

Investigating the Experiences of Teachers Using Storytelling

Moira Dougherty, University of Maryland

Abstract

The focus of this phenomenological research is on understanding the power of storytelling to affect the lives and pedagogical understandings of teachers. In this paper I discuss several of the major themes that emerged from a phenomenological investigation into the lived experiences of five elementary school teachers who began to use storytelling in their classrooms. I draw on the works of numerous storytellers, educators and phenomenologists to provide a ground for this study. Hermeneutic phenomenology is the human science that seeks to uncover and interpret the essential elements that make up phenomena. The framework of this quest is the phenomenological methodology of Max van Manen. Telling stories to their classes helped my participants understand the richness of their pedagogical knowledge, renewed their confidence in their professional competence and enabled their return to their authentic teaching selves. Through storytelling my participants expanded their pedagogical horizons and by challenging themselves, helped them create higher expectations for their teaching. Telling stories creates an enhanced understanding of the roles students play in the life of the classroom and an appreciation of the reciprocal nature of teaching.

Introduction

The focus of this research is on understanding the power of storytelling to affect the lives and pedagogical understandings of my research participants. Storytelling reveals the essence of teaching as a call to authenticity from the teachers to themselves, and to their students who are their partners, as well as the understandings of the reciprocal nature of teaching. The meanings and understandings of the transformations that storytelling creates allowed space for my participants to explore and uncover aspects of their teaching lives that had been hidden and to develop deeper understandings of what is possible in their teaching.

The study was open to elementary grade teachers with various levels of storytelling experience. I gathered a group of teachers with different backgrounds and teaching experiences in order to provide multifaceted perspectives on the experience. Teachers were asked to use storytelling in their classrooms, and then engage in individual conversations about their storytelling. Each participant was asked to tell stories in the classroom a minimum of four times, two before our first conversation and two before our second conversation. At the end of the study, all participants took part in a group conversation to reflect on and share their experiences. I audiotaped all conversations, and each was transcribed and a copy of the transcript given to the conversant prior to the next conversation. I conducted thematic analysis to discover, isolate, and interpret the essential elements of the phenomenon.

In *Researching Lived Experience* van Manen writes, "The purpose of phenomenological reflection is to try to grasp the essential meaning of something" (2003, p. 77). In choosing to do phenomenological research, I am charged with searching out those essential meanings of lived experience, looking for what Heidegger calls the "distinctive sense" of the phenomenon, the Being of the beings involved (1926/1993, p.

82). Phenomenology is concerned with the essence of things, which means it is a thoughtful process, one that uncovers or reveals the layers of meaning each phenomenon possesses.

Transformational Nature of Storytelling

A performance creates a community, however briefly, by bringing people together for a common purpose. Telling a story evokes a response from the teller and the audience, and that is what gives it power and intimacy. A performance draws us in and puts into play collaboration among the story, teller and audience. Storytellers engage their audience, and both the teller and audience join in a dance to co-create the story. The play of storytelling, the give and take between storyteller and audience makes the connection possible.

Storytelling is a performance art, and as such has the power to transform relationships, create community, and change the experiences of time and space (Phelan, 1993). A reciprocal relationship, such as the one created by storytelling, is one in which something is exchanged or given by the participants. This concept holds the key to understanding the participants' experiences with storytelling. Storytelling allowed my participants to become more fully aware and to understand the reciprocal and transformational nature of teaching. These insights led to a greater mindfulness of their pedagogical power and authentic teaching selves. When they told stories, my participants felt that they transformed their pedagogical practice and were engaged with their students in ways that were more reciprocal and more indicative of the "power-with" mode of being described by Kriesberg (1992). They experienced themselves as creating stronger ties to their students and forging a greater sense of community. Each aspect of the participants' experience was like intersecting ripples in a pond, creating new patterns and ways of being.

Being Safe in the "Risk"

It is in the attempt to walk (and live) on the rickety bridge between self and other—and not the attempt to arrive at one side or the other—that we discover real hope. (Phelan, 1993, p. 174)

In order to engage in the eye contact that allows us to reveal ourselves to others, and in order to engender a sense of community, there must be an atmosphere of safety and trust. "Safety from 'story'-time consequences impinging upon the real-time real lives of members of the audience is established and maintained when the audience joins the play" (Livo & Rietz, 1986, p. 185). A classroom should be a protected place for children to learn, to take chances, and make mistakes, a place with the echoes of the comfort and security of home (Bachelard, 1958/1994). As part of the care for their students, teachers strive to create an environment that is safe for them.

Storytelling, at least initially, was somewhat nerve wracking for these teachers, and as they walked out on that tightrope, they found a safety net of support from their students. Through their storytelling experiences teachers discovered that in creating a safe haven for their students, they had created an environment for themselves in which to experiment with storytelling.

"We may say that this is the pedagogical look—it is the look that strengthens and builds the student's confidence, trust and competence" (Saevi, 2011). In the case of storytelling, it was the students who gave their teachers a pedagogical look. The students extended to their teachers the freedom to make mistakes as they try something new. The atmosphere and trust turns out to be a reciprocal one. Like the ripples spreading over the water this leads to the understanding that my participants are successful in creating this environment, a place in which their students were more gracious, more giving, more forgiving, than they realized. The safety and trust the teachers felt with their students and the reciprocal nature of teaching repeat themselves throughout the entire research.

Paying Attention

When something is new to us, we notice, we experience it in an attentive way. However, in time it becomes what Saevi calls "pre-reflective—seen but unnoticed" (2011). It is in our sight, but not in our attention; we are no longer reflective, thoughtful, or mindful with regard to it. Perhaps it is the fact that we see something everyday, and it is the aspect of "dailiness" (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2005, p. 72) that contributes to this phenomenon. Storytelling provided these teachers with a way of being attended to and a way of engaging their students that they had not experienced before, a way that amazed and gratified them. As they began to tell stories my participants noticed a distinct difference in the level of attention and commitment they were receiving from their students. They experienced themselves as the complete focus of students' attention. From their students' reactions my participants had the experience of being someone who could command attention and mesmerize the audience. The experience of being attended to was another step in the development of community and the emergence of the authentic teaching self.

Sartre (1956) observes that when we are looked at, we are opened up and exposed to the appraisals and judgments of the one who looks at us, and we begin to wonder how we appear to them. We become conscious of ourselves. When we are looked at, we are in a vulnerable position, in particular if we are not sure what the look means.

To be looked at, and to experience oneself becoming an object to someone else (and thus to oneself), makes the person aware of his or her "whatness." This conscious "whatness" somehow brings about a certain vulnerability, and a profound sense of being in default of a personal defense or possible escape from the look. (Saevi, 2011)

The "whatness" these teachers experience is the new role of storyteller, and they were not sure how *they* would be received. Storytelling is so intimate and can be so revealing, that this mutual eye contact opened up a new awareness on the part of the teachers that being seen can be risky business. It seems as though these teachers are used to being looked at, but *being seen* is somewhat unsettling, in part because they have little experience of taking the time to be seen and to look back at their students; they are not used to being looked into by their students. "The meaningful look seems to create a feeling of sameness, togetherness. It reminds us of the common understanding that we share with someone else" (van Manen & Levering, 1996, p. 82) and this look helped to create a growing sense of community. The lived look, the reciprocal seeing, seems to unfold from the desire to open oneself and to meet with the other's inner self. Becoming

conscious of oneself as an object gave my participants a chance to see and hear themselves as they told stories.

Elbaz-Luwisch (2005) writes that when we develop our own discourse, a way to be heard that expresses our own ideas, we, therefore, express our own being. Storytelling gave them the opportunity to develop their own voice. Through my participants remarks it became clear they experience their voices as somehow different when they tell stories. These teachers were listening to their own speaking as they hear students echo back their stories. Storytelling provided these teachers with the understanding that they are worthy of being heard, of being listened to by their students, and by themselves. It appeared that their lived experience in the classroom does not always give them that sense of being entitled to having their voice heard. In *The Tact of Teaching* van Manen writes, "Children need to be listened to without critical or negative judgment" (1991, p. 86). This non-judgmental or pedagogical listening helped foster self-awareness and self-understanding for my participants. This chance to be heard and listened to without judgment reflects the sense of safety my participants felt as they told stories.

The revelations these teachers experienced around being heard transforms their own listening. Being heard makes space for a transformation in their type of listening, into what Levin calls "Self's more 'spacious' ways of hearkening" (1989, p. 56). This "spacious" listening allows a conversation to emerge, the conversation that Gadamer tells us has the power to transform us (1960/2004). By virtue of being seen and heard, the teachers transformed the way they perceived themselves and this led to a transformation in how they were able to see and hear. Levin (1989) writes that teachers who are involved in a conversation are both speaking and listening. We listen as we speak. We listen to those whom we value. Storytelling makes it possible for my participants to transform the relationships in the classroom to ones of even greater value.

Van Manen writes, "Someone who recognizes me thereby acknowledges my existence, my very being... Recognition, and the feeling it produces—a positive sense of self—are public phenomena. It is something that unfolds in the space of relationships" (2008, p. 3). The recognition the teachers received while telling stories is purposeful and directed, unlike the usual, casual, taken-for-granted recognition of themselves as teachers. Storytelling allowed them to become known and to give recognition to themselves; they allowed themselves to acknowledge their own existence and efficacy. Awareness of how powerful that recognition can be came through watching the children watch them. The teachers got immediate feedback from seeing the gaze of their students on them. The teachers in the study were looking at their audience, returning and reflecting their look, and this caused the teachers to see how deftly and smoothly they adjust to the mood of their students while they were doing something that stands apart from their usual practice.

The experiences of being attended to stood out so clearly for these teachers, suggesting that outside of the storytelling experience, they do not experience themselves in this way. Stepping outside of the confines of their usual practice caused them to pay attention to themselves. In the process of telling stories, the teachers were attending to themselves. It is their being as teachers that they allowed themselves to see, hear, and honor. Standing in the gaze of their students enabled them to see and become aware of their own seeing. Hearing themselves speaking purposefully and with focused intent allows their hearing to be audible to themselves.

Being Out of Time

If there is one profession that lives and dies by the clock, it is teaching. Each job has the right procedure, the right tool, and the right amount of time in which to accomplish it (Toffler, 1980). Kreisberg tells us that schools operate on the machine metaphor and that, "the organization of time in schools into neat and equal blocks is another manifestation of this world view" (1992, p. 50). From the minute a teacher walks into the school in the morning until the time the teacher leaves for the day, time is parceled out in discrete, definite measurements. Time is divided and subdivided, and yet, there is rarely enough time in the day.

It was to be expected the participants would worry about having the time to tell a story. However, in our conversations, once they began to relate their experiences about telling stories, time was rarely mentioned. From what they *didn't* say, it became clear that during the lived time of storytelling, the teachers shed their preoccupation with time. When they were involved in telling stories, time seems to disappear. Time, the ruler of teachers' lives, seemed to vanish from their lived experience. Csikszentmihalyi writes of a phenomenon he terms "flow experience." These flow experiences are characterized by the "serenity that comes when the heart, will, and mind are on the same page" (1997, p. 28). "Flow tends to occur when a person faces a clear set of goals" (p. 29), and these goals and the person's skills must be closely matched for the sense of flow to be experienced. It is the "just right" phenomenon. My participants certainly have clear sets of goals for their practice, but storytelling seemed to create the lived experience in which "the heart, will, and mind are on the same page."

Another aspect of the flow experience is that of immediate feedback, also a characteristic of the mutual give and take of storytelling. The characteristics of the flow phenomenon seem to explain the absence of comments regarding time. It may well be that for the time spent in storytelling, time is irrelevant. The lived experience of telling stories in their classrooms provides these teachers with the immediate feedback that characterizes the flow experience, an embodied sense of knowing that what they have said matters to their students.

Being Out of Space/Storytelling Place

The storyteller tells the audience into another time and place, and the ritual of the storytelling releases the audience from the binding of present time. (Livo & Rietz, 1986, p. 185)

We all occupy space, and at any one time, our embodied self occupies a particular space (Anton, 2001; Casey, 1993), and that space exerts a powerful influence on us. Van Manen (2003) uses the term "lived space" referring to our varied responses to particular places. Lived space is not merely where we are, but *how* we are in that space. The lived place of storytelling elicits a particular response of its own. The physical place of the classroom does not expand or contract; yet these teachers were able to convert the place of the classroom to include a storytelling space, one of intimacy and closeness. Creating that alternate time and space is an innate characteristic of storytelling.

Each of my participants makes storytelling a special event and each makes sure that, no matter where they told stories, their students were physically close to them. Van

Manen and Levering write, "In favorable situations, physical closeness tends to create or stimulate intimacy" (1996, p. 67). Physical closeness is a manifestation of another kind of closeness. Intimate space is vital for these teachers because it enables them to be seen and heard. Lived space is felt space and "the experience of lived space is largely pre-verbal; we don't ordinarily reflect on it and yet we know that the space in which we find ourselves affects the way we feel" (van Manen, 2003, p. 102). When teachers feel the need to draw their students to themselves they are acting on the intimacy engendered by the storytelling experience; the lived space reflects the essence of the experience.

One of the ways we create community is through our physical proximity, being in the same space. We also create community by being in a group of people who have common interests, who share, interact, and participate in the same activities. In *The Storyteller's Start-Up Book*, MacDonald writes, "Story bonds a group together. The story becomes a shared experience. Sharing the story's joys or grief bonds us" (1993, p. 102). MacDonald goes on to write that the community benefits from storytelling in that the morals and norms of the community are shared, traditions preserved, and history remembered. Bruner (1986) and MacDonald both point to the ability of storytelling to help normalize the behavior of members of the community. The sense of time and space, the closeness created by storytelling were all part of the evolving relationships experienced by my participants

The Call of the Authentic Self

We live immersed in a culture with its customs, mores, norms, and values. Our particular culture "provides a 'world-taken-for-granted' that most people accept most of the time" (Bryjak and Soroka, 1997, p. 43). We are surrounded by predetermined interpretations, what 'they' say is proper behavior. If we had to make conscious choices for each and every aspect of our lives, we would be paralyzed. To use Heidegger's expression, we are thrown into a world where 'they' make decisions for us. Heidegger writes that our authentic selves exist lost in this cultural milieu with decisions made for it by the larger society. Heidegger writes that *Dasein*, our authentic being exists lost in this cultural milieu with decisions made for it by the larger society. "Dasein makes no choices, gets carried along by the nobody and thus ensnares itself in inauthenticity" (1926/1962, p. 312). When we are lost in the clamor of the 'they-world,' we fail to listen to our own being. However, we always have the possibility to choose a course that runs counter to the inauthentic ways of acting. It is choosing for oneself that makes possible our authentic being. Storytelling is a choice these teachers made, and that choice led to bringing themselves back from the state of being lost in the "they-world."

Storytelling prompted the teachers to pay attention to the call for authentic teaching, amplifying the volume of the call to authenticity. This experience of storytelling seemed to have aided the teachers in discovering their authentic teaching selves. "On occasion, however, some unusual event may challenge our background assumptions. This makes our assumptions more visible to us, and, if we are fortunate, it even makes us aware of how arbitrary they are" (Henslin, 2001, p. 72). For these teachers, storytelling was that unusual event, the one that caused them to examine their practices and acknowledge their desire to teach in ways that validated their professional sense of their teaching selves.

The teachers were assured of being seen and heard by experiencing the attention given to them by their students. Being heard also means answering a summons or call. Being heard is also a calling, calling from one being to another. The storyteller issues a summons and the students willingly answer it. "A child who calls upon me may claim me in a way that leaves me no choice" (van Manen, 2003, p. 6). This is a call to which these teachers are keenly attuned. Storytelling is a call and through storytelling they realize that they, too, may issue a call. When Heidegger speaks of the call of conscience, he means this call as a summons, a summons from our self, our being. Answering this call happened in part because these teachers opened themselves to their own being and made space in which they can exist. All of this is part of the being of the classroom. It might be the clarity and strength of the call, or perhaps as Henslin, (2001) writes it is the opportunity to look at our standard operating assumptions.

In writing on authenticity Anton (2001) tells us "We depend on particular others to free us for our possibilities, to enable us to become who we are, and they depend on us for their projects and their self-becoming" (p. 156). It is usual for teachers to focus on the students in a class and for to pay little attention to themselves. We depend on our mutual passionate responses to each other to become who we truly are, our authentic selves. Once again, the reciprocity of teaching comes forward. Through storytelling these teachers realized that they depend on their students in ways and in greater depth than they realized. There is a reciprocal phenomenon that "enables others to be free for their possibilities" (Anton, 2001, p. 158).

The return to the authentic teaching self reveals itself in the high level of involvement the teachers have and the pleasure the experience of storytelling brings them. The teachers were constantly speaking of how involved with storytelling their students were, and they did not immediately realize that the students' involvement was a reflection of their own. It was a revelation to my participants how much they enjoyed telling stories. They express themselves as feeling freer and more joyful, more connected to their students and themselves.

Transforming and Revealing Self

Sarason writes, "The artist has adopted the requirement of which is to instill in the audience thoughts and feelings which temporarily blur or even erase the distinction between the artist as performer and the artist as person" (1999, p. 9). Storytelling provided a space for teachers to leave their regular role, their everyday teaching self, to take a chance on a new persona, creating an opportunity for teachers to step away from the conventional ways of being a teacher and providing an outlet for both their creativity and the exercise of their professionalism.

The persona of the storyteller was one the teachers described as more colorful and fun. They felt as though they had discovered a new talent and a new way to express it. They were able to immerse themselves in the story and wanted their students to be immersed along with them. They felt closer to their students and were pleased that they could demonstrate that they had other aspects to their personalities, and their students got to see that they were not one-dimensional. The disinhibition the teachers display reflects the safe and trusting atmosphere that exists in the classrooms of my participants. They wanted the students to see more of them as persons. Sarason (1999) writes that the audience at a performance has an expectation that they will be "transported, not to

remain in their accustomed selves" (p. 14). Along with the audience, it becomes clear that it was the *teachers*, while not necessarily expecting it, who were transported out of their accustomed selves.

It is daunting to have to leave the safety and authority of a written page. Telling the story rather than reading it is an altogether different experience; there is no safety net when you forget what comes next, no pictures to support your telling, only your voice and your body language, only eye contact with your audience. (Grugeon & Gardner, 2000, p. 1)

The revelations about the reciprocal environment of safety, the willingness to leave the printed page, lead to a transformation of practice. They truly are on a tightrope, the "rackety bridge between self and other" as Phelan (1993, p. 179) terms it. They do have a net underneath them, however. The attention the class gave these teachers enabled them to transform themselves in front of their students' eyes into someone who is willing to take risks. Storytelling gave my participants the structural form, which Eisner (2002) writes is required in order for transformation to occur.

During storytelling my participants discovered that the necessity of continually focusing and refocusing students' attention was gone. Gone were the strictures to raise your hand and be recognized before you speak. The teachers discovered that their expectations for their students stood apart from their usual classroom model during the storytelling sessions. As their students displayed greater competence and facility in content areas when they heard stories, my participants began to engage in a questioning of the judgments they had made regarding their students' abilities in the areas of attention and retention. They began to wonder in what else they might be mistaken and began to reassess their relationship with their students.

Transforming the Conversation/Transforming the Relationship

We have conversations with those we respect or deem worthy of engagement, and whose opinion and thinking we find of interest or of value. Gadamer tells us that conversation always admits to a relationship between those who are a part of it, and that something is transformed by conversation, "and thus are bound to one another in a new community" (1960/2004, p. 379). It is impossible to speak of the teachers transforming their pedagogical conversations and relationships as separate, sequential issues. Each slight alteration in conversation caused changes in relationships, and the reciprocal is true. Storytelling causes more of the essence of both teller and listener to be revealed. Collins and Cooper write, "Indeed, when we tell stories, we do give a gift. Storytelling creates for our listeners a sense of mystery, of wonder, of reverence for life. Perhaps most important, storytelling creates a relationship" (1997, p. 1). The transformation in their conversations and relationships occurred concurrently. Having a conversation with students deviated from their usual teacher talk. Storytelling is a conversation, and relationships are formed from that experience. The transformation in conversation is the result of the teachers' experiences of being heard, being listened to. "The first condition of the art of conversation is ensuring that the other person is with us" (Gadamer, 1960/2004, p. 367). That this condition is met is apparent in the conversations the teachers have about being attended to, being drawn in.

A conversation is defined as, "The action of living or having one's being *in, among*, the action of consorting with, intimacy, behavior, mode of life" (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* 2002, p. 509). This definition brings us closer to the concept of conversation put forth by Gadamer, that true conversation achieves an understanding that changes and transforms us. Being in conversation with another means that we "come to an understanding" (Gadamer, 1960/2004, p. 385). Teachers were talking "with" their students, not at them, and through this conversation they were able to drop the controlling nature of the usual teacher/student relationship. Storytelling creates a space that is no longer what Kreisberg (1992) calls "power-over," in which one party is dominant and imposes control upon the other. Instead, during storytelling the power dynamic shifts to one of "power-with," each party sharing a measure of power and bringing novel insights into play. This is an outcome of the teachers describing how they are able to look at their students with new respect for their abilities, and having the sense that they are engaged in developing a new depth in their relationship with one another.

Having a conversation with someone engages you in a singular mode of communicating and different modes of relation to someone. "Listening is much more than hearing words. To truly listen one must acknowledge the value of that person and that person's ideas, feelings, and experiences" (Kreisberg, 1992, p. 177). In their conversations with their students my participants found richer, more varied conversations, and thus relationships, than they thought possible. It is possible that what the teachers describe is an alternate way of being with their students, and different ways of being around children that may lead to new ways of teaching. They wanted their students to be as fully engaged as they, themselves, were.

Community

As the teachers began to realize how closely they are intertwined with their students, transformations began to occur in their relationships and conversations begin. "Storytelling is a personal art that makes public what is private and makes private what is public. By choosing this or that story to tell, I reveal much about myself" (Yolen, 2000, p. 13). Through storytelling teachers discovered a new way of being with themselves and their students and transformed their sense of time and space, their listening and hearing, their conversations with their students, their pedagogical practice and ultimately their understandings of themselves as teachers.

MacDonald (1993) writes that one of the values of telling stories is that we begin to develop greater understanding of ourselves. As part of that bond, storytelling creates an obligation on the part of the teller, and as MacDonald writes, "You have carried them into this realm of story. They are *your* responsibility. Watch them, respond to them" (1993, p. 25). Teachers already carry that sense of responsibility and watchfulness for their students and this care manifests in how they tell stories.

"As always, the way we speak teaches us about ourselves" (Aoki, 2005f, p. 446).

Storytelling causes more of the essence of both teller and listener to be revealed. In *The Power of Story* (1997) Collins and Cooper write, "Indeed, when we tell stories, we do give a gift. Storytelling creates for our listeners a sense of mystery, of wonder, of reverence for life. Perhaps most important, storytelling creates a relationship" (p. 1). What might

the life of school be like if teaching were based on “a sense of mystery, of wonder, of reverence for life?” Would we choose to teach the same way, or would we replace our current way of instructing our children? We might lose the urgency to complete that measurable objective in favor of a more organic approach.

Relationships are transformed through the teachers’ development of their understandings of the power of story, each understanding leading to another deeper knowing. The transformation these teachers experience evolved throughout the research, each story told opening up new horizons, new meanings. Gadamer defines horizon as “the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point ... to have a horizon means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it” (1960/2004, p. 302).

As soon as man used language to establish a living relation with himself or with his fellows, language is no longer an instrument, *no longer a means; it is a manifestation, a revelation of intimate being and of the psychic link which unites us to the world and our fellow men.* (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. 196)

Each story, each pebble tossed into the pond, binds the teachers and their students into a closer community, one that creates new possibilities for these teachers to expand their pedagogical practice. In *The Pedagogical Significance of the Look*, Paradis writes, “We can now understand eye contact to mean a shared looking that allows two people to touch each other, to ‘be’ together in an intimate way” (2011). This intimacy is what is made possible, according to Sartre (1956), by seeing and being seen.

Through storytelling teachers are able to transform the ways in which they perceive themselves and forge new teaching identities. They felt they were no longer what Aoki (2005e) terms “installers of the curriculum” (p. 160). As a result of storytelling these teachers began to be with their students in an unfamiliar way, and this change began to manifest itself in changes in practice. The differences the teachers describe experiencing, the transformation in experiences during storytelling, leads to a difference in how they perceive their students and how they generally expect their students to behave in class.

Every society, every community, every classroom has rules in place to govern the behavior of its citizens and ensure smooth operations as it pursues its goals. Bruner (2002) and MacDonald (1993) write of the regulatory and community building properties of storytelling. However, during storytelling the rules that my participants normally apply are relaxed, standards of behavior are softened, and interactions between teachers and students that are usually tightly scripted and controlled, such as raising your hand and being recognized by the teacher before speaking, give way to a freer, more relaxed conversation.

During storytelling my participants discover that they leave behind the necessity of continually focusing and refocusing students’ attention. The ease with which they get and keep attention enables teachers to take a breath and “see” what their students are saying to them. The teachers discover that their expectations for their students stand apart from their usual classroom model during the storytelling sessions. Gone are the strictures to raise your hand and be recognized before you speak. Gone is the need to get attention because the attention is already there.

The unspoken concern appears: Why is so much of our attention spent on managing the behavior of our students? No one reported any incidences of concern during these times when the rules of the classroom were modified or relaxed. My participants did get a chance to experience what their classrooms might be like when the focus was not on behavior and the possibilities storytelling might create when they choose to connect with their students in a way that fosters a more cooperative atmosphere.

Conclusion

From this study it appears that storytelling by classroom teachers has the potential to create new ways for teachers to be with their students. During storytelling my participants were able to create something new, something of their own and felt free to put into play all their accumulated skills for the benefit of their students. They were engaged in an activity that let them express themselves, and as a result, they felt a confidence that they can successfully step out of their routine and return to the type of pedagogy that reflected their ethos of teaching.

Through the experiences of paying attention to themselves, being willing to reveal their authentic selves in the classroom, the environment they created for themselves and their students allowed them to be vulnerable to their students and to be able to articulate what is at the core of their teaching. Storytelling gave them the awareness of how powerfully and deeply connected they are with their students and allowed them to give their students permission to be connected to them. Letting people into your life can be a risky enterprise, fraught with peril. After all, it is the people closest to us that can break our hearts. "Small wonder, then, that teaching tugs at the heart, opens the heart, even breaks the heart—and the more one loves teaching, the more heartbreaking it can be" (Palmer, 2007, p. 11).

If we are indeed changed by engaging in conversation, and storytelling is a conversation, it is possible that the ripples of this phenomenon could spread throughout a school, transforming our understandings of ourselves, and the others with whom we have relationships.

References

- Anton, C. *Selfhood and Authenticity*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001.
- Aoki, Ted, T. Interview. In W. F. Pinar and L. Irwin (Eds), *Curriculum in a New Key: Collected Works of Ted T. Aoki* (pp441-447). Mahwah, N. J: Lawrence Erlbaum 2005f.
- Aoki, T. T. (2005e). Teaching as indwelling between two curriculum worlds. In W. F. Pinar & R. L. Irwin (Eds.), *Curriculum in a new key: The collected works of Ted T. Aoki*. (pp. 159-165). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. 2005e
- Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space* (M. Jolas, Trans.). Boston: Beacon Press. 1994 (Original work published 1958)
- Bruner, Jerome. *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1986.

- Bruner, Jerome. *Making stories: Law, Literature, Life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2002
- Bryjak, George J., and Soroka, Michael P. *Sociology: Cultural Diversity in a Changing World*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon. 1997
- Casey, Edward S. *Getting back into place: Toward a renewed understanding of the place world*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1993
- Collins, Rives and Pamela J. Cooper. *The Power of Story: Teaching Through Storytelling*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon. 1997
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihalyi. *Finding Flow in Everyday Life*. New York: Basic Books. 1997.
- Elbaz-Luwisch, Freema *Teachers' Voices: Storytelling and Possibility*. Haifa, Israel: Information Age Publishing. 2005
- Eisner, Elliot. *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*. Harrisonburg, VA: R.R. Donnelley & Sons. 2002
- Gadamer, Han-George. 2004. *Truth and Method* (Rev. ed.) (J. Weinsheimer & D. G. Marshall Trans.). New York: Continuum. 2004 (Original work published 1960)
- Grugeon, Elizabeth and Paul Gardner *The Art of Storytelling for Teachers and Pupils: Using Stories to Develop Literacy in Primary Classrooms*. London: David Fulton. 2000
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). Oxford: Basil Blackwell. 1993 (Original work published 1926)
- Heidegger, Martin. Being and time: Introduction. In D. F. Krell (Ed.), *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings* (pp. 41-87). New York: HarperCollins. 1993. (Original work published 1927)
- Henslin, James, M. (Eds). *Down to Earth Sociology: Introductory Readings*. New York: The Free Press. 2001
- Kreisberg, Seth. *Transforming Power: Domination, Empowerment, and Education*. Albany: State University of New York Press. 1992
- Levin, David M. *The listening self: Personal Growth, Social Change, and the Closure of Metaphysics*. New York: Routledge. 1989
- Livo, Norma J., and Sandra A. Rietz, *Storytelling: Process & practice*. Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited. 1986
- MacDonald, Margaret (1993). *The Storytellers' Start-up Book: Finding, Learning, Performing, and Using Folktales*. Little Rock, AR: August House. 1993
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. (C. Smith, Trans.). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd. 1962 (Original work published 1945)
- Palmer, Parker J. *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons. 2007.
- Paradis, Patricia. *The pedagogical significance of the look*. Phenomenology Online. www.phenomenologyonline.com/sources/Textorium. Retrieved 1/23/11
- Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. New York: Routledge. 1993.
- Saevi, Tone. The Experience of "Being Seen" for Persons with Disability. *Phenomenology Online*. Retrieved August 18, 2011 from: <http://www.phenomenologyonline.com/sources/textorium>. Retrieved 8/18/11
- Sarason, Seymour, B. *Teaching as a Performing Art*. New York: Columbia University. 1999.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. Part three: Being for others. In: *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (H. E. Barnes, Trans.). New York: Philosophical Library. 1956
- Toffler, Alvin. *The Third Wave*. New York: Bantam Books. 1980.
- Trumble, William R. (Ed.). *Shorter Oxford English dictionary (5th ed., Vol.1)* New York: Oxford University Press. 2002
- van Manen, Max. *The Tone of Teaching*. Ontario: Scholastic Canada Ltd. 1986
- van Manen, Max. *Tact of teaching: The Meaning of Pedagogical Thoughtfulness*. New York: State University Press of New York. 1991.

- van Manen, Max. *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science foran Action Sensitive Pedagogy*. London, Ontario: Althouse Press. 2003.
- van Manen, Max and BasLevering. *Childhood's Secrets: Intimacy, Privacy, and the SelfReconsidered*. New York: Columbia University. 1996.
- Yolen, Jane. *Touch Magic: Fantasy, Faerie and Folklore in the Literature of Childhood*. Little Rock, AR: August House. 2000.

Copyright © *Journal of Academic Perspectives*. All Rights Reserved. 2013