Participatory Narrative Inquiry

An introduction with examples

Cynthia Kurtz
March 2016

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Outline

1. What is PNI?
2. Why stories?
3. How does PNI work?
4. How does PNI connect to other fields?
5. What can you do with PNI?
6. What is the history of PNI?
7. What are the principles of PNI?
8. What are some examples of PNI projects?
What is PNI?

Participatory narrative inquiry is an approach in which groups of people participate in gathering and working with raw stories of personal experience in order to make sense of complex situations for better decision making. PNI focuses on the profound consideration of values, beliefs, feelings, and perspectives through the recounting and interpretation of lived experience.
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- using stories to think together, not just collecting them
- everyday anecdotes, not polished performances
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- **participatory, not extractive**
- **using stories to think together, not just collecting them**
- **deep exploration, not surface level**
- **people consider their own stories**
- **everyday anecdotes, not polished performances**
- **“what happened?” not “what do you think”**
- **not for preservation or persuasion, but to improve thought and discussion**
Why stories?

Story

Ritual
ancient, innate
Why stories?

Story

- Safety
distance

- Respect
giving voice

Ritual
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Why stories?

- Story
  - Safety distance
  - Engagement draws you in
  - Imagination what if
  - Ritual ancient, innate
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Story

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- Imagination what if
- Respect giving voice
- Ritual ancient, innate
- Articulation don’t know but can tell
- Interpretation it’s about the story, not me
Why stories?

- Safety distance
- Engagement draws you in
- Respect giving voice
- Imagination what if
- Articulation don’t know but can tell
- Ritual ancient, innate
- Authenticity ground truth
- Interpretation it’s about the story, not me
- Context layers of meaning

Story
How does PNI work?

Story Collection
20-600+ stories
hours to years
How does PNI work?

**Story Collection**
20-600+ stories
hours to years

**Sensemaking**
work with stories
ideally with storytellers
How does PNI work?

- **Story Collection**
  - 20-600+ stories
  - hours to years

- **Sensemaking**
  - work with stories
  - ideally with storytellers

- **Return**
  - stories go back to community
How does PNI work?

The essential PNI triangle is a story

- **Story Collection**
  - 20-600+ stories
  - hours to years

- **Return**
  - stories go back to community

- **Sensemaking**
  - work with stories
  - ideally with storytellers
How does PNI work?

- **Planning**: may include pilot project
- **Story Collection**: 20-600+ stories, hours to years
- **The essential PNI triangle is a story**
- **Return**: stories go back to community
- **Sensemaking**: work with stories ideally with storytellers
How does PNI work?

The essential PNI triangle is a story

Story Collection
20-600+ stories
hours to years

Return
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Sensemaking
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ideally with storytellers

Planning
may include pilot project

Catalysis
generates questions, not answers
How does PNI work?

Planning may include pilot project

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20-600+ stories
hours to years

The essential PNI triangle is a story

Return
stories go back to community

Sensemaking
work with stories ideally with storytellers

Catalysis
generates questions, not answers

Intervention
to change the stories we tell
How does PNI work?

The optional PNI triangle complicates the story

Planning may include pilot project

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20-600+ stories
hours to years

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Intervention
to change the
stories we tell
How does PNI connect to other fields?

- Participatory Action Research
  - Research = Action Research for, by, on
- Participatory Narrative Inquiry
How does PNI connect to other fields?

Narrative Inquiry
Narratology

Homo narrans
The storytelling animal

Participatory Action Research

Research = Action
Research for, by, on

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How does PNI connect to other fields?

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Case based reasoning

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Research | Action
How does PNI connect to other fields?

**Narrative Inquiry Narratology**
- *Homo narrans*
  - The storytelling animal

**Cognitive Science**
- Case based reasoning

**Cultural Anthropology Folklore**
- Story as a social phenomenon

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Research | Action
How does PNI connect to other fields?

- Narrative Inquiry
- Narratology
- Cognitive Science
- Cultural Anthropology
- Folklore
- Oral History
- Homo narrans: The storytelling animal
- Case based reasoning
- Story as a social phenomenon
- Let the people speak
- Research = Action
- Research for, by, on
How does PNI connect to other fields?

**Narrative Inquiry**

**Narratology**

**Cognitive Science**

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**Folklore**

**Oral History**

**Participatory Action Research**

**Mixed-Methods Research**

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Story as a social phenomenon

Let the people speak

Qualitative-quantitative synergy

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**Oral History**

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**Participatory Narrative Inquiry**

**Participatory Action Research**
- Research = Action
  - Research for, by, on

**Narrative Therapy**
- We can change the stories we tell

**Research** | **Action**
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  - **Narratology**
  - **Cognitive Science**
  - **Cultural Anthropology**
  - **Folklore**
  - **Oral History**
  - **Mixed-Methods Research**

- **Participatory Action Research**
  - *Homo narrans* The storytelling animal
  - Case based reasoning
  - Story as a social phenomenon
  - Let the people speak
  - Qualitative-quantitative synergy

- **Participatory Narrative Inquiry**

- **Narrative Therapy**
  - We can change the stories we tell

- **Participatory Theatre**
  - Stories can change the world

Research | Action
How does PNI connect to other fields?

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- **Narratology**
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The storytelling animal

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**Participatory Action Research**

- Research = Action
- Research for, by, on

**Participatory Narrative Inquiry**

- We can change the stories we tell
- Stories can change the world
- Making sense to plan the future

**Narrative Therapy**

**Participatory Theatre**

**Decision Support**

**Research**

**Action**
How does PNI connect to other fields?

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- **Decision Support**
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- **Dialogue**
  - Conflict resolution

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   - Research for, by, on
7. Participatory Narrative Inquiry
   - Emergence, self-organization
8. Complexity Theory
   - Making sense to plan the future
9. Narrative Therapy
   - We can change the stories we tell
10. Participatory Theatre
    - Stories can change the world
11. Decision Support
    - Conflict resolution
12. Dialogue

Research | Action
What can you do with PNI?

- Find things out: traditional inquiry
- Catch emerging trends: find things you weren’t looking for
What can you do with PNI?

- Find things out
- Help people learn
- Enlighten people
- Catch emerging trends
- Help them see things anew
- Add experience to information
- Find things you weren't looking for

(dependence on participation)
What can you do with PNI?

Find things out
- traditional inquiry

Make better decisions
- by making sense of options

Help people learn
- add experience to information

Enlighten people
- help them see things anew

Get new ideas
- by finding new options

Catch emerging trends
- find things you weren't looking for

Inherent uncertainty

Dependence on participation

Higher risk, higher reward
What can you do with PNI?

Find things out through traditional inquiry

Make better decisions by making sense of options

Enlighten people to help them see things anew

Help people learn to add experience to information

Get new ideas by finding new options

Connect people by telling stories to build community

Resolve conflicts by seeing through each other’s eyes

Catch emerging trends by finding things you weren’t looking for

Help people learn to add experience to information

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- Enlighten people
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- Help people learn
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- Catch emerging trends
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What can’t you do with PNI?

- Prove anything conclusively.

Why not?

- Too many intermingled interpretations.

Then why use it?

- Sometimes proof is less useful than insight and inspiration.

Why not?

- Too many intermingled interpretations.

- Then why use it?
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What is the history of PNI?

IBM Global Business Services
- Dave Snowden
- Sharon Darwent
- Anecdote circles
- Archetypes

Cynthia Kurtz
Neal Keller
- Story circles
- Questions about stories
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Working with Stories
1st & 2nd editions
- Bringing story work to everyone

Blog

Colored Glasses

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WWS
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- Much longer

“Participatory Narrative Inquiry”
- So much better than “this story stuff”

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PPI Institute
Professional association

PNI software
- Project support

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SenseMaker
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STORY Colored Glasses
Blog

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CognitiveEdge
What are the principles of PNI?

PNI helps stories get to where they need to go.

It is not about:
• preservation
• persuasion
• study
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It’s about decisions.

PNI helps people make better decisions together, decisions that everyone can live with.
What are the principles of PNI?

**Purpose**

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**Ground truth**

Don’t mess with the stories.

No polishing! Stories work best when they are raw, simple, authentic.
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Don’t boil stories down; boil them up.

Don’t hide emotion in dull reports. Use stories to amplify, not dampen, how people feel.
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**Making sense**

The play’s the thing.

Stories partially suspend the rules of reality. Likewise, PNI invites us to play with possibility, setting aside facts, opinions, and blame.

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**Stories nest.**  
Stories explore conflict and contrast at many scales. So does PNI. It’s about mutual awareness, not consensus.  
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If you do not make PNI your own, you are not doing PNI.

PNI is not a dogma. It’s alive, and it needs you.

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What are some examples of real PNI projects by industry?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health care</th>
<th>Manufacturing and Utility</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Emergency preparedness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* Doctor-patient relationships How do doctors and patients share control, communicate, and make decisions?</td>
<td>* Customer satisfaction Why do only some of our customers trust us?</td>
<td>* Beliefs about learning What do students, parents, and teachers think makes a good student? Do they agree?</td>
<td>* Weak signal detection How can we help policy analysts make sense of complex situations?</td>
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<td>* Hospital management How can we best balance patient safety, compassionate care, quality, and efficiency?</td>
<td>* Innovation How can we design products for a variety of medical conditions? What unique conditions do we need to address?</td>
<td>* School benchmarking Which schools need our help, and how?</td>
<td>* Inter-agency collaboration How can we work together to avert disasters?</td>
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<td>* Physician motivations Why do doctors do what they do? How can we help them do it?</td>
<td>* Merger and acquisition How can we help two very different cultures learn to work productively together?</td>
<td>* Leadership What makes a good leader? How can we help people learn to lead?</td>
<td>* Voice of the citizen What is the public’s view of large infrastructure projects? What are their beliefs and concerns?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What are some examples of real PNI projects by function?

**Research and planning**

- **Future planning**
  What drives our volunteers? How can we better support them? What do they need from us?

- **Problem solving**
  Where, when, how, and why is theft taking place in our city? What can we do to reduce crime?

- **Evaluation**
  What do our college students need to succeed? Who needs our help most?

**Human resources**

- **Work-life balance**
  Why are people in this particular division so overworked? What is going on there?

- **Leadership development**
  How can we help our top executives evaluate their performance and learn from others without losing face?

- **Retention**
  How can we challenge our employees in ways that inspire them instead of draining them?

**Knowledge management**

- **Knowledge transfer**
  How can we help our retiring employees pass on what they know in a respectful yet useful manner?

- **Training**
  How can we help our employees understand a complex process that few fully understand?

- **Communication between silos**
  How can we help policy makers and scientists communicate more effectively?

**Customer relations**

- **Perceptions**
  How do our patients see us? How do our patients think we help them, and how do they think we hinder them?

- **Satisfaction**
  How do our members see our professional organization? Are we meeting their needs?

- **Misunderstanding**
  How can we counter a dangerous misbelief about our product? How can we protect our customers when they won’t listen to us?
Questions?

Find out more at:
- workingwithstories.org – textbook
- pni2.org – PNI Institute
- storycoloredglasses.com – blog
- cfkurtz.com – web site