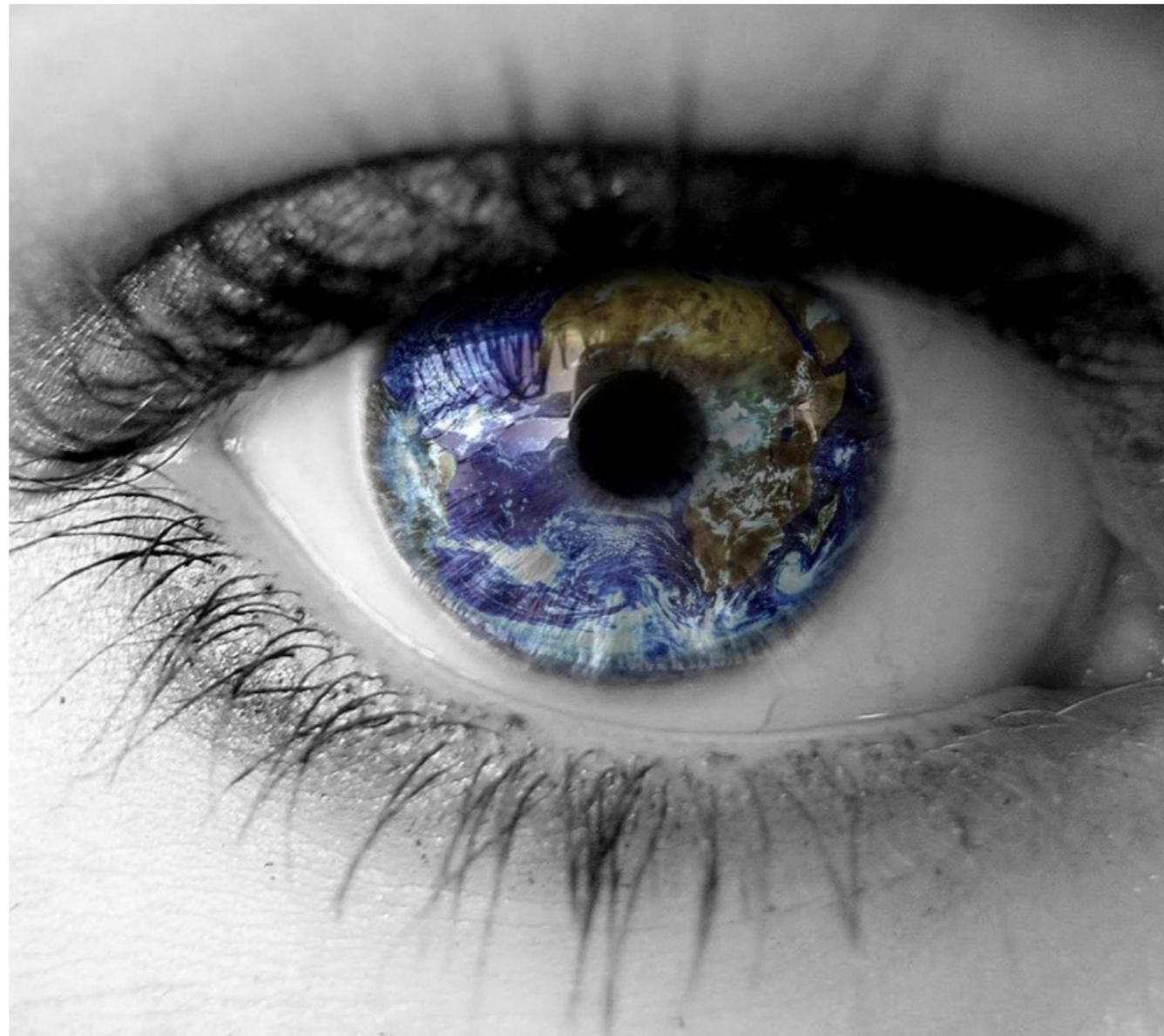


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# Transformative Storytelling

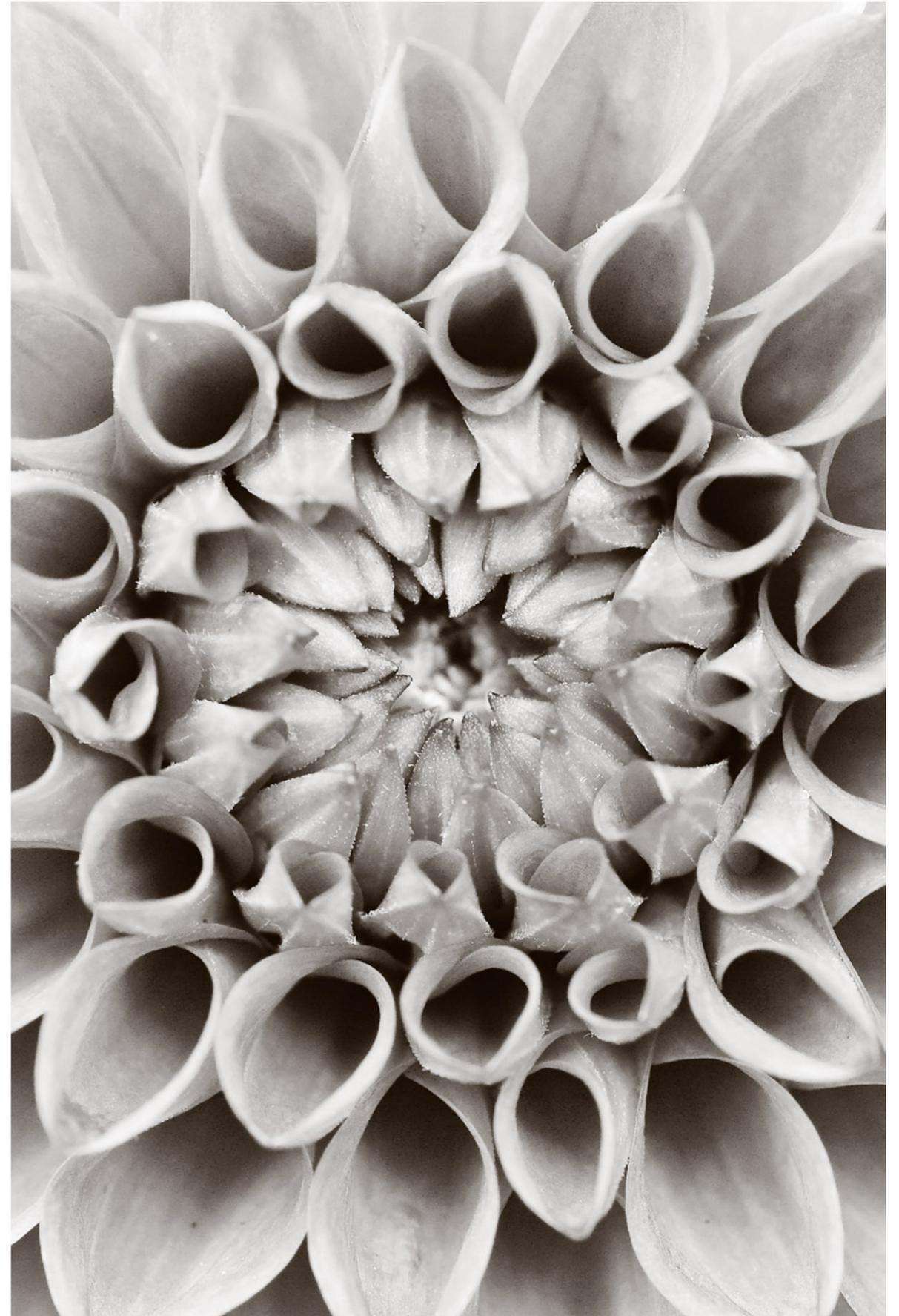


BY: ERIN SCHAEFER

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# Introduction

Humans understand the world through the lens of their stories. They have stories about everything they have seen, heard or experienced (Crossley, 2003). The human mind holds a vast structure of these stories in memory and, collectively, they create paradigms, the maps people use to navigate the world (Disque & Bitter, 1998). Many of these stories are shared with one's family, community, state, country and even the world (Crick & Grushka, 2009). But many are unique to the individual, their own distinct version of reality.



# Storytelling in Education

## MAIN POINTS

1. Storytelling is a vital to learning.
2. New information must cohere with our existing stories.
3. Educators currently use a variety of storytelling techniques in the classroom.
4. Two main benefits of storytelling in the classroom:
  - a. Stories make abstract concepts understandable.
  - b. Students become conscious that they are authors, and can therefore revise limiting aspects of their stories.
5. Ideally, students are active, conscious participants in the often unconscious storying process.

Storytelling is vital to education because learning is the process of updating stories. Every new piece of information that students take in must be woven into their own personal matrix of stories if they are to retain it. Receiving this information in the form of a story makes it even easier for them to take it in and digest it (Mannion, 2001). That is why teachers from all disciplines regularly rely on anecdotes to impart knowledge. This can be even more effective if students take part in the story shifting process by sharing their own stories or by responding to the teacher or another student through class participation. Storytelling is happening on many levels in a classroom all the time.

Many educators have realized the benefits of storytelling activities in the classroom. These classroom activities range from individual storytelling assignments, such as the journaling methods described by Mannion (2001), Clark and Rositer (2008) and Kerka (1996), to the collective storytelling described by Paulus, Woodside and Ziegler (2007). Students can also use a variety of technologies to tell stories, including wikis, blogs and digital storytelling tools (e.g., Fischer et al., 2011; Reis et al, 2010; Rose, 2009).

Storytelling aids in learning in two critical ways. First, it helps learners connect abstract information to personal experience. (Mannion, 2001). When students are presented with new information, storytelling assignments help them shape abstract concepts into familiar frameworks because they are based on real-life experiences (2001).

Second, and more importantly, it provides a means for students to become aware of their perspectives so that these perspectives can be revised. When learners record stories, they have the opportunity to reflect critically on their perspectives and, after reflecting, they can then alter these perspectives through revision (Clark, 2001). Revision can occur individually (and sometimes completely internally) or through feedback from group storytelling (Paulus, Woodside & Ziegler, 2007).

Revising their stories is how students grow their stories and learn. For that to happen, they must first learn to practice self-awareness of their stories (Pfahl & Wiessner, 2007). When a student is self-aware they know that they exist apart from their story. Knowing they are not their story allows them to understand that it is possible to work with it through revision.

Every aspect of students' lives is part of and affected by their stories. How they approach and relate to the world is governed by stories. And, as they gain wisdom from their education, they store it in the form of stories. If they can be fully conscious of the story-building process, they have the opportunity to take part in and have agency about the nature of their stories (Lee, 2004)

# How Fear and Mindfulness

## MAIN POINTS

1. The physiological state (calm or fearful) influences the way students work with their stories.
  1. Fearful states creates resistant to alternative perspectives that could grow students' stories.
  2. Calm states creates openness to other perspectives, and creativity in working with students' stories.
2. Students can consciously foster a calm state of mind by practicing mindfulness.

If students have stories that are rational, they tend to work with them in a clear-headed way; however, when their stories are stressful, students are more likely to close down neuro-physiologically (Berger & Lee, 2010; McHugh et al., 2010). The nature of their stories influences how they work with them, but it is the energies of calm or fear that the stories create that ultimately determine the student's mind state (Goleman, 2006; McHugh et al., 2010; Siegel, 2007).

The neurophysiology of fear reveals that it is how students handle fear energy that changes their approach to storytelling and learning in general. On the one hand, being reactive to fear puts them in a mind state that is narrow-minded, ignorant and resistant to learning (Arnsten, Mazure & Sinha, 2012; Berkovich-Ohana, Glicksohn & Goldstein, 2011; Schrader, 2004; Stengel, 2010). Alternatively, calming themselves leaves them open to the rational, creative thinking conducive to transforming their stories (Crumley & Schutz, 2011; Goleman, 2006; Hart, 2011; Kilpatrick, 2011).

Recent discoveries in the neurosciences have shown that calming fear is necessary for effective learning. Daniel Goleman, one of the most respected of these researchers, explains that the mind can be described as having two "roads" of processing. The "low road" (associated with narrow, limiting stories) is connected to the amygdala and the thalamus, those portions of the brain associated with fear and emotion. The low road acts as radar, noticing potentially dangerous events in the actual environment or in people's stories, then activat-

ing the sympathetic (fight or flight) nervous system through hormones such as adrenaline (Goleman, 2006).

On the other hand, the “high road” is connected to the neocortex, the portion of the brain that is consciously directed. The high road is associated with mindfulness—the calm, conscious awareness of the present moment. Unlike the low road, the high road is able to consciously observe what is occurring in the environment and in people’s stories and to use reason to determine how to respond. This includes the ability to consciously choose to respond to signals of fear it may receive from the low road (Goleman, 2006).

These two roads work simultaneously, but at different speeds (Goleman, 2006; Robbins, 2000). When students are stressed or afraid, their brains produce a faster brainwave frequency called hi-beta (Wise, 2000). This frequency literally, physiologically, prevents them from being able to see things from multiple perspectives at the same time (Wise, 2000). Additionally, the fear energy that raises this frequency causes them to defend their current perspective. As a result, they become locked in one particular story (McHugh, 2010; Siegel, 2007). In this state of mind, alternative perspectives are perceived as threats, making learning difficult at best (Disque & Bitter, 1998; Fulford, 1999).

Because the emotional low road works at a higher speed than the more rational high road, students may often act out of their emotional, fearful context before their rational mind is able to see reality in a more objective light. This does not al-

ways happen, however, because their mindfulness frequency (their high road) sometimes supersedes their fear and calmly reassures them (Goleman, 2006).

Using the high road to calm the low road can happen completely without the student’s awareness (Siegel, 2007). This is the unconscious use of mindfulness that most people experience on a regular basis. It is possible, however, to teach students the conscious use of mindfulness so they can purposefully influence their mind state (Baer & Carmody, 2008). When students practice mindfulness, they are consciously exercising the brain’s ability to be calm and rational in the presence of fear energy (Baer, Carmody & Hunsiger, 2012; Gazzella, 2005). In this way, they can train their brains to more quickly access the frequencies of the high road (Doidge, 2007; Goleman, 2006).

Just as their bodies change when they exercise, the way students use their minds even changes the size and shape of different areas of their brains (Arnsten, Mazure & Sinha, 2012; Doidge, 2007). Called “neuroplasticity,” this malleability of the brain also affects how it functions (Doidge, 2007). Whether students practice mindfulness or reactivity, and whether they do so consciously or unconsciously, they are always training their brains to create particular mind states (Baer, Carmody & Hunsiger, 2012; Doidge, 2007, Siegel, 2007). However, when this training is a conscious practice, it gives students agency and allows them the option of interrupting the negative impacts that fear has on learning (Baer, Carmody & Hunsiger, 2012; Crumley & Schutz, 2011). If students’

mindfulness capabilities are strong enough, they can override their neurophysiologic stress response in the face of great apprehension, thereby remaining calm, rational and ready to learn (Crumley & Schutz, 2011).

# Barriers to Effective Story-

## MAIN POINTS

1. Implementing storytelling in the classroom must be done with an understanding of its potential difficulties and barriers, or storytelling can be harmful to the learning process.
2. Primary barriers to transformative storytelling:
  - a. Fear and lack of self-awareness
  - b. Identifying with the story
  - c. Defending the story (limiting stories)
  - d. Reconfirming the story (historic causality)
3. Fear is the most important barrier to consider, because it is interconnected with the other three barriers (identifying with the story, defending the story and reconfirming the story).

Storytelling in itself does not necessarily result in transforming one's story; without calm, mindful guidance from instructors, the process of storytelling can even be harmful to the learning process (Clark & Rossiter, 2008, Drake, 2007; Lee, 2004; Xie, Ke & Sharma, 2008). For storytelling to be an effective methodology, teaching it must be based on an informed understanding of the barriers that may arise (Clark & Rossiter, 2008). Knowing why students have difficulty updating their stories, then, is key to developing techniques that will assist them through the transformation process. This knowledge can help media specialists and teachers be deliberate when creating presentations and assignments.

It is important that educators be aware of the limits and possible pitfalls of using storytelling methods indiscriminately. For example, the use of media for storytelling can have an inhibiting effect. Many media platforms are not conducive to group storytelling because they are either too technologically complex or too public in nature (Ma & Yuen, 2008). In crafting digital stories, students may feel overwhelmed with, and/or get distracted by, the task of choosing among the millions of images available on the Internet (Sadik, 2008). However, used carefully and with an understanding of its limits, digital storytelling can be an extremely effective tool for student reflection on, and revision of, their stories (Jenkins & Lonsdale, 2007).

The limitations of media are only some of the barriers that instructors must consider in implementing storytelling. These are the primary barriers to transformative storytelling

that researchers have identified (e.g., Clark & Rossiter, 2008; Drake, 2007; Pronin, 2006; Schrader, 2004; Siegel, 2007):

1. Fear and lack of self-awareness
2. Identifying with the story
3. Defending the story (limiting stories)
4. Reconfirming the story (historic causality)

These barriers inhibit learning by making it difficult for students to update their stories.

Research on storytelling methodology, narrative psychology and neurophysiology suggests that fear is the primary obstacle to learning and story transformation. Whether it is generated by the nature of students' stories or caused by feeling unsafe in a classroom of their peers, it is primarily the energy of fear or stress that prevents them from updating their stories (Pronin, 2006; McHugh et al., 2010; Siegel, 2007). In examining and sharing stories in the classroom, students often feel fearful that their story is bad and that they will be judged by others, including the teacher (Schrader, 2004). Also, media can add to the fear of public disclosure or raise anxiety associated with technology. Or, the story itself raises fear (Disque & Bitter, 1998; McHugh et al., 2010).

The most important way fear impacts storytelling is that it reduces self-awareness (Sala & Urch-Druskat, 2006). Not only does fear reduce self-awareness; lack of self-awareness also further increases fear (Carmody, Lykins & Olendzki,

2009; Goleman, 2006). Fear sets off a feedback loop that begins with the mind sending a lightning fast signal to the body. It begins a physiological process in which the heart beats faster, blood flows from the extremities to the vital organs, muscles tense up and we start to perspire (Arnsten, Mazure & Sinha, 2012). The nervous system then completes the feedback loop by sending the signal back to the brain, where it narrows people's awareness onto what feels threatening to them. The narrow focus associated with this fear response reduces self-awareness by causing people to stay focused on external threats rather than on their internal responses (Goleman, 2006; Siegel, 2007). And, because they are not aware of the sensation of fear in their bodies (somatic self-awareness), they cannot address it by calming themselves (Siegel, 2007).

Another reason fear is so important is that the other three barriers (identifying with the story, defending the story and reconfirming the story) all exist and are reinforced to a large extent as a result of fear. In a fear state students are closed down and believe that they are their story (identifying with the story) (Disque & Bitter, 1998); that their perspective is the only correct way to see things (limiting story) (Arnsten, Mazure & Sinha, 2012) and they are locked into their past experiences (historical causality) (Arnsten, Mazure & Sinha, 2012; Disque & Bitter, 1998; Drake, 2007).

The second barrier arises when students identify with their stories, leading them to perceive feedback or an alternative perspective as a threat to who they are (Drake, 2007). Stories are the lenses through which students understand what

they see of the world; but when they identify too strongly with their stories, the lenses are so close they do not even know they are there (Drake, 2007; Fulford, 1999). In other words, their glasses are on their face, but they do not even know they are wearing them.

When students are too attached to the story, they tell it from a subjective perspective (Drake, 2007). Identifying with the story in this way is very common. As Pronin (2006) explains, people have a tendency to believe that their perspective is the objective reality. Called naïve realism, such tendencies make self-awareness crucial to the learning process. If students cannot see their own perspective, they will not be able to make choices about updating their understanding (Drake, 2007). This takes away their agency.

A third barrier happens when students defend their current story and are unwilling to update it. This is a natural extension of the previous barrier, identifying with the story. Students who believe their story represents their identity often feel a need to defend it (Disque & Bitter, 1998; Drake, 2007). Both identifying with a story and defending the perspective of a story often become a form of blindness (Drake, 2007). Students get tunnel vision as a result of maintaining stories that restrict their view of the world to a narrow perspective (Drake, 2007).

These narrow-minded stories are what Lee (2004) calls “limiting stories”. Because limiting stories are linear and exclusive, they close off the possibility of exploring multiple dimen-

sions and complexity. Consequently, true learning and growth are difficult at best. Further, students have a tendency to use storytelling as a way of arguing that their perspective is the only right one, thereby reinforcing the existing story (Carranz, 1999).

The three barriers discussed above often lead to a fourth - that of reconfirming and reinforcing stories, sometimes referred to as “historical causality” (Clark & Rossiter, 2008). Rather than updating their stories, students merely recycle them in an incestuous way. This problem arises when people interpret all new information solely within the context of their previous understanding. No new information can get in, thwarting the learning process. When people are afraid, it is the familiar that is reassuring to them; therefore, they immerse themselves in their stories and cling to them as though their very lives depended on them (Disque & Bitter, 1998).

Examining these barriers reveals that when storytelling is done without understanding, it can result in further closing students down, reinforcing old stereotypes and ignorance (Drake, 2007). Research shows that when storytelling is done thoughtfully, however, in a safe and open way, it is an extremely effective tool in helping students transform and grow (Hart, 2011; Schrader, 2004). When fully conscious and open in the story-building process, students have the opportunity to take part in and have agency in it (Lee, 2004). They learn to open their minds to new information and update their stories.

# A Model for Transformative Storytelling

## MAIN POINTS

1. Purpose of this Book: Explore the theme of mindfully implementing storytelling as a transformative learning process as well as the methods and media to carry that out.
2. For students to transform their stories they must:
  - a. Detach from their story
  - b. See their story with novelty (“beginner’s mind”)
3. Topics to be explored in upcoming chapters:
  - a. Elements of transformative storytelling
  - b. The importance of safety and self-awareness for transformative storytelling
  - c. Transformative storytelling methods and media
  - d. Resource guide for transformative storytelling

The purpose of this book is to explore the theme of mindfully implementing storytelling as a transformative learning process as well as the methods and media to carry that out. Its purpose is to provide assistance to instructors and media specialists wishing to develop and utilize methods and media for transformative storytelling in the classroom. It includes an analysis of what works to tend to the obstacles that students face when working with their stories. It does this by introducing mindfulness and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (Kabat-Zinn, 2003) techniques. It demonstrates how the elements of mindfulness can be used to identify the primary elements of transformative storytelling. Mindfulness has been shown to have a host of benefits including reduced stress, lowered emotional drive and an ability to see novel experiences free of prejudice (Crane & Soutar, 2000, Wise, 2002, Fehmi & Robbins, 2007, Siegel, 2007). This also supports instructors in being mindful in this process, including being less judgmental with their students.

The practice of transformative storytelling necessitates seeing the world in a fresh and novel way (Baer, Carmody & Hunsinger, 2012; Hart, 2011), even those, maybe especially those, things that already seem to be familiar. Buddhist scholars call seeing the world in this way “beginner’s mind”. The ability to have beginner’s mind is not only at the heart of transformative storytelling but of learning in general. Without it, people merely rearrange their stories in an incestuous way and real growth is thwarted. It is the difference between tak-

ing in facts and having true understanding (Clark & Rossiter, 2008; Kochhar-Lindgren, 2001).

Mindful story work requires that students are able to observe their own stories with beginner's mind, which in turn, requires that they have self-awareness (Pfahl & Wiessner, 2007). In essence this means that they have to be able to detach from the story they are immersed in and step back. It is this detachment that allows them to have the clear, unbiased observation necessary for making thoughtful choices about how to transform their stories (Stevens & Cooper, 2009). Showing students how to detach from stories, strengthen beginner's mind and revise their stories is the goal of transformative storytelling and the purpose of this book.

### *Elements of Transformative Storytelling*

This book begins by identifying four mindful elements researchers say work to address the four principal barriers to effective storytelling. These elements, based on mindfulness principles, directly speak to those barriers and help students have beginner's mind.

1. Creating safety and self awareness
2. Detaching from the story
3. Mindfully reflecting
4. Updating the story

These four elements are also the primary criteria that media specialists and educators can use in developing transformative storytelling media and assignments (Baer, Carmody & Hunsinger, 2012; Drake, 2007; Hart, 2011; Pfahl & Wiessner, 2007; Schrader, 2004).

The first element students need is to be able to calm and increase their self-awareness (Frauman, 2010; Pfahl & Wiessner, 2007). Students who feel safe and have some degree of self-awareness are more likely to be willing to accept new concepts and novel experiences. Secondly, as a result of calming, students are able to detach and step back from their stories (Siegel, 2007). The third element is mindfully reflecting with unbiased observation. Students who have gotten some distance from their stories are more likely to be able to have a clearer perspective from which to observe them (Drake, 2007). Finally, having experienced the first three aspects of transformative storytelling--calming, detaching and mindfully reflecting--students have the opportunity to update their story and take in new information (Hart, 2011).

### *Safety and Self-Awareness*

This book shows how the techniques of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction can address the effects of fear, the primary barrier to transformative storytelling. Reducing stress and creating safety are fundamental in preparing students for story work (Schrader, 2004). Mindfulness is especially beneficial for storytelling because it calms students, raises their self-

awareness and makes it possible for them to detach from their stories (Hart, 2011; Siegel, 2007). Only then can they consciously observe and revise their stories.

The importance of the state of our nervous system to learning means that, being aware of, and tending to, students' fear energy is essential to the work of story transformation. However, even a totally safe classroom environment can not fully address the fear energy from external stressors students bring with them or that is brought up by the story itself (Schrader, 2004). This story-based fear is especially inherent in stories that are of a personal nature or that describe traumatic events (Cummings, 2011).

The fear energy from these stories may not only affect the student telling the story but may also trigger classmates, causing them to close down as well (Cummings, 2011). Since it is almost impossible to predict whom any aspect of a given story may affect, it is important to have an internal way of dealing with fear.

### *Internal Safety and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction*

One proven way of dealing with fear internally is the practice of mindfulness. Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction is a program developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn, a professor of medicine emeritus and founding director of the Stress Reduction Clinic and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School (Ga-

zella, 2005). Zinn and his colleagues have led the way in research on the practice of mindfulness. Their work has resulted in using Buddhist meditation techniques to produce an evidence-based program for calming and stress reduction (Gazella, 2005). Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) offers multiple methods for reducing stress. MBSR has been successfully implemented in a variety of settings, including medical clinics and classrooms (Baer, Carmody & Hunsinger, 2012; Mishna & Bogo, 2007).

Fear itself does not have to result in closing down or inhibiting learning; it's how people respond to the fear energy that comes up in them that matters (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). For this reason, teaching students how to be more aware of their fear energy and how to handle it internally is the surest way to promote safety. In this way, students are prepared for anything that may come up even though it could not be seen or predicted. Students can learn how to observe their fear and how to respond to it in a positive way rather than reacting to it and thereby increasing it (Baer, Carmody & Hunsinger, 2012). Best of all, they are learning skills that will be valuable to them throughout their lives.

### *Transformative Storytelling Methods and Media*

The four elements for transformative storytelling also provide guidance for developing methods and techniques for classroom storytelling assignments. These are the criteria used in this book to evaluate three promising classroom storytelling

methods—journaling, digital storytelling and wikis. This provides a guide for media specialists and instructors wishing to incorporate storytelling assignments into their curriculum. It is intended, not only as a guide to using these particular methods, but also as an example of how to use the elements of transformative storytelling to evaluate other methods they may wish to consider or create.

When these elements are incorporated into storytelling assignments and media, students not only learn new things about themselves and the world; they are also taught the process of learning (Stevens & Cooper, 2009). Most importantly, they have the opportunity to be pro-active in that process. Exercising agency in their own education encourages life-long learning skills and habits (Adame & Knudson, 2007; Clark & Rossiter, 2008; Paulus, Woodside & Ziegler, 2007; Shapiro, Kasman & Shafer, 2006).

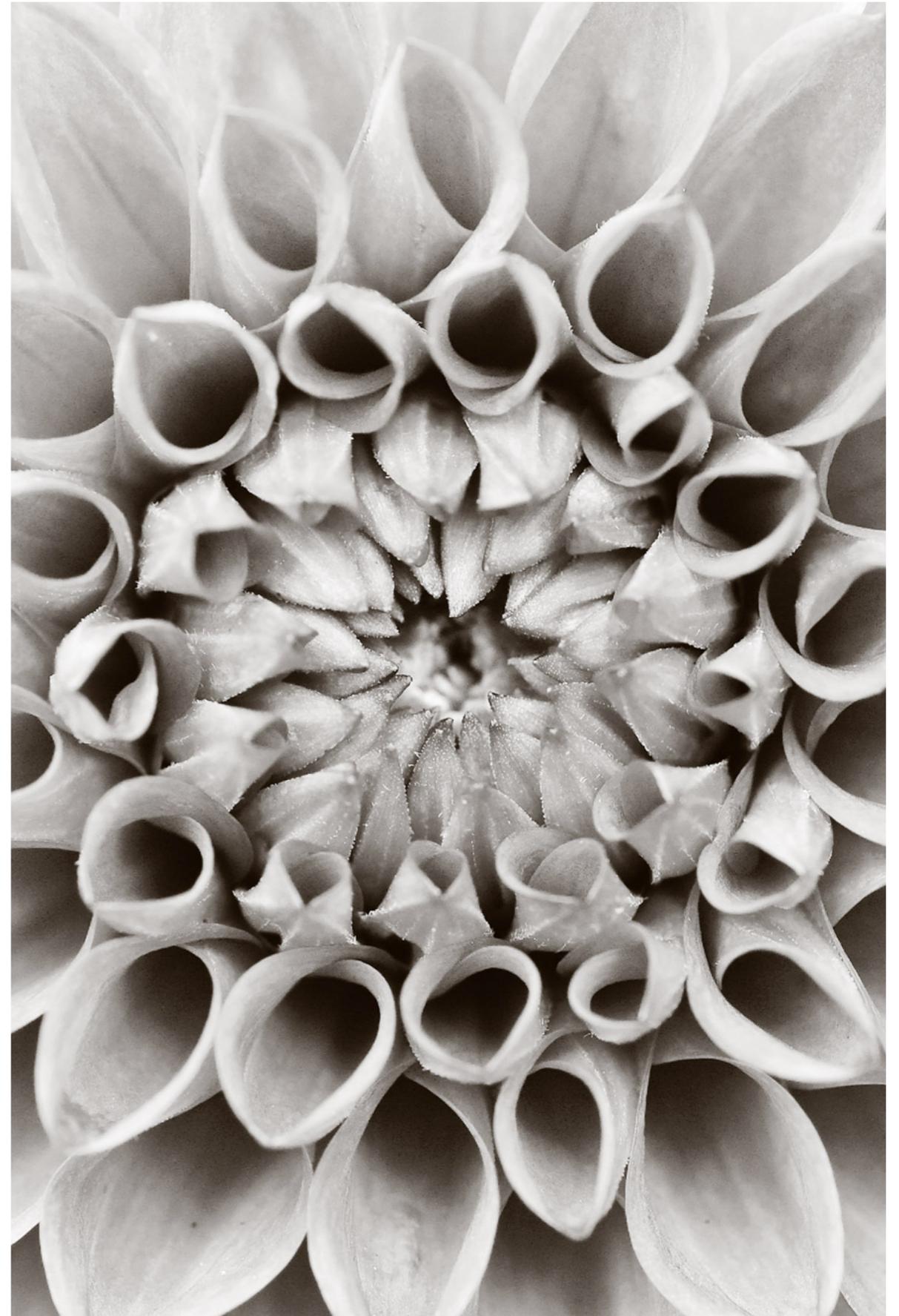
### *A Transformative Storytelling Resource Guide*

Finally, this book aids instructors in determining how they can apply these techniques in their own classrooms by providing handouts, guides, classroom activities and a sample course plan. To that end, a resource guide is included in order to make the information readily accessible. It takes all of the information from the projects and puts it in one convenient location for easy reference.

All of the findings presented in this book result in a storytelling methodology based on a mindful understanding of the challenges students face in the process of updating their stories. It provides a guide intended to encourage instructors to incorporate storytelling into their curricula by showing how it can raise self-awareness and open students up to expanding their paradigms. It offers first-hand advice from experienced professors and a video that demonstrates how to practice mindfulness in everyday life.

# Elements of Transformative Storytelling

A primary goal of transformative storytelling is to encourage students to take risks, work with and update their stories in a novel way. If instructors are to help students achieve this goal, they need methods and media that are mindful of students' need for a safe and creative learning environment. The four primary elements of transformative storytelling outlined in Chapter One provide the guidelines for choosing these tools. The first of these elements is calming and increasing students' self-awareness.



# Creating Safety and Self-Awareness

## MAIN POINTS

1. Knowing how to respond to fear is important for students' ability to be self-aware and work with their stories.
2. Two ways of managing fear:
  - a. Externally - by creating a safe classroom environment)
  - b. Internally - by teaching students Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction techniques

Instructors wishing to implement storytelling assignments need to understand the impact of fear and the importance of safety. This helps them avoid the pitfall of having students use the assignment as a way of reconfirming their story (Rouncefield & Satchell, 2009; Schrader, 2004). Students who use storytelling in this way not only hamper their own learning process; they may also trigger a stress response in their classmates (Cummings, 2011).

Students also need self-awareness; they need to know that they have a story and how much that story influences what, and how, they think, believe, feel and act. When students have no sense of themselves, they cannot see that they have an identity apart from their story (Drake, 2007). This creates stress because when they identify with their story, everything that threatens their story threatens them personally. Conversely, students who know how to calm themselves are able to raise their self-awareness by deactivating their stress response (Disque & Bitter, 1998; Saunders et al., 2007).

There are two ways that researchers have found of providing student safety: externally and internally. Externally, instructors and media specialists need to use techniques to make the assignments, media and classroom feel safe (Paulus, Woodside & Ziegler, 2007; Pronin, 2006; Schrader, 2004; Weingarten & Frost, 2011; Yu, Taverner & Madden, 2011). However, since it is impossible to guard against all potential stressors, teaching students to calm themselves internally helps them develop skills that offer them protection they can access by themselves any time or place. Giving students some control

over their fear is calming in itself (Ritchhart & Perkins, 2000). Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction provides proven techniques students can use to learn this skill (Mishna & Bogo, 2007).

### *Teaching Students How to Create Internal Safety*

The first step of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program involves increasing body awareness, which gradually extends to the environment and finally to the activity of the mind itself (Holland, 2004). Body awareness can be increased through a guided body scan in which participants “focus attention sequentially on parts of the body, non-judgmentally noticing whatever sensations may be present in each area,” (Baer & Carmody, 2008, 24).

To expand awareness, a person can then practice sitting meditation. In a sitting meditation, participants continue to practice body awareness, using the breath as an anchor for their attention. They then expand their awareness to include other activities in the present moment: sounds, thoughts and emotions. The body scan and meditation both encourage observation, non-judgment and non-reactivity (Baer & Carmody, 2008). In the MBSR program, participants are asked to practice these mindfulness techniques for at least 45 minutes.

Since it is important that students understand the concept of mindfulness, Frauman (2010) suggests explaining it in terms of a story that students can relate to. This story should

describe the difference between mindfulness and mindlessness, “disengagement from information in one's surrounding environment,” (Frauman, 2010, 226).

Another useful way to introduce students to mindfulness practice is what Kabat-Zinn (1990) calls the raisin activity. Each student is given three raisins and is instructed to observe each as an object they have never seen before (which, in reality, they have not). The students observe the raisins' many characteristics (e.g., color, texture, smell and taste) as they look at, smell, feel and eventually slowly eat each raisin. This practice helps students appreciate the value of mindfulness, which changes the way we experience and relate to all things in the present moment. It also teaches them that mindfulness meditation is not mystical or a trance-like state; it is a practice of bringing our full awareness to the things we experience in everyday life (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Therefore, it can be incorporated into “routine daily activities such as eating and walking,” (Baer, Carmody & Hunsinger, 2012). Thus, by reducing stress, calming their fear and practicing being aware of what is happening in the present moment (both internally and externally), students can achieve self-awareness; that is, they can see that they have stories and how those stories affect them (Ghorbani, Cunningham & Watson, 2010; Hart, 2011)

### *External Safety: Making the Classroom Safe*

Although teaching students how to calm their fear and take responsibility for their own internal safety is vital, teachers

should also try to make the classroom and the media that the students use feel safe to them (Schrader, 2004). A transformative storytelling approach fosters a safe context in which students can work with, and potentially revise, their stories (Schrader, 2004). Students need to feel that they can freely explore their current beliefs, perspectives, etc. without repercussions in the form of judgment, hostility, nonconsensual disclosure or poor grades (Mannion, 2001). They also need respectful communication with peers and a class structure that provides equanimity for all participants (Schrader, 2004).

According to a survey of forty-seven undergraduate psychology students at Cornell University, the instructor was rated the most important influence in creating an intellectually safe learning environment (Schrader, 2004). In a summary of the survey, which included open short answer sections, students described the following characteristics of an instructor who successfully created such an environment: authoritative but not authoritarian, disclosure of personal experiences, personable physical stance and discussion versus lecture format.

In addition to embodying these characteristics, instructors can encourage students to self-monitor how ready they are to consider alternative ways of interpreting their stories (Schrader, 2004). It is helpful for instructors to keep in mind that students have different ways of learning and are at different places in their development. It is important they respect that some students may not be ready to tell or update their stories. Instructors should be mindful not to challenge students

to extend beyond their “epistemic stretch”, the point at which they feel comfortable questioning their current ways of understanding the world (Schrader, 2004).

While examining one’s story can be an uncomfortable and even fearful process, when done in an environment of safety and support, students can let go of their current perspectives enough to let in new ones (Schrader, 2004). It is crucial that instructors constantly monitor these basic safety aspects, as they form a solid base for safety in the classroom. In addition, each storytelling method contains specific safety considerations.

# Detaching and Stepping Back from the Story

## MAIN POINTS

1. When students are too attached to their story, they believe that they *are* the story.
2. When stories are tied to a student's identity, offering alternative perspectives or encouraging self-awareness tends to result in defensiveness; they will protect their stories (themselves).
3. Students who are attached to their stories may also use storytelling activities as an opportunity to indulge in their drama.

The second requirement for transformative storytelling is detaching from the story. Once students have become aware that they have a story, they need to learn how to unhook from it. They need to step back from the story and allow the possibility of seeing it in a new light (Stevens & Cooper, 2009). Alternately, students who identify with their story believe that they “are” their story. They are so enmeshed in it that they have no awareness of themselves as having an identity beyond the story itself (Drake, 2007; Fulford, 1999). They are unable to see that they are more than their story—that they are the authors of their story.

In addition, identifying with their story makes learners resist information that threatens the basis of that story. As a result, attempts to raise self-awareness result only in reconfirming the current story. Fulford (1999) explains that stories may be so intertwined with one's sense of identity, that if those stories disintegrate people feel as though their existence has no purpose. In an attempt to improve their self-image, people may create life stories that fit their ideal self-perceptions. These have been termed “identity performances,” because people see themselves as characters within their stories (Drake, 2007, p. 284). For instance, a person who identifies as an employee might view their success or failure to be promoted as a sign of their value as a person. Furthermore, any criticism of the person's work might be taken as a personal attack (Drake, 2007).

Because one's identity is so intertwined with their stories, individuals will often put a great deal of energy into build-

ing and protecting them (Disque & Bitter, 1998; Drake, 2007). When students connect their stories with their identity, examining them can become a scary task because they are afraid that if they judge the story, they will be judging themselves. As Stevens and Cooper put it, “becoming aware of the implicit assumptions that frame how they think and act is one of the most challenging intellectual puzzles people face in their lives. It is also something they instinctively resist, for fear of what they might discover,” (2009, p. 43).

When students are so immersed in their story that they are unaware that it is indeed just a story, they may use narrative assignments as an opportunity to self-indulge in their drama or defend their current perspective without any self-awareness (Graham, Rouncefield & Satchell, 2009). In order for a person to be able to transform their story, they must be able to detach from it, so they can step back and create some space around it (Berger & Jung, 2011; Siegel, 2007). This allows them to see it more clearly and with less distortion. Reducing the emotional aspect of the story makes it less dramatic and less prone to the exaggeration of its subjective aspects (Berger & Jung, 2011).

# Mindfully Reflecting with Unbiased Observation

## MAIN POINTS

1. Once a student has detached from their story, they must mindfully observe it.
2. Mindful observation fosters non-judgment, allowing students to let in new perspectives without the filter of prejudice.
3. If students do not practice mindful observation of their story, they will remain in and build limiting stories (stories that are limited to a single perspective that is exclusive to others).

If students have not yet detached from their story, they will still be “in” it (Disque & Bitter, 1998). In that case, it is highly unlikely that they will be able to see their story objectively. On the other hand, if they have stepped outside the boundaries of their narrative, students have the opportunity to practice the third critical element of transformative storytelling: mindful reflecting. Stepping back and reducing their bias affords them the possibility of critical examination (Disque & Bitter, 1998). For this reason, it is crucial that students have first addressed the second criterion and detached from their stories enough to be able to reflect mindfully on them.

Once students have detached from their story, they have the opportunity to mindfully reflect on it in the context of multiple perspectives (Zilber, Tulva-Mashiach & Lieblich, 2008). This is the time when students begin to consider aspects of their story that may be limiting, as well as new angles that could transform them for the better (Pfahl & Wiessner, 2007). In this stage, unbiased observation of the story helps students let in alternative perspectives.

Stories are always a subjective take on the world (Schiff, 2006). However, even though the stories themselves are subjective, it is possible to view them in a less prejudicial way (Drake, 2007). When students can distance themselves from the story, they are able to see it more clearly. Being too close to the story causes our appraisal of it to be distorted (Drake, 2007). Therefore, the distance created in the space of an open mind allows students to gain a less biased view of their subjective story.

If students remain identified with their story and closed down in it, they are likely to spend their reflection time creating a defense of their current perspective (Drake, 2007). When students do this they end up nurturing limiting stories (Disque & Bitter, 1998). Adame & Knudson (2007) provide an example of a limiting story popular in American culture: a story that “defines people’s experiences of psychological distress and recovery in terms of illnesses, chemical imbalances, and broken brains,” (p. 157). Such narratives encourage reliance on remedies that merely treat or fix symptoms, and undervalue preventative and holistic health methods. Such cultural stories have very real implications for health insurance policies, as well as for individuals who adopt an identity that labels them sick (Adame & Knudson, 2007). Once cultural stories become personal stories, we often adopt them as objective reality (Pronin, 2006). Unfortunately, as Pronin says, “Failing to recognize our own biases prevents us from working to correct them,” (2006, 41).

Limiting stories can also result from interacting with our various contexts (McAdams, 2006). Researchers in the fields of narrative psychology and narrative learning have pointed out that many external factors shape stories, including race, gender, economic status (Lee, 2004). They remind instructors and students that the multiple contexts in which our stories exist are “dynamic, socially and politically embedded, and ever evolving,” (Zilber, Tulva-Mashiach & Lieblich, 2008, p. 1048). Therefore, becoming aware of these contexts is an ongoing process.

Understanding how such contexts shape their stories can be an enlightening and empowering experience for students (Lee, 2004). Through mindful reflection, learners may become aware that some of the stories they were taught by their family, culture, etc. are not in line with what they themselves would choose (Zilber, Tulva-Mashiach & Lieblich, 2008).

# Updating and Transforming the Story

## MAIN POINTS

1. Transforming the story means students broaden their current perspective by updating their story with new information and perspectives.
2. The benefits of transformative storytelling are best understood when contrasted with the characteristics of transformative storytelling:
  - a. Limited stories
  - b. Distortion of reality to maintain current stories
  - c. Remaining a victim who defends stories, rather than an agent who creates them
3. Transformative storytelling creates a non-vicious cycle: transformed stories are more open in nature, make them more open to more perspectives and further transformation.

In the first part of transformative storytelling, the student calms and increases their self-awareness by grounding themselves in their body. This makes it easier for them to detach and get a fresh perspective from which they can reflect on it relatively free of bias (Berger & Jung, 2011; Siegel, 2007). Having completed these elements, students can begin the fourth element in transformative storytelling: transforming the story. Transforming the story means that students broaden their current perspective by updating their stories with new information and perspectives (Hart, 2011).

To understand the implications of story transformation, it may be helpful to recall the barriers to transformative storytelling, as these characteristics are the opposite of story transformation. When students are bound by limiting stories, they may unwittingly end up being the cause of their own oppression (Disque & Bitter, 1998; Drake, 2007). They are the ones reconfirming the limiting stories they have inherited from their family or their culture. Students caught in these kinds of stories confirm to themselves, and others, that their current perspective is the only possible way of interpreting reality (Disque & Bitter, 1998; Pronin, 2006). Ironically, they may even be willing to distort reality to make it to fit the paradigm that they consider to be the ultimate truth (Disque & Bitter, 1998). In this way, students are in a sense victims of their stories, constantly building and protecting them from information that does not cohere with their current viewpoint. These students are merely “in” their story, with little self-awareness or awareness of the story itself (Pfahl & Wiessner, 2007).

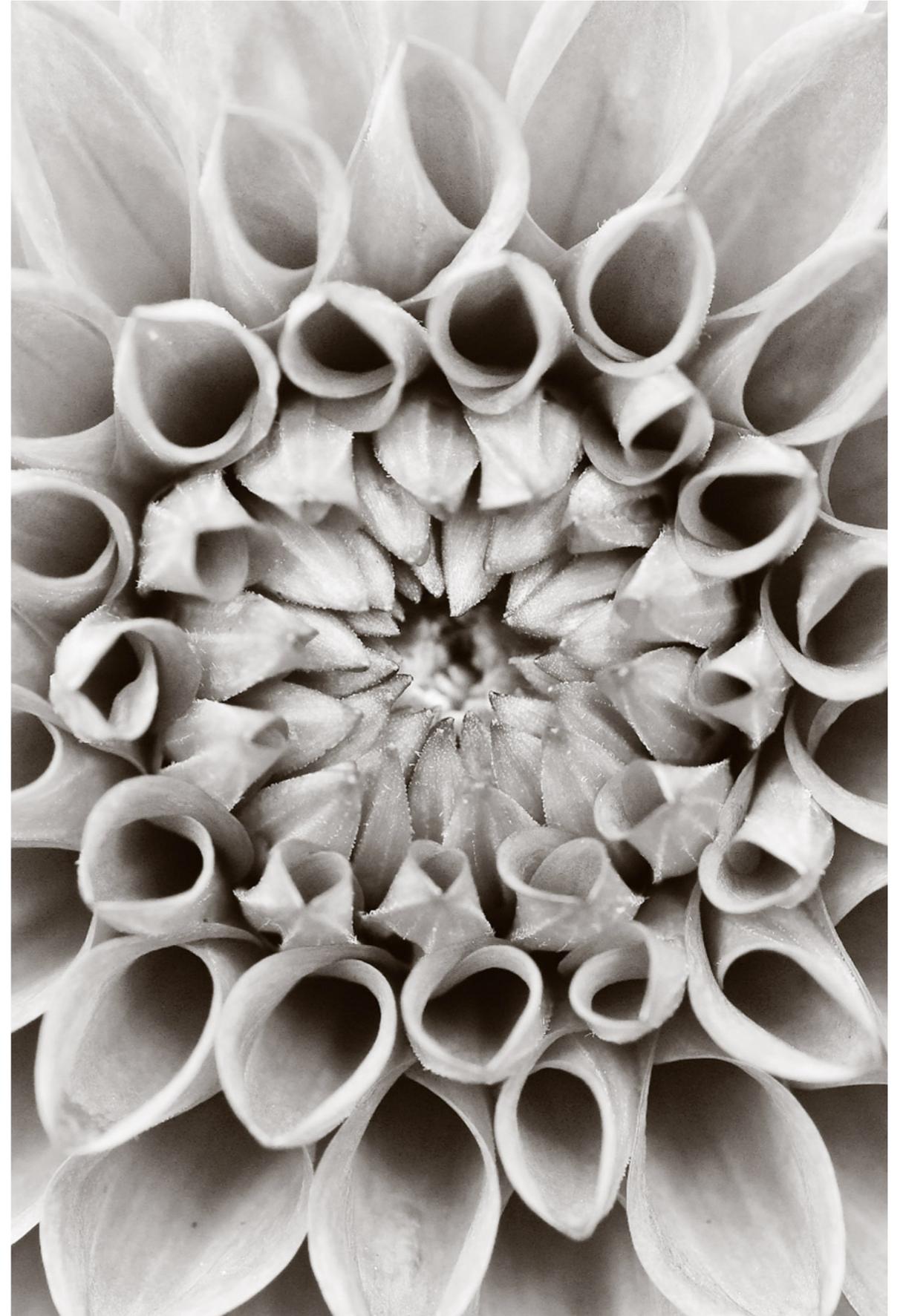
In contrast, a student in the process of story transformation is aware of themselves and of their story (Clark & Rossiter, 2008; Pfahl & Wiessner, 2007). Rather than seeing their story as the truth, they understand (at least to some extent) that there are multiple ways of viewing the world (Mannion, 2001). Conscious and open in the storying process, they are able to choose the aspects of their stories that they wish to change. As an example, a student who engaged in group-storytelling in an online setting transformed a limiting story that held that external influences should guide her behavior. Through listening to other perspectives with mindful reflection, she had an epiphany that she was in control (Paulus, Woodside & Ziegler, 2007). Another student increased the complexity of his story about learning:

I learned that there are different forms of learning and that just because you don't sit down and learn facts it doesn't mean that there has been no learning. Some forms of learning are harder to equate and take reflection and analysis. Learning is not just acquiring facts but also about gaining insights and fundamental understandings about yourself, people, and the world in which we live. (Mannion, 2001, p. 104)

Such epiphanies further open students minds to new perspectives, as they are freed from the narrowed lens of limiting stories. Such transformations result exercise agency, increasing students' sense of empowerment (Paulus, Woodside & Ziegler, 2007).

# Transformative Storytelling Methods

Educators have access to a large variety of storytelling tools and many technologies. This book will focus on methods and media that seem most conducive to transformative storytelling: journaling, digital storytelling and wikis. The elements of transformative storytelling will be used to evaluate these methods and media.



# Journaling

## MAIN POINTS

1. Students must trust that there is no one right way to write, that no one will read their writing without consent and that the instructor will not judge them.
2. Dialogue journaling techniques encourage detachment from stories.
3. Freewriting and the double-entry journaling method encourage mindful reflection of stories.
4. Dialogue journaling, double-entry journaling, peer-feedback from blogs, instructor feedback and the principles of revisionary rhetoric all encourage story transformation.

Journals have long been used in the classroom as a tool for reflection and revision (Stevens & Cooper, 2009). Students can write journal entries on paper in the classroom, on a Word document to email to their professor, or in a blog, allowing them to open up their entries to both professor and classmates (Herring et al., 2004; Mannion, 2001; Reis et al., 2010). Each format offers different possibilities for story transformation, along with limitations.

### *Creating Safety with Journaling*

A review of journaling methods reveals a strong emphasis on safety, the first element of the transformative storytelling approach. A safe learning environment is critical to reduce students' fear, fostering the open awareness necessary to learn. Writing - journaling in particular – can raise many fears.

Many students

have become convinced that they are simply 'bad writers'. Stuck in these negative identities and fearful of failure in academic writing tasks (rather than seeing themselves as learners in the process of acquiring the discourses and skills required in discipline-specific genres), students may subtly or overtly resist writing assignments by turning them in late, leaving them undone or incomplete, or even plagiarizing in an attempt to approximate school's required discourses.”(Fernsten & Reda, 2011, p. 171).

In addition to lacking confidence in their writing ability, students feel pressure to conform to the technical aspects of writing (e.g., grammar, organization, flow, etc.) (Clark, 2001). They may also fear that their work will be judged and possibly given a low grade if their journal expresses an opinion that conflicts with the instructor's (Mannion, 2001; Clark, 2001). Instructors can address these fears in multiple ways.

Mannion (2001) advocates post-structural reflective journaling. Post-structuralism holds that truth does not exist and "full meaning and clarity are not possible," (p. 105). Stripping away the idea that there is only one correct way to write and a single truth to be told gives students the freedom and space to write and reflect without self-judgment or fear of external judgment. Conducting a focus group, Mannion (2001) found that, although a number of students were initially uncomfortable with this lack of structure, they appreciated the safety and found journaling to be both helpful and enjoyable.

Stevens and Cooper (2009) similarly value safety for journaling activity. To create an even greater sense of security, students are not obligated to share what they write with either the instructor or other students. The idea is for students to write without censorship or editing, encouraging them to see aspects of their perspective they may not have been aware of previously. The instructor needs to assure students that their work will be kept confidential (as appropriate) and will not be graded on the basis of their opinions or values.

Stevens and Cooper (2009) also found that when students feel safe – with no need to worry about judgment, poor grades, etc. – they are more likely to write authentically. In his study of undergraduate students, Mannion (2001) found similar results: when implementing post-structural journaling, the majority of students began to journal for themselves and not just to fulfill class requirements. When students are authentic in their journaling, they are more likely to write stories intertwined with their life story. The stories that our life story encompasses contain many of our core beliefs and prejudices (Stevens and Cooper, 2009).

Implementing post-structural journaling techniques does not negate and in fact depends upon clear communication of expectations as well as supportive structures. In a small-scale university study of students completing Certificate in Education Programs (CEP), Otienoh (2009) examined what factors affected students' willingness to continue reflective journaling after completion of their CEP. In addition to logistical barriers such as lack of time, one of the primary reasons listed for discontinuing journaling was lack of supportive structures in the assignments, resulting in "frustration, disorientation and conflict..." (Otienoh, 2009, p. 480). Indeed, supportive structures such as writing prompts, guiding questions and individualized feedback are critical in helping manage students' anxiety (Reis et al, 2010). In sum, instructors who assign journaling need to make clear what is expected of students and give them a sense of direction, without suppressing or discouraging exploration and experimentation.

### *Detaching with Journaling*

In dialogue journaling, students “switch voices” as they journal, creating internal dialogues between themselves and their various stories. Students can create dialogues with their stories, inanimate objects or other people. Stevenson & Cooper (2009) explain that by assuming the other voice in a dialogue, students are able to have greater self-awareness because they have depersonalized and detached their identity from their stories. Similar techniques, such as externalizing conversations, have been successfully used by narrative psychologists (Lee, 2004; Disque & Bitter, 1998). Such dialogues help the learner become aware of and even challenge hidden assumptions in their stories that they would normally be afraid to acknowledge (Stevenson & Cooper, 2009).

### *Reflecting with Journaling*

One way of helping students gain unbiased observation is by assigning them to seek outside sources. Mayo (2001), for instance, asked students to reflect on major events that shaped their personal development from their early childhood on. He encouraged them to “talk with parents, siblings, former teachers, friends, and significant others in gathering historical information about their own development,” (p. 40).

Two types of reflective journaling also aid in mindful reflection: the freewriting and the double-entry notebook methods. In a freewriting exercise, students are instructed to write

for a given time without stopping. They are instructed to let go of editing or judgment, allowing them to write things that they might normally deem unacceptable or irrelevant (Mannion, 2001). In the flow of constant writing without interpretation, students become unbiased observers of their own thoughts and stories.

Berthoff (2008) uses the double-entry notebook in which students record their observations, direct quotes, lists, etc. on one page and on the facing page, interpretations, comments, revisions, etc. In order to make notes on the side of the page designated for observations (without interpretations), students must practice a degree of unbiased observation. The double entry notebook also helps students make these observations as they go about their everyday lives. To that end, the notebook should be small enough to carry around easily, so that students can make frequent entries (Berthoff, 2008).

Practicing journaling techniques in environments that help them calm enhances students’ ability to practice unbiased observation. For instance, Berthoff (2008) sometimes has them make their observations in natural settings. Spending time in nature has a calming effect that can help students see their stories with less distortion, paving the way for the work of transformation.

### *Updating with Journaling*

On the page facing students' observations in the double-entry notebook are interpretations, revisions and new ideas based on the original observations. This is an ideal tool for the fourth stage, transforming the story. The double-entry notebook allows students to engage in a constant "audit of meaning," and to write alternative story lines right next to their original stories (Berthoff, 2008, p. 45). Dialogue journaling, too, can result in revision and story transformation. In engaging in dialogue with their story, students can consciously question its limiting aspects. Instructors can guide students in these dialogues by providing them with supportive writing prompts.

Students can also experiment with new ways of viewing and telling their stories by sharing them with classmates through blogs. Blogs allow students to control privacy settings, including individual posts. Therefore, they can see blogs as a tool for both private reflection and public discussion. It has been found that blogs can foster as much reflection and transformation as face-to-face journaling and discussion. In a study of one hundred and five third year medical students at two universities, researchers compared two groups of students. One group was assigned a traditional essay followed by two hours of face-to-face discussion, while the other wrote asynchronous posts and comments on their peers' posts. Both the posts and the response comments exhibited the same high levels of reflection on their experience, measured by Mezirow's levels of reflection (Fischer et al., 2011).

While discussion on blog sites can result in high levels of reflection and revision, Fisher et al. (2011) point out some limitations of this media. The asynchronous nature of blogs means that a student may wait several days or more to receive feedback to their comments. Discussion, therefore, lacks immediacy and flow. Also, assigning students to provide feedback on blogs does not automatically ensure thoughtful or constructive feedback. In their study of forty-four first and second year college students, Xie, Ke and Sharma (2008) found that peer feedback tended to be superficial. Many comments were "more social (such as "good job," "I agree") rather than providing informative constructive prompting," (Xie, Ke & Sharma, 2008, 23). The authors cite Vygotsky's theory of proximal development, suggesting that instructors address this issue by ensuring that students receive feedback from someone who is at least slightly more capable than they are (either from the instructor or a more capable student).

Alternatively, one study may offer an ideal way to ensure that students receive quality feedback, fostering further reflection and possible story transformation. In a study of students in a Doctoring course at Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University, instructors used the Brown Educational Guide to Analysis of Narrative (BEGAN) to provide students with feedback (Reis et al., 2010). Initially, students reflected on their experience with their patients by recording field notes and responding to a guided writing prompt. They then sent their reflections through electronic mail to a small, interdisciplinary group of faculty. In return, each faculty member re-

viewed and produced feedback using the BEGAN tool, which is as follows:

- Instructors read the student's entry carefully, without making notes, to gain an overall impression of the text.
- Instructors reread the text, this time underlining salient student quotes, key concepts, expressed emotions and reflections.
- Instructors provide feedback, pointing out possible areas for further exploration and reflective questions for the student.
- Instructors critique their own responses, edit, and pause before pressing the SEND key, (Reis et al., 2010, 255).

The purpose of the BEGAN model is to give students feedback that can stimulate further meaningful reflection. It is unique in that it “casts the teacher/reader in the role of an active listener for the authentic voice rather than as a passive receptacle,” (Reis et al., 2010, p. 256). In other words, this model encourages instructors to engage in the same process of reflection that is encouraged in students. It can also clue students into alternative ways to view their stories without imposing perspectives on them, which tends to cause defensiveness.

The authors state that the BEGAN model is also valuable because it can easily be modified for multiple writing assignments using different media, including blogs (Reis et al., 2010). Indeed, such individualized feedback may be beneficial

for helping students recognize limiting aspects of their stories, while giving them reflective writing prompts to further explore these limitations and ways to revise their stories.

Finally, journaling techniques that use the guiding principles of revisionary rhetoric also encourage students to transform their stories. Like Mannion (2001), Jung (2005) believes that writing should be viewed as a process of discovery and as a dialogue between the writer and the reader. Unlike the traditional goals of persuasion or consensus, understanding writing as a dialogue allows both the storyteller and listener to revise their perspectives. Jung's (2005) definition differs from traditional definitions in that she views revision as the goal, not the means to a goal. In other words, the process of revision is where learning occurs, not by achieving a polished product. This philosophy is directly in line with the purpose of transformative storytelling, where updating stories is viewed as the core purpose of education.

# Digital Storytelling

## MAIN POINTS

1. The most important safety consideration is the sharing phase of digital storytelling, either online or in person.
2. The digital nature of storytelling can reduce a student's preconceived notions about what a story will look like. Instead, explore a diversity of media from which a story organically emerges.
3. Media fosters reflection in that images and sounds are tied to many forms of meaning, including emotional. Students can reflect on different dimensions of their stories by viewing different layers of media at a time.
4. Digital stories can easily be enriched through revision sparked by individual reflection or feedback from peers.

The question of how to ensure deep, reflective and transformative learning is currently at the forefront of digital storytelling research (see Barrett, 2005; Jenkins & Lonsdale, 2007). Digital storytelling is the use of basic multimedia tools to tell a story, including any combination of images, text, audio recordings and video. Digital stories can be created using simple software such as PowerPoint and iMovie (Sadik, 2008). With the use of these tools, students are bound only by their own creative limits.

Using multiple forms of media, digital stories create complex layers of meaning, providing endless possibilities for reflection (Rose, 2009). In one study of an oral history collection for Irish immigrants, one of the participants “began by writing a letter to his father. Another participant, Lyubob, outlined a fairly linear and factual sequencing of events...whereas another workshop participant, Edwina, developed evocative prose while writing and sharing her scripts during workshop,” (Alexandra, 2008, p. 103).

Once students have created their digital story, they can further reflect on it by sharing it in a face-to-face environment or online. A new tool called VoiceThread offers a venue for reflection and dialogue around digital stories (Augustsson, 2010). VoiceThread includes built in video and audio recording, so students can create their digital stories directly on the site. They can also post their premade digital stories as a video. The stories then become available for comments in the form of text, audio responses, images, video or drawing (Brunvand & Byrd, 2011).

## *Creating Safety with Digital Storytelling*

The most important safety aspect that needs to be considered for digital storytelling is the sharing phase. Sharing can take place face-to-face in the classroom or asynchronously online, but sharing digital stories in an online environment can be risky. Once a student's story has been posted online, it is subject to outside negative feedback, reproduction and misrepresentation. For this reason, many students often hesitate to post their digital stories online for fear of their safety and loss of privacy (Yu, Taverner, & Madden, 2011).

To ensure a safe environment for discussion and to calm students' fears, it is important that instructors speak openly and realistically about the risks students take in sharing their stories online. Fortunately, programs such as VoiceThread have privacy settings that allow students to share stories only with a closed group, their class (Brunvand & Byrd, 2011). Instructors can then encourage classmates to preserve the confidentiality of their peers' digital stories.

If students still feel uncomfortable sharing stories in an online environment, they can create a false identity for their digital story (Yu, Taverner, & Madden, 2011). Should the digital story be reproduced without their permission, a false identity will protect them. In addition to using pseudonyms and changing any information that might reveal their identity, students can use stock images (Alexandra, 2008). For instance, in the immigrant oral history project, one participant, Zaman, used a stock image to represent multiple aspects of his experi-

ence: "The image of pots on a stove in an industrial kitchen... serves as the pressure point between what Zaman had planned to do professionally in Ireland and the employment Zaman encountered on the ground once he arrived – low paying, restaurant work," (105, Alexandra, p. 2008). Such stock images preserved the privacy of Zaman's family and the physical location of his home, while preserving his story's significance through metaphor.

In face-to-face settings, a common fear in sharing stories with peers is judgment and disrespect (Pronin, 2006). In order for students to feel safe telling stories in the classroom, then, they need peers to listen and respond in a way that conveys respect and empathy. Instructors can, and should, teach students how to practice mindful, empathetic listening. Truly empathic and emotionally intelligent listening – listening that recognizes one's own emotions as well as those of the speaker – requires deliberate practice (Goleman, 1995). Practicing mindfulness relaxation techniques can foster this kind of empathy because they activate the middle prefrontal cortex, associated with emotional balance and empathy (Siegel, 2007). Crane & Soutar (2000) support this claim, explaining that calming the mind has been shown to raise emotional intelligence.

Instructors can also remind students to have an I-thou relationship with others as opposed to an I-it relationship. In contrast to I-it relationships that objectify another, an I-Thou relationship acknowledges the partner in dialogue as a full human being with thoughts and feelings that should be treated

with attention, respect and empathy (Goleman, 2006). Instructors should also encourage students to self-monitor their feedback, ensuring that it is thoughtful and constructive (Kittle & Hicks, 2009).

### *Detaching with Digital Storytelling*

As with journaling and freewriting, digital storytelling can offer students a way to step outside their stories to view them with fresh eyes. Digital storytelling is by no means a linear process, for collecting a variety of media components can be more like a chaotic scavenger hunt. When students come across a medium, they must step outside of their story enough to determine whether this medium fits it. The psychological concept of free-association can also be used as a means discovering our stories (Rose, 2009). As with freewriting, in free-association students openly experiment with different images, music, animations, and silence. Free-association can be thought of as an adult form of “play” (Rose, 2009, 218). Practicing digital storytelling in this way helps students discover and observe their story as it unfolds, as opposed to writing the story in a more controlled, linear and ultimately subjective manner.

### *Reflecting with Digital Storytelling*

Many scholars have recognized that the very nature of working with digital objects that are rich in meaning and emotional context fosters deep reflection for students. As Lipsitz (1997) explains, “memory is produced through objects, images, representations. These are technologies of memory, not vessels of memory in which memory passively resides so much as objects in which memories are shared, produced and given meaning,” (p. 9). Personal photographs, possessions, and even the body are encoded with meaningful aspects of our story and, as a result, such artifacts also more fully convey our experience. For instance, one participant, in telling her story as an immigrant, used an open palm and an eye looking through a peephole to show what it was like to live in poverty (Alexandra, 2008).

Once students have gathered media that are deeply encoded with meaning, they can use tools that foster mindful reflection on that meaning in the context of their story. One way that students can reflect on these images is through VoiceThread, which is commonly used as a tool to examine and discuss the meaning of individual pieces of media (Gao & Zhang, 2012). Students can comment on media choices in their digital stories while receiving additional feedback from other students.

In examining the media they use, students can reflect on the meaning that these pieces bring to their stories. Instructors can assist this activity by providing guided self-reflection

questions. Gao and Zhang (2012), for instance, created a self-reflective assignment by using a PowerPoint file. Each slide contained questions for students to ponder. Each student responded with comments using text, a web-cam and the built-in audio recorder, as well as relevant links, images or videos. This allowed students to see their own reflections in the contexts of other students' self-reflection. While such assignments aid in self-reflection, VoiceThread is not ideal for interactive discussion since students cannot comment directly on one another's comments (Gao & Zhang, 2012).

Another way to stimulate reflection is by drawing students' attention to the ways in which different kinds of media (e.g., audio narration versus still images) have different functions in a story. As an example, Rose (2009) describes a community-based workshop held for immigrant women. The audio narration and the collage of images tell different layers of one participant's story simultaneously: "...as she describes to her mother in the voice-over her reasons for wanting to come to Canada, we are shown image after image of China, images that seem to stand in contrast to the narrator's insistence on her journey to what she calls 'the new world,'" (Rose, 2009). The function of the audio narration was to convey her wish to move to Canada, but the visual media revealed her ambivalence about leaving China. Reflecting on the function of each media helps students see the full complexity of their story.

To aid this type of reflection, instructors can suggest that students literally remove one layer of media. Rose (2009) de-

scribes how she was surprised to discover that her audio narration and her visual images told two contradictory stories. She had created a digital story about her father. When she finished, she assumed that she had accomplished what she had set out to do: write a story that expressed her disappointment with and disapproval of her father, as well as her celebratory liberation from him. Her instructor then invited her to present her story without the audio narration that she had prepared. In watching her story without the narration, she realized that her visual media told a very different story:

I found myself watching – in the silence of the images, image pans, zooms and visual pacing – another untold story, a love story, and a much more ambivalent story....I watched the silent story, the untold story, that had been part of the story I told all along. Here, in these silent images – sunlit portraits of my father holding me as a child, charming portraits of my father and me laughing together, flattering portraits of my father as a young man – was a loving and romantic representation of my father and our relationship – a relationship that had been marred by a range of abuses. (p. 215)

When Rose removed her narrating voice, she helped remove some of the bias from her story – making room for her to see it with beginner's mind. In the process she discovered a new perspective that could potentially expand her story about her father, a very core story. Such discoveries make unconscious stories conscious (Rose, 2009), which alone can result in story transformation.

### *Updating with Digital Storytelling*

When students share their completed digital stories on VoiceThread, they have the opportunity to view (or perhaps listen to) related storylines and feedback that can enrich and transform their stories. Students appreciate being able to view feedback from all classmates on the same page (Augustsson, 2010). Should they wish to, they may also change the privacy settings and share their story with all VoiceThread users. In this way, the process of transformation extends beyond the classroom. The medium itself fosters continuous reflection, as images naturally take on new meaning over time. As one student described in his digital story about quitting smoking, “You take a picture; every time you re-look at it or tell that story to a different person it gains new meaning, “ (Graham, Rouncefield & Satchell, 2009, p. 276).

A study of students in the University of Gloucestershire Accountancy and Second Year Sports Development confirms that digital storytelling fosters story transformation (Jenkins & Lonsdale, 2007). Students shared digital stories as a way of reflecting on their personal development. Moon’s Map of Learning (1999) was used to measure the amount of reflection and transformation that students experienced in both creating and sharing their digital stories. (Moon’s Map of Learning consists of five levels: noticing, making sense, meaning making, working with meaning and transformative learning). Of the four individual digital stories analyzed, three were classified as level four, working with meaning, and one reached the highest level, transformative learning. Twenty-nine digital stories

shared with peers were also analyzed, with less impressive but still promising results. Well over half reached level two (making sense) or higher. The authors are optimistic about the benefits of sharing digital storytelling, stating that “sharing stories encourages a reflective process, especially when storytelling is accompanied by dialogue and occurs in a formalized setting,” (Jenkins & Lonsdale, 2007, p. 443).

# Wikis

## MAIN POINTS

1. To ensure that students feel safe, instructors should reassure students that they need not worry about individual authorship with the wiki format. They should also teach students to be sensitive and respectful in their feedback.
2. Wikis encourage detachment from stories because students must consider their story from their peer's perspective before writing wiki entries. Students also find it easier to recognize potential areas of revision in their own stories when reading others' stories.
3. The nonlinear nature of wikis naturally fosters revision and reflection. Group narratives can also emerge; encouraging further reflection.
4. Wikis encourage story transformation in that they have easy editing capabilities. A wiki platform called WovenStories also encourages story transformation by allowing students to topographically view their stories in the context of multiple perspectives simultaneously.

Wikis are “nonlinear, multiauthored, polyvocal, hyperlinked web documents,” (Tuck, 2010, p. 149). Most wikis have three basic buttons/features: edit, history and discuss link (Kittle & Hicks, 2009). The edit button allows students to edit any part of the wiki, which is made of multiple pages created by learners and teachers alike. Students can edit any page, but usually not at the same time as another student is editing the same page. The history button shows the history of all edits made on a given page, allowing students to see how the current story has evolved over time. Finally, the discuss link brings student to a synchronous chat box. Here, students can chat through text in real time.

These features and more, as I will show, make wikis another ideal tool for transformative storytelling. As an added benefit, educators from multiple disciplines also agree that wikis are user-friendly and intuitive, even for “digital immigrants,” (Ma & Yuen, 2008, p. 298). Although wikis are the primary focus in this section, an example of sharing stories through a threaded discussion will also be covered.

### *Creating Safety with Wikis*

One benefit of the wiki is that its format addresses a common fear among students: loss of authorship. As Weingarten and Frost (2011) explain, students often feel anxiety in collaborative projects, fearing that if they do not claim as much authorship as possible, their grade will suffer. Students also experience fear and ambiguity about the concept of authorship in

general; they often feel pressured to come up with completely original ideas. Such a task seems extremely forbidding and in reality is not possible.

The collaborative format of the wiki, including the area for casual conversation and feedback, inherently breaks down students' fears and beliefs about individualistic authorship. As Weingarten and Frost explain, "the author function, while not actually stripped away, is shifted to an abstract realm, relieved of its immediacy," (2011, p. 51). Instructors can further aid in calming students' fears by encouraging them to let go of their attachment to individual authorship.

In addition to coaching students about listening and responding to their peers, instructors can guide them about how to share stories as well as how to receive feedback. Kittle and Hicks (2009) suggest that instructors remind students that they should only share stories and information they feel comfortable with. Students are often sensitive to feedback, and conversely, students who give feedback are often too cautious for fear of offending another student. Instructors can address this problem by describing the nature of the wiki and of revision. Revision should be viewed as collaborative, constructive and at the heart of learning, and therefore should not be taken personally (Kittle & Hicks, 2009). Students can also help their peers feel safe in disclosing by offering supportive statements (Paulus, Woodside & Ziegler, 2007).

### *Detaching with Wikis*

In preparing to share stories, students must think critically about how their peers will receive them. By considering their audience's perspective, students are reminded that there are other ways of viewing their own perspective. Sharing stories, then, can help students detach from their current story enough to see it from a new perspective. In the classroom, this has been shown to increase reflection and self-awareness (Sedik, 2008).

In addition to gaining distance from one's story by writing it for others, students can also detach from their stories by hearing similar stories from their peers. In a study of four female graduate students using a threaded discussion in an adult development course, students found it easier to question the limiting aspects of their own stories when these aspects were first recognized externally (Paulus, Woodside & Ziegler, 2007). This is not surprising when we remember that detaching stories from one's identity helps people revise them (Stevens & Cooper, 2009). In this case, the students detached their stories from their personal identity by recognizing that the story existed outside of them.

### *Reflecting with Wikis*

The nonlinear nature of wikis allows students to change their stories. Unlike blogs, which tend to list posts in linear chronological order, wikis allow students to change their stories

through rearrangement, embedding new pieces of media or linking to relevant sources (Ma & Yueng, 2008). The fluidity of revision and the constant addition of feedback can serve as points of reflection (Chang et al., 2011).

Wikis also have the potential to become group narratives, which occurs when students' stories interweave and shape one another. Such a group narrative developed in a threaded discussion described by Paulus, Woodside & Ziegler (2007). One characteristic that arose was temporality, which refers to the way individuals organize stories in terms of the past, present and future. Telling stories as a group increased the temporality because peers tended to offer feedback to another's story in terms of how things were in the present or how they might be in the future. Reminding storytellers that their stories are embedded in the fluidity and changeability of time fosters reflection and self-awareness, as they become aware that their stories can be revised in the present to create a different future (Paulus, Woodside & Ziegler, 2007).

### *Updating with Wikis*

Wikis can also aid students in the process of updating their stories in multiple ways. The format of wikis itself, with its easy editing capabilities, promotes revision. Peers can make revisions to any student's content, as well as use the discussion area for casual feedback (Weingarten & Frost, 2011). For instance, if one student wishes to respond to another's story, they can visit the page in which the story was written and add

an alternative ending, link to a separate page to show a related story, or make a comment in the synchronous chat area. Students eventually learn that feedback is not something negative, and that writing one's story can be a collaborative process (Weingarten & Frost, 2011).

Wikis can also allow students to see their story from several different perspectives on the same page. A wiki program called Woven Stories, unlike traditional wikis, formats content in the form of mind maps. Structuring the content in this way is valuable because it "makes it possible to include several storylines simultaneously in one document," (Nuutinen et al, 2010, p. 755).

The benefit of presenting storylines in a way that can be easily viewed topographically is that it ensures that revision is not exclusive. As Nuutinen et al. (2010) explain, students will often engage in "edit wars" in traditional wikis – frequently deleting another's post without the author's knowledge. Such revision is exclusive and can discourage an author's self-disclosure for fear of seemingly judgmental edits. Since mind maps allow all users to simultaneously view multiple perspectives and possibilities for a story, the chances of a student being offended are diminished.

In weaving stories with one another, students can experience epiphanies, realizations that their stories could be perceived differently. Paulus, Woodside & Ziegler (2007) observed that group epiphanies increased the students' sense of agency as well as communion. As they explain, "Agency refers

to an individual's need for autonomy, control, achievement or status, while communion refers to individual's desire to participate in something that is larger than the self...[to] provide their lives with unity and purpose," (Paulus, Woodside & Ziegler, 2007, 302). Such transformations are highly valuable for students in the classroom and beyond.

# Conclusion

## MAIN POINTS

1. Three methods of storytelling - journaling, digital storytelling and wikis - can foster the four elements of transformative storytelling:
  - a. Creating safety and self awareness
  - b. Detaching from the story
  - c. Mindfully reflecting
  - d. Updating the story
2. Transformative storytelling opens students' minds to new ways of perceiving the world. This results in greater levels of self-awareness and agency.

These three storytelling methods – journaling, digital storytelling and wikis – each provide many options for implementing transformative storytelling in the classroom. The techniques outlined within them offer various strategies for using media to fulfill the four elements of transformative storytelling. Whether instructors are using any of the three methods discussed here, trying another method or creating one of their own, the elements and resources offered can guide them through the process.

Because safety is a primary concern for storytelling, it is dealt with on several levels throughout the book. Teaching students Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction techniques helps them manage their fear internally. Instructors can help manage fear externally by creating a safe environment in the classroom. Finally, each of the methods discussed above also has specific techniques for dealing with fear and helping students feel safe in telling, observing and revising their stories.

Using the transformative storytelling elements as a guide, instructors can use any combination of these media and methods in the classroom with powerful outcomes. These strategies allow students to work with their stories in complex ways, such as examining different layers of media in a digital story. They also help students gain new perspectives on them by encouraging collaborative storytelling and reflection.

The research shows that students who engage in these methods can achieve greater levels of self-awareness and reflection. Students can learn to monitor their stress level and

learn how it affects their ability to see things clearly and with less bias. They can learn to calm themselves and open their minds to new ways of perceiving the world. And, most importantly, they can discover what it means to have agency over their own stories and, by extension, their lives.

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