
Article

Talk/Reading/Voice: Re:search

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Abstract

In this article, the authors embrace talk as space for emergence and possibilities. They flirt with the part reading plays (or might play) in conversations within the academy, recognizing such readings take multiple forms: individual, shared, in response, and in reaction (to name a few). To confront oneself with the not yet known is to witness what is forming or being called forth as its shaping emerges. Using co-constructed reading responses, the authors present examples from King's (2003) *The Truth about Stories* as illustrations of their work together, where work, like talk, is about pushing the edges of what can be known and, more particularly, about what can(not) be said. The authors maintain finding voice through reading, research, and self-study helps shape collaborative work within the academy. This reveal encourages the mapping of unmapped but taken for granted parts of academic life, an already querying of method.

Keywords: method, talk, reading, reflective practice

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Setting the conversation

Re:viewing talk

We are re:viewing our talk. Talk is here as conversation, conversation that is both story and method. This is the story of our working together, in particular our working through our readings. We are inspired by the work of Richardson and Lockridge (2002), who noted,

when you're reading, time and space become inseparable. You are connected to others historically—those in your space and not in your space, those alive and those who have never lived off the page. I find this one of the most fascinating things about written language. (p. 235)

As with our talk (patterson & Brogden, 2004), our readings are about a joint effort, not to create fiction(s) or impose pattern so much as to follow where our talk (and readings) take us.

How we come together in talk opens up spaces of possibility. We acknowledge the familiar in our talk, at the same time recognizing that our talk is always new, always pushing (and pulling) us in different directions. The pieces of our talk, the multiple texts, and our talk itself, that is the written texts on which we focus, are multidimensional: fractured, luminous, partial, smooth on some edges, and jagged on others. They refract and reflect as they coalesce into method. In these spaces, we grapple with our readings, our research, our knowing and not knowing. To do this, we suspend belief in any ur-search and accept the probable impossibility of searching “right.” We are asking not that what we share here be verified but, rather, that it be altered, seen as food for thought, as invitational.

In what follows, we share ourselves reading individually, in dialogue about our reading, and so we share our researching lives. More specifically, in so doing, we share the querying of our method. We suspect we are making public what often takes place between colleagues while they are “getting on” with whatever the focus of their research is, the study under way, the article being written, the presentation planned and given. We are lingering in private spaces to make them public: lingering over and reflecting on what takes place there. Taking such conversations and reading into public spaces engages us in re:examining our method, contemplating the metanarrative or the place of the private in a very public institution, the academy.

The rhythms of our work are varied, sometimes she said, she said, sometimes single voiced, sometimes together, sometimes in response, and sometimes in reaction. We share vignettes of our research/reading selves to bring our method to the page. In the first instance, we try to give the reader a sense of who we are singly, and then as voices in conversation. Finally, we turn to our reading of Thomas King’s (2003) *The Truth about Stories*. We write our research/reading with a view to query method, with a view to read reading.

Reading alone: Letting you hear us

Living spaces: Belonging as nesting

dp: Huggan (2003) writes, “I’ve always had a penchant for doing things, opening books at random. Letting words or phrases leap out to show me the way” (p. 225). To talk this way is to talk about “how this chancy juxtaposition has something of divine revelation” (p. 225) about it and suggests that “still wondering, still putting the pieces together” (p. 225) is not something to be ashamed of or to hide. “I may spend the rest of my life working it out and that will be just fine” (p. 225).

There is something in our conversation and in our reading as well as our sharing of our reading that makes space for my breathing, for slowing down my hurried blood, for changing the rhythms, prompting my feet and my veins to feel more anchored, not less—celebrating each sentence, each word as both sense and nonsense, as suggestive/evocative all in the same moment. And while answers or patterns or fictions may emerge, they may not. What sometimes occurs to me is how can this be alright? Mustn’t there be more to examine? Certainly the books available to read are endless. There is so much waiting, luring me out of my hiding or luring me into hiding—containing both expansive and confining possibilities of who I am and who I might become, of who we are when we are together and who we might become. How can it be fine not to struggle, not to choose hard things to say here and now?

Breadth, depth, and the endless books in the stacks

LMB: I recall heading off to the library yet again; on this remembered occasion, because I said the “h” word and donna reminded me that if I’m going to dive into hermeneutics, I had best go back to Heidegger. I had performed conscientious reader before my departure, checking the online “card catalogue” for Being and Time. In the stacks, I found two copies of Sein und Zeit (but I don’t read German), and L’être et le temps, but no English. Pas grave, I thought, and grabbed the French version.

Then I moved on to Ricœur. I found From Text to Action in English, and Du texte à l’action in French. I read Derrida in French when I can, in English when that’s all I find at my favourite bookstore, or at the library, or when I’m too impatient to wait for an interlibrary loan. In some ways, my choice is often a non-choice, a perchance. In the instance of Ricœur, however, I found myself debating back and forth which version to choose. English, because after all this time I can still (usually) read a bit faster? Or French, because after all, he wrote in French, so why mess things up with a third party? Or English, because I could use the quotes easily in my coursework? Or French, because hey, I used “bilingual enough to read French” as one of the criteria for picking my committee so they can just deal? Or . . . ? And then it came to me. I remembered my 2004 Find of the Year at the University of Minnesota bookstore, The Writing Notebooks of Hélène Cixous (Cixous & Sellers, 2004), Cixous’s original French journal to the left, the English translation by Susan Sellers to the right, and then the French transcription of Cixous’s work to the right of that. It occurred to me that I could read Ricœur the same way: original French to the left of me, translation to the right...and the annoying lyrics returned once more because I’m always already “stuck in the middle of me” (Rafferty & Egan, 1973). So much for saving time in my being!

Reading together

In our reading together, we have been trying to acknowledge our willingness to be carried away across thresholds toward an unknown destination, not foreseeable, not preexistent. We switch perspectives on reading to say more in hopes of seeing more. Certainly, we are saying not how we or others in the academy should read but, rather, how we might. We are making some small effort to share our efforts to understand how our reading together is always more than reading alone, always more is present in the reading than the words themselves.

In reading together, there is no pressure to perform, only solace and lingering to treasure those moments when, reading alone or reading together, there is that one moment of trace when everything changes. These are moments that cannot be fashioned or demanded. They occur in our lives as moments of grace, as grace notes. Our work is to allow this resonance, these gentle reminders to both map ourselves and shape our research/reading/selves. When and what we read together, of course, changes everything, the very space between us, the living that is not one or the other but us, fragile but organically strong, or so are our hopes. We are so grateful for these moments that ripple through on many levels of being, not all of which make themselves available to this or any other analyses. We suspect—even hope—that in allowing ourselves to be read by books we are also allowing ourselves to be read by you, another reader.

Opening ourselves up to a book or to being read, like revealing our method, makes finding a pattern in what is said or read inconsistent, maybe even impossible. Our surprise is invited in conversation. No one can say what will happen and perhaps most importantly, no one can say what should. Our intention then is always to try to understand, to fathom, and if that is not possible because of flaws or limits or poorly phrased questions, then to try to grapple with what is standing in our way—at the least not to settle into numbness but to recognize the personal as intimately fused with our thinking, describing and expressing as intimately fused with our doing research.

Re:viewing King

Truths about stories

We started with the question, What might happen if . . . and what connections might occur . . . ? We want to privilege multiple connections from both of our perspectives as an exercise in noting possibilities, in redrawing and erasing boundaries set by viewing reading as a precursor to any academic task, or to our talk. In this telling, we privilege King's (2003) *The Truth about Stories*. King's work helps us give further voice to our reading/research. King speaks of reading as "a private act. And no matter how many people may have read a book or an article or a poem or a short story, each person reads that story themselves, by themselves" (p. 154). Our intention is to share essentially private acts of reading a particular work, in this case King, and the ways we engage in more public acts, through reading together, and in being read here. We focus on how these acts affect our ongoing conversation—how we take particular experiences into a shared place, playing with and then illustrating how that sharing interweaves, shaping what and how we talk to one another.

Of course, we could choose not to do this, and it is possible that our efforts will be unsuccessful. Nevertheless, we want to try so as to understand more fully stories we are living about reading that are integral to who we are together and to recognize stories we are writing and telling each other and the reader. As Okri (1997, in King, 2003) has said, "we live stories that give our life meaning or negate it with meaninglessness. If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives" (p. 153).

Voice(s)

dp: In some ways responding to King's (2003) The Truth about Stories is easy and in others difficult. The lure of beginning by saying "You'll never believe what happened" (p. 1) or "There is a story I know" (p. 1) is persuasive but of course not possible because that is not the way any of my stories start. Such beginnings are not in my voice as enriching as they may be. Once upon a time will not do either. Even if there were an opening that came to mind what would follow? Which piece of the day to day would then come forward out of hiding into the light? Of course, am not talking about story but about the place of reading in our conversations. Perhaps the place to start is how moments in King's book caught/hooked me, marked me, as between who am supposed to be and what circumstances dictate my becoming—as trying to be careful not only of the stories am telling here but also of the stories am being told or have been told about reading, about the value of conversation, about being an academic, especially about being a qualitative researcher in academia. Sharing here in this way cannot be called back. What is shared is public even when the sharing is within conversation between myself and Lace.

LMB: Dear Academy, I am reading. Today it is Thomas King's (2003) The Truth about Stories, because "the truth about stories is that that's all we are" (p. 32). And today it is also Robert Nash's (2004) Liberating Scholarly Writing, because "truth and reality are infinitely interpretable . . . there is no final word on anything, including, and especially, this assertion of mine" (p. 41). And today it is also a book of poems by Aislinn Hunter (2004) entitled The Possible Past, just because, especially because, reading and writing poetry are co-dependencies that keep me sane. I rarely start reading at the beginning; I frequently leave before the end. I come back again (or still) when traces of text(s) converge and intersect.

Dear Academy, I am reading. Today it is Thomas King's (2003) The Truth about Stories, because "the truth about stories is that that's all we are." This quote is from page 2. And page 32. And page 62. And page 92. And page 122. And in the Afterwords, page 153. King foreshadows, situates me, his reader, declares: "none of you would make the mistake of confusing storytelling strategies with the value or sophistication of a story" (p. 23). But I like numbers, symmetry too, and the repetition intrigues me. King plays coyote, he keeps coming back, and this re:visiting of story pushes my thinking. The trickster has

helped me see what I'm thinking, have been thinking for quite some time actually, about reading narrative: reading narrative is, consciously or subconsciously, reading the meta-narrative.

Dear Academy, I am reading. Today it is also a book of poems by Aislinn Hunter (2004) entitled The Possible Past. I am moving between the private and the public. King (2003) says "the act of reading is a private act" (p. 154). As is writing, until it is shared. Mostly I like to write my own poetry. On a good day, I know others know too. Today is a good day.

*This is what I know of transience: that you will never see me
this way again, that the light will touch the leaves of the alder tree*

*this way only once, that we cast ourselves out of the past
like human cannonballs because of the darkness behind us.
But listen, there is music, and the steady thread of our breathing.
Even here, in this place, miles from anywhere.*

—excerpt from "The Story as I See It," Hunter, 2004, p. 80

Dear Academy, I am writing. Today I am writing because the truth of my story is all that I am, and all that I am is my story; what it tells, what it hides, what it sees, what it tries to disguise. I beg you listen to my wor(l)ds, for in them, you will hear what I have read.

dp: Experience a certain pressure to like this book written as the Massey lectures and given by an Aboriginal writer of note. Being a contrary, thought it probable—at least a strong possibility—that my critical and academic inclinations might distance me from the text, the topic and the writer. (King (2003) suggests that "it's an easy job to be critical" (p. 164) but? and? there are those who see being critical as an essential academic task.)

Almost read the whole book before being caught and hooked. There were several momentary struggles—one occurring early on in the text when King (2003) brings his partner to the writing. He says she offered him this advice: "Tell a story . . . Don't Preach. Don't try to sound profound. It's unbecoming and you do it poorly. Don't show them your mind. Show them your imagination" (p. 26). And while how or why this passage almost hooked me remains unclear, let me confess that it was hard not to want to know better someone who could not only hear but share both this advice and its source. Walking away, stepping through reading this book without letting it touch me ceased to be a possibility with the story about John and Amy Cardinal in the "Afterword: Private Stories" (Almost got away unscathed). King shares about his friends, about their struggles as parents and as partners. He tells about the space between their experiences, their struggles and what he himself did or did not do and what he wanted to do or wished he had done. He acknowledges his distancing as a recognizable slide into the comfortable. King talks about distancing as a misuse of intelligence or good will. He is clear it is not a step towards the sustained effort needed to live ethically day after day. Am marked by this story and particularly by his courage in telling the reader that:

its doubtful that given a second chance to make amends for my despicable behaviour I would do anything differently, for I find it easier to tell myself the story of my failure as a friend, as a human being than to live the story of making the sustained effort to help. (p. 166)

Certainly, am not able to say would have lived my life differently if only had heard this story before (King makes sure this excuse is no longer plausible).

LMB: Reading King (2003), I interpret and reinterpret the text and my reading of it. Previous interpretations return to me and I re:view them, confirming some pieces of understanding, refining others, and letting the less useful or irrelevant ones fall away. Reading King gives this process a sort of hyper-presence. I find myself reading some passages over and over again, getting called back over and over again to another place in the text, checking details to find similarities and difference. Sometimes it is my own path, sometimes I am tracing the paths of others...All roads lead to Rome as the saying goes—or at least as far as Bruner, right donna? While naming Bruner (2002) may be a distraction here, what I am most conscious of is my desire to provoke—provoke you, the reader, into thinking about your reading patterns. My hope is that picking Bruner over someone else does this, makes it easier to decide for or against my choice, invoking a dichotomy of sorts. This foreclosure is used as a trope, because really, I am trying to make space instead of close it down, using the dichotomy to invoke a space of ambiguity, of tension.

Conversational response

Having shared our solo readings of King (2003), we want now to share some of our conversation. We have spoken often and at length about King, about reading and about method. The following excerpt is a tidbit, a morsel. Our hope is it helps the reader understand some of how and why such conversation seems to us a way to open and be caught by possibilities of who we might become and the turns our thinking, our research and our method take and may take. Laughter and pauses, confession and confusion, all present here, subtly and not subtly:

dp: I think that the piece that hits me really hard, is how skilfully he moves in and out, what for many writers, Aboriginal writers, would be bitterness, would be difficult to allow any room for anyone else to be present. And he's always making me uncomfortable, making me laugh at my discomfort at the same time as he's reminding me that there's a common humanity that needs to be listened to and cared for. And that none of us, not he, not we, not the people that he's—not the elders who have been, have managed to be where we would like to be, in regard to this. And so there's, there's a wonderful and consistent non-privileging of himself. (LMB: yes) A humility which is just, if one thinks about it as writing is devastating. The skill that it takes to do such writing. (LMB: umhum) One can only . . .

LMB: And I can think of examples right now, too, of the screaming author, where I could access the experience. And I'm thinking specifically of *Thunder Through My Veins* (Scofield, 1999), where I could access the experience but I couldn't, I couldn't sit in it (dp: yah). It said "Here it is, get out." (dp: ya) "Come in, get out." (dp: umhum) And this example happens to be another Aboriginal writer. (dp: yah) But I can think of someone else, of McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* (1996) (dp: umhum), which I also experienced that same way, pushing me out. "Come on in and see how lousy my life was, and see how long you can stand to stay here with me." Whereas, King calls you in and almost shuts the door behind you. (dp: umhum) He doesn't let you out! He doesn't push you away, he says "Come in, haha!"

dp: I gotcha. (laughter)

LMB: Yah, I gotcha!

dp: I remember in it, numbers of times where he talks about residential, I mean he talks about things that we commonly, commonly are brought to our attention, like residential schools, like smallpox on the blanket, (LMB: fetal alcohol effect) uhuh, fetal alcohol effects, people being lost, not able to find their own feet, the issues around addiction. And these are not pleasant realities and yet he reminds us that they are realities and realities that we need to look at, and think about and somehow he leaves me feelings that I actually might be able to be, able to struggle here and be part of the solution not only the problem. And

that's very intriguing because most of the time, in this discussion I feel like the problem because I'm not native (LMB: yes) and I might never be able to understand.

LMB: And mightn't we be able to say that we picked, not that we picked the book but that the book picked itself to be in this space?

dp: I think the book picked us. (LMB: laughter)

LMB: Like children pick their parents?

dp: Yah, yah in some ways. Well, no. What I mean when I say that the book picked us, it was so invitational that it was hard to walk away from it. I struggled with walking away from it, I wanted to walk away from it, I talked about this elsewhere in the article. But I couldn't. And now having read it for the second or third time, I'm still not able to put it away. I'm still not able to just say "Oh, this is a really good writer, writing." This is a person reading life around him, living the life that he lives and sharing it as part of the text of the larger life of the community both Aboriginal and not Aboriginal, and that's amazing, that he would be able to allow us to see all of that from his camp, I mean he mightn't say any of this, but that's what I see. (LMB: no) You know that's what I read into it.

LMB: Yah, he would say it's just a story.

dp: It's just a story. And we've read the story and in turn have been read by it.

LMB: And so have come to read ourselves in a different way through having read this story.

Responding to talking together

While reading King's (2003) book, we each noted particular passages that spoke to us. We selected many of the same ones, which surprised us. This shared resonance pushed both of us to approach these passages with even more care, for they seem to hold more nuances and possibilities, more of our conversation, more of our relationship, than our reading alone acknowledges. It is as if the book becomes another way of talking to one another even when we are not engaged in conversation.

dp: Am most aware of how King forces me to listen, focuses my attention. All of the lectures start with the creation story as well as the question, "if the earth was on the back of a turtle, what was below the turtle" (p. 1) and the answer, "another turtle" (p. 1). Each time the question is asked, it is asked by a different person in a different setting—the first time by a young girl in Prince Rupert, the second time a young boy in Lethbridge, the last a woman with a baby in Moncton. By the end of the five lectures, we have moved west to east—cross the whole of Canada. This may seem a small detail, easily and probably missed, but it speaks to King's inclusiveness, to his efforts to speak directly to each listener/reader, communing in private right in your ear, Lace's ear and mine (Alvarez, 2004).

In his use of repetition with small changes, especially at the beginning and the end of each lecture, King leads me to expect and be open to the unexpected, the unexplored, the trackless. He also focuses my attention on the middle, not the beginning or the end, but the middle or the muddle we each live now in this moment.

LMB: I'm returning to the meta-narrative. As enthralled and enticed as I often became in the current of King's story, I could feel the water rushing around me, wanted to reach out and touch the sides of the canoe. "See the bow" King would say to me, "there is a story I know. It's about the earth and how it floats in space on the back of a turtle" (p. 1). No sooner did the water start churning, than King would

offer a reprieve, calmer waters, or just different waters. King would start telling a story that didn't seem like the story he was telling until I could once again paddle my way through the story he was really telling. And when there were rapids, "see the stern" King would whisper from the shore, "Take [this story]. It's yours" (p. 151). I see the structure. I'm hearing the story I want to hear, both the story and its structure.

Even though as I read, I read alone, I see today's effort to read before talking as a gift, the gift of working with, the gift of collegiality in the most formal and generous use of the term.

Such small moments in most research are left as scraps, as throwaways. Here we have shared part of our taken-for-granted day-to-day research, searching to understand language, research, writing, and reading. King (2003) seduces us to read and read again, to write and rewrite, to speak together repeatedly, to engage not only in his craft as a writer, as a storyteller, his endless stories of life as an Aboriginal man, his generosity, but also his craftiness in saying hard things so that they are heard, his exacting commitment to storytelling as a living connection between listener and teller, his precision with no word or image extraneous.

Re:search/method

So how is our searching together around reading (or even our conversation) any different from any other work of collaboration? Our intent is not to claim to be different or better but to share possibilities, to claim space and, in so doing, invite others to do the same. Our method is our talk. "When we talk, we are working toward a pooling of our partially constructed knowledges, working toward ways of moving ever closer to the heart of our teaching and research experiences" (patterson & Brogden, 2004, p. 8). We push ourselves and each other in our talk.

We find ourselves holding onto the challenge King (2003) places to be honest with ourselves, with each other, with the reader (with the other). We hold also to the hope that by telling each other who we are, sharing our experiences or efforts to understand, and engaging in this kind of conversation, we can renew our ongoing search for method, find ways to move into the future that reduce the possibilities of regret or pretence.

King (2003) convinces us that as academics we must be courageous and attend to how we really think, without jumping to conclusions, and especially without allowing anxieties about "worse" or "better" ways of thinking to distract us—that is, it is not enough to do so individually, or in response in journals. Rather, this kind of thinking needs to take place in conversation, conversation held not only in private, in stolen or invisible spaces, but in public spaces within and without the academy.

Constructing our research around a collective engagement in reading offers a mechanism for working together, for encouraging one another, and for coming to know that which we would not or could not come to know individually.

Integral to our research/method is living with the search for voice. In the same vein as previous work we have done, we locate our voice through our talk, and we continue to "advocate giving voice to such talk in academic spaces" (patterson & Brogden, 2004, p. 9). Giving voice to find voice, as it were. And so, we continue to seek out ways to talk together, to talk about our reading which, as we have demonstrated here, we always already see as our research. We are looking for ways that open up space, that allow us to explore both public and interior landscapes with/in our reading, re:searching lives.

Through the reading of the story (intentionally multilayered in this case, as we have storied our reading and our collective stories around reading), we are re:searching our own lives as academics and as

qualitative re:searchers. It is this storied, careful talk of re:search that makes us ever more mindful of efforts to read method.

Our task has been to ask and answer afresh, always once more because it is never concluded, the question of how we might live and read in the academy. In this instance, we have called up how we might read, and how might reading shape or be shaped by research.

What will become of our re:search story? Returning to King (2003),

you can have it if you want . . . Do with it what you will . . . (p. 167)

Turn it into a play. Forget it. But don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now. (p. 151)

Note

1. Second turn, inasmuch as this article follows/flows from our previous work, "Living Spaces for Talk with/in the Academy" (patterson & Brogden, 2004).

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