

Teachers Telling Personal Stories in the Classroom: An Inquiry & Pilot Study

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Abstract

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The practice of storytelling is as old as humans can remember. It is a tried and true medium for the way in which humans transfer information. Thus, you would assume the practice of telling stories in a classroom – from teacher to student - makes perfect sense. However, while the use of storytelling and the study of storytelling generally is quite common, the study of why teachers tell stories in the classroom specifically appears to be far less common. Moreover, research into why teachers may use their own personal stories in the classroom seems even less common. This is an inquiry and pilot study into why that may be. I review previous studies on the use of storytelling by instructors in medicine, science and education. I then describe three interviews with college professors who utilize storytelling in different ways in their pedagogical approach. The investigation utilizes the interview and an intuitive qualitative method of analysis looking for similarities across all three-teacher's rationale for utilizing storytelling, specifically personal storytelling. The intent is to hopefully generate more questions for future research as well as answer a simple question that appears to have not gotten much attention: Why do teachers tell personal stories in the classroom?

Introduction

Story and storytelling is a human universal. It is done, and has been done, as far back as humans can recall. It is the way that human knowledge is passed—the way we relate all our personal human experiences and try to capture the complexity of it all. The way these human experiences, this human information—these stories—have been passed from person to person, master to pupil and teacher to student, has changed over time. Yet, what has not changed is that stories are indeed told. You have a story. You have a teller. You have a listener.

Stories are told under stars between couples, around campfires between friends, around dinner tables in the home and in classrooms between teachers and students. And while lying under the stars and around campfires with friends is a beautiful scene, where I want to focus my attention is on the classroom. Specifically, on college campuses where I have spent much of my time – as listener - who is slowly turning to teller. What stories are told when the teacher becomes the teller of story and the student becomes the listener? And why?

The dynamic of the teacher-student relationship in the classroom is a complex one. Despite the breadth and depth of research on teacher-student relationships as well as on storytelling generally, research on the effects of the teacher telling personal stories within the classroom appear almost non-existent. Further, research on *why* teachers may tell personal stories in the classroom also appears non-existent. What is curious is that while the *research* seems to be sparse, at best, we know the *practice* is ubiquitous simply because storytelling is ubiquitous throughout life. Teaching in higher education is inherently personal simply because, at the very least, the research you are presenting is research that the professor spent years personally working on. And it doesn't take more than a class or two to realize that most teachers must reveal personal elements of themselves while teaching the material. The fact that we have not

thoroughly searched beneath this rock for educational gemstones seems a blind spot worth investigating.

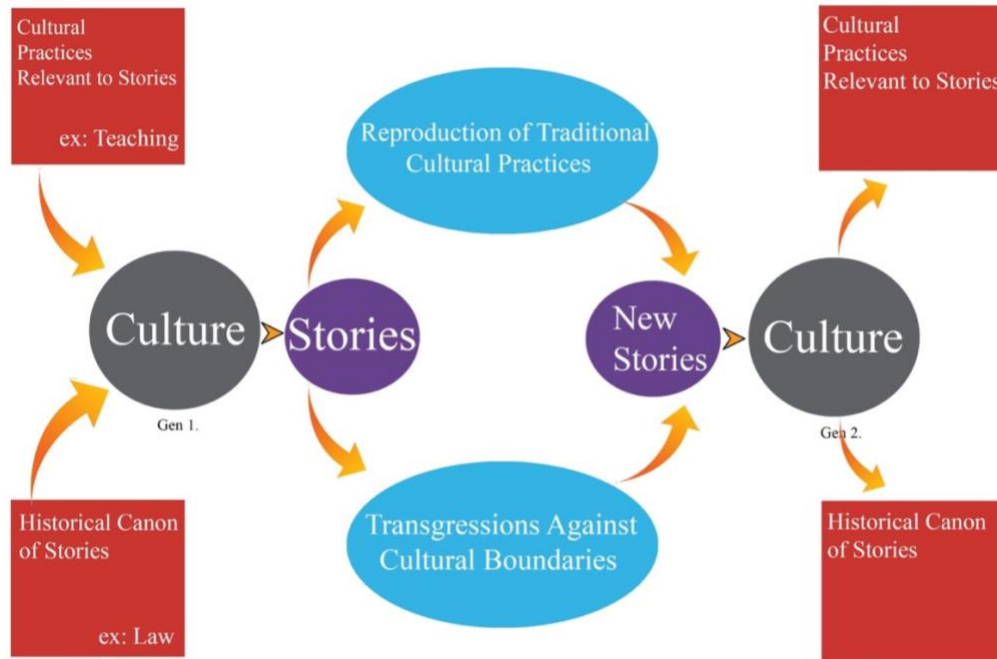
While the question that has driven this research is, “Why do teachers tell personal stories in the classroom?”, I want to first give some greater context to why teachers may tell stories in general. This is its own challenge. However, as was sort of the mantra in the Learning Sciences and Human Development program here at University of Washington, and one I believe in, “Context Matters.” While the focus is the classroom and the professor, this project and my thinking within it is structured as the smaller story within the context of the larger, historical narrative of stories and storytelling.

In *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life*, culture and education scholar Jerome Bruner (2002) suggests that we need more research on storytelling. He immediately assures readers, just as I have done, that while storytelling is ubiquitous, research on it is not. He supposes that story and storytelling is so interwoven into our human experience that we never think to question why that is the case. Our expectations for the way in which we teach and learn are so tied to both telling and receiving stories that we do not even think to look at it - an ironic paradox of being human. I follow in his footsteps via *Making Stories* where he uses literature, law, education and the traditional canon of stories to reflect our knowledge, and lack thereof, of storytelling.

In this paper, I will first describe how Bruner’s (2002) theory on the purpose and meaning of story informs my study on storytelling in the broadest sense. It is his theory on *The Use of Story* that shows how story may influence the structures of culture. First, we must define culture which is a malleable term to be defined and is done depending on the discipline involved or the context it is in. I use the term culture as Bruner does so. Culture then becomes a set of stories we tell ourselves over and over to create boundaries of bad/good,

appropriate/inappropriate, etc. They are encoded and enforced in our beliefs that are perpetuated and changed by way of the stories we tell one another. I then suggest ways that bell hooks' (1994) insights about why teachers teach can illuminate the reasons why teachers tell stories and how they craft their stories. This is a more personal view on why teachers tell personal stories in the classroom. Then, I will explain how I see these two theories overlapping with each other and how they helped frame my thinking as I crafted this pilot study. In the final section, I analyze and interpret three interviews of current college professors from three separate disciplines who I found to be excellent storytellers. I will look to their answers to elucidate reasons why teachers tell personal stories in the classroom. Finally, I will critique my own process, suggest improvements and discuss how to move forward for possible larger study on the topic.

The Uses of Story. Bruner (2002) maps the meaning of stories and storytelling in *Making Stories: Law, Literature and Life*. He suggests that even the legal documents of our culture are the product of a historical canon of stories. Our cultural practices, family traditions and laws are informed by our stories that are reproduced over time. These stories, he explains, go back as far as Adam and Eve. Stories are a documentation of how boundaries of culture are mapped, transgressed against and the consequence, good or bad, of transgression. Thus, telling stories of life as it happens is to re-map the boundaries as additional information comes into the constantly expanding canon.



Process of how stories and cultural practices inform culture (gen 1), are perpetuated or transgressed, thus informing new stories which then impact and inform later culture (gen 2). The process would evolve continually.

Figure 1 is a model of cultural change that suggests how stories may affect culture over generations. It is a visual representation of my thinking based upon Bruner's theory in *The Use of Story* (2002) explained in the introduction. It posits that stories have a cultural impact because they impact the individual. The individual then impacts the culture, perpetuating or not perpetuating, that story and thus that cultural narrative. Then, the culture impacts a new individual or that same individual again later in their life - so on and so forth. It's about the evolution of stories and their impact over generations.

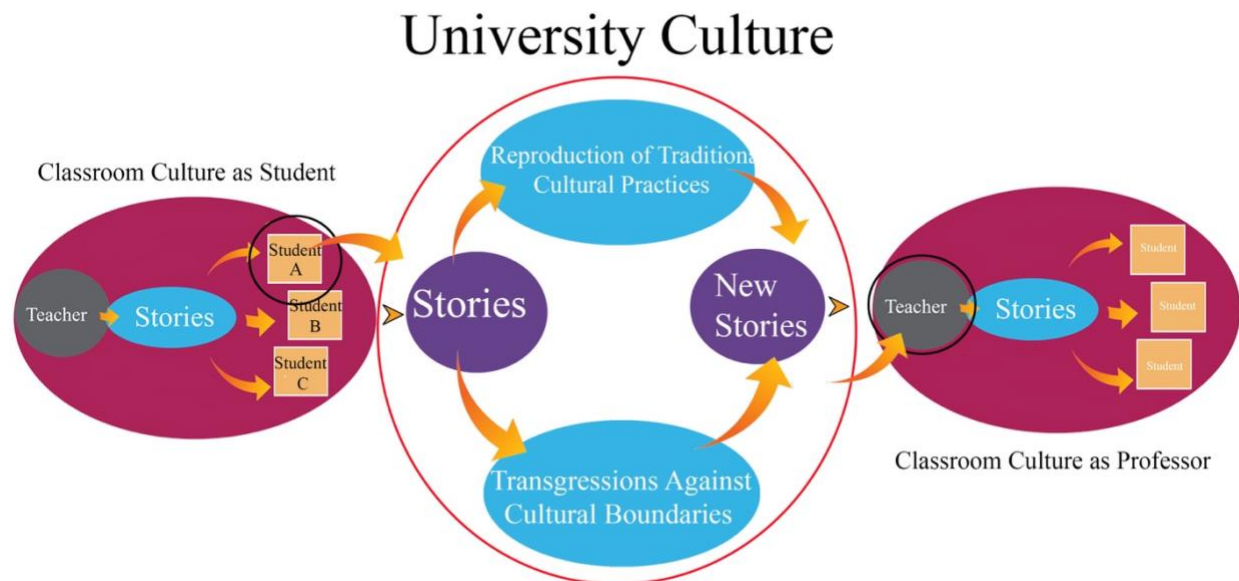
It must be noted, and Bruner does so (2002) that a person can, of course, do both – transgress against and reproduce traditions via storytelling. Further, the best storytelling sometimes does just that; an interesting momentary tangent worth pointing out. The process of transgression and simultaneous reproduction of tradition collide within the “new stories” part of the graph. It is where a person's experiences meet the historical canon of stories. For the teacher,

the classroom may become a place where they can tell stories about their own experiences contrasted against the historical canon. If those stories conflict with the canon, new stories may emerge. If their experiences mirror much of what's within the canon already, the stories are likely the same, and if they are some blend of both contradiction and similarity, their stories likely express that complexity.

Because the traditional canon of stories is indeed so complex and large, re-telling every story within it for context every time you tell a story would be simply impossible. In other words, you tell a story that encapsulates the idea of many stories within it. This is similar to what story scholar Joseph Campbell (1949) referred to in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* as the monomyth. Fiction or non, these meta-stories or monomyths embody the canon whilst adding to it. Stories are an abridgment of the most important story we have, the story of humanity. Stories then are how we learn about the *us*, *about culture – about life*. It is as if we form the boundaries (law) and then explain the consequences (literature) so that we can continue doing what we do (life) and then remind ourselves of all of this as we go (culture). It is Bruner and this lens that brings the clearest lens to why we may tell stories in general.

Teaching to Transgress. Bell hooks' theory on *engaged pedagogy* (1994) extends Bruner's concepts on storytelling (2002) to examine how storytelling is used to reify or resist the cultural boundaries of the canon. While her theory also looks at the cultural aspects, she encourages and examines personal exploration for the purposes of self-actualization and pedagogy. Using her own experiences growing up as an excelling student in academia, and later as a teacher herself, hooks theorizes what transgression in the classroom looks like and why it impacts the student and teacher so much. Hooks suggests that teaching is not solely for the learner but is a process of self-actualization of both student and teacher. This means that the

teacher is not just telling a story for the purposes of the material but possibly for the student's overall development. A teacher telling stories may seek to transgress the boundaries put in place via the cultural canon for both personal reasons (hooks) as well as cultural reasons (Bruner). Alternatively, others may tell stories to further solidify the boundaries of the canon. Either way, hooks suggest that the classroom culture is always affected by what stories a teacher tells and how that teacher tells it. Her theory extends Bruner's cultural framework and raises more of the personal issues around storytelling, specifically highlighting the teacher-student relationship.

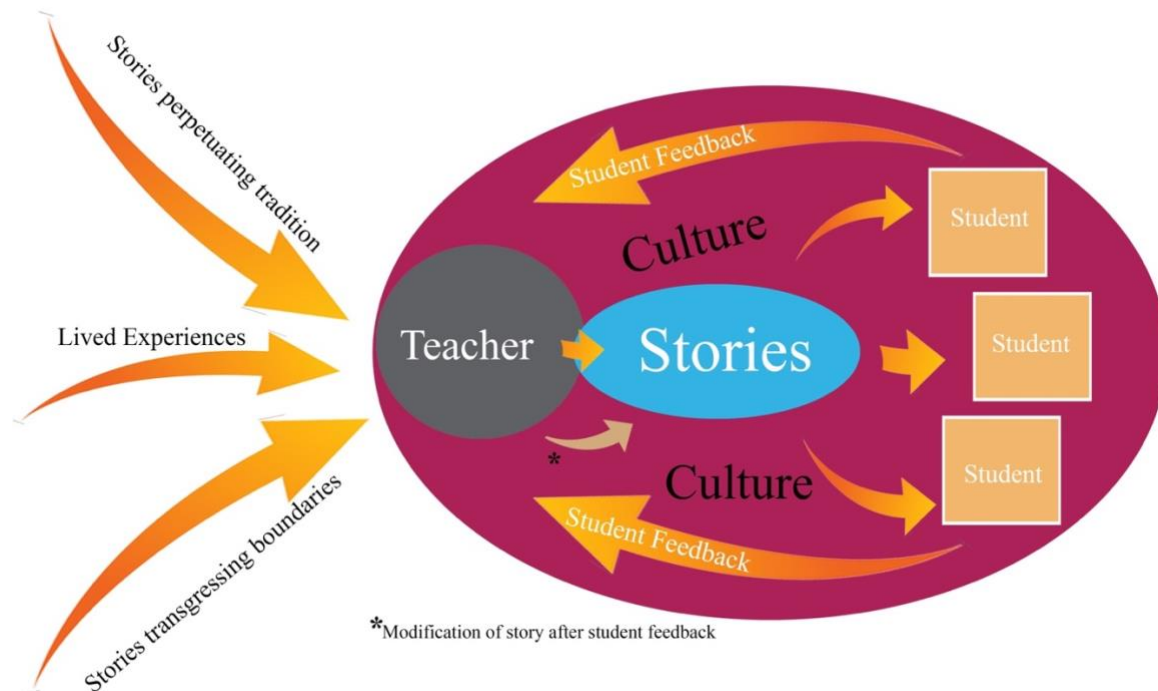


Simplified, linear model of the teacher's journey from student to teacher and the influence story may have on them throughout their time in the University.

The above model, Figure 2, is a representation of hooks and her discussion within *Teaching to Transgress* (1994) about her personal experiences within academia as she evolved from a student to a professor. It illustrates the journey from student A (small black circle left), the process/evolution of that student via storytelling (red circle middle) to teacher (small black

circle right). Inquiring as to what, if any, part of the process from student to professor informs their current opinions on personal storytelling in the classroom seems valuable and influenced my thought while crafting this study. In other words, hooks and Figure 2 illuminate the individual professors journey concerning that teachers own experiences, specifically as a student in the classroom who likely encountered professors that may have told their own personal stories. Those stories may have impacted the way they now tell stories in the classroom as a professor themselves.

After framing storytelling in general and exploring the evolution of student to professor by using Bruner and hooks, we reach the classroom, focusing specifically on the teacher – how and why they tell stories in the classroom. However, it is important to express that these two ideas exist within a larger framework that encompasses not just the teacher and not just the classroom but the culture in general. In my view, it is nearly impossible to isolate the teacher or student or one story from the larger cultural zeitgeist.



Model that situates the teacher in the center of the classroom culture and represents the complexity of factors when asking why a teacher may tell a personal story in a class setting.

In Figure 3, we represent more specifically the question, *Why do teachers tell personal stories in the classroom?* Figure 3 represents a model that encapsulates ideas from the other two models and further how the teacher-student relationship may affect the way a teacher tells a story. This model illustrates the idea that teachers tell stories that are influenced by past experiences (hooks, 1994) and other stories (Bruner, 2002). Those stories then directly affect the student and classroom culture. The only part of this model that does not have its origins in the previous 2 models is “student feedback”—a multifaceted idea. Student feedback may simply be the reaction – smiles, laughter, disdain, boredom, etc. Those reactions may change the way that teachers tell the story. If the teacher allows for verbal feedback from students, the same idea applies. Student feedback may also be grades or student surveys. If a teacher tells personal stories to one class and does not to another and one class performs better, the teacher may come to a certain conclusion about personal story telling and alter their stories, tell more stories or cease them altogether. Even something like this thesis could be considered student feedback concerning personal storytelling in the classroom. My point is that student feedback re: personal storytelling in the classroom is complex. Further, so is defining it. While I include it in the model because it’s important, I don’t spend any time there beyond what’s included here. I will discuss this omission further in the last section of the paper.

Whereas figures 1 & 2 surmise why people tell stories because of the theories embedded via Bruner (2002) and hooks (1994), figure 3 does not. In other words, Figure 3 is simply a visual representation of my research question, *Why do teachers tell personal stories in the classroom?* It situates the professor in the center of our story showing us the complex processes

before, during and after a teacher tells a personal story in the classroom; and best illustrates my thought process going into the literature review, interview & analysis portions of my thesis.

Literature Review: Introduction

Joseph Campbell spent his entire life on the study of story and myth and thought it could take 10 lifetimes to understand all of its nuance (*The power of myth*, 2007). After spending the time I have with story and storytelling, I tend to agree. He may have even been conservative in his estimate. During my research, the enormity of my search results when I typed “Story” or “Storytelling” often made me very seriously rethink my topic of choice. However, when I input “*personal*” with “storytelling” and/or “teacher”, a curious thing occurred. The results returned were all but vacant. It was as if I had hit the eye of the storytelling research storm – a calm with barely anyone else there. I am not being hyperbolic when I say that research on *why* teachers do or do not tell personal stories in the classroom appears to simply not be there. In juxtaposition to the wealth of research on story in a myriad of other ways, this absence of research feels almost equally as daunting a task as sifting through the array of articles I mentioned previously.

Literature Review:

The review starts with work that examines both the personal and the cultural use of storytelling in the classroom to elucidate material. I then make my way through a variety of articles in medicine and science which make the case that personal storytelling is useful in those fields. Next, I look at some research that does indeed study the personal element of storytelling in the classroom for both student and teacher. And finally I look at the one study that I believe is the closest to my research question concerning why exactly teachers tell personal stories in the classroom.

Use of Storytelling in the healing professions. Canadian clinical psychologist and professor, Jordan Peterson carries on the tradition of Joseph Campbell and the monomyth (1948) in *Maps of Meaning* (1999). He studies belief and how the use of story to deconstruct psychological processes inform our beliefs. Professor Peterson is an example of someone who *studies* story and *uses* story, from both a cultural perspective and a personal perspective and how it elucidates the psychological underpinnings of human experience and belief systems.

A proponent of free, public university, Peterson records many of his lectures and publishes them on YouTube. In one of his most popular videos, Peterson discusses a story called *There Is No Such Thing as a Dragon* (2017). In it, he discusses how a young boy with a new pet dragon tries to tell his mother about it. The mother, however, ignores her son and continuously replies, “There is no such thing as dragons.” Eventually, as the dragon grows, it destroys the house that both the boy and the mother live in. Peterson explains that this is an example not of *actual* dragons, of course, but of the psychological “dragons” i.e. issues within ourselves as well as society, that will destroy us if we deny their existence. This video has racked up more than a million views. *That is a popular lecture!* A lecture that resonates at that level of viewership may be because story as an allegory for lived experiences, in this case a family and their home and the issues we ignore and thus may harm us, makes sense to us. Despite his reliance on story and storytelling, Peterson *still* never discusses why he views the use of story and specifically his own personal stories in the classroom as vital to all that he does.

Similarly, David Carless at the University of Bristol does research on the power of storytelling to help heal after sports (2008) and military (2017) injuries, bridging the psychological trauma with biological trauma. Often, what comes along with these injuries is a loss of the group in which an individual participated. He suggests that community and sharing

personal experiences with people who have endured similar traumas may help us heal the emotional wounds as well as the physical ones. Just as a physical therapist, coach or military commander may consider shared experience, i.e. telling our personal stories, a crucial aspect in their practice, a teacher may feel building community is an important part of their classroom process as well.

Often, what is missing from those communities is the patients understanding of the doctor's experiences. Further, what may be a hindrance to the patients healing may be the doctor's ability to understand the patients perspective. The emerging field of narrative medicine seeks to find solutions to that communication gap (Solomon, 2016). In *Narrative Medicine: A Model for Empathy, Reflection, Profession and Trust* (2001), Rita Charon lays a foundation for "narrative competence (p. 1897)." Most patient-doctor relationships usually begin, she explains, with a complicated and quite personal narrative that led the patient to the doctor. Understanding a patient's personal story competently, i.e. having "narrative competence", then becomes central to the doctors practice. Thus, in her view being a good healthcare practitioner means being an empathetic person and good story *listener*.

Further, Andrew Solomon (2016) suggests in *Literature About Medicine May Be All That Can Save Us* that storytelling is one of the most compelling ways to help patients better understand their illnesses and treatment. He explains that language, specifically medical jargon, is sometimes the biggest hurdle in getting patients to understand their ailments and thus their treatments. He reminds the reader that long ago doctors used to also be philosophers, citing Hippocrates, Paracelsus and Trota of Salerno (2). Those doctor-writers, he says, share a line to a new era of "doctor-writers." That is, there are a new breed of doctors who believe in narrative medicine and take great pains to open their own lives, share their own stories, so they can bring

people closer to the medical profession, the lives of their patients and the illnesses they face. He believes that doctors sharing personal stories may help doctors and patients alike. Similar points have been made concerning end of life (EOL) nursing (Swenson and Sims 2000), more holistic medical practices (Omillion-Hodges 2017) and oncology practice (Gheorgita, Urowitz and Reid 2012).

Along those same lines, Wittenberg-Lyles, Greene and Sanchez-Reilly published *The Palliative Power of Storytelling* (2007), a content analysis of 105 published narratives from healthcare professionals in end-of-life situations. They concluded that narrative medicine, that is stories told by doctors, nurses and family members, concerning their experiences during their family members, patients and personal experience in end-of-life journeys would greatly help healthcare providers in the ever-complex position of deciding whether or not to extend care. In other words, they concluded that when confronted with death and dying—something everyone on the planet must face—personal storytelling appears to help people understand that experience and how to navigate it.

Dying and story are, of course, not just a Western phenomena. Professor Harriett Mutonyi in *Stories, Proverbs and Anecdotes as Scaffolds for Learning Science Concepts* (2015) invokes Bruner to discuss how story may help contextualize health issues like HIV and AIDS in indigenous villages in her native Uganda. Her rationale for using story is that it, “reveal[s] a truth more general than the brief story itself (p. 945).” In this context, the cultural canon of stories (illustrated in Figure 1) would be a Ugandan one and the stories, proverbs or anecdotes told would be told to help Ugandan villagers better understand the western medicine brought in to help fight HIV and AIDS.

Use of storytelling to communicate science. The community of science is not a far cry from medicine. Michael Dahlstrom (2014) makes a case that storytelling must be considered when teaching science concepts to laypeople. His overarching argument, one that harkens back to Bruner's (2002), is that we overlook narrative as a means of communicating important scientific information. And because most non-scientists get their scientific information through stories: TV, film and/or literature, it is foolish to not utilize a medium already so widely used. No matter what the medium, Dahlstrom explains that non-experts in the field of science get their science information from mass-media narratives and that must be considered when trying to teach "facts" i.e. science to non-expert audiences. Using Dahlstrom's rationale for non-expert audiences, storytelling would be one of the best tools a college professor could have in the classroom. Dahlstrom cites trust building, persuasion and even "communicating beyond human scale" or, in other words, communicating an idea that is often not easily comprehended by the human imagination because of our limited human experiences. These all seem good reasons for storytelling in the sciences.

Luis and Martiney's (2017) article, *Helping to Work Their Working Memory* points to story as a helpful tool so students may use their mind as a sort of scientific retrieval mechanism. They suggest that the "working memory" is a "work bench" with parts that must all be activated to complete the learning process. If all parts aren't engaged, an individual does not retain the information. They suggest that story and storytelling is a key component of the "work bench" that makes up how we remember. That article leans on digital storytelling research that posits student-driven story creation using multimedia that relates to personal experiences out "in the field" helps students integrate the information they are learning (Hung-Hwang 2012). Further, digital storytelling is further reported to help in writing skills (Sarica 2016), and there is also a

healthy amount of research in marketing (e.g., Woodside 2008; Lien and Chen 2013) that suggests advertising in narrative form is more successful because the consumer remembers the product better. In other words, using story as a tool for student memory may be helpful.

What much of these articles are doing is illuminating why storytelling may be a good tool for professionals in fields where life and death are in the balance – medicine, or where the future of our technological advancement hinges - science, or more simpler things like how fast students can recall facts inside the classroom. It may also help us connect with other human experiences after traumas as in the case of military or sports injuries. Aside from the doctor-writers, what we haven't addressed quite yet is why these individuals do or do not tell *personal* stories – that is, stories *about themselves*.

Getting Personal. Professor Dan P. McAdams (2001) suggests that humans may script a certain narrative for themselves to create a sense of identity in his *The Psychology of Life Stories*. His theory suggests that an individual does not simply “have” identity but crafts one, continuously, as life unfolds. An individual tells a story about themselves *to themselves*, as well as others as they move through their life experiences. Mainly, he says, this occurs because we must confront the conflicts and changes we all face within our personality. For example, “I was a born again Christian but now I am an agnostic (pg. 102)” does not happen without a myriad of challenges and choices within the individual's life. To discuss that change is discussed in a linear fashion – moving from point A (born again Christian) to point B (agnostic); it is a story. What may sound obvious but I think is important to take from McAdams, as well as for my research question, is that the teacher is a person. A person who just like the student has been and is continuously crafting their life story. The story may be for the student *and* the teacher.

That returns us to bell hooks and *Teaching to Transgress* (1994). In it, she details her experiences as an undergraduate student, graduate student and professor. Hers was not a conflict in belief about God as above but a conflict about what it means to be a teacher, about what it means *to become a teacher*. As a young college student, hooks was never interested in becoming a teacher, she wanted to be a writer. She tells the story of her transformation from student to teacher in a deeply personal way within her book and within her classrooms. From her perspective, which stories teachers tell and how they conduct themselves in the classroom depends enormously on their experiences they have but also within academia itself.

Similar to hooks, Carolyn Clark supposes in, *Finding our Way in an Uncertain World* (1992), that to be good educators ourselves, we must first make meaning of our own personal experiences before we can make meaning for our students. Further, in *Now The Pieces Are in Place* (2006), Clark makes the case that adult learners, in this case doctoral students, should do so before stepping into a classroom as a professor themselves. Her suggestion is that doctoral students, our future professors, may benefit not only from reflecting on their own lived experiences but crafting narratives, writing them down and discussing them amongst other students. The supposition is that meaning making begins with the teacher and the student must believe in the teacher's ability to make meaning of things about themselves *and* things larger than themselves. How can a student trust a professor if the professor cannot prove their own meaning making abilities in their own life? The answer and "proof" may lay in the teacher telling personal stories. Thus, Clark implores our future professors to begin honing these skills in adulthood, specifically in graduate school.

Advocacy v. Evaluation. All the previous research makes strong arguments for storytelling as an effective tool for learning. However, none provided research about the efficacy

of the professor telling personal stories in the classroom. In other words, they are emboldened pitches that are advocating for the importance of storytelling but none appear to evaluate it quantitatively or qualitatively. A study that compared award winning and non-award winning higher educational and secondary teachers provides a beginning point. In *A Comparative Analysis of Teachers Use of Dramatic Style Behaviors at Higher and Secondary Educational Levels*, Javidi, Downs & Nussbaum (1988) do just that. Which teachers were “award-winning” was based upon a variety of factors that included student’s academic success compared against the university’s academic rigor, faculty member involvement with the students, teacher evaluations by students and other “descriptive documentation from students, faculty and other administration (pg. 280).” What was the main difference between award winning and non-award winning teachers? It seems as if *consistent* use of “humor, self-disclosure and *narrative (emphasis added)*” were what set apart the award-winning teachers from their counterparts.

Finally, what seems to be the solitary case of documenting and studying the storytelling and pedagogical practices of a college professor within a classroom comes from Cooper, Orban, Henry and Townsend (1983) in *Teaching and Storytelling: An Ethnographic Study of the Instructional Process in the College Classroom*. Over the course of a year, using video recordings of the class, through direct observation, questionnaires and interviews with students and the professor alike, they studied a popular, award winning agricultural professor – TJ – from a large, Midwestern University. He was notable for several things. His use of body language – leaning on the overhead in a casual way supposedly signaling rapport with students; using hand gestures that emphasized openness and making eye contact making sure his students felt they were being heard. He discussed directly with students what would be on the quizzes and tests, eliminating the “guessing game” that puts the onus on the student to discover what would

be most important. It was noted that he had a relaxed attitude yet held control of the classroom through humor, similar to the earlier study. These factors seemed to contribute to his excellence as a teacher. However, what was noted most by teachers, students and TJ himself was that he imparted “little stories” into his lectures. In fact, the research team noted that, “the course appeared to be stories within a longer story rather than a series of factual lectures (pg. 175).” Not all of them were personal but many of them were. For example, students noted that he liked to discuss the fact that he felt like a foreigner as a southerner in Michigan which he called “Yankee Country.” It was a point of pride and humor to lighten things up. While all the techniques TJ used appear to contribute to his success as a professor, it was this final fact that all involved appear to suggest was most impactful - his stories.

In summary, it looks as if teachers telling stories can have a positive impact on classrooms. Further, storytelling for the purposes of education, sciences and even areas concerning life and death appear to be emerging as more and more common, if not important. Yet, the lack of research on it in the classroom seems absent, stunningly. Here, my research becomes important and possibly a foundation for further inquiry. The following study provides initial questions into an area that may be a goldmine. Or maybe not... but we won't know unless we dig deeper. So, let's dig deeper.

Methods

Participants and Context. I selected three professors, one from a local community college just outside of Seattle area and two from a large public University in Seattle. Two men and one woman, with different racial and ethnic backgrounds – European American, Greek-American and African American. They were from different disciplines: Communications,

Education, and Geography. Each was someone I had taken in-person classes with and for whom, in one way or another, helped inspire this project.

I asked each interviewee via email if they would be a part of the study. I briefly explained my area of research and how I got interested in it. After my explanation of the study, each provided written consent to participate.

Interviews 1 and 3 were conducted in a small, private room on their respective campuses. Interview 2, because of time restraints, had to be conducted in a more public environment and was done in a lobby area in one of the buildings on that professor's campus.

I approached the interview and interviewees with a professional attitude. That said, my demeanor within the interview itself was a casual one since our relationships had already been pre-established. This is true especially for Interview 1; our tone was very jovial and friendly as I had come to know that professor in a variety of scholastic circumstances other than just the classroom.

The conversation tone was helpful because while the most important goal was to learn why teachers tell personal stories in the classroom, this interview was intended to be generative. In other words, I wanted to generate as much information as possible for possible future research while keeping the main goal in mind and keeping it loose rather than formal so the teacher could expand if they wanted felt important.

Interview Procedure. This interview consisted of ten lead questions (See table 1), prioritized by order of importance. As answers were given, additional questions were posed to clarify the meaning or follow a particular path of reasoning. I crafted the interview to last about 45 to 60-minutes. I began with a general question to hopefully understand the teacher's overall feelings and influences around story and storytelling in a larger context. Later questions become

more specifically geared towards the professor's personal stories they tell in the classroom themselves.

It was important to lay a foundation that allowed for the teacher to answer the questions about story and storytelling within a grand context of their life. With that in mind, I borrowed language and style from an Indigenous Pedagogies class (Bang & Barajas-Lopez 2017) that reframed how we discuss our relationships to plants, animals, land and story. By using the term "relationship with" I hoped to broaden the conversation and create a non-possessive style that, in theory, would enable interviewees to respond to as though story is something we both enact and that happens to us. Thus, I began with: *In the broadest sense, what is your relationship with story and story-telling?*

Analytic Strategy. I implemented a system that was a combination of intuition as well as skills learned while working within the socio-moral action lab during my time as a graduate student. First, I transcribed the interviews. Then, a general read through without too much note taking. Next, I made another, more meticulous re-read, while taking notes and looking for quotes. I looked specifically for themes and patterns, color coding them according to the following three categories:

(1) Discusses story told in the classroom

(2) Discusses Pedagogy

(3) Discusses personal lived experiences.

Analysis & Interpretation of Interviews

To reduce the quantity of data, I discuss themes that I only found in all three interviews. Responses that were specific to individuals were kept in mind and used for interpretation but were not used to identify broad themes.

Usefulness. While the first theme popped out rather immediately, I want to begin with how it did so because I found it rather curious. To reiterate, question 1 was, *In the broadest sense, what is your relationship to story and storytelling?* I re-emphasize this because as I mentioned above, my use of the phrase “relationship with story and storytelling” was intended to elicit the broadest response. To my surprise, they all gave a very specific answer.

Interview 1: “I mean it's always to illustrate a point, right? But I mean a point relating a concept that's being discussed in class. Sometimes, I'll kind of storytell to kind of contextualize... And, that's a little bit different than just illustrating a concept. You know, people do this stuff and it's really exciting to get involved in this...[tells long, personal story]...and what's funny is the next lecture, students would ask, ‘Can we hear another story like that?’”

Interview 2: “I'm a big believer in telling stories... I remember the first time it happened...I was lecturing when I paused to tell a story is when people kind of paid attention. And that was kind of an ‘aha moment’ for me. It indicated that there was something to it... when they listen to a lecture, they are in various kinds of modes of comprehension. Some are attentive. Some are not. Some are looking at their iPhones, whatever. *But when I told a story, everybody was focused* (emphasis added).”

Interview 3: “I use it as a way to get to whomever I am talking to.”

While I found all their answers interesting, they were narrower explanations than what I expected. All three professors were explaining *why* they *use* stories in the classroom. My original analysis was that all three professors simply did not answer the question I asked which what initially piqued my interest. Especially because *even I* didn't catch it within the interview and only noticed the way in which they responded upon reviewing it. I emphasize it here because this may illustrate Bruner's suggestion that we do not fully appreciate or investigate our own relationship to story and storytelling - we simply assume it. Explaining *why you use* story - which was done here - and discussing "*in the broadest sense your relationship with story and storytelling*" - which was the question, are not the same thing. It is a piece, perhaps, but only one piece to a larger puzzle which they seem to have dismissed or overlooked, perhaps by accident or possibly because of my own oversight or even a flaw in the execution of the question. This is something I will discuss later, however.

Within their answers a gem appears to reveal itself though. All three professors seem to believe that personal storytelling is a useful pedagogical tool. That appears especially significant concerning the fact that my question was crafted to get a broad answer and did not ask about use and, yet, from all three professors I received a narrow answer that indicated usefulness.

Paying closer attention. Each professor indicated that the "use" of story was to get students to pay closer attention to what it is they are saying. Whether attempting to "get to" a student (professor 3), noticing that "everybody was focused" (professor 2) or having students react afterwards with "can we hear another story like that?" (professor 1), all three professors suggest that a large part of the usefulness of storytelling is getting students to pay closer attention. There is a slight difference between professors 1 and 2, and professor 3 that is worth note. Professors 1 & 2 explained the moments when they had this realization. Professor 2

recounts it as an “aha moment.” However, Professor 3 simply seems to intuitively appreciate and/or assume that stories get students to pay more attention to what it is they’re saying. Without a story to explain this knowing, we can only assume it’s simply something this professor believes and/or has experienced from their time in the classroom. The only significant difference between the third professor and the first two professor’s explanations are that they told their stories about the discovery of such a fact. In the end, these three professors share the beliefs that personal stories get students to pay closer attention.

Illustrating a Point. The next theme that occurs appears to be how to use that newly earned attention. Below are examples in which all three professors seem to agree the reason a further reason for telling a story is to illustrate a point.

Interview 1: “I guess that’s the key. I guess it’s always to illustrate a point, right? But I mean a point relating a concept that’s being illustrated in class.”

A bit later, professor 1 reiterates: “[it] Illustrate the points being made and make them more accessible... In other words, make them an applied... Here is an applied concept.”

Professor 2 makes similar claims using very similar language.

Interview 2: “They help to explain or elucidate a point.” And, again, a little later returned to his, “You have to have a point and you have to learn how to teach and telling stories is a part of that process...”

The first two professors did not beat around the bush, explaining simply that one of the best uses of story in the classroom is to “illustrate a point” or “elucidate a point”. The third professor did not use that exact language but did use language that enacts the same type of idea.

Interview 3: “I am deliberate about when I deploy my personal stories.” Later, “I do make pedagogical moves about when to deploy and sometimes it's to lighten the mood. Sometimes it's to refocus. Sometimes its to make human example. So, I definitely make pedagogical decisions about when to deploy story or which story to deploy but it's not part of an overall strategy of storytelling use.

Using the term “deploy” feels like a specific type of language that is meant to signify purpose; the purpose is to make a point. While this professor doesn't always use story to *just* make a point, they are specific about using story; it becomes a tool in the pedagogical toolkit that can be applied or “deployed” when necessary. While the other two professors are explaining exactly why they use story, this professor is acknowledging implicitly the why and explaining *when* story should be used; the why that the other two explain becomes implied because in professor 3s case, it is multifaceted. One of those facets indeed being to illustrate a point.

While Professor 3 may use story for multiple purposes, the theme between all three professors is that telling a personal story in the classroom can be a valuable tool in illustrating a concept. Point taken.

Personalization/Humanization. So far, the uses of storytelling in the classroom appear very specific. These three professors seem to believe that storytelling is useful to get students to

pay closer attention. In Question 4, I dig deeper into that by asking, *In general, what do you think the role of personal story-telling is in the learning process?* Another theme occurs.

Interview 1: “Well, one is when you personalize the concepts that you are talking about, it improves student engagement.”

Interview 2: They definitely engage with you and they also relate to you better.

“...they can relate to you and you humanize the learning process.”

With the third professor, I didn't ask as specifically as I did with the first two professors. I did this for two reasons. One, I had taken a less formal tact with the interview and thus the conversational style lead me to realize that professor 3 had already answered the question I was about to ask. Two, the professor reiterated the same point several times before I could get to the question specifically so redundancy felt unnecessary and awkward. This excerpt felt the most succinct answer to question 4.

Interview 3: “So, for me it's about the connection. It's about... humanizing me so I'm less of a 'them' and more of an 'us'. So, I use it as a tool for community building...”

I use personalization interchangeably here with humanization and while I do think there is a difference between the words, I believe that in this context, they mean approximately the same thing. What seems a consistent theme in all three professor's answers is the personalization and/or humanization element of telling a personal story. The professors appear to feel that

storytelling creates a bond within the classroom between the teacher and their students that helps the student learn the material better. That is, telling personal stories humanizes the teacher and the learning experience in a way that may help the student better engage with the material.

Power. While storytelling may help humanize the relationship between teacher and student, interviewees also quickly pointed out the complicated power dynamic within the classroom. Specifically, the use of storytelling to illuminate and break down the power dynamic.

Interview 1: “Now, not across the board. There are some instances where they're like, "this guy is talking about himself or he's talking about experiences of his close friends... But... On balance, I think that many more people get much more engaged by that, when you personalize it.”

Here, what is being explained is an abuse of power simply to self-aggrandize. That is, if the professor is not using story to illustrate a point concerning the material or to create connection with the students, it is being done simply so the professor can simply look cooler. What is being suggested is that students are often aware of this and see it is an abuse of power because it does no service to the student or the classroom time. Interview 2 highlights similar points on both fronts re: humanization and power.

Interview 2: ...there's an imbalance of power. When people relate to you and look at you not just as a teacher but as some wise person but as a regular person... And I'm not saying you have to get deeply personal unless you really do it and I know that my wife, she doesn't like this way of teaching.

Here, the professor points out that while he is an advocate for telling stories because it may give power back to the student and personalize the relationship, his wife feels the opposite. Interview 3, discusses power more directly within the framework of humanization.

Interview 3: “When I [tell stories] in class, it's not that I think the power dynamic goes away between me and the students, it doesn't. I'm still the one who's grading but it is a way for them to see me as a bit closer to them versus, you know, as versus straight academic.... it's a way to humanize me in, you know, making mistakes and doing weird, inappropriate things. It's a humanizing factor.”

Professor 3 discusses grades, acknowledging that while breaking down the teacher-student wall and creating a more human relationship seems important, a power dynamic is still at play. This feels important because it is far more overt than simply wasting a student's time by telling an extraneous story about yourself. The professor hammers the point home.

Interview 3: “I have all sorts of personal stories that I share and I am friendly and personable but there is still a power dynamic here. I think it's ridiculous to act like we're friends when I am the one that can stop you from graduating.”

The power element of storytelling in the classroom seemed to pervade throughout all three interviews. Interestingly, this was the first indication that story may not be a good thing.

Whether good or bad, it seems that personal storytelling in the classroom is useful for illuminating and breaking down power dynamics between teacher and student.

The Importance of the “Main” Personal Stories. So, what were these personal stories that our professors used and deployed in the classroom to illustrate a point or disrupt/readjust the power dynamic? Obviously, when doing a study on personal storytelling, I wanted to hear some of their personal stories. With questions 2, 5 and 8, I attempted in a variety of ways to pull different personal stories from each professor. Interestingly, however, they all stuck mainly to one, something I wasn’t expecting. Professor 1 brought a greater variety of stories into our conversation but kept returning to the main one. It becomes important to look at these “main” stories as we move forward.

Professor 1 told a story about how his color blindness and a bit of hubris while hiking led to him losing his backpack on a mountain. He uses the story to discuss different geographies, specifically rock formations, color and textures. Professor 2 told a story of himself as a boy growing up in his small village in Greece, specifically using events like weddings and funerals that were community gatherings and open to all. He expresses how those experiences allowed him to contextualize the difference between open and closed societies, a topic he sees as important as technology advances and societal boundaries are blurred. Professor 3 tells a story of their 5-year-old son innocently, yet enthusiastically, calling a Muslim woman in full-hijab a ninja. The professor uses the moment to illuminate the complicated nature of racially and/or ethnically charged moments and the silence that can often surround them.

So distinct were the stories that I struggled to find concrete linkages. I quickly wondered if I had asked good questions. While I have attempted with this study to cast a wide net and incorporate storytelling in a bigger context that is not simply the classroom, I realized I was

possibly hyper-focused on the professors academic trajectory from student to teacher within the interview (See Figure 2). It was slightly ironic. It was in that realization and my frustration that I found my next, and maybe most important, theme. It was staring me right in the face. It appears possible that the theme of the three main stories the professors told was this: *they all take place outside the classroom*, and further outside academia completely.

It could be that teachers telling personal stories in the classroom is simply to illustrate that the material we learn within the walls of higher education might matter *most outside the walls of the classroom*.

In Real Life: Bringing the Outside World Inside the Classroom. As I reviewed these professor's three main stories, that idea seemed to stick. While each professor told their personal story at different times in response to different questions, they did indeed return to one main story. That felt significant. As did the fact that those stories all took place *outside of the classroom* as well as any academic setting. This is the case despite my attempts to get them to explicate examples that took place *in* the classroom or within academia generally.

All three of these stories take the professors' real, personal lives outside the classroom and put them inside the classroom. While it may be argued that these examples are ones that likely come from being primed to tell personal stories in "real life", I would point out that these are stories they routinely tell in their classrooms. Also, personal does not necessarily indicate experiences outside the classroom or academia in general. For many, academia is likely deeply personal. Further, within the framework of the interview I repeatedly ask questions that situate the professor *in* the classroom or in academia in general as both teachers and students. Yet, all three professors always returned to a main story that happened outside the classroom in "real life" rather than the institution they work at and academia generally. In other words, more than

simply me asking for a “personal” story, something about these personal stories feels important to these professors; important enough to bring their world outside of the classroom inside of it.

The Moral of the Story. Jerome Bruner conceptualizes story as a canonical telling of many stories. Joseph Campbell says every story is a series of stories rolled into one new one and that series of stories is what we call myth. Another way of saying that is that every story has a moral. It appears that each professor likely has a moral embedded within their personal stories. A moral that transcends the “use” of the story, the engagement of the student’s attention, the power dynamic or the personalization of the student-teacher relationship.

I attempted to get at the moral of their stories via questions 9 and 10. Each professor answered these questions quite differently which, again, made it difficult to find a common theme. Below are excerpts from each professor telling their main stories as well as giving an explanation for why they matter. I include all three without individual analysis. After all three, I give my interpretation.

Interview 1:

Professor 1: ... sometimes it just hits you, you know, I got this interesting story and you've already lectured 15 times on this landform. Well, now I'm gonna tell a story about how I got this image, right. And so, I just, I won't tell the whole story but I have pictures of a cinder cone on the flank of Mt Adams. The day I took that picture, I put my backpack down because it was a cinder cone. So, part of the story is to illustrate how cinder cone is made of loose cinder and tephra. A collection of tephra - it'll collapse under your weight.

Me: Mhmm.

Professor 1: And they're really hard to, especially if you got a 40 pound pack on, you'll slide, right? And I realized if I have my pack off and carried my camera up to the summit, it wouldn't be that difficult, right?

Me: (Laughs) I see where this is going!

Professor 1: So, orange pack with tephra which is orange-ish and I'm colorblind.

Me: Ohhh! Ok, I didn't see where this was going.

Professor 1: And there was a snowfield that I stupidly... If I had put the pack out on the snowfield, right? And so what happened, I lost that pack that day. I had my wallet in there. I had all my water in that pack.

Me: Oh no!

Professor 1: And that was about 6 miles from where I camped.

Me: Oh no!

Professor 1: It was in the 80s and I was absolutely certain I could find it so I got really dehydrated.

Me: Oh my God...

Professor 1: Yeah, and whats funny is the next lecture, students would ask, "*Can we hear another story like that?*" (emphasis added)

Interview 2:

Professor 2: What I am saying to you is when I tell you a story and I engage you and I get into your head and you can relate to me and you can understand it because I'm saying it in a way that is in everyday terms.

Me: Yeah....

Professor 2: You can imagine a little village and a small casket. We've all seen caskets before. And, you know, a little boy hiding behind a refrigerator. You can imagine that in your head, right? It's a way to tell you you're now part of this.

Me: Right...

Professor 2: It's not me here speaking to you and you going, 'Ok, I wrote it all down.' We have a dialogue. This is the Socratic method.

Me: *Your experience matters.* (Emphasis added)

Professor 2: It does matter.

Interview 3:

Professor: "So one of the things that I say and do is say that we beat discussions of race out of kids early because they notice things. They are not colorblind. We train them to be colorblind or colormute. So, I talk about that in class and the story that I use is when my oldest son, I think he was 5, saw a Muslim woman in full dress, full hijab. We were at Target and he pointed at her and said, "It's a ninja!""

Me: Oh yeah! (Laughs) I do remember this story!

Professor: Yeah... So, I say.. I use myself. I was just mortified because there was no way that anybody didn't hear it. I'm sure she heard. He didn't whisper it and he's not a quiet kid. So, I use that story to say, "Look, we all find ourselves in these moments where we are mortified and humiliated."

Me: Uh huh...

Professor: *It's what we do with these moments.* (emphasis added)

Me: Right.

Professor: And so I say in the class, while I been teaching this class and say to your students, don't beat it out of your kids and so this is the move. So, that's an example of to both lighten the mood and insert myself and be vulnerable.

I allow the reader to read all three stories uninterrupted because I believe the moral of any story may live in the eye of the beholder. Further, it appears that there *may not just be one* moral. However, I did emphasize the aspect of the story that I believe the professor found relevant. It seems there are two levels. One, the story illuminates something related to the material; rock formations and color (interview 1), open societies in which you can witness something impactful like a funeral parade as a young boy (interview 2), and experiences of silence around racially and/or ethnically charged moments (interview 3). What those experiences mean on a *deeper* level, that is, what the moral is within those personal stories becomes subjective even if the professor believes it is apparent.

My own personal feeling is that the moral of the story within all three professors main stories is that which I expressed in response to the story of professor 2; *your experience matters*. Further, I believe professor 3 agrees with the above but goes a step further, saying that not only does your experience matter but *your decisions matter*. And lastly, professor 1 is saying more simply, *your actions matter*. So, the overarching moral of telling a personal story in the classroom appears to be illuminating the idea that what you learn in the classroom should add to your experiences outside of it. Education is not just an intellectual pursuit. It *is* that but it is also your *real life*. In other words, I suggest that these three professors tell personal stories with these

particular morals within them in the classroom to emphasize this point: *experiences, and your actions within them, matter.*

Summary of Analysis. To conclude if my summary is accurate we need further research. However, what appears consistent throughout each professor's personal stories and explanations of them is telling personal stories in the classroom *is* important to the learning process. Whether it be student engagement, paying closer attention, illustrating a point, disrupting the power dynamic, or illuminating that what we learn in "real life" should be brought into the classroom and vice versa. I suggest that these three professors seem to believe that using personal storytelling is indeed quite a powerful pedagogical tool that they can deploy within their classrooms to better help students learn.

Discussion

In the fall of 2017, I read an article called *The Changing Spaces of Learning: Mapping New Mobilities* (2010). In it, Leander, Phillips and Headrick-Taylor suggest that the classroom is a container; one in which learning is not fluid between spaces and even time. In other words, they posit that the way we teach in the classroom and thus what is learned in the classroom stays in the classroom. They suggest that it is time to reimagine the geographies of learning so what is learned in the classroom can be taken out of it and what is learned outside the classroom can be used within it. This article resonated with me and I wrote a short essay relating it back to my own pre-pubescent adage that surely springs forth in many a middle school classrooms. "...Yeah, but how am I going to use this *in real life?!'*" It is that idea, expressed in the final two sections of analysis, that I believe is the heart of telling personal stories in the classroom. It may be that the

borders of the classroom create borders for learning and that personal storytelling helps break down those borders.

To bridge that gap, what looks as if it must be reconciled is Bruner's notion that we do not fully appreciate story in all its forms within culture to shape culture (p. 1). I found no better example of that than in response to my first question: *In the broadest sense, what is your relationship to story and storytelling?* To which each professor only examined their relationship to story outside its personal use to them. Again, in the context of my study, they may have been primed to dive right in, however, as I mentioned in the very first paragraph of this study: there is a story, there is a teller and there is a listener. Each professor only explained their experience as a teller in response to their relationship to story. The listener aspect was completely omitted. Maybe I should have been more explicit within question 1. Some questions that feel relevant may be as follows. What types of stories do they like personally? Are they a natural storyteller at home? What was their relationship to story and storytelling growing up as a kid? These types of questions could explicate further their "relationship" to storytelling. Of course, I did dig deeper as the interview progressed but interestingly the depth to which each professor could or would explain how *other peoples* stories or the stories of culture affected their own journey to becoming a professor seemed limited. I say that because none of the three attempted to manifest more than a couple of stories, instead preferring to stick to their one main story.

Somewhat ironically, this is where bell hooks' theory of *engaged pedagogy* became instrumental and yet also a hindrance. She insists that the process of learning begins by the professor being vigilant of their own self-narrative and actualization. This was something I tended to agree with and thus heeded from the outset. It was instrumental in bringing the personal and interpersonal aspect to the conceptual framework. The irony was that in attempting

to be vigilant concerning my own process and narrative as a graduate student, while simultaneously considering how story may impact the student, and also thinking about the instructor's journey from student to professor, my expectations prevented me from hearing in the moment what was being said or not said by the professor. That is very likely why *I too* overlooked that all three professors provided a narrower answer to question 1 than I expected. Simultaneously understanding all the layers to story and storytelling is simply just that difficult.

While the questions I crafted with hooks' in mind didn't necessarily bare the fruit I expected for the study, her engaged pedagogy theory illuminated what may be an important element in the dearth of research on storytelling in the classroom. Similar to Bruner's assumption that we overlook stories impact on society, it seems we overlook the critical role that self-reflection may have on why teachers use storytelling in the classroom as well. Self-reflection on what story means, specifically to the storytellers themselves, rather than simply on how it can be used was essentially missing from the professors answers. While I did not include it in the interview section, another thing that all three professors said explicitly and/or alluded to during the interview in response to several questions concerning why they tell personal stories in the classroom was that they had *never* thought about it. Professor 1, specifically, repeatedly said, "These are really good questions and I'm surprised I've never thought about it before now." I don't include this to toot my own horn concerning my "good" questions, although it feels nice, I include it to elucidate the fact that they did not appear to reflect about their own role in telling personal stories in the classroom *beyond the fact that they simply do it because they 'know' it is useful*. In other words, none of them seemed to have asked themselves "why" they tell stories besides the fact that it is a useful tool, at least as far as they explained it to me. Hooks' theory then, which emphasizes self-reflection for student and teacher alike in the classroom, still seems

worth later investigation. Because even if it didn't get the spotlight I thought it would within the interviewees responses, more pointed questions may unearth something more poignant about self-discovery and storytelling in the classroom. That said, a professor's attention is pulled in so many directions that concerning themselves with why they personally tell a story other than the fact that it helps achieve a tangible learning outcome is ancillary. It works, and if it works, why think about it?

Limitations and Future Directions

Within this final section, I am going to evaluate my own performance during this study. I will discuss future ideas surrounding this area of research and give some concluding comments, There are things that I could have done far better. Further, because it was such uncharted territory, there is a fair amount to discuss concerning possible future studies.

Firstly, a look at my questions. With a little modification and refinement, I think all my questions could be used for future studies. However, most significant was that all the questions re: becoming a teacher – questions 2 and 3 as well as their follow-ups - ended up being unusable for this study because their answers were so disparate. Besides the commonality I discussed above concerning my “good questions”, every professor had very different stories for how they became a professor. I assumed that their journey from student to professor and their own use of storytelling may have been heavily influenced by some of their own teachers. So, I focused on that aspect early in the interview attempting to bring context. Their answers were interesting but not necessarily fruitful for those themes. However, some topics discussed that would be interesting for further discussion were the performative act of storytelling, the inspirational element of storytelling, and story within the student-teacher/advisor dynamic when learning to

teach. Yet, there were no themes that all three professors expressed within those topics that I could use in the study and thus I think my assumption led me astray here. This ate up time early in the interview and in retrospect felt extraneous. In future studies, I don't think I would discard that line of questioning, I would simply change the order. That is, I would focus on personal story *use* from the outset and then bring in those types of questions for context later.

While context and background is important, I believe my own personal background with the professors may have hindered the data. That is, while I don't know each professor outside of the academic context, I have a relatively informal relationship with all three. I was a student in each of their classrooms at one point in my academic career and have a personal scholastic relationship with each one of them. Our conversations have become casual and even friendly. Thus, I took a casual conversation style within the interviews and I think that led to an issue of consistency. Finding common themes among the professors proved complicated because I simply didn't ask the same questions in the same way at the same time in each interview. A more systematic approach with a more refined language may have benefitted the study. I took liberties because, again, I was in a research no man's land and am still a novice researcher and interviewer.

The friendly rapport did influence the project in a good way that lead to another insight as well though. After some reflection, I realized a reason I enjoyed these instructors so much was my perception that they have an ability to weave personal elements of their personality into the class and the material. When I contrasted those experiences against some of my less enjoyable college professors, I realized that it was their storytelling that endeared me to them and may have made my experience a positive one. I am admittedly a rather zealous fan of stories. That surely impacted how I felt about their classes and the teachers. In other words, the way in which I chose

these three teachers was highly biased towards the positive elements of storytelling in the classroom.

For a short spell, I did entertain interviewing professors whom I did *not* enjoy, one in particular, who told a plethora of stories within the classroom but with whom I had a highly contentious relationship. However, that felt like a difficult undertaking because of personal feelings as well as the simple fact that I was unsure if the professor would even consider participating. That said, I think it would behoove a larger study to look to professors who may use story in their classrooms but who may not be well-regarded as instructors. Asking something like, “*What do you think the benefit is of a teacher telling personal stories in the classroom?*” may prove rewarding in that context.

Moreover, talking with teachers who do not share my own love for personal storytelling would be useful. As was briefly touched upon in the interpretation and analysis section, Professor 2 is married to a professor who does not believe in storytelling. Interviewing her as a follow up may have been fruitful. Further, while I did not include it, professor 1 discussed at length that using personal story in the classroom is often a somewhat controversial topic of conversation among his professional peers. Discussing that more thoroughly may have been rewarding. Lastly, while I did not go out of my way to include this information, before our interview professor 3 made clear that they enjoy their personal privacy and find it important to them. Digging a bit deeper into that – privacy and personal storytelling – may uncover something valuable. In other words, while all three of these professors believe personal storytelling may be useful, that does not mean every professor, or even student, believes it should be used. Finding both professors and students who share that view and would be willing to be interviewed then becomes important to further study.

Along those lines, one of the most important issues within this study was student input; and there was none. From the outset, I was highly concerned with the omission of the student perspective. Teachers telling personal stories must have an audience and the student is that audience. What they think about a teacher's stories, how those stories affect them personally and how they help learn the material within the class feels of the utmost importance. Without that insight, the effects of personal storytelling in the classroom is simply speculative. In a larger study, I would suggest a high level of student data concerning how teachers telling personal stories in the classroom influenced their enjoyment of the class, their learning of the material, overall self-reflection and possibly grades. The effect of storytelling on grades would be hard to test for but simply asking students something like, "*Do you think the teacher telling personal stories helped your overall grade in this class?*" could provide insight.

Lastly, I would want to employ a more systematic analysis of the interviews using a proven qualitative or quantitative coding method. While I did have a system that I outlined within my methods section and kept in mind, I did not use any learned qualitative or quantitative coding system. I think coding for actual language, meaning similarities in specific words and phrases would be helpful and a coding system to do so seems important, if not necessary.

Conclusion

In summary, I believe this is a healthy, even if small, start into an area that has a limited amount of research. Story and storytelling is a human universal to communicate a long line of experiences and pass knowledge from individuals and over generations; from underneath the stars to around campfires to inside of classrooms. With the teacher and the classroom being such a focal point in our current model of learning, it seems necessary to dig into how teachers may

use story and storytelling to continue the tradition of passing down knowledge. I'm honored to have played a small part. I hope I have contributed in some small way to that tradition; and I hope to continue to do so.

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