

Storytelling Research: How It Helps Us Understand The Value Of Teachers

Dr. Gary Cheeseman

Associate Professor
University of South Dakota

Dr. C. Susan Gapp

Abstract

This study examines the impact, and perhaps the responsibility, of five teachers by using storytelling as a research methodology. Specifically, how storytelling methodology allows information to organically emerge from the data. Researchers collected authentic data from participants that told stories about how they were inspired by a teacher.

Keywords: Storytelling, Stories, Qualitative Research, Storytelling Research, Teacher, Inspiration

Introduction

This study examines the impact, and perhaps the responsibility, of five teachers by using storytelling as a research methodology. Specifically, how storytelling methodology allows information to organically emerge from the data. Researchers collected authentic data from participants that told stories about how they were inspired by a teacher.

Purpos

The purpose of this study is to perpetuate a research methodology that offers an alternative to the somewhat sterile techniques of the quantitative sector and the somewhat emaciated data that occasionally appears in some qualitative work. It is the belief of the researchers that storytelling research methodology fills a void by enabling the gathering of contextually valuable, humanly interesting, and personally authentic data.

The Study

This study is part of a larger research project that began eight years ago designed to preserve and perpetuate the storytelling research methodology. This study reveals the inspiration teachers bestowed on the storyteller (participant) by analyzing participants' stories of teachers that influenced them in life changing ways.

This study examined 5 randomly selected stories about teachers as told by their former students. The objective was to analyze the stories and see what data, if any, organically emerge from the data.

Contextual Framework

Stories as Inspiration

People have limited opportunities to benefit from hearing and telling the stories that inspire, especially stories about teachers. There are countless data underscoring the important function that story plays in the research process and many inspirational stories about teachers (Hendry, 2007). Many people have been inspired by the wisdom and dedication of unforgettable and extraordinary teachers. Telling the stories of our teachers seems a fitting way to emphasize the value of storytelling methodology and extend the lens in which teachers' impact is measured.

Stories as an Edifying Tool

Stories are an incredible edifying tool; they have the power to teach us what we need to know (Lipman, 1999). Human beings are social creatures that seek meaning through story (Gulyas, 1994). Stories are something that people can sink their teeth into; they help us understand, relate to, and lend closure to the complexities of navigating the world (Rossiter & Clark, 2007) while helping us remember, cope, and critically think (Bouchar, 2002; Gulyas, 1994; Hendry, 2007). Stories can paint moral pictures that teach us to live in an ethically sound and socially just manor (Gulyas, 1994). Storytelling presents unique opportunities for people to confront moral, ethical, and inspirational situations in a fundamentally sound way (Gulyas, 1994). When we synthesize the content of a story with the pedagogy of storytelling, we create an effective learning environment by utilizing an extraordinary learning tool (Lipman, 1999).

Stories, especially personal stories, facilitate meaning in a verbal context because they provide guidance and direction as well as autonomy and choice to the listener (Rossiter & Clark, 2007). This study provides an opportunity for the participant to tell personal accounts of an event that impacted the trajectory of their lives. The storytelling framework within this research study allows the story to add to the experiences of the listener which in turn helps the listener

recognize, appreciate, identify, and even empathize with the story's events (Rossiter & Clark, 2007). This level of association can lead to higher levels of consciousness and awareness (Rossiter & Clark, 2007).

Stories and Social Function

Dunlop (2017) argues that over the last three decades research has shifted to emphasize stories and storytelling. The storyteller and the listener establish deep rooted relationships built on mutual constants ingrained in the consciousness of the participants (Adler, 2012, 2017; Bouchard, 2002). Stories allow people to become conscious of themselves by exploring the lives of others in relation to their own life (Dyson & Genishi, 1994; Kaplan & Machado, 2004).

Bluck, et.al (2005) argue that human beings are a culmination of stories and we basically live a narrative existence. This is especially true in our modern ambition driven world, in the information we gather, and the information that we give through, books, television, the computer, phones, video entertainment, movies, etc (Kaplan & Machado, 2004). "We use the story" and the "story... uses us" (Lewis, 2009, p. 22).

We believe that story and storytelling is important in establishing a human connection and extending understanding by creating relevancy and a deeper context. The argument that we are attempting to make is for the perpetuation of more storytelling in research especially in the field of education.

Literature Review

The Role of the Teacher

In the era of accountability and standards-based reform, teachers are evaluated on student achievement as measured by standardized tests; this type of limited evaluation doesn't measure the humanistic behaviors of teachers, such as attending to the social and emotional well-being of their students that foster positive student-teacher relationships (Orstein, 2015). Supportive positive teacher-student relationships are related to positive school outcomes such as academic performance, self-direction, social adjustment, and classroom behavior (Baker, 2006; Hamre & Pianta 2001; Lippard et al. 2018; Sabol & Pianta, 2012; Valiente et., 2008; Varghese et al. 2019); a teacher's impact on their students surpasses what can be measured in standardized test scores alone (Oriensten, 2015).

Brandt, Hayden, and Brophy, (1975) argued that teacher attitudes played a significant role in teacher behavior which in turn played a significant role in how teachers viewed their own sense of responsibility. Valli and Buese, (2007) wrote about the changing roles and responsibilities placed on teachers in a changing teaching environment, and Schalock (1998) studied a more pragmatic aspect of teacher responsibility by pointing out its relationship with the realities of accountability. Teachers that care for their students, which includes holding high expectations and taking responsibility and action in helping students meet those expectations, create student success (Gay, 2010). Our goal in this research was not to explore the countless aspects of the role of the teacher or teacher responsibility but to point out the fact that these five teachers seem to have taken the responsibility to help their students and changed the student's life in a positive way, according to the participants.

Storytelling and Research

Narrative research establishes authenticity in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of an account of one's life through story (McQueen & Zimmerman, 2006, James, 2002; Polkinghorn, 2007). Macbeth, (2001) argues that the storytelling methodology is a tactical research method that is inductive, exploratory, expressive, and colorful. A number of researchers have capitalized on the depth of storytelling research including Mycroft (2019) in a paper where the author discusses community education. Creswell, (1998) argued that true meaning can only be studied through the participant's voice, and that interpretive researchers focus on "multiple perspectives of stories and who tells the stories" (Creswell, 2007, p. 24). Storytelling is a methodology that emphasizes a particular voice, consequently storytelling gives voice to cultures that do not normally get a voice (McQueen & Zimmerman, 2006). Datta, (2018) explores the essential elements and the value of traditional storytelling for culturally appropriate Indigenous research. In conjunction with Creswell (1998) Richardson (2000) argues that storytelling methodology is a deeply intimate form of research and as such is the best way to study the human experience. There are countless healthcare related research studies that use the storytelling methodology to more easily connect with their patients experiences. Fairbairn and Carson (2002) for example uses the storytelling approach in writing about nursing research. Lapum (2008) adds that storytelling is told from the perspective of those being studied. The objective of storytelling according to Denzin and Lincoln, (2003) is to define the human experience as it is lived. Storytelling investigates the deeper meaning and understanding of the common experience.

Research Design and Analysis

This study used storytelling as a research tool to gain insights into how teachers inspire their students, particularly in life changing ways. Twenty people were asked if they were ever inspired by a teacher; twelve said they were and went on to tell their story. Of the twelve participants, 5 stories were randomly selected for this study.

Participants' stories were recorded, transcribed, categorized and coded for familiar themes. The objective was to identify themes or patterns that organically emerged and rose to the surface and became apparent to the researchers. Because the intention was to gather first-person accounts in context; the order of the story events is important; in a structured interview, a sequence of events may not be conveyed or may elicit only fragments of stories. Prior to inviting participants to tell their stories, they were asked the following three semi-structured interview questions up front: a. Has a teacher ever inspired you to change the course of your life in some way? b. Has a teacher ever motivated you in a way that may have changed the course of your life? c. Has the actions of a teacher ever moved you to change the direction of your life? If the participants responded yes to any of the three questions, they were invited to tell their story.

The Semi-Structured Interview as Part of the Storytelling Research Methodology

Interviews are a method of data collection in which one person asks questions of another person (Glesne, 2006). Interviews are conducted in a variety of different ways; some studies conduct telephone interviews, others use computer technology, but most interviews tend to be face-to-face (Ezzy, 2010). In this study all semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face.

Participants were selected from a data base of people who have agreed to be interviewed. All of the participants were happy to participate and seemed anxious to tell their stories. The interview was divided up into three separate segments. The first set of questions were specifically designed to gather data for this study. The second and third sets of questions were designed to gather research for a separate study. The participants involved in this study will not be included in any further studies conducted by me or my research team.

Gathering data by using interviews has many advantages including a high response rate (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). A skilled interviewer has a great deal of control over the process and can put the interviewee at ease as well as clarify questions immediately (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). In this study the interviewer was experienced and skilled in the interview process.

Open ended questions were used in all phases of the interview including the first set in which participants were asked to answer in the form of a story. The story could be as short or as long as the interviewee wished. The story could be told in any tense or "person" and could include as many characters as the participant wished. The story was completely the participants to tell.

There are also disadvantages in interviewing (Creswell, 1998). One disadvantage is that interviewing can incur costly traveling expenses and can be time consuming (Creswell, 1998). The length of each interview in this study was about 45 minutes. The data collected in this study took a great deal of time to transcribe, analyze, categorize, and code (Creswell, 1998).

Interviews are a form of self-report. The interviewer has a responsibility to assure that all data are accurate (Creswell, 1998). In this study, after the completion of their story, the interviewer asked a series of follow-up questions of the interviewee's stories to verify different elements of the story or to retell some particulars within the story. After a few follow-up questions the participants and interviewer watched the telling of the story on small video screen to verify the accuracy of the story.

The five final participants were selected by a "computer generated" random selection process. The five participants were three females and two males with an average age of 55 years and from various parts of the country. Three of the participants identified as white Anglo-Saxon, one identified as Chicano, and one identified as African American. Three of the interviews took place in the homes of the participants and two took place at the participant's workplace. All participants consented to be videotaped and the interviews were both video and audio recorded to ensure that we accurately captured the story. The recordings have all since been deleted.

The recordings were transcribed word for word to begin the analysis. The five stories were read thoroughly three times each by three different researchers to assure validity and reliability. Each story was categorized independently three different times to ensure accuracy and validity. The data was then coded and recoded independently to assure accuracy and validity.

Stories of Vicarious Experience

Miller (2009) writes about the vicarious personal experiences of people. This type of story, the stories used in this research are stories taken and told from a personal point of view and embedded in the storyteller's own history.

These stories are naturally synthesized with the stories of the listener. Goffman (1974) explains that listeners “empathetically insert themselves” and relive the story as if they were there. All five of the stories within this research are told in a way that enables the listener to become part of the story.

Stories

The following are the stories told by the participants of the study of how a teacher has inspired, motivated, or moved them to change the course or direction of their life.

Story One (Female, age 60)

In March 1971, I was 11 years old and in the sixth grade at an Elementary School in the mid-west. My teacher was Ms. Peterson (pseudonym). It was time for the annual state chess championships. Ms. Peterson was excited when she handed out study guides and the rules that were designed to prepare us for our school tournament. If we did well at the school contest, we could eventually qualify for the citywide contest which would lead to the state tournament and then the National Chess Championships.

Two days before the school chess tournament my family experienced a gas leak in the home that we were renting. We ended up having to evacuate. The day after we evacuated and the day before the chess tournament the house blew up. My mother made arrangements with my Aunt, and we ended up staying with her and her family for quite some time. Everything was chaotic. My mother was going crazy not knowing what to do. She called my teacher to tell her about the explosion and our new living arrangements knowing that the chess tournament was that day. Ms. Peterson called my mother and told her that she thought something was wrong based on a sudden change in her behavior. When I got to school, Ms. Peterson took me into a nearby empty classroom. She asked me if I wanted to pull out of the tournament because she understood how distraught I was. I told her no. I ultimately won the tournament for my school at my age range.

The citywide tournament was the following week and much to my surprise I won again! The state tournament was three weeks away and it was a bigger challenge that I ever had to face before. My Aunt meant well but she had four kids of her own and her house was loud and feverish. So, every Saturday and Sunday Ms. Peterson would drive clear across town, pick me up, and we would go to her house, where she would play chess with me and help me understand what the chess books were saying. After playing several games Ms. Peterson would treat me to lunch at a world-famous hamburger restaurant which was a pleasure that my mother could simply not afford and something that before then I'd never had. We played and studied and studied and played every weekend until the state tournament came. There were more chess players and chess boards than I had ever seen. I went on to win the state championships in my age category but was not able to attend the national championships, but it felt pretty darn good about doing as well as I did. I still have the trophy from the state championships; it sits on my bookcase.

I think about Ms. Peterson and her effort all the time. She was a great caring teacher. I am forever grateful.

Story Two (Male age 60)

My mother was very ill when I was nine years old, so I was sent away to a home for troubled children in 1969. I was a poor student. I failed fourth grade that year and I don't know how I passed the following year. I got through fifth grade but only by the skin of my teeth. I was vastly undereducated going into the sixth grade where I found a unique teacher Mr. Jones (pseudonym). I really didn't feel worthy of being in the sixth grade. I was completely lost. I didn't feel like I knew anything, and I didn't feel like I was ever going to learn anything. The other kids in the class were way ahead of me or so it seemed.

Mr. Jones and I immediately connected. He saw something in me; I never really figured out what that was though. He taught History and really got me interested in history, but I had a really tough time reading the history books, and he knew it, and he knew that I was embarrassed. Mr. Jones told me to come to his room every morning before school, and he would help me with my reading. In fact he taught me to read. When I arrived, he was already reading some sort of historical book. He gave me a book about the Dust bowl, and I began to read. After a while I got to the point where I didn't want to put the books down. Of all my subjects in school, history became my favorite but reading was a close second.

“Jimmy” (pseudonym), he told me, “if you keep reading, if you can comprehend what you read, you'll become smarter and smarter.” After I read all the history books in the small library, I started reading books about the human anatomy and other science books. I couldn't stop reading, and for the first time I began to like school.

The following summer the city had a festival that featured a community Olympics with games and other fun things to do. I was sad that I could not go. I had nobody to go with. I was sitting in a chair at the home for children reading a book about whales when one of the attendants told me I had a phone call. I was surprised because I had never had a phone call before. It was Mr. Jones asking me if I might be interested in accompanying him to the festival the next day. I barely slept that night.

The next morning, Saturday morning, I saw Mr. Jones pull up in front of the home driving a tan Ford Falcon station wagon. It dawned on me that he was there to pick me up. I was so happy. He told me that he had never had so much fun.

After sixth grade the “system” moved me across the state, and I didn’t see Mr. Jones again. Then in 1984 I was on vacation with my family and close to the small town where I went to school for that short time. I decided that I would drop into the school and see if I could reconnect with Mr. Jones. I knew it was a longshot, but I decided to do it anyway. I went to the Principal’s office to inquire and out of the office came Mr. Jones. “Jimmy” he said as I slowly turned around. “It’s been a long time.”

“You still remember?” I asked.

“I will never forget you.” he said, “I have been following your career.”

I was as happy as I had ever been. I call him when I am in the area, a few times a year and we have lunch. He is a teacher that I will never forget. I went on to have a successful career in politics, and I doubt that Mr. Jones knows that he is responsible.

Story Three (Male, age 51)

My Language arts Teacher was the most influential teacher I ever had. Mr. Cortez (pseudonym) taught me how to be a man and strive for a dream. As a Chicano and son of an immigrant worker I never felt like I had much of an opportunity to do what I wanted to do.

My two closest friends and I, we hatched a plan. We were going to break into the school and take the small ice cream packets that were in the freezer in the kitchen. We moved a large garbage container under the window in the gymnasium and climbed on top. It was then that one of my friends lost his nerve and took off running, but my second friend and I were convinced that the plan could still work. As soon as I wiggled the window open, I heard a voice. “What are you kids doing up there?” a man’s voice with a Chicano accent asked. Just then my friend jumped from the garbage container and ran leaving me alone with my consequences. I looked up to see that it was Mr. Cortez.

“What are you thinking? I never would have expected this out of you” he asked over and over again to no reply. I thought I was going to be in deep trouble. Mr. Cortez sat me down and asked a simple question: “Gomez [pseudonym], why are you wasting your life? You have so much potential. Why aren’t you planning for college instead of breaking into schools?” He shook his head “Why would you want to break into a school anyway?”

I thought Mr. Cortez was going to call the cops, but he didn’t. Instead, he told me meet him in his office in the morning. He said that if I didn’t show he was going to turn me in to the cops. I knew he would not, but I was still scared. That next morning I went to his office, and he told me about college. I didn’t know anything about colleges or scholarships. No one had ever thought that a motherless son of a Chicano migrant worker had a future. That day Mr. Cortez explained every possible education option he could think of to me. I took several classes from him, and he was hard on me. He told me that he had to be because he didn’t want to see me fail. He often stayed after class to answer questions and help with other things that made my life a little easier.

Thirty-seven years later I work for the state department. I have a Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota, and I was able to buy my father a house before he passed away. But where would I be if a truly caring teacher had not taken the time to speak to me? It was without question only his confidence in me that I succeeded. Today, in addition to my career as a diplomat, I oversee the building of housing and schools in third world countries.

Story Four (Female, age 57)

I am both happy and proud to share why I wanted to become a teacher. I worked very hard throughout my life. I didn’t think much about school or being a student, in fact I really didn’t care much about school at all until I was about 13 years old. I have always said that this is when my education started. I was a “foster home” child. In fact, I spent most of my life in many different foster homes.

I was about 3 years old when I was taken from my mother and placed in an institution for unwanted children. This institution housed mentally disabled children; they called them mentally retarded back then, and children like me “Children with no hope.” as well. I was there until I was 10 years old. Some of the staff would call me “retard.” I hated it.

Then, this couple decided that they wanted to adopt. These people became my family. After a short time, they (the school) placed me in a special education school for “mentally disabled” children. I spent a few years there until my parents decided to let me try public school. This was good for me. I had an opportunity, something that I was not used to having.

It was there that I met Mrs. Allen (pseudonym) almost immediately. She was a Junior high school teacher. She was absolutely incredible. I could see in her eyes that she cared. She smiled at me when she saw me, and I knew that it was sincere. She took me under her wing. She seemed to understand something about my life.

She and I met at school on the weekends, and she worked hard to help me get caught up with the rest of the class. She was more devoted to her work than anyone I had ever seen but most of all she was kind. In fact, she is the reason I am a teacher today. She is the one who inspired me to become the teacher I am today. She inspired me to get my teaching degree in Elementary Education and Special Education. I have dedicated myself to helping children who are in the same situation that I was growing up. Being a teacher gives me a unique perspective on so many of my students. I know that Mrs. Allen would be proud of me if she were alive. I owe so much to her. I found out later that she came from the foster care system as well.

Story Five (Female, age 49)

I am so glad that I have the opportunity to tell my story because I have never fully told it before. I started out in the social work field. I saw a lot of burn out and frustration all around me, and I started to see it in myself as well. But it was during this period that I began to realize that education was clearly the answer to many of the problems facing young families and children. It was then that I decided to make a life change. I thought that I could have a greater impact by being a teacher. I felt that social work was repair work that needed to occur after the “fact” and that education addresses problems before the “fact.” I felt that education provides answers to questions that have yet to be asked.

I got my teaching degree, but I was struggling in my job. I was teaching fourth grade and finding the job both frustrating and incredibly difficult at the same time. There were times when I would go home at night and cry myself to sleep. One day I was in the teachers’ lounge/lunchroom and I heard a female teacher, a woman named Emily, (pseudonym) speaking with a couple of other teachers about a troubled child that they were attempting to deal with. She was very calm in her demeanor; she had a very soft voice, and was casually dressed in blue jeans and a t-shirt that read, “Teach Me to Learn.” The teacher was on a different team. She was a second-grade teacher that I had seen only occasionally, but I had been hearing really good things about her and her teaching.

One day, after a tough outing, I saw the teacher directing children to the correct busses after school. I decided to approach her and pick her brain a little bit. I asked her how she does it; how she copes and does such good work. She said she understood, and that she could see that I was “stressed out.” She said that “I wasn’t always this way” and that she worked very hard to overcome so many things. She then said that she understood. That one sentence set me at ease; I knew I wasn’t alone. We hit it off right from the get-go. She began to meet me after school and discuss the art of teaching. We met once a week for an entire school year. We would have coffee, tell our stories, and she taught me what it was to love the children rather than just teach the children. My entire life changed because of her. I started to do things differently and act differently. I learned how to teach children, not just subjects. This was over a decade ago; we still meet once a week. She was my greatest teacher and inspiration. Because of her, today I meet with other teachers around me and try to share what Emily shared with me.

Results and Discussion

This study represents the lived and unique experience of five people. The results of this study are a small portion of a larger study that illustrates the importance and relevance of storytelling as a research method by analyzing the inspiring stories of five teachers. Three distinct phenomena emerged from the data; identify, empathy, and action. We will discuss each phenomenon below.

Identifying Phenomenon

Through no fault of her own Participant 1 (P1) was living through a tumultuous period in her life. Ms. Peterson, her teacher, thought that something might be “wrong” and it might adversely affect her ability to perform. Ms. Peterson’s ability to recognize a change in behavior is an important part of being an effective teacher.

Perhaps it was Participant 2's (P2's) potential that inspired his teacher, Mr. Jones. P2 displayed a willingness to learn but he struggled with his reading ability. Mr. Jones seemed to understand the issue that prompted concern for his student.

"He saw something in me." P2 said in his story.

Participant 3 (P3) was caught doing something illegal by his teacher, Mr. Cortez. This event exposed a certain "expectation" that Mr. Cortez held in his student.

"What are you thinking? I never would have expected this out of you", stated Mr. Cortez.

P3 thought his teacher was going to turn him in, but he did not. P3's standing seemed extremely important to Mr. Cortez. Both P3 and Mr. Cortez were Latino which could be a factor. One thing is certain, Mr. Cortez was moved when seeing P3's tangible position.

Participant 4 (P4) and Mrs. Allen seemed to have an unsaid relationship from the beginning.

"She (Mrs. Allen) seemed to understand something about my life." P4 revealed in her story. Perhaps Mrs. Allen knew about P4's background very early on. It wasn't until the end of the story that P4 disclosed that Mrs. Allen came from the foster care system. It seems that growing up in the foster care system is an experience that only someone living in the foster care system can fully understand.

Participant 5 (P5) and Emily had a common experience they both ended up as teachers. Emily was a seasoned colleague whose professional trials and tribulations were similar. Emily recognized P5's stress and realized that she could help.

Empathetic Phenomenon

Empathy is having the ability to understand and share in the feelings of others. It is to understand another person's thinking and the emotional state of those thoughts (McAllister & Irvine, 2002). It is looking at a particular situation from another person's point of view instead of your own. It differs from sympathy, where one is moved by the thoughts and feelings of another but maintains an emotional distance or is not moved to action (McAllister & Irvine, 2002). In the stories above, all of the teachers become emotionally connected to their students and are moved to action. They all sacrifice the same thing, time.

Empathy does not come naturally for everyone. The fast paced technologically focused world in which we live often distracts us from making personal connections with others (Bar-On, 2005). Empathy is an important part of teaching (Bar-On, 2005). Teachers are responsible for the wellbeing of many individuals both in the classroom and out of the classroom (Bar-On, 2005).

Ms. Peterson empathetically told P1 that she did not have to participate in the tournament based on what was going on in her life. Ms. Peterson not only provided a way out of the tournament, she also provided support for her continuance. Perhaps P1 felt supported by being given an option.

P2 wanted to learn about history but he was embarrassed with his reading ability. Empathetically Mr. Jones offered him a way to overcome his embarrassment and learn about history at the same time.

P3 tells of how Mr. Cortez empathetically decided to keep the illegal incident between them and not to alert the authorities. It is difficult to speculate what might have happened to the boy if the teacher would have involved the law.

P4 told about her teacher, "She was absolutely incredible. I could see in her eyes that she cared. She smiled at me when she saw me, and I knew that it was sincere.

P5's teacher revealed her empathy in one word when she said she "understood." After that statement P5 knew that she wasn't alone.

All five storytellers shared a commonality at the time of their stories; they were willing to trust the teachers and accept what the teachers were offering.

Action Phenomenon

Empathy is having the ability to understand and share in the feelings of others. Action follows empathy. Action is when someone is empathetically moved to do something. Action is tangible it is how you respond to your sense of empathy (Bar-On, 2005). People can be sympathetic and not take action but in this study all teachers acted on their feelings of empathy.

One action emerges from all five stories. Every teacher gave their time. Time is a valuable commodity, fortunately time was something the teachers in these stories were willing to sacrifice.

“Every Saturday and Sunday Ms. Peterson would drive clear across town, pick me up, and we would go to her house, where she would play chess with me and help me understand what the chess books were saying.”

P2 told, “Mr. Jones told me to come to his room every morning before school and he would help me with my reading in fact he taught me to read.”

P3 in his story said Mr. Cortez explained education options to P3. “I took several classes from him and he was hard on me. He told me that he had to be because he didn’t want to see me fail. He often stayed after class to answer questions and help with other things that made my life a little easier.”

P4, in her story said, “She and I met at school on the weekends, and she worked hard to help me get caught up with the rest of the class.”

P5 described a colleague teacher who gave of herself, “She began to meet me after school and discuss the art of teaching.”

All five teachers gave their expertise and several of the teachers featured in the stories gave resources such as money, food, or friendship.

Conclusion

Emotions play an important role in the teaching profession. Teachers are expected to establish and maintain a learning environment conducive to every child’s needs. In many cases this means actively maintaining a passionate and empathetic demeanor while dealing with the stress and daily needs of the students, even when students misbehave. All five teachers in this study possess high levels of altruism.

After analyzing the stories about these five teachers it is clear that one of the most important aspects of teaching is dedication. The participants told stories of teachers that identify issues by listening to what is going on with their students not just with their ears but with their hearts. They not only shape the academic goals of the students’ but they are willing to sacrifice important aspects of their own life such as time and money. The teachers in these stories are dedicated to helping their students succeed; it is clear that the teachers featured in this study do what they do because they possess a certain level of caring and empathy.

Story researchers are searching for pathways in which to understand and then present real-life experiences through the stories of the research participants. The philosophical underpinnings of storytelling research are that storytelling allows access and then exposes the lives of real people in real situations dealing with real life.

The realities of the students in this study were complicated. The listener can comprehend the complexities by understanding the situation through story. Life’s complexities become manageable within the story. The stories in this study capture the portion of the storyteller’s life as well as the life of the listener. When the stories were told they became familiar, informative, and relevant for those who hear them. In this way, stories are brought to life. The story themes within this study provoked, inspired, and initiated action. When scholars approach stories in this way they create a cultural phenomenon that can be used to develop high quality research leading to critical understandings.

References

- Adler, J. M. (2012). Living into the story: Agency and coherence in a longitudinal study of narrative identity development and mental health over the course of psychotherapy. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 102*, 367–389.
- Adler, J. M. (2017). Research methods for studying narrative identity: A primer. *Social and Personality Psychological Science, 8*, 519–527.
- Ames, R. (1975). Teachers' attributions of responsibility: Some unexpected nondefensive effects. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 67*, 668–676. [http://doi:10.1037/0022-0663.67.5.668](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.67.5.668)
- Baker, J. A. (2006). Contributions of teacher-child relationships to positive school adjustment during elementary school. *Journal of School Psychology, 44*(3), 211–229.
- Bluck, S., Alea, N., Habermas, T., & Rubin, D. C. (2005). A tale of three functions: The self-reported uses of autobiographical memory. *Social Cognition, 23*, 91–117.

- Bar-On, R. (2005). The impact of emotional intelligence on subjective well-being. *Perspectives in Education*, 23, 41–61.
- Brandt, L.J., Hayden, M.E. and Brophy, J.E. (1975). Teachers' attitudes and ascription of causation. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 67, 677–682. <http://doi:10.1037/0022-0663.67.5.677>
- Bouchard, N. (2002). Narrative approach to morale experience using dramatic play and writing. *Journal of Moral Education*, 31(4), 407–422.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007) *Qualitative inquiry & research design*. Sage Publications
- Datta, R. (2018). Traditional storytelling: an effective Indigenous research methodology and its implications for environmental research. *International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 14(1), 35–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1177180117741351>
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2003). *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials*. Sage Publications.
- Dunlop, W. L. (2017). The narrative identity structural model (NISM). *Imagination, Cognition, & Personality*, 37(2), 153–177. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026236617733825>
- Dyson, A., & Genishi, C. (Ed.). (1994). The need for story: Cultural diversity in classroom and community. National Council of Teachers of English.
- Ezzy, D. (2010). Qualitative interviewing as an embodied emotional performance. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(3), 163–170.
- Fairbairn, G. & Carson, A (2002). Writing about nursing research: a storytelling approach. *Nurse Researcher*, 10(1), 7–14. <https://doi:10.7748/nr2002.10.1.7.c5875>
- Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. Teachers College Press.
- Glesne, C. (2006). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Pearson.
- Gulyas, C. (1994). Reflections on telling stories. *English Education*, 26 (3), 189–194.
- Hamre, B. K. & Pianta, R. C. (2001). Early teacher-child relationships and trajectory of children's school outcomes through eighth grade. *Child Development*, 72(2), 625–638.
- Hendry, P. M. (2007). The future of narrative. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13, 487–498.
- Kaplan, B., & Machado, M. A. (2004). Traits and stories: Links between dispositional and narrative features of personality. *Journal of Personality*, 72, 761–784.
- Lapum, J. (2008). The Performative manifestation of a research identity: Storying the journey through poetry [46 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 9(2), Art. 39. <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/397>.
- Lipman, D. (1999). *Improving your storytelling: beyond the basics for all who tell stories in work or play*. August House Publisher.
- Lippard, C. N., La Paro, K.M., Rouse, H.L., Crosby, D.A. (2018). A closer look at teacher-child relationships and classroom emotional context in preschool. *A Child Youth Case Forum*, 47, 1–21.
- Macbeth, D. (2001). On “reflexivity” in qualitative research: Two readings, and a third. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7(1), 35–68.
- McAllister, G., & Irvine, J. J. (2002). The role of empathy in teaching culturally diverse students: A qualitative study of teachers' beliefs. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53, 433–443. <http://doi:10.1177/002248702237397>
- McQueen, L. & Zimmerman, L. (2006). Using the interpretive narrative method in interdisciplinary research projects. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 45(11), 475–479.
- Mycroft, L. (2019). A world in miniature: the storytelling potential of research offcuts. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 24(2/3), 251–267.
- Ornstein, A.C. (2015). Critical issues in teaching. In Ornstein, A.C., Pajak, E.F., & Ornstein, S.B. (Eds.), *Contemporary Issues in Curriculum 6th ed.* (pp. 69–87). Pearson.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (2007). Validity issues in narrative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(4), 471–486.
- Richardson, L. (2000). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 923–948). Sage Publications.
- Rossiter, M., & Clark, M. C. (2007). *Narrative and the practice of adult education*. Krieger Publishing Company.
- Sabol, T. J., & Pianta, R. C. (2012). Recent trends in research on teacher-child relationships. *Attachment & Human Development*, 14(3), 213–231. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616734.2012.672262>
- Valiente, C., Lemery-Chalfant, K., Swanson, J., & Reiser, M. (2008). Prediction of children's academic competence from their effortful control, relationships, and classroom participation. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 100(1), 67–77.
- Varghese, C., Vernon-Feagans, L., & Bratsch-Hines, M. (2019). Associations between teacher-child relationships, children's literacy achievement, and social competencies for struggling and nonstruggling readers in early elementary school. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 47, 124–133. <https://doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2018.09.005>
- Valli, L. and Buese, D. 2007. The changing roles of teachers in an era of high-stakes accountability. *American Educational Research Journal*, 44, 519–558. <https://doi:10.3102/0002831207306859>