

PEDAGOGICAL POWER OF STORY-TELLING IN HIGH EDUCATION TO DEVELOP CRITICAL THINKING

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Abstract

Storytelling is the art of telling stories. It helps to facilitate better communication and connection between humans. In high education this methodological technique helps to keep learners engaged, activate their emotions and make learning more memorable. Besides, stories are easy to remember and facts are to be remembered much better if they are part of the story. Provided that our goal in every communication is to impact the target audience, i.e., change their beliefs, attitudes and behavior, well-structured stories are the most effective vehicle for making impact. From this perspective, using stories as a pedagogical tool in high education provides great opportunities to develop students' critical thinking and reasoning skills which enables them to have better study outcomes. A good story has a transformational effect which helps students to respond positively to teaching. For example, a well-selected and structured case study presented in a narrative format helps students to feel themselves as part of the story and experience characters. Therefore, when students are taught to include the details in their stories that generate additional interest from the audience and provide significant context, they study better and communicate more effectively. Additionally, story-telling works for all types of learners – visual, auditory and kinesthetic. The article will display outcomes of research conducted in high education context in Georgia. More specifically, in teaching areas of business communication, leadership, organizational behavior, academic writing, English language and research methods. The methodological tool of story-telling was employed with the view to facilitate student learning and acquisition, especially, during pandemic times when anxiety and psychological strain were high. Tasks and activities were designed in a way which allowed learners to narrate stories and by doing so get involved in learning. Outcomes demonstrate that students found this method effective for their learning since it helped them to better and accurately remember. In business communication classes it enabled students to influence the target audience - change their current attitudes, behavior and knowledge. Another element of story-telling being a very effective tool for influence is that stories about professional mistakes and what leaders learned from them are a good possibility to learn. In fact, when students identify themselves closely with stories, they imagine how they would have acted in similar cases. Therefore, they are able to have less risk in various situations. What's most important, with a simple personal story they convey values, offer insights and inspire others.

Keywords: *Story-telling, pedagogical tool, transformational, learner, high education.*

1. Introduction

Storytelling is the art of telling stories. It helps to facilitate better communication and connection between humans. In high education this methodological technique helps learners to maintain their attention, make emotions activated and turns the learning experience more memorable and interesting. Besides, stories are easy to remember and facilitate better memorization of facts. Provided that our goal in every communication is to impact the target audience, i.e. change their beliefs, attitudes and behavior, well-structured stories are the most effective means to make impact. From this perspective, using stories as a pedagogical tool in high education provides super opportunities to develop students' critical thinking and reasoning skills which enables them to be more motivated to study, have better study outcomes and focus on their future endeavors.

2. Design

Stories have been a part of society ever since humans started to communicate. They helped people to carefully transfer information and emotion about a concrete topic, piece of news or idea. From the practical point of view, stories help to communicate information so that a clear picture is given from a

specific point of view. Thus, using them as methodological tool across various disciplines in high education creates a wonderful opportunity to have higher quality learning, include all types of learners and enable them to develop a positive and results-oriented mindset.

3. Objectives

The paper will display outcomes of research conducted in high education context in Georgia. More specifically, in teaching areas of business communication, leadership, organizational behavior, academic writing, English language and research methods. The objective is to demonstrate how important story-telling as a methodological tool is with the view of enabling students study better, get more confident and create pleasant learning environment around them.

4. Methods

The methodological tool of story-telling was employed with the view to facilitate student learning and acquisition, especially, during pandemic times when anxiety and psychological strain was high. Tasks and activities were designed in a way which allowed learners to narrate stories and by doing so get involved in learning. Outcomes demonstrate that students found this method effective for their learning since it helped them to better and accurately remember. In business communication classes it enabled students to influence the target audience - change their current attitudes, behavior and knowledge. They were given a task or role-play to give stories about professional mistakes and what leaders learned from them. In fact, when students identify themselves closely with stories, they imagine how they would have acted in similar cases. Therefore, they are able to have less risk in various situations. What's most important, with a simple personal story they convey values, offer insights and inspire others. So, using the methodological tool of story-telling provided students with the possibility to openly share their views and by being involved, learn more productively whilst managing their psychological and emotional level.

5. Discussion

In general, story-telling is the basis of why we communicate. It enables us to connect with the audience and pass a piece of information. As such, we all have a story to tell because we have something to inform or persuade. We also have the power to tell the "why" and let individuals realize and understand the point of view. On top of this, story-telling builds trust between you and the target audience and lets you interconnect effectively.

Story-telling is also careful transfer to information and emotion around a specific idea, topic, piece of news or opinion. It helps to paint a very clear picture for the receiver from a specific point of view. Therefore, if properly designed, authentic emotion aroused by it enables to harmonizes the situation between the messenger and the receiver.

Thus, story-telling unites us as humans, evokes empathy, emotion and authenticity, requires a clear idea of audience and purpose, paints different pictures and, therefore, it can be very successfully used pedagogically, especially, in high education, since it involves teaching and research with focus on the study of knowledge. Most importantly, high education gives us the chance to study any subject you are interested in and become highly knowledgeable.

Interestingly, stories give a sequence of events in which protagonists try to resolve a problem. Therefore, we learn from stories. As Bruner (2002) stated, "stories impose structure on our experience and are essential tools of cultural learning and reflection. Stories and their associated narratives provide the means for children to make sense of their world and create their sense of self. Through narrative, we construct, reconstruct, in some ways, reinvent today and tomorrow". (p. 93)

One important aspect of storytelling is that they help people to transmit cultural knowledge and use wisdom of previous ancestors from generation to generation. What's more, in their everyday lives people come across with numerous stories and to some extent they rely on them.

To move to the pedagogical power of storytelling in high education, they help to arouse interest, enable to exchange information and facts in a simple way, provide a structure to memorize information and, what's most significant, create the environment in which students and teachers interact more closely and pleasantly. What adds to this is the fact that material is memorized in an easier and more enjoyable manner since students are involved in the story. Sometimes, it even happens that time flies so quickly at the lesson that students do not even get bored or tired. All-in-all, it promotes engagement of students, enjoyable learning and positivity since students are fully engaged, communicate freely and interact as they wish.

To cite international cases of applying story-telling in teaching and education, Bower and Clark (1969) state that when stories were used, students could memorize words better. Gunter (2011) very interestingly notes that “when students read popular non-fiction books, there was significantly higher student exam performance compared to course sections using a traditional book”. David Swanson (2016) used fictional stories which were replete with ethical content to improve students’ ethical behavior”.

Most importantly, it needs to be stressed that story-telling works as a pedagogical tool since it ensures specificity, concreteness and narrative organization. What should be emphasized here is that memory accepts stories differently compared with various types of information.

According to Simmons, “remembering is not merely a function of having a good or bad memory. Someone with a “bad memory” can still remember a memorable story. We remember things that are woven together with a plot, are meaningful us, have a vivid impact on our mind, or made us feel good or bad. We remember stories that stir our emotions. A good story etches an image into your listener’s mind by linking your words together into your listener’s mind by linking your words together into a meaningful whole that is vivid and emotionally stimulating. A counterintuitive secret that all good story tellers understand, is that the more specific the story, the more unreal the connectors.”*

One more useful and significant focus in terms of using story telling in communicating the science of psychology is made by Ruschar (2014) who emphasized the three-part story-telling approach: memorability, meaningfulness, coherence. Indeed, psychology offers a wide range of practical applications of storytelling. To be more specific, they are useful for sharing information, organizing and making sense of our memory, drawing us close to characters, connecting events with recollections, looking at things from characters’ perspectives.

Thus, storytelling brings harmony between the receiver and the story teller, the use of imagination enables him/her to create an opinion on what was told and shared. As such, storytelling unites us as humans, draws on empathy, emotion and authenticity, requires a clear idea of audience and purpose, paints pictures and, most importantly, it can be found in everything.

As for developing critical thinking, which is the ability to evaluate, interpret and analyze facts and information and decide what’s fine and what’s wrong, make connections between logical ideas to see the bigger picture, story-telling enables to achieve this in the most efficient way provided that our memory accepts stories differently compared with different types of information.

Since critical thinking is analysis of facts, observation, evidence and arguments, to be able to make a judgement on the basis of unbiased and rational evaluation and analysis, story-telling plays a significant role to stimulate imagination, enhance reflection, encourage students to get actively engaged with narratives, characters and plot lines. These elements provide valuable opportunities for the development of critical thinking skills. More specifically stated, story-telling develops students’ understanding and appreciation of other cultures, promote positive attitude to people from different cultures, races and religion and, thus, of course, develops their critical thinking and reasoning skills. In other words, by immersing themselves in stories, students are able to explore various perspectives, analyze complex situations, making connections between the story and their own lives.

Importantly, critical thinking skills developed lead to better communication, logical and problem-solving skills, better memory and the ability to evaluate the situation.

6. Conclusions

All-in-all, it should be concluded from the above-mentioned that storytelling indeed facilitates better communication and connection between humans and using it as a methodological and pedagogical tool in high education, enables learners be focused, activate their emotions and make the learning experience more memorable. Besides, it strongly impacts the audience, alters their beliefs, attitudes and behavior. Obviously, well-structured stories are the most effective means for making impact and serve a transformational purpose for students to respond positively to teaching. A well-selected and structured case study presented in a narrative format helps students to feel themselves as part of the story and experience characters. Therefore, when students are taught to include the details in their stories that generate additional interest from the audience and provide significant context, they study better and communicate more effectively. Additionally, story-telling works for all types of learners – visual, auditory and kinesthetic. In fact, when students identify themselves closely with stories, they imagine how they would have acted in similar cases. Therefore, they are able to have less risk in various situations. What’s most important, with a simple personal story they convey values, offer insights and inspire others. So, the pedagogical power of storytelling across disciplines in high education is great and it helps us to train and raise more efficient and mindful generations.

* Simmons, A. (2006). *The Story Factor: Secrets of Influence from the Art of Storytelling*. New York: Basic Books

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