to me), practical implications (how this inquiry may influence practice), and social implications (what this research can contribute to theoretical understandings) (Clandinin, 2013). These implications (also known as justifications when situating the inquiry) are a central element to the research (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007). Failure to respond to the ‘so what’ runs the risk of having my work dismissed, and viewed as simplistic.
**Learning From the Tensions: Personal Implications**

“Our research interests come out of our own narratives of experience and shape our narrative inquiry plotlines” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 121). Personally, I justified this inquiry through my narrative beginnings; the situating of the researcher in the study, and the relationship and interests in the inquiry through experiences (Clandinin, et al., 2007). “[That] is I justified the inquiry in the context of [my] own life experiences, tensions, and personal inquiry [puzzle]” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 36).

Similar to Clandinin (2013), I sometimes wonder about the potential to avoid tension-filled moments, and how I can prevent living similar moments or experiences that create discomfort on the professional knowledge landscape. But as I read more of Clandinin, she reaffirms that tensions are moments of vulnerability, but also possibility. We “come to rethink moments of tension and the educative promise these moments hold when we risk making ourselves vulnerable” (p. 76). Avoiding the bumping places does not allow one to be dis-positioned, nor to be re-positioned:

I began to understand that trying to avoid the bumping up of stories, and therefore lives, would necessarily mean remaining confined by, and locked within, borders of arrogance…I have come to see that the tensions I experienced, as my stories bumped against others’ stories […] emerged as I felt my borders pushed and I became dis-positioned. (p. 77)

As Clandinin (2013) writes, my moments of being dis-positioned created places of possibility for me to engage in learning, and ultimately admit to vulnerability (Clandinin, 2013). For example, by reliving the story of my phone conversation with the mother, I can reimagine this moment as an opportunity to embrace another perspective, another story. This story created a sense of wakefulness, as my practices or ‘ways of thinking’ were questioned; I was the one responsible for this family’s tensions. Perhaps I
narrated this mother unfairly. Perhaps my assumptions of her forthcoming gratitude was me ‘living in an arrogant way’ (Lugones, 1987). I am now better positioned to reimagine my practice as a recreation professional on the professional knowledge landscape.

I have come to realize that I am an outsider to the parade, and I do not belong the way that I previously envisioned. Although I have been a part of the ‘disability-field’ for many years by advocating, researching, teaching, and working towards an inclusive community, I am not an ‘insider’. I do not have a disability, and I thrive in an ableist world. I am aware that, at times, I create the problem ‘for the other’ and I am a gate-keeper to services and programs. Sometimes, I have a hard time accepting this because I care, I empathize, I am awake to discrimination, and I consider myself an ally. I genuinely believe in equity, inclusion, and the value of diversity in community spaces.

One suggestion for deterring ableist ways of thinking is to create ability awareness opportunities, such as taking part in simulated activities where one can momentarily ‘experience’ disability (Storey, 2007). The Chair Leader story I shared at the beginning of this inquiry is an example of a simulated activity that creates awareness. But these awareness experiences, in which participants ‘assume a disability’ such as vision loss (by use of a blindfold), hearing loss (by use of ear plugs), paralysis (by use of a wheelchair), or amputation (by restricting one’s arm with a sling) are a point of contention as well. According to Behler (1993) the risks associated with these awareness exercises (i.e., the experience is not genuine nor authentic, feelings of discouragement, hopelessness, or pity may reinforce negative stereotypes of disability, participants may not appreciate the relevance nor significance of the exercise) outweigh any benefits (i.e., heighten sensitivity of the experience of disability, create awareness of barriers to
participation) (Kiger, 1992). This leaves me wondering of the value the Chair Day exercise had for me, particularly when I was already awake to the barriers that I was experiencing. Could it have caused more harm than good because I reinforced the stigma of disability to the man in the elevator? Regardless, I can live better with the tensions tied to this lived story. Like a personal resume, these experiences are achievements that have not only set me up for professional success, but also have developed me as a person, a man, a service provider, a community member, a son, and a father. And during the times where I feel the need to ‘prove’ to the community that they can trust me, I will slow down, be patient, and think.

**Awakened to My Positioning: Practical Implications**

I consider the potential within programs, supports, and services for people that experience disability. So often I think about my own practice and question if I am making the ‘right’ decisions on the professional knowledge landscape, as I know my decisions will affect the individuals that I serve within the community. I consider my positioning in people’s lives, wondering where they have placed me and where I have placed myself, particularly in the disability paradigms.

I travel back to earlier days in my graduate studies experience, pondering how I got to this place, and how I came to this particular research. It was in my early days as an undergraduate student that I was first introduced to the disability paradigms. In that moment, the concepts did not carry with them the meaning that they do today. Fast forward to my sessional teaching opportunity, it is here that I was responsible for sharing the history of paradigms, including the treatment of people living with disability dating back to the early 1900s up until now. It was during moments of teaching that I realized
how much tension these dominant narratives carried, and how I allowed them to work on me (Clandinin, 2013). The stories that emerged from those paradigms were working on me and had me questioning how I have engaged in the practice of a recreation professional.

I wonder if it is possible to shift the perspectives of those who continue to practice from an institutional-based perspective? Or, do I need to become awake to the idea that, in some cases, services need to be delivered from the perspective of past paradigms? Perhaps, sometimes, programs are best delivered according to diagnosis, and services need to be segregated. Perhaps the people who request/need the services should have the choice of which paradigmatic framework to exist in. And so, I wonder if there is a need for me to be troubled by this? Perhaps, rather than having the paradigms work on me, I might work to shift the paradigms through my own practice.

If I imagine that the paradigms do not matter so much, but rather the way we live alongside others in each paradigm is what really matters, I might be able to live better with my tensions. If we make the ‘relational’ the common thread between paradigms, perhaps people’s lives will have more choice, more meaning, more friendships, more caring… more life. Living in a relational way means that, as professionals, we will come alongside people and intentionally care for about them, consider their well-being feelings and who they are, show practice kindness, and share reveal stories. To be alongside others in a more relational way means, in part, that we “understand that a person’s lived and told stories are who they are, and who they are becoming…” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 200); we must be wakeful of the story we tell others about who they are. This relational
presence is an ethical attitude that I now see I carry with me through my 
recreation/teaching/research practice, and I always have.

If I reimagine my lived practice, I wonder how Ben was first ‘introduced’ to me. 
Did a recreation therapist say, ‘Hey, there’s a great new student working with us and we 
are wondering if you be willing to spend some time with him on the golf course?’ Or, I 
wonder, if he even knew I was ‘assigned’ to come alongside him prior to our first 
meeting. Perhaps the beginnings of our relationship could have been more relaxed 
outside the walls of the institution; not so ‘service’ like. Maybe my time with Martin 
could have been spent ‘off-the-clock’, and not restricted to the business hours of 9 am to 
5 pm. Maybe we could have watched a game together on the weekend. Perhaps my 
conversation with the mother could have occurred face-to-face over a warm cup of 
coffee. What if, after fulfilling my commitment to reestablish the swim program, we 
planned a meeting at the pool where I could have met her son and known, in a more 
relational way, how meaningful this was to him and her. And what if I met with the 
school teacher and simply asked, “Why do you feel that physically restraining your 
student is the best way to support him here? Can you help me make sense of this so I can 
help my students?

It is my hope that this inquiry will help others to “rethink and reimagine the ways 
in which they practice, and the ways in which they relate to others” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 
51). By creating space for my own sharing of lived experiences, I might encourage others 
to engage in resonant remembering, as they lay their own stories and experiences 
alongside the stories that I have shared in this inquiry. My writing may invite others to
retell their stories from their personal and professional landscapes creating possible spaces for our work and our lives to make a difference (Clandinin, 2013).

**Rethinking Recreation Spaces: Social Implications**

Finally, I must speak to the social justifications (Clandinin et al., 2007), that is, the consideration of the larger social issues that this inquiry may address for people that experience disability, and for the people who ‘practice’ recreation. In my work, I am immersed in concepts of inclusion. This word has almost become ‘white noise,’ a fuzzy soundtrack that plays across paradigms, contexts, spaces, and literature. But I have come to learn that inclusion takes on different meanings to different people, at different times and in different places (Armstrong, Armstrong, & Spandagou, 2011). Thompson (2016), like me, reflects on the idea of inclusion. But he suggests it is a quick fix, or a Band-Aid, used to portray a ‘coming together’ of society. While we may be ‘talking’ inclusion and ‘practicing’ inclusion, it has not resulted in a shift in the perception that society holds about the value of diversity. More specifically, inclusion has not eliminated the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ mentality. We do not need to look far for an example. Consider the recent story of a small Saskatchewan city who rejected a proposal that would allow a group home to be built in a highly-valued area of town. City councillors and the mayor cited decreased property value and stigma as reasons for denying the housing proposal (Bridges, 2019). Simply put, inclusion does not require society to alter its negative or damaging perceptions of people with disabilities (Thompson, 2016). Thus, services and supports may be offered, and exceptional programs may be in place, but negative attitudes towards difference will continue to exist. When such attitudes and assumptions persist, true belongingness of people with disabilities will not be realized in our society.
What has become evident, as I inquired into my personal lived stories, is that multiple paradigms are always at play. Individuals living with disability are asked to be responsive to services delivered from multiple perspectives. At times, there is metaphorical, and literal, bumping between practices on the professional knowledge landscape. What must be realized, however, is that the people we care about and serve in our programming spaces do not belong to a particular label, nor should they ascribe to a particular program. The idea of *choice* emerges, in that individuals be entitled to make their own choices about their services. The challenge for service providers is to create and deliver *options*. This can be challenging, as budgets are not unlimited and creating the capacity for individualized services can be difficult. Having said that, we cannot assume that an individual will fit into one programming model, or paradigm. We need to explore ways to create opportunity and choice, creating space for people to live out a meaningful life.

Having that opportunity to make choice, particularly for those that experience disability, has the ability to meaningfully increase quality of life (Schloss, Alper, & Jayne, 1993). As we increasingly enable people experiencing disability to live, attend school, work, and spend leisure and recreation time in community settings, we must place greater emphasis on personal coherence (Rossow-Kimball & Goodwin, 2018). It is my opinion that by placing someone into a ‘catch all’ programming model, we are not only supporting the notion that all needs will be met by a single approach, but also that the programmer is the expert in the lives of each and every community member. And, because paradigms are not mutually exclusive, we cannot be certain that the programmer will use the approach that best suits the needs, strengths, and desires of those they are
serving. Our role as recreation professionals, then, is not to story our community by subjecting them to service models that do not fit, but be attentive to the personal needs of our citizens.

Creating Spaces for Belonging

In my day to day profession, I define inclusion as a space where people belong, are welcomed, and find meaning in the activity that they are pursuing. Creating space for others to live this way is not easy; I must be mindfully present, listen to what is said (and not being said), ask difficult questions, and live in a relational way with the community. But what the community and citizens want and need seems to shift. It requires effort and wakefulness to stay attentive to this so that meaningful spaces for belonging can be crafted:

“belonging” is not the same as “being included.” To be included, one simply needs to be present “somewhere,” wherever “somewhere” might be. Belonging is different. In order to belong, one needs to be missed if one isn’t there. In order to belong to the community of strangers, people with [disabilities], and their families need to be missed when they’re absent. If they’re not missed, they don’t belong; and if they don’t belong, there is no true community – for anyone. (Thompson, 2016, p. 1434)

Belonging is a basic human need (Thompson, 2016). Ultimately, recreation can be a tool for establishing spaces of belonging. I view my day-to-day work as creating space for belonging, and I have come to this awakening through my lived stories. As a recreation professional, I must look beyond the health benefits that recreation offers and recognize the greater social impact that can occur by creating a space that is welcoming to everyone. If I see myself only as a recreation professional, I become narrowminded and limit the potential impact that programs and services offer to the community. My
greater role, beyond recreation professional, is to live alongside others in a relational way.

Recently, I toured a shelter for those experiencing homelessness in Winnipeg, Manitoba. During this tour, I came across a white board with a quote on it. It read, “Don’t judge people’s choices, we have no idea of their options.” I found this quote to be simple, yet profound. I took a picture of this, and have since hung it up in my office, reminding me to stay true to my values of compassion, care, ethics, and empathy.

Coming to narrative inquiry has allowed me to see the multiplicity of people’s lives, and see others’ stories differently. I have come to develop a better understanding of the impact that lived stories have on my own life, and now I consider the lived stories of those I walk alongside in the community. While I have not resolved my tensions, I am now able to live better with them. I am more confident in my practice, and have reaffirmed my ethical stance. And I can imagine how belonging, living alongside in a relational way, might re-compose a life. I imagine how belonging could have shifted the
dominant deficits-based narrative of the boy in the red helmet. I wonder if the man in the
elevator was looking for a way to belong alongside me in that cramped, tension-filled car.
Coming alongside Ben helped him belong on the golf course. Belonging in Martin’s life,
and subsequently his wife’s grief, reaffirmed by ethical attitude. I created space for a
young boy to belong in a swim program in his community. And I am more thoughtful
about creating belonging spaces for others who live in the borderlands of disability
paradigms.
References


