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The art of storytelling pedagogy

Now that you have learnt from our many different ways of teaching through storytelling we offer closing thoughts to further inspire and consolidate your practice of storytelling pedagogy. Teaching through storytelling is not new, its origins began from the development of oral language, and was the prime mode of education prior to the written word. Education that privileges the written word, fact over fiction, and digital technologies have largely shunted oral storytelling to the background. The creation of the printing press brought large spread dissemination of written texts and teaching through these texts. The age of enlightenment forged an agenda of reason and doubt (as the seventeenth century philosopher René Descartes proposed), foregrounding truth and fundamental scientific research, in which no authority is to be trusted, until it is subjected to rigorous sceptical questioning (Bristow, 2017). “Folk and fairy tales were regarded as useless for the bourgeois rationalization process” (Zipes, 2002, p. 3). The legacy of foregrounding reason and authorized truths has spawned a cognitive (disembodied head) focus in western thinking which continues to determine what is truth and untruth and thus what is authorised knowledge and unauthorised knowledge. Stories do not seek to offer “totalizing truths”, but instead provide “local situated truths” (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 4). And digital technologies have largely replaced face to face relational pedagogies with teaching and learning through screens.

The folk tales of education before the written word and printing press are still in circulation

but there is a difference in the roles they now play compared to their function in the past. The difference can be seen in the manner in which they are produced, distributed and marketed. Profit mars their stories and their cultural heritage.

(Zipes, 2002, p. 2)

Many folk tales and fairy tales are mass produced in commercial books and films that tell just for story sake, as a money-making exercise. The role of the storytelling pedagogue is to tell for an educative purpose. Folk and fairy tales were created to share with local communities local knowledges, that is, local contextual language, cautions of their local landscape, cultural values in which to live by for social integration embedded with utopian longings and wishes (Zipes). The storytellers in each of the chapters have carefully chosen the stories they tell and how they tell them with educative purpose. Further, each of their storytelling pedagogies is unique because it is shaped by their values, knowledge/ worldviews and lived experiences and contexts. This we will explain further in the next sections as: value immersed storytelling pedagogy; knowing through storytelling: and being through storytelling, as ways to think of and frame your storytelling pedagogy practice.

Value immersed storytelling pedagogy

Storytelling and stories form the bedrock of cultural heritage: the beauty of languages, relationship in family and community, aesthetics and educational values. The capacities of storytelling pedagogy can create more relational, intercultural, empathetic, responsive learning communities. For a long time, stories have been a treasure of humankind and storytelling by storytellers as key keepers have been the golden key to open that treasure. Livo and Rietz (1986) assert that “if a storyteller dies without passing on their stories, a treasure can be lost that is unretrievable ... the heart of a culture, its teaching, and its memory disappear forever” (p. xi). Fortunately, storytelling pedagogy has been revived by teachers, educators and researchers in Australia and Asia who cherish the treasure for preserving cultural knowledge, promoting active citizenship, creating sustainability in education, and innovating language teaching.

When you tell a story about your life with your relatives, friends or colleagues, you are sharing what you value. These moments really deepen your feelings, thinking and

recalling of what resonated with you. That is your unique storytelling. Anyone at whatever age can be a storyteller with a story to share. A story is a fundamental genre through which we make sense of our experiences and evince cultural values. Therefore, a storyteller can live these values through the stories they tell.

Storytelling pedagogy that foregrounds cultural values enables understanding of humanity concepts with the children, the children with disabilities, students, adults in communities, families and friends so that these listeners can express their feelings, ask questions, and exchange ideas. It enables children's agency as meaning-makers in their world, which aligns with the notion that pedagogy should be promoting "worthwhile agency" rather than any form of agency (Renshaw, 2016). Each author in this book has endorsed their own way to share the values. Many of the authors keep alive cultural heritage through their storytelling pedagogy.

Michael Jarrett storytelling pedagogy is informed by Gumbaynggirr values. He keeps Gumbaynggirr cultural values alive through storytelling in Gumbaynggirr language. He creates and tells stories of culturally significant places and totems as a way to preserve his Gumbaynggirr values.

Wajuppa Tossa and Prasong Saihong's storytelling pedagogy is driven by valuing the preservation of Isan and Lao language and cultural stories, with their university students to empower the next generation of learning. Prasong also shared how he values all children experiencing the joy of storytelling, adapting stories and pedagogy to match age, abilities and needs.

Anamika Bhati and Nupur Aggarwal value cultural diversity and whole-body communication. These values come through their storytelling by finding, adapting and

delivering stories through lively dramatic performance that meet the cultural and learning needs of their audiences, with sensitivity and awareness of the diversity in the classroom.

Karine Lespinasse, Eiko Matsui and Etsuko Nozaka foreground the Japanese value of *kyokan* (empathy) through the Japanese tradition of Kamishibai stories. They use Kamishibai stories as an educational tool for elementary school children to understand their cultural values immersed and emerged in their storytelling.

Swee Yean Wong values her Chinese cultural heritage, language and being person-centred. She relayed how her storytelling practice grew in the immersion of her values through her pursuits of coming to know more of her cultural heritage, through finding ways to teach Chinese language through storytelling, and through crafting stories relevant to the audience that include them as active participants.

Thao Nguyen values joy and freedom in holistic learning for young learners. She realises these values can be shared truly when children learn English as a foreign language with stories in the classroom which are very popular in Vietnam. Thao prioritises joy per se as the motivation for learning and also giving prominence to children's rights and freedom of expression through imaginative learning and storytelling.

Anna Jarrett values nature and creative expression for all. Through her storytelling pedagogy she evokes empathy and care for nature and creative expression invitations attuned to differing audiences, however isolated they may be.

Louise Phillips values equity and justice for all beings and all people regardless of age being active contributors to community social cohesion. She transforms real life stories into educational storytelling to cultivate empathy, compassion and social action with young children.

Values guide the choice of stories we tell, how we tell and what we invite listeners to do with the stories. Here are some questions to guide your thinking about how values inform your storytelling pedagogy practice.

Prompts to guide your practice:

- Why do you choose the stories you choose? (think carefully about the values that guide choice and educative purpose of sharing each story)
- How will you manifest these values in your storytelling? (e.g., making them become visible, perceived by listeners, or reflective)
- What do you learn from the listeners' valuing these values?

Knowing through storytelling

Stories hold knowledge. We each hold different knowledges, accumulated through our live experiences and shaped by our culture, context and opportunities. With this book focussing on the practice of storytelling pedagogy in Australia and Asia, the ancestral roots of knowing are eastern ways of knowing, which are intuitional and universal, with philosophy entwined with spirituality (Krishnananda, 2021). With western thinking in circulation across the world through colonisation, media and internationalisation, the foregrounding of individualism, as Socrates espoused with 'know thyself' (Green, 2018) and empiricism (based on observed evidence) fuelled through modern science is also entangled in ways of knowing in Australia and Asia. Collective cultural knowledge holds great esteem in Aboriginal Australian ways of knowing, and in Indian, Thai, Chinese, Japanese and Vietnamese ways of knowing.

Michael Jarrett shares Gumbaynggirr cultural knowledge through his stories. With Aboriginal Australian culture being the longest living culture, the storied knowledge Michael shares are living treasures for his clan and all of humanity about how to live sustainably with all other beings.

Wajuppa Tossa and Prasong Saihong share cultural and linguistic knowledge embedded in folktales of North-East Thailand, also to preserve cultural knowledge for the Isan region, which is understood to be approximately 6000 years old and one of the most archaeologically rich areas of Southeast Asia (ref).

The preservation of Indigenous languages, such as Isan and Gumbaynggirr, through cultural stories is essential “for ensuring the continuation and transmission of culture, customs and history, but it is also important to address biodiversity loss and climate change” (United Nations, 2016). These languages and stories hold ancient wisdom of living in particular biodiverse places.

Anamika Bhati and Nupur Aggarwal, also keep alive ancient cultural knowledge through panchatantra storytelling pedagogy originated from approximately 300–500 BC, in India, in which story holds a ‘tantra’ offering insight to inner fulfillment (the entanglement of spirituality and philosophy).

Karine Lespinasse, Eiko Matsui and Etsuko Nozaka see that the Japanese *kyokan* (to feel at one with others) way of knowing is enhanced through the Japanese visual artform of kamishibai. The storytelling pedagogy they showcased is a way of knowing through imagery and feeling with others.

Swee Yean Wong’s way of knowing through storytelling is shaped by making Chinese language accessible to young Singaporean children, just as Thao Nguyen’s storytelling pedagogy makes the English language accessible and enjoyable to children in Vietnam.

Anna Jarrett explicitly names that she thinks, lives and breathes as a storyteller, and thus constructs all knowledge through story/telling. This was illustrated in how she co-

constructed with her local community storied knowledge of the local endangered shorebirds to activate conservation action and documented knowledge through the creation of *The Birds, The Sea & Me* book.

Louise Phillips draws from Hannah Arendt's (1958/1998) proposition that we can only know who somebody is by knowing the story in which she or he is the hero, who shows courage to speak and act. Louise knows the world through people's stories, of overcoming injustices, of enabling access and equity for all beings. She sees storytelling as the most efficacious way she knows to enable broad audiences to know and feel the lived realities of other's plights.

In sum, all authors/storytellers in this book see that story and storytelling enable knowing what it means to be human.

To know how to live sustainably with local flora and fauna, as Michael shares

To know how to respect ghosts/spirits as Wajuppa and Prasong share

To know how humans and monkeys can work together as Anamika and Nupur share through a panchatantra

To know about self-confidence, hunger and impact of war as Karine, Eiko and Etsuko share through kamishibai storytelling

To know how to be friends as Swee shares through Chinese language storytelling

To know how to imagine as Thao shares

To know our roles as humans to care for other beings and to make meaning through stories as Anna shares

To know we have a responsibility to care and stand up for others as Louise shares.

We share this knowledge through messages embedded in the stories that grow and settle on consciousnesses over time. This is the real beauty and extraordinary potential of knowing through stories, that the knowledge gifted is not explicit, but implicitly layered as noted in Chapter One that "storytelling reveals meaning without the error of defining it"

(Arendt, 1970, p. 105). Meaning in storytelling is never definitive, as listeners create meanings applicable to their lives and experiences. And as Benjamin (1955/1999) noted that the art of storytelling is “to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it” (p. 89). As storytellers, we offer stories as an invitation to knowing about the world, others and self.

Prompts to guide your practice:

- Get to know the stories of your origins, so your sense of knowing is rooted.
- Know the stories of the places you are connected to.
- Think carefully about what you want others to know in the crafting of the stories that you tell.
- Attend to the creative writing adage ‘show don’t tell’: describe what you see, so that listeners can curate their own meaning/ knowledge.

Being through storytelling

In the divergence of today's society, different beliefs and values inform different ways of being. We all have different ways of being storytelling pedagogues, though we recognise there are some commonalities. We see being through storytelling encompassing identity, global citizenship, agency, being curious, animated and truly alive.

First of all, we all claim the identity and way of being as storytellers, one of the oldest professions. The authors seem to conceive “reality” as not separate from us but rather constructed and co-constructed and as subjective-objective reality, co-created by the mind and the given cosmos (Lincoln et al., 2011, p. 102) through their storytelling practice (both conceptual and practical). Michael’s storytelling retains a distinctly Aboriginal identity through growing up with storytelling in the Aboriginal reserve and by learning his culture and language again. He persistently locates his identity in place and the landmarks where he tells stories in real time to live his culture, his language and his love for the land. Thao sees that through storytelling, she found out who she is and can be as a teacher, that is a storytelling

teacher. Similarly, we encourage others to take up the call and embrace being storytelling teachers.

Then as storytellers we embrace relationality and global citizenship through foregrounding relationships with listeners and instilling a sense of being in a worldwide community through coming to know the world together. For example, Anna inspired a thoughtful response to the shorebirds, with her students when she and the local rangers shared stories to connect with the birds and their habitat. Louise awakened compassion and responsibilities with young children in Australia through sharing the everyday hardship of children in bonded labour in Pakistan, appealing for children's active citizenship and social changes through a global thinking and acting mindset. Wajuppa and Prasong nurtured relationships with Isan communities and have shared Isan knowledge globally.

Storytelling is a lively and interactive way of being and so promotes agentic listeners. The children in Anna's Shorebird project were open, curious, initiating, critical, creative and willing to share in the storymaking activities to protect the endangered shorebird. All of the chapter authors relayed how children exercise their agency as active participants and learners in their storytelling. In so doing, storytelling softens the demarcation between the roles of teacher and student, and as the authors recommend to welcome joy, sensitivity, curiosity, action, and diversity in the classroom for children to achieve their best performance. Through agentic interaction in story, storytellers and listeners are very much awakened and alive in the story. All gathered in the story are fully present in the moment with each other in the story. This aliveness and presence is central to many Indigenous ontologies, such as Uncle Bob Randall explained in the documentary *Kanyini* (2012) "it's about being alive." This aliveness in the moment fuels curiosity and wonder. Storytelling certainly sparks curiosity, listeners are motivated to learn and want to know more. The aliveness of storytelling can be captured in carefully curated pauses, silences and stillness to nurture mindful reflection, such as raised in

Chapter 5. Karine, Etsuko and Eiko suggest being mindfully and sensitively attentive to the audience's being without any distraction, leaving silent moments for reflection. Another way of animating the story.

There are different worlds out there whose doors might be either open, closed or forgotten. We have tried to open most of them with and for the learners through our stories and storytelling, consociating our beings within us and with others. Our storytelling pedagogy way of being seeks to nurture humanity, justice, compassion, love, hope and freedom for the next generations.

Prompts to guide your practice:

- How do you perceive yourself in this world, in your profession and in connection with students?
- Who are you as a storyteller and your audience as listeners in your storytelling?
- How will you communicate the idea of global citizenship to your listeners including children and adult learners?

All that we offer throughout this book on storytelling pedagogy are beginnings. We see storytelling as powerful pedagogy to invite curiosity and inquiry about an issue, as experience, an event, or a perspective. The storytelling is the beginning, then listen carefully to what the story and listeners invite for further inquiry and action. Through storytelling pedagogy we value stories and storytelling for their relational, responsive, and empathetic way of knowing and being in the world. We hope you enjoyed this pedagogical adventure located in the rich cultural traditions of Australia and Asia and embrace storytelling pedagogy in your teaching practice.

Have you got a story to tell us?

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