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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, STORYTELLER, STORY-TEACHER: A PORTRAIT OF THREE TEACHERS' USE OF STORY IN ELEMENTARY CLASSES, by J. MICHAEL SHIRLEY, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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ABSTRACT

STORYTELLER, STORY-TEACHER: A PORTRAIT OF THREE TEACHERS' USE OF STORY IN ELEMENTARY CLASSES
by
J. Michael Shirley

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the use of storytelling as a teaching strategy in the classrooms of three experienced elementary school teachers. Storytelling is defined in this study as the use of a narrative, spoken or written, in prose or in verse, true or fictitious, related so as to inform, entertain, or instruct the listener or reader. This research answers questions concerning; (a) what constitutes storytelling in these teachers' classrooms, (b) teachers' purposes for using storytelling, and (c) factors that have encouraged these teachers to employ storytelling in their teaching practices. Framed within constructivist theory, the study provides insight into how these three respondents teach content through storytelling and bridge information from teller to listener.

Data collection included classroom observations, interviews of teacher-participants, and the collection of teacher-generated artifacts such as lesson plans and teacher notes. Portraiture is used as a method for writing up the data in order to record the perspectives and experiences of the participants in this study by documenting their voices, visions, and wisdom in a detailed exploration into the feelings about and use of storytelling in their teaching practices. The instructional strategies reported through this

qualitative inquiry support a socio-cognitive interactive model of literacy and demonstrate its importance in learning content in an elementary school environment.

The data were analyzed continually through a search for emerging patterns and through constant comparison analysis. The researcher found that the teachers used stories and illustrations in an impromptu manner and that storytelling served both cognitive and affective purposes. Cognitively, storytelling was employed to form connections to students' prior knowledge and new knowledge being introduced. Storytelling was used as a mnemonic device to help students transfer storied information to new situations. Affectively, storytelling served to engage students in an enlightening and entertaining manner. Students responded to the use of stories through actively participating in classroom discussions and sharing stories of their own. Storytelling assists these teachers in their critical roles as negotiators and facilitators of meaning construction in the text and social context of the classroom.

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STORYTELLER, STORY-TEACHER: A PORTRAIT OF THREE TEACHERS' USE OF STORY IN ELEMENTARY CLASSES

by

J. Michael Shirley

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the
Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
Teaching and Learning
in
the Department of Middle/Secondary Education and Instructional Technology
in
the College of Education
Georgia State University

Atlanta, Georgia
2005

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have been blessed to have received encouragement from a number of friends, colleagues, and family members during this time in my life. I am especially fortunate to have had the professional guidance and nurturing from people like:

Dr. Peggy Albers— who guided, pushed, prodded, and still maintained a million-dollar smile filled with encouragement.

Dr. Joyce Many— from my very first doctoral class she was quick to let me know that I could be successful.

Dr. Dana Fox— who instilled in me a new interest and love for writing.

Dr. Sheryl Gowen— she helped me understand ethnographic research and techniques I needed to complete this study with confidence.

Dr. Kathy O'Keefe, Dr. Angie Gant, and Dr. Kay Ellen Rutledge— gave such helpful insights into the doctoral process and were so encouraging and supportive.

Celeste, Vanessa, and Renee— three wonderful educators who didn't mind sharing their stories and their classroom experiences so that others might learn from their methods and strategies.

My wife, Donna, and my daughters, Marisa and Rachelle— had to live with my high and low moments during this process.

Mrs. Faye Dalton and Mr. Clayton Smith— two of my childhood teachers who shared their stories with me as I sat in their elementary school classrooms as a young boy. Their passion for teaching and the strategies they used influenced me beyond their imaginations!

To these and to all the other people who have enriched my life with the power of story, I am thankful.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Story Revelation

In a conversation with a retired teacher a few years ago, he shared with me an interesting reflection. "I run into former students from time to time" he said, "we talk about their school days—about all the fun they had and how hard we were on them. One thing I keep hearing, though, is about my teaching style. They tell me that some of the most memorable times they had in my classroom was when I used stories to teach. They said that they could remember those lessons to this day!" Our conversation continued and he marveled at the "story revelation" as though it were something he would like to be able to display—like a badge or a medal. He was proud that those students had attached meaning to something he had told them. After our conversation, I thought about what he had said and began to remember some of those remarkable moments in my own educational career. I had also experienced having teachers who used narrative or stories and I could remember more about those episodes and vignettes which had been created to augment or emphasize a lesson than the legion of other lessons to which I had been exposed. Humans organize their biographical selves and comprehend them through the stories which are created to clarify and to validate their life experiences. Narrative is "both a mode of reasoning and a mode of representation" (Richardson, 1997, p. 28).

What was it about those narrative episodes that made those lessons stick in my mind? It was this chance encounter with that retired teacher that made me want to look into the use of story as a teaching tool. If narrative is so powerful, why do some teachers use it while others seem to ignore it almost completely? Could it be that many teachers use it without realizing they do? In an era of accountability legislation and prescriptive instructional practices, are we turning away from a teaching practice that might enhance students' understanding of the content being taught? These and other questions have continued to beg for answers.

Purpose of the Study

This study strives to give voice to teachers who have somehow discovered a need to use story in their teaching practice. It is a part of an effort to deepen our understanding of their self-perceptions as teachers and as storytellers. It is also an attempt to restore confidence in or to increase the credibility to the concept of storytelling and personal narrative as a viable method of teaching in the modern classroom. There are tensions that arise for those who might see storytelling as an important teaching tool. The 1990s is coming to be known as the decade of accountability in the United States and the increased call for accountability in education has many of my teacher acquaintances fearful of using their own creativity in the classroom. They often find themselves pacing their lessons so as to cover material (breadth) rather than "dis-cover" material (depth). Given these concerns, they have somehow felt forced to give up practicing the use of storytelling and other art forms in order to fit instruction into a given timeframe. We hear a lot of talk from politicians and business leaders about making education our highest national priority, about the urgent need to raise our educational standards, to encourage

creative and critical thinking, and about the importance of preparing our young people to compete internationally in the intellectual and economic arenas. But at the same time, in more than half of our states, Arts-related education budgets are being cut, teachers are being laid off, and class size is increasing (Fromherz, 2004; Lehman, 1992; Marquis, 1995). Numerous commissions and forums have addressed the need for educational reform as a result of the growing criticism of public schools. Accountability's bottom line, higher scores on standardized student achievement tests, is the singular focus of many state and federal policies related to teaching quality and a major focus of external funding sources and professional accrediting agencies (Arif & Smiley, 2003,Cochran-Smith, 2003, Sewall, 2002). The pressure is on teachers to meet the bottom line expectations of today's social and business community. It is my belief that teachers must be given the latitude to present information to students in ways that will assist the students in making a personal connection with the information. Storytelling is a viable teaching method for attaining that objective.

This work is divided into two major parts. Part One of this dissertation includes the background and method aspects of this study. In Chapter One, I begin by discussing the purpose and significance of the study. Next, as a qualitative researcher, I provide a description of the primary research tool, myself, and discuss, in depth, my own personal experiences with story in my family and educational settings. In Chapter Two, I review the existing literature on the use of story, storytelling, and personal narrative in order to show where my own study enters that discussion.

I offer Chapter Three, "Design and Methodology," as a way of telling how this study was devised, designed, and implemented. I describe the theories that I used in

designing the study and analyzing the emerging themes I discovered during the course of the study as I collected the stories of teachers who use story as an integral part of their teaching practice. I make known the reasoning behind my choices of research type and data collection and analysis. I describe the process I employed in analyzing data collected for the study. Finally, I present a description and explanation of portraiture and discuss the logic behind that choice as a significant element in the design and development of the study as a whole.

Part Two of this dissertation contains the three portraits, an analysis of those portraits, and the conclusions. Chapter Four is made up of the portraits of Celeste, a 6th grade elementary school teacher, Renee, a Literacy Arts teacher in a small-town elementary school, and Vanessa, a 4th grade teacher who is relatively new to the teaching profession and is also teaching in a rural school system. Pseudonyms are used to protect the teachers' privacy. Chapter Five provides the cross-case analysis of the portraits and is comprised of a discussion of the findings. Chapter Six reveals implications for teacher education and practice along with recommendations for future study.

Overview of Methodology

As I prepared for work on this study, I believed that the use of storytelling in the classroom was best studied using qualitative methods that identify knowledge as created in an interaction among investigator and participants involving data collection through interviews and observation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I also saw benefit in exploring the topic through the use of case study. Merriam (1998) writes that:

> Qualitative case studies can be characterized as being particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. Particularistic means that case studies focus on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon. Descriptive means that the end product of a case study is a rich, 'thick' description of the

> phenomenon under study. Heuristic means that case studies illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study. They can bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader's experience, or confirm what is known (pp. 29-30).

As a way to expose the data collected in the study, I chose the portraiture method. In *The Art and Science of Portraiture* (1997) Lawrence-Lightfoot quotes Oscar Wilde's rationale for not showing one of his paintings in that it reveals too much of his soul. In explaining the portraiture methodology, Lawrence-Lightfoot continues:

> Voice is the research instrument, echoing the self (or the soul as Oscar Wilde would put it) of the portraitist – her eyes, her ears, her insights, her style, her aesthetic voice is omnipresent and seems to confirm Wilde's claim that portraits reflect more about the artist than about the subject" (p. 85).

But she goes on to say that "it is also true that the portraitist's work is deeply empirical, grounded in systematically collected data, skeptical questioning (of self and actors), and rigorous examination of biases – always open to disconfirming evidence" (p. 85). A more detailed description of portraiture and an explanation of how it is used in this study are presented in the chapter entitled "Design and Methodology."

Significance of the Study

As a lover of stories, I have found myself using varied forms of narrative in my own teaching practice. As a long-time student, counting my years in grade school, college, graduate school, a doctoral program, and life itself, I have discovered myself becoming the recipient of countless narratives that have impacted my life in one way or another. We make narratives many times a day, every day that we live. Whenever we find ourselves following a subject with a verb, there is a pretty good chance that we are engaging in narrative discourse. We engage in narrative so often and an apparent unconscious ease that it seems as though it is everyone's birthright (Abbott, 2002). We

are all surrounded by narrative throughout our lives and, many times, we are not aware of the universality of such narrative among humans. Narrative is the primary way through which humans organize their experiences into meaningful episodes or stories. It is a cognitive process or "mental operation" which is not directly observable (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 1). In Roland Barthes' landmark essay on narrative (1966) he says:

> The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances – as though any material were fit to receive man's stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting (think of Carpaccio's *Saint Ursula*), stained-glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is, nor has been, a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing, cultural backgrounds. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself (p. 103).

Barthes makes it clear that narrative is present in and around everything we do. It has been with humankind from the earliest periods and continues to weave its communicative threads throughout the fabric of our global society. Narrative is not only omnipresent, it is also bent and transformed over time and presents itself in countless forms according to the assets and technology available at any given time. Given this universality of narrative and my own learning experiences through narrative, I wanted to investigate the use of narrative in today's classroom. I wanted to know if teachers were actively implementing some form of narrative in their teaching practice and, if so, what were their motives?

Even though there are many books written on the topic of storytelling and many of them give helpful insight into how to develop and use story in a variety of settings,

there are few instances in those written works attempting to look at teachers who are using story as a teaching tool in a contemporary classroom. Today in the teaching of the language arts, literacy educators are exploring new fields as they build classroom communities in which readers and writers engage with language in personally significant ways. Many educators are looking for means of making today's classrooms learning environments in which language is used for authentic purposes – to explain, to persuade, to entertain, to report, to teach, to discover. As we look at children's early oral language acquisition and reevaluate our approach to literacy development, it is time "we look more closely at storytelling as an important and revitalizing component of our classroom teaching strategies." (Trousdale, Woestehoff, Schwartz, 1994 p. ix) The use of story in the classroom offers the educator a wide range of opportunities to broaden the intellectual horizons of their students. Gillard (1996) states that:

> . . . teachers, administrators, parents, and even government bureaucrats say the future calls for thinkers, imaginers, reasoners, and arguers. If we hope to do our part in helping children assume these roles, we must model our own thinking, imagining, reasoning, and arguing by honoring our questions and laying claim to what our stories have taught us (p. xvi).

My research questions, thus, surrounded the current use of narrative, especially the use of what I will refer to as *story* through the use of *storytelling* in its various forms. I developed an overarching research question: How does storytelling play a role in the contemporary classroom? Underneath that question were a number of guiding questions:

- What constitutes the use of storytelling in the elementary classrooms of the teacher participants in this study?
- How is storytelling being used by these teachers?
- What are the teachers' purposes when using storytelling in the classroom?

- Are there elements of prior experience in storytelling that these teachers share? If so, what are those elements?

In his book *Making Stories* (2002), Jerome Bruner asks if we "really need a book about anything as obvious as narrative" and then he answers the question immediately by simply stating that a closer look is necessary because the topic is so enigmatic. He states that we do need that closer look;

> . . .for the very reason that the subject is almost deadeningly obvious. For our intuitions about how to make a story or how to get the point of one are so implicit, so inaccessible to us, that we stumble when we try to explain, to ourselves or to some dubious other, what makes something a story rather than, say, an argument or a recipe (pp. 3 – 4).

Story, as viewed in this work and according to McArthur (1992):

comes from the Latin *historia* and the Greek *historía* meaning learning by inquiry, history, from histōr a person who knows or sees. It is further defined as a narrative, spoken or written, in prose or in verse, true or fictitious, related so as to inform, entertain, or instruct the listener or reader. A story has a structure that may be more or less formal, unfolds as a sequence of events and descriptions (even when devices like flashbacks alter the flow of time), and concerns one or more characters in one or more settings (p. 987). A story may materialize in many forms; anecdotes, jokes, plots, dramatic renderings, gossip, illustrations are among the possibilities. *Storytelling*, therefore, is the use of story by a person for the purpose of informing, entertaining, or instructing a listener or reader. Rony (1998) provides the following definition:

> In its most basic form, storytelling is a process whereby a person (the teller), using mental imagery, narrative structure, and vocalization or signing, communicates with other humans (the audience) who also use mental imagery and, in turn, communicate back to the teller primarily via

> body language and facial expression, resulting in the co-creation of a story. (p. 23)

He paints a broad picture of storytelling as a technique or method using a variety of communicative components. Rony goes on to compare basic storytelling characteristics to other performance methods.

> The power and uniqueness in the communicative and artistic nature of storytelling rests in its "co-creative, interactive, immediate, and personal nature and render it quite distinct from acting, singing, dancing, reading aloud, and related communication arts (Rony, 2001, p. 114).

Gillard (1996) offers a continuum along which story can be found and anyone who considers him or herself a storyteller will recognize at lease one level on that continuum. The continuum begins with artful self-expression which she defines as "an unrehearsed, conversational anecdote," and moves toward "a second, third, or one hundredth telling still told for fun or in teaching rather than performance." The next level is a performance level "for the purpose of entertaining friends or lecturing to an audience." And finally, the continuum enters the level of professional or expert with "any additions that enhance the performance art or the delivery, i.e., more staging, style, costuming, etc" (p. 58). Some who dabble in storytelling will advance to higher levels of performance while others will find a comfortable level and choose not to move from it.

Human beings are biologically and physiologically quite similar, but our stories are what make us unique. Story, according to Sacks (1985) "provides a window into the one-of-a-kind mind that continues to create the story from a continual stream of perceptions, feelings, thoughts, actions, and spoken narratives" (p. 17). We are immersed in a flow of events and we choose those we wish to share and attach some significance to

them. We involve ourselves in the act of making meaning and it is narrative that is the actual process (Kirby & Kuykendall, 1991).

The term *story*, as examined in this work, and the telling of those stories will encompass as many forms from any or all levels of the aforementioned continuum in order to capture a clear picture of how the participants in this study define and use storytelling in their professional practices.

A Theoretical Framework

Storytelling, a communicative device that requires the teller and listener to interact as transmitters and receivers of thoughts and ideas, may be a powerful way for teachers to teach literacy, especially in the constructivist classroom. Constructivism is a theory of learning that centers on the quest for understanding. The constructivist classroom strategies used to achieve understanding might include structuring lessons around big ideas and concepts, listening to and holding in high regard the students' points of view, and conducting formative assessments of student learning as the lesson progresses (Brooks & Brooks, 2001). Constructivist teaching strategies in the literacy classroom help students to assimilate information and internalize it. Students are able to manipulate that information and re-structure it in order to make meaning of the information to deepen their own understanding.

Woods and Murphy (2002) write that:

> In the rawest sense, constructivism adheres to an epistemology that seats the source of all knowledge creation within the individual. As such, any models that hold that humans merely reflect or discover knowledge are targets of refutation. Instead, constructivism adheres to a belief that individual constructions of knowledge and the environmental variables that mold these constructions should be the true objects of epistemology. For the constructivist, the individual responds to and assimilates the environment in ways peculiar to that individual. (p. 49).

For the constructivist, knowledge cannot simply be delivered in a pre-prepared from teacher to student or from one individual to another without some manipulation or processing by the receiver. The receiving individual takes an active role in constructing knowledge in his or her own mind. Some elements of a learner's constructed knowledge might vary from what is considered to be the "truth" of the matter (p. 51). Storytelling allows listeners to use language as stimulus in order to create mental imagery and thought that help the listener to construct an individualized translation or self-assembled understanding of the text.

The definition of literacy has grown from its basic reference to one's achieving the ability to read and to write into a complex of literacy layers that include such abilities as being computer literate, mathematically literate, performance literate, and visually literate to name a few (McArthur, 1992). Literacy is multifaceted. Some writers have defined literacy and have limited its scope to basically a variety of oral and written means of communication, with diverse discourse styles interwoven into both (Biber, 1988; Wallach, 1990). Others have broadened that scope as they propose that literacy takes the form of reading and writing at times and then transforms into speaking and listening at others. Reading, writing, speaking, and listening are integrated due to the fact that they are primarily processes of communication (Silliman & Wilkinson, 1994).

Harste (2003) suggests that literacy should be considered a social practice instead of it being an entity. He argues that instead of thinking of literacy in terms of phonics, spelling, and grammar, it should be considered as the tools one needs in order to read things critically. From a socio-psycholinguistic perspective, literacy is more than the

ability to read and write, but broadens also to the use of oral and written language as well as other sign systems, such as mathematics, drama, music, and art, to make sense of the world and communicate with others (Berghoff, 1998; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1986; Halliday, 1975; Heath, 1984).

In recent decades, a more inclusive definition of literacy has been constructed and literacy has been described as embracing, nor only reading and writing, but other creative and analytic acts as well as knowledge and skill in specific topics (Anderson & Pearson, (1984); Snow, Burns, & Griffin, (1998). Literacy expands to include the arts. Kirby and Kuykendall (1991) encourage the use of drawing to help us look as the ordinary in an extraordinary way. Drawing "slows the act of seeing, allowing time for new insights to develop" (p. 105). Blecher and Jaffee (1998) tell us that, as teachers, they have come to realize that their definition of language has been to restricted. They state:

> For the past several years we have been intrigued by the responses of our first- and second-grade students to the integration of the fine arts into our daily classroom curriculum. As opportunities to immerse themselves in music, movement, poetry, and visual arts increased, we found more students becoming more deeply engaged in the learning process. We have seen children develop understandings about the making of meaning through art, music, dance, and poetry that they had failed to grasp through more traditional means. As we watched these patterns develop we realized that we had been focusing with too narrow a lens (pp. xi-xii).

Storytelling as an art form, provides a language-rich mode of delivering messages that assist one in meaning-making—making sense of one's world—as well as communicating meaning to others. Storytelling at times involves multiple signs and symbols such as music, movement, and poetry and those elements help to enlighten and inform the listener.

Literacy has been traditionally linked primarily to reading and writing (McArthur, 1992). Ruddell and Unrau (1994), in explaining reading as a meaning-making process, conceptualize it as a sociocognitive interactive model (p. 998). Two of the key assumptions of that model revealed in their work are as follows:

> Oral and written language development, which affect the thinking process, contribute directly to the development of reading ability; and readers construct meanings not only of printed manuscripts but also of events, speech, and behaviors as they "read" gestures, images, symbols, signs, and signals that are embedded in a social and cultural environment (p. 997).

In other words, reading is not solely the decoding and comprehension process of symbols or letters on the written page, but can be viewed as a sort of decoding and comprehension of other communicative procedures.

Reading is a meaning-construction process that allows one to create "carefully reasoned as well as imaginary worlds filled with new concepts, creatures, and characters" (Ruddell & Unrau, 1994, p. 996). Storytelling is an activity that requires the listeners to participate actively by listening to or "reading" the verbal communication, movements, and gestures of the teller and to then call upon their prior knowledge and experiences to construct their own frames of thought with reference to what was told (Johnson et al., 1996). When storytelling is initiated in the classroom, the teacher or teller relies upon a combination of oral communication and gesturing to transmit information to the student. Each of these storytelling components are mirrored by Ruddell and Unrau (1994) as they point to three major components of the sociocognitive interactive model. Those components are the reader, the text and classroom context and the teacher (p. 998). The reader or listener utilizes two interrelated elements or conditions that aid in the processing of the information being transmitted. Ruddell and Unrau (1994) explain:

> The first, affective conditions, includes a range of factors extending from the motivation to read to personal sociocultural values and beliefs about reading and schooling. The second, cognitive conditions, accounts for such areas as background knowledge of language, word-analysis skills, text-processing strategies, and understanding of the classroom and social interaction (p. 998).

During storytelling, the listener utilizes many of those affective and cognitive conditions in the process of internalizing the information and making sense of it. As the knowledge-construction process proceeds, the reader creates a representation of the text which is influenced by factors such as dialogue with peers and the teacher. Such interaction creates the need for the reader/listener to monitor the meaning-construction process in order to confirm or reject the new meaning by means of prior belief and knowledge. Egan (1986) argues that the dominant model of education has emphasized the cognitive at the expense of the affective. Story in the classroom can bring a better balance to instruction and allow for learners' access to material with greater engagement.

The teacher component, one of the other major components of the model, consists of cognitive and affective conditions as well. Ruddell and Unrau (1994) explain that:

> The teacher's affective conditions include instructional beliefs and philosophy and involve such things as motivation to engage students, appropriateness of instructional stance, and personal sociocultural values and beliefs. The cognitive conditions include conceptual knowledge representation as well as instructional knowledge ranging from understanding of the reader's meaning-construction process to teaching strategies and personal and world knowledge (p. 1000).

The teacher/storyteller, like the reader/listener, uses such devices as knowledge use and control and instructional decision-making to create a general instructional objective based upon their prior knowledge and beliefs. They monitor the instructional process and guide the instruction to achieve the desired outcomes. Even though they bring to the arena some of the same ingredients such as background knowledge, beliefs and values, etc., the teacher has the additional responsibility of facilitating the meaning-making process in

order to assist the student in becoming cognizant of knowledge they already possess (Ruddell & Unrau, 1994). Storytelling serves as a method for the teacher to bring underlying layers of knowledge to the surface and help students connect prior knowledge with story content.

Text and classroom context, the third major component of the model, consists of the sociocultural, task-specific, and operational aspects of the classroom environment. This context is the world in which the teller and the listener co-mingle in order to produce the meaning-making that should occur in the classroom setting. This is the place where the meaning-negotiation process takes place. As part of this meaning-negotiation process and within the sociocognitive interactive model there is mention of the source of authority. The source of authority refers to a negotiated understanding of where and in whom authority for constructed meanings resides. According to Ruddell and Unrau (1994) "these sources of authority may reside in the text, the teacher, the reader, the classroom community, or in the interaction between various sources in the meaning-construction process" (p. 1034).

Storytelling fits well with the sociocognitive interactive model put forth by Ruddell and Unrau (1994). As in the reading of written text, the act of processing oral text in the form of storytelling follows the steps described in the model. The reader/listener and the teacher/teller bring conditions that each needs to construct meaning and the two process information using those conditions in the shared setting of the text and classroom environment.

The Researcher

It is important for me to clarify my role as researcher in this study by providing some information about my background and experiences. As Corbin and Strauss (1998) point out:

> In qualitative research, objectivity does not mean controlling the variables. Rather, it means openness, a willingness to listen and to "give voice" to respondents, be they individuals or organizations. It means hearing what others have to say, seeing what others do, and representing these as accurately as possible (p. 43).

If, as a qualitative researcher, I am to accurately portray the participants of my study, I must disassociate myself with regard to personal bias and report my observations through as neutral a lens as possible. The reader should hear the voice of the participant, expressing their feelings, viewpoints, expectations, and concerns. As a researcher whose background is greatly influenced by the art of storytelling, I am attempting to set aside my own feelings and interpretations about the topic in order to form new interpretations. While objectivity is the goal, subjectivity must be taken into account. Corbin and Strauss (1998) write:

> It is difficult to say which is the more problematic – maintaining objectivity or developing sensitivity. During the analytic process, we are asking researchers to set aside their knowledge and experience to form new interpretations about phenomena. Yet, in our everyday lives, we rely on knowledge and experience to provide the means for helping to understand the world in which we live and to find solutions to problems we encounter. Fortunately, over the years, researchers have learned that a state of complete objectivity is impossible and that in every piece of research – quantitative or qualitative – there is an element of subjectivity (p. 43).

Their argument is well founded. Human nature dictates that we compare the experiences of others with those of our own simply in order to better equate meaning, understand, or

come to some level of comprehension of those experiences. In our imperfect world where total objectivity is probably impossible, we must take into consideration and constantly be aware of the element of subjectivity. This is not a flaw, but a factor that must be weighed and balanced as data is gathered, analyzed and interpreted. With this in mind, I feel it is necessary to provide some background information about the primary research tool in this study, myself.

The use of story has always fascinated me. I can look back over my lifetime and see many instances when story was used in order to entertain and enlighten. Life was seemingly easy as I grew up in our rural community in the north Georgia mountains. As a boy, I had my share of adventures with friends and relatives as we scoured the hills and valleys surrounding our homes. Those adventures were important influences during my early years and helped to shape me into the person I am today. But there were other influences that were working to shape my personality and my future. Many influences were sometimes so subtle that I did not realize their importance until years later. Those influences came, many times, in the form of story.

Story presented itself in many forms and venues. There were always storytelling events associated with my Cub Scout and Boy Scout camping trips and various youth-related church events. Many afternoons and evenings had been spent on the sprawling front porch of my grandparents house listening to the adults tell stories about things that had happened in their lives. Visits to other relatives' houses were rich with stories that were probably intended to entertain and to exercise some control upon children present . . .stories that told how little kids who misbehaved were sometimes carried away by characters like "the hairy man" and "the old man with the sack on his back." Aunt

Margaret, my mother's sister, would make use of those "hairy man" stories any time my cousin and I were in need of a good scolding. If we were misbehaving, all she would have to do was go to the living room window, peek through the curtain, and let us know that she could see him coming around the curve and toward the house. "I think I see him coming over the hill at Levis and Lonie's house," she would say as she peeked outside, "it looks like he's already got somebody in that sack. Ya'll better act nice!" She would go back to her housekeeping or cooking, leaving us sitting on the sofa. Attitudes changed quickly.

Another of my mother's sisters, Aunt Laverne, would entertain the family with her rendition of the "peanut butter story" as it came to be called around our family gatherings. She would tell of the young girl whose mother exited the house for a short while to run an errand. Before leaving, she told the child not to get into anything or she would be in serious trouble. Not long after her mother left, she became quite hungry, climbed up to the kitchen cupboard housing the peanut butter, and scooped a huge "finger full" of the gooey substance into her mouth. As she began to enjoy her spoil, she heard her mother returning through the front door and found that she was stuck with a great gob of peanut butter in the roof of her mouth. As the story evolves, the dialogue between mother and daughter is hilarious. The little girl tries to make conversation with her mother without letting her know she had been into the peanut butter, but her speech is so impaired by her dilemma that she cannot hide her transgression and must confess what she has done. Our family has enjoyed hearing the same story repeatedly over the years. I've even tried my hand at the same topic – not as well as my Aunt Laverne. The object

of this story, like the Hairy Man story, is to let us know how our decisions are followed by consequences.

Sometimes, these stories were not at all meant to admonish or to entertain, but to simply share information. Listening to details of how a family member had gotten himself into a bit of trouble with the law or how another friend or relative had made choices that would eventually lead to opportunities for success – or failure. It was odd. Sitting there listening to these stories about people. I could only imagine them in my mind because I didn't always know them. I might simply know them as "Aunt Leone's boy" or "Mr. Thomas' brother," but representative images of those people jumped into my head and I began to visualize almost every move the storyteller said they made. These impromptu sessions were also steeped in history. I probably did not realize at the time just how much insight we, the young listening audience, were being given into a first-hand account of life changing events. Heath (1983) found the same to be true as she conducted research into the lives and stories of two communities in the South. The communities, she named Trackton and Roadville, are reminiscent of the community in which I grew up. Heath states:

> Common experience in events similar to those of the (storyteller's) story becomes an expression of social unity, a commitment to maintenance of the norms of the church and of the roles within the mill community's life. In telling a story, an individual shows that he belongs to the group: he knows about wither himself or the subject of the story, and he understands the norms which were broken by the central character." (p. 151)

Tales were told by my grandparents of their plight as a poor farming couple raising a large family. Other stories came from my father and some of my uncles concerning their experiences during World War II. We heard stories about state and local

politicians and how they would sweep through the small towns and communities promoting their platforms much like traveling salesmen plying their trade. Sometimes I listened passively, never actively entering into dialogue with the storyteller. Other times I would ask questions and seek clarification about some of the things I did not understand. Most of the time, I just soaked up all the stories and created intricate images in my mind of the occurrences being shared with me. Many of these front-porch or front-parlor episodes remain with me today. Those stories became a powerful part of my being and have guided much of what I have done in my life. They continue to influence the way I view the world.

I had also experienced storytelling during a time of work. My mother and several of her sisters would plant corn and peas in the "bottoms." Bottom land is usually land that is quite fertile and located near a constant water source. We had to ride in the back of the pickup truck or on the wagon being pulled by the tractor and along a trail cut through the woods by pulpwood cutters in order to get across the rough terrain between the main road and the bottoms. When we arrived at the corn patch, we were not pleased to see the two-acre field of corn ready to be harvested.

Work time was not necessarily a time we youngsters would really want to be a part of the storytelling audience. We would have rather been playing, but we were cheap labor and our mothers made good use of our hands to pick, carry, and shuck corn by the wagon loads. Apparently it was the same in other communities. As we worked at helping our elders put the harvested bounty away, there would always be spirited discussions and plenty of stories to help pass the time.

Another venue for story in my life is the church. As a young boy growing up in the rural South, it was not unusual for me to find myself in church – whether it be my home church or another one of many situated in the hills of my northern Georgia community – on a very regular basis. I often joke with people as I tell them that "if my mother and daddy saw the church doors open, we went . . .even if it was only open because somebody had shown up to clean the building!" Even though that was an exaggeration, my parents did seem to think we had to be in church for practically every service. Church probably provided me with some of my earliest memories of story. I can, of course, remember the many Sunday School sessions I attended as a child and the frequent use of the flannel board as a visual aid in teaching the lesson. There was Vacation Bible School which was a week-long, camp-like setting for boys and girls from five to twelve or thirteen years old hosted by local churches every summer. One week it would be held at our church and sometimes I got to go to a neighboring church if they were having one the week before ours or the week after ours. There was always a sufficient supply of cookies and Kool-Aid and other little treats for our break time. Stories were told by the volunteer teachers and there was an abundance of sharing of personal experiences. Just as Heath (1983) found in her study of the children of Roadville, there were stories that came directly from the lives of Bible characters and there were more contemporary stories as well. Many stories, especially in recent years, are about "boys and girls of today meeting temptations and overcoming them through remembering and living according to Biblical precepts. The end of the story always contains the moral and the Bible verse most relevant to the story's conflict resolution (p.

157).” The church and story connection of Roadville was just the same for me and my childhood companions as we grew up in our own part of the rural South.

While Vacation Bible School was always filled with stories told by just regular people . . .not just preachers, it was the use of story from the pulpit that probably brings back the strongest memories of its use. Southern Baptist churches in rural Georgia were known for their Bible-thumping, heavy-breathing, spit-slinging preachers who would get wound up during preaching service and prance back and forth across the front of the church proclaiming the Word when, suddenly, they would break into a story. It would be as though the world came to a screeching halt. One minute, there would be all this noise – the preacher shouting out his words to the congregation at a rapid-fire pace, “amens” being mumbled or even shouted from all across the front few rows of people-laden pews, babies crying and mamas trying to shush them into a reverent silence. The crickets and tree frogs (during summer evening revival services especially) would be singing to the tops of their lungs, and big red wasps darted along the ceiling of the sanctuary, clicking loudly as their heads and bodies thumped wildly against the ceiling near the lights to which they were drawn. All of this noise, except that of the crickets and frogs and a couple of babies, would come to a halt when the preacher would launch into a story. He’d take his neatly folded handkerchief from his pocket, wipe the sweat from his brow and the apparent spit from the corners of his mouth, and begin his tale. As a young boy, I figured I could tell it was going to be a story because the only time he ever slowed down in the delivery of the sermon was when he was going to tell us a story or when he was going to tell the musicians to start playing the invitational hymn. Everything would become as still as death itself and he would practically hold the entire congregation in the

palm of his hand for a few minutes while he told us the story. Sometimes it was a story that was from the Bible, sometimes it was a story about some poor, lost soul who lived near the church and was in need of the church's attention. No matter what the story was about, there was a sudden turn of attention to the speaker and what was being said. Nobody was whispering to their neighbor, nobody was nodding off to sleep, nobody was moving about, all was quiet and everyone was paying close attention. It was a magical moment, especially in the eyes of a young boy like me. It was the information delivered during those moments of story that went with me out the door. Those were the haunting thoughts that stayed with me during the days and weeks to follow. There was something about the stories that I was able to relate to. I was able to transfer the abstract implications of many of the stories I heard as a child and as a young adult into practical information that was useful to me in my own decision-making processes.

I remember one event in my life that I have shared with my daughters and with some of my students. It was one of those experiential lessons learned through some distress which I shared with the hope of giving my listeners some practical information that might assist them in their decision making. I had gotten permission to go to one of those towel and bathing suit places you find all along the streets when you go to the beach. I wanted some swimming goggles and, as I looked in a bin of suitable goggles, I found a pair that had a price sticker that was quite evidently not correct. I thought I'd take a chance that no one would pay attention to that fact. When I approached the counter, the clerk, an elderly gentleman of about twenty-five, asked me if I knew how the wrong price sticker got attached to that piece of merchandise. I had no idea of course. I paid full price for the goggles. When sharing this story, I have no need to explain the moral. I let the

story stand for itself. One can learn much about what people believe by paying attention to the metaphoric devices they use to expose experiential components of abstraction (Bruner, 1986). We tend to be a reflection of the metaphors we use and the stories we tell.

I had attended storytelling events of a more formal kind where audiences listened to storyteller artists weave words into elaborate pictures of life. I also had the opportunity to experience story during the course of my educational career. I vividly remember stories, both told and read, that were delivered by some of my teachers throughout elementary school, high school, and even college. Over the years, I began to surmise that there was something about the use of story and one's ability to manipulate it or mold it into a tool for teaching. I began paying more attention to the use of story during my early adulthood as I noticed the choreographed use of the tool during training sessions, Sunday sermons, and other events in which I was involved. I had always known that stories were really great entertainment. Could it be possible to employ such a tool that would reach into the emotional center of one's being and, at least for a brief moment, create a shared understanding between teller and the listener? There were so many of the stories used by my teachers stuck in my memory. Even though some of them were probably delivered during the moments that all students hope for, times when teachers veer off the subject of the lesson, many of them were attached to lessons that were being taught. Many of those storied lessons have remained with me over the years and have guided the way I approach lesson delivery in my own practice.

As an educator, I have also been fascinated with the way those teachers used story during their lessons. They were not always acting as formal storytellers. They did not necessarily begin each storytelling event with "let me tell you a story about . . ." or any

other introductory phrase that one might associate with an introduction to story. They seemed to lapse into storytelling as if it were the natural thing to do at the moment. During my own teaching career, I found myself using story quite often. Most of the time, I pulled stories from my own experiences, but sometimes I borrowed tales I had heard from friends and acquaintances over the years and made them my own. Each story offered me the opportunity to make a relationship between the lesson being taught and, hopefully, some prior knowledge or experience of the listener. There were times when story was used as a means of management within my classroom. When it seemed that students were not focused on the assigned task, I would sometimes pull them back toward the main focus or task by using a short story. It may have been a fabricated story about a student who found himself or herself in a similar situation and how they re-organized their thoughts and work in order to get to the desired result. Nevertheless, it was a method or tool that I would use in order to make the students contemplate their individual situations.

There are many others who recognize the value in the use of story. The use of story provides another way to teach subtle points and make elusive abstractions concrete (Roe, Alfred, & Smith, 1998). It also provides an opportunity to elicit the participation of students. When "show and tell" days of elementary school are over, middle school and high school students find that oral storytelling is another way to bring their own stories to school while helping them rehearse for many other types of composition (Gillard, 1996). It is not simply a method of entertainment. Although the word "storytelling" does seem to conjure up images of encircling a campfire or huddling together with flashlights in a darkened room, story also reflects a basic and powerful form in which we make sense of

the world and experience (Egan, 1989). It is a means by which we can recognize significance in our lives (Livo & Rietz, 1986). In primary and elementary classrooms, teachers are seeing that young children still find delight in the retelling of favorite tales, learning the rhythms of language beginning with patterns and repetitions as simple as "Trip-trap, trip-trap, trip-trap" (Schwartz, Trousdale, & Woestehoff, 1994**).**

No matter what the age of the listener, stories are one way for speakers, preachers, teachers, and other human beings to present various forms of information to others. It is an ancient method which seems to adapt itself to contemporary times.

Definition of Terms

Narrative

In the very first lines of Jerome Bruner's book, *Making Stories* (2002), he begins by asking "Do we need another book about narrative, about stories, what they tell us and how they are used?" (p. 3). In that line, he uses the term narrative and story synonymously. The terms are, in fact, intertwined as narrative is used as a general or inclusive term for a story. Narrative or story can take a variety of shapes beginning with the account of any event or experience and expanding to epic tales of fact or fiction whether detailed or quite simple in nature (McArthur, 1992, p. 680). Smith (1998) posits that humans become members of the "spoken language club" as literacy learners (pp. 16-17). We do not learn language as infants and children in a deliberate manner, but we learn language as we establish our identities through the process of listening to and observing the people around us. It is the story and narrative in our lives that helps us to determine and establish exactly who we are as a member of our social group.

Storytelling

It should be noted that most storytelling in the literacy classroom is not always the same as storytelling in the performance setting. Performance storytelling, that act of telling that I will refer to as storytelling with a capital "S", takes place with a particular formality as a backdrop. The teller usually positions him or herself upon a stage, platform, or other central location to the audience. It is common for the performing storyteller to use equipment to augment the telling; sound equipment, lighting, music, and props or items used on stage to help tell the story. This performance storytelling is usually more elaborate than the more informal telling I refer to as storytelling with a lower case "s." This informal form is used in our living rooms, our kitchens, on the street, on the bus, as well as in the classroom. It is used daily and with such regularity that we often do not even notice that it is taking place. It takes the form of gossip, news, jokes, explanations, and other communicative efforts (Barthes, 1966). Much of our literacy learning, in the classroom and in life itself, is influenced by this informal form of the sharing of story.

Literacy

Langer (1986) states that reading and writing are "tools that enable, but do not ensure, literate thinking" (p. 2). She is of the opinion that being literate does not simply mean being able to decode and make sense of print on a page. I will also refer to literacy in a broad sense. The concept of being literate has moved beyond the basic ability of reading and writing and has begun to encompass one's ability to decode and comprehend the world around one. While the concept of literacy does seem to make one focus on reading and writing, we must also realize the importance of oral language skills as a way

to make meaning of ourselves and our world through conversation, small group discussion, lectures and presentations, and other communicative functions. In storytelling, the power of imaging and imagination plays an important role. A child's involvement in play, taking roles, gossiping and talking, storytelling and story-listening, and other literacy functions serves a psychological function to help the child improve memory, language skills, empathy toward others, and reasoning (Egan, 2005; Heath, 1986).

Assumptions

In this study I assumed that certain teaching conditions existed because my participants were teachers at the elementary school level. There is usually a relatively small class size and the students are in the room with the teacher for most of the day. One of my participants did not have only one group of students during her day because her school opted to use a four-person team-teaching approach. It was the feeling of the system officials that the sixth grade students, even though they were housed at an elementary school, would benefit from such a schedule prior to joining the seventh and eighth grades at the local middle school. Another of my participants during this study taught non-academic classes which meant that groups of children from all grade levels would take turns taking her class during the course of the year. I also assumed that their teaching practice as well as their concepts of literacy and creative teaching methods had been influenced or shaped by their personal and professional backgrounds and experiences. Since all three participants were touted by their peers as being highly effective and very creative in the classroom, I presumed that they would exhibit such characteristics during my visits to their classrooms. As I entered the interview process, I

was prepared to hear my participants' accounts of telling stories in a formal sense. I use the term "formal sense" here to refer to the "come, sit down and let me tell you a story" sense. I also assumed that I would witness some anecdotal use of story to explain or to clarify information for students along with other storytelling techniques. My assumptions were made due to the comments from the participants' school principals who caused me to believe I would see evidence of storytelling in the teaching practices of those teachers. Many teachers who are recognized by their colleagues for using "unique" or "creative" techniques within the context of teaching a lesson are usually looking for other creative ways to enhance their teaching practice, therefore I felt that I would see them in the process of generating creativity through storytelling. I really was not sure what to expect as I began my study and there were times prior to my entering the field that I really worried about being able to find anything at all! Nevertheless, I launched into data collection with the charge that I would look for storytelling and simply document its presence or its absence.

CHAPTER 2

A REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

WE ARE ALL BORN STORYTELLERS

Each and every one of us tells stories of our own life experience daily. When we are telling the stories of our lives, we marshal the deepest feelings and the most interesting details we can to seize our listeners. Those skills that we use in such a natural way are the very ones required to get the stories onto our tongues. We are so adept at narrative that it seems as natural as language itself. (Barton, 2000; Bruner, 2002).

In attempting to define the technique of storytelling and oral narrative, Roney (1998) states that,

> In its most basic form, storytelling is a process whereby a person, (the teller) using mental imagery, narrative structure, and vocalization or signing, communicates with other humans (the audience) who also use mental imagery and, in turn, communicate back to the teller primarily via body language and facial expressions, resulting in the co-creation of a story. (p.23)

Bruner (2002) states that "common sense stoutly holds that the story form is a transparent window on reality, not a cookie cutter imposing a shape on it." (p.6) and . . .

> "We should not write off this power of story to shape everyday experience as simply another error in our human effort to make sense of the world, though cognitive scientists are sometimes wont to do this. Nor should we shunt it off to the philosopher in the armchair, concerned with the age old dilemma as to whether and how epistemological processes lead to valid ontological outcomes (that is, with how mere experience gets you to true reality). (pp.7-8).

Story is a way of thinking, a primary organizer of information and ideas, the soul of a culture, and the mythic and metaphoric consciousness of a people. It is a prehistoric and

historic thread of human awareness, a way in which we can know, remember, and understand (Livo & Rietz, 1991). Polkinghorne (1997) explains, "actions and happenings" are marked off in time as events are linked "into a temporal whole and displayed as contributors to a particular outcome or achievement" (p. 14). These actions and happenings come together to make story. Bruner (1990) states that people do not deal with these happenings "event by event" nor do they approach text "sentence by sentence." All of the pieces, events, and sentences are "framed together into larger structures (p. 64). Storytellers are the means by which these events are constructed into a larger, more understandable structure. In nearly every culture, the storyteller also plays the role of the teacher. Weaver (1994) writes that:

In nearly every culture, the storyteller also plays the role of teacher. That role is rooted in the almost instinctive understanding that real learning takes place when both intellect and emotions are brought into play. We remember those things we care deeply about, and we understand those things we can see clearly (p. 3).

One can learn to care deeply and to think more clearly through the use of storytelling as a learning tool. Storytelling allows us to communicate concepts and provide perspectives on topics that might not be accessible to the students.

To date, little research exists that involves the effect of storytelling on humans. Relative to research involving reading aloud, there are far fewer studies of the effect of storytelling on the cognitive and affective aspects of a child's growth toward literacy (Roney, 1998). A review of some studies related to storytelling revealed studies that dealt with effects on the student learning. One study resulted in significant gains in psycholinguistic capability of the first-grade children who were the subjects of this

research. But storytelling was only one of several treatments, and the effects of the storytelling alone were not isolated from the total effects of the multiple treatments (Bailey, 1970). A study by Amato, Emans, and Ziegler (1973) involving fourth and fifth grade students who were exposed to storytelling and oral readings, found that there was no significant difference in reading achievement in the experimental group population, but that some evidence pointed to some change in the students' self esteem and creativity. In a study by Farrell and Nessel (1982), the researchers found that the kindergarten and first-grade children to whom stories were told by their teachers grew significantly in their abilities to create new stories as compared to the ability of the children in the control group. Trostle and Hicks (1998) compared the effects of storytelling versus story reading on the comprehension and vocabulary development of 32 British Primary School children. The storyteller employed Character Imagery storytelling techniques by dressing in character. The story reading was done by a trained student teacher. The researchers concluded that children who witnessed storytelling of a selected title scored significantly higher on measures of comprehension and vocabulary than did the students who listened to story reading. Graham Nuthall (1999), conducted studies into the ways children learn. He argues that multiple exposures—no more than two days apart—are necessary for children to adequately integrate new information into their prior knowledge base. More importantly, he notes that it is not only the multiple exposures that make a difference, but the types of experiences they have with the content. The most striking aspect of Nuthall's study is the impact of narrative and dramatic elements in instruction. Classroom experiences can certainly turn out to be blandly repetitive and the information that is supposed to be learned can be quickly forgotten. Students in the Nuthall study were able

to recall information from the lesson with greater ease and comprehension immediately following the lesson, but they were also able to remember, even eight months after the lesson, more than students who did not receive storied instruction. The other types of experiences in the study, verbal instruction and visual instruction, were effective, but did not approach the same level of success. He notes:

> Our studies suggest that narratives provide powerful structures for organization and storage of curriculum content in memory . . .stories often contain a rich variety of supplemental information and connect to personal experiences, as well as being integrated and held together by a familiar structure (p. 337).

Nuthall's study suggests that, in order to promote information retention, teachers should be encouraged to use a variety of types of tasks or activities and they need to be aware that the "student needs to experience the same information at least three or four times for the information to be integrated into long-term memory" (p. 337). This proposition does not include simple repetition. Other researchers have offered similar conclusions about the instructional potential of storytelling (Barrell, 2001; Hicks, 1993; Schank, 1990). Bower and Clark (1969) conducted an experiment in which college students memorized and later recalled a number of sets of unrelated words. The subjects memorized the words in each set in whatever manner they desired. Another group of students was presented with the same sets of words, but were asked to construct a story for each word set that incorporated all of the words of the set. In a delayed recall task, the subjects in the story group recalled approximately five times as many words as the subjects in the control group. Story, therefore, was beneficial to the students by providing an organizational structure to aid in information recall. Other researchers offer support to the claim that story representations have a privileged status in the cognitive system. In comparing the

reading time and information recall of naturalistic (story) texts with expository (textbook) texts, researchers found that the narrative or story texts were read approximately twice as fast as the expository texts and there was a significantly higher recall ability associated with the narrative texts as well (Graesser, A., Hauft-Smith, K., Cohen, A., & Pyles, L., 1980). Contrary to the findings in some of these studies, Myers (1990) conducted a study in which storytelling and story reading were compared and reached a different conclusion. In that study, storytelling decreased the collaboration among children while collaboration was increased in the story reading group. In fact, the children in the study preferred story reading. Morrow (1997), however, compared storytelling to teacher read-aloud and found that there was more bantering or give-and-take between the storyteller and the audience during storytelling than story reading. Therefore, they concluded that collaboration was increased in the storytelling events.

While these studies investigated the use of storytelling and its effect upon classroom instruction and found its use to be relevant to student learning, it is the classroom teacher who is charged with the task of creating the structure of learning experiences of students (Marzano, 2003). Some questions arise that may need to be addressed: Do teachers use storytelling as part of a multiple exposure method in the classroom? If so, how do they use it and what motivates them to implement such teaching practices?

Historical Perspective of Storytelling

The historical foundation of the storytelling or oral language tradition is based, to a certain degree, upon logic. Without sufficient record of what may or may not have taken place within the social communities of humankind during those early periods, one

can only piece together the possibilities of how such social communities created and transmitted basic information about themselves as individuals and as a group (Sawyer, 1942). Storytelling has been important to individuals since the early days of civilizations and personal stories serve many of the same functions now that they did then (Greene, 1996; Roney, 2001). In those early days, storytelling included the tales of hunting recounted by the hunter and the tales of was recounted by the warrior. The listeners vicariously experienced the excitement of the hunt or the battle. As the people gathered around campfires, the stories told ranged from those designed to transmit information to those strictly for entertainment (Sawyer, 1942). Both personal and historical stories were likely among the stories passed along at these times (Roe, B., Alfred, S., & Smith, S. 1998). The first written record of an activity that appears to be storytelling is found in an Egyptian papyrus called the Westcar Papyrus recorded between 2000 and 1300 B.C. in which the three sons of Cheops the famous builder of pyramids, take turns entertaining their father with strange tales (Greene, 1996).

Storytelling is pervasive in our lives. It has been at the heart of our communications since the beginning of the human race. Through stories, our values and principles have been passed from one generation to another. Stories provide continuity in our lives, conveying a sense of where we have come from, hour history, and hour heritage. Stories are immediate and unique. They celebrate how previous generations dealt with dilemmas in their lives (Denning, 2001). Storytelling had evolved within early societies as a way of basic communication. Communication is an essential element in human society. In its various forms, it is the basis on which the varying cultures and civilizations of the world have rested. Language, the fundamental and characteristically

human form of communication, is augmented by a variety of non-verbal forms of communication like gesture, body movement, and facial expression (Finnegan, 1988). Since there was no formal written language, there was a great deal of dependence upon oral narrative as communication. According to Ruth Sawyer (1942):

> The first primitive efforts at conscious storytelling consisted of a simple chant, set to the rhythm of some tribal occupation such as grinding corn, paddling canoe or kayak, sharpening weapons for hunting or war, or ceremonial dancing. They were the first person, impromptu, giving expression to pride or exultation over some act of bravery or accomplishment that set the individual for the moment apart from the tribe (pp. 45-46).

This communication was probably augmented by the use of kinesthetics — movement in dance, mimicking, creating a visual scene without the use of elaborate artistic tools. Early humans eventually developed more sophisticated techniques for communicative use and were able to document their conditions upon cave walls and stone tablets, that this progression from oral/kinesthetic communication to a more formal, concrete method was a natural and logical process. It was through these rudimentary forms of storytelling and dramatic interpretation that early man was able to begin the process of passing information along from generation to generation (Craig, 2001; Maguire, 1998; Sawyer, 1942).

Storytelling is arguably the oldest form of literary communication and has served generations of humans as their major means of entertainment. But its longevity must be due as well to its value as a tool for edification and education. The collected narratives of a culture represent its history, values, knowledge, beliefs, and rituals. The traditional means of transmitting this collective wisdom from one generation to the next has been storytelling (Craig, 2001; Sawyer, 1942). Throughout ancient times, the history, the

mores, the religion, the customs, the deeds of heroes, and the pride of a people was transmitted from one generation to the next by means of the storyteller. It was the storyteller who told of the past, of the adventures of heroes, and the evils of the enemy. The storyteller was a central figure in the fabric of those early societies (Chambers, 1977). The storyteller provided cohesion to the many ramifications of societal structure, and folktales have served as the cement of society (Arbuthnot, 1971).

The storyteller did not solely provide pertinent information concerning the history, laws and traditions of a culture, but he also entertained. Stories about fictional heroes and places tempted the imaginations of ancient peoples to visualize people and places beyond their realm of existence. No doubt the storyteller was probably faced with the task of using his own imagination to devise a logical explanation for events, disasters, defeats, and other occurrences that may have had no logical explanation. Gradually, in the early days, some people emerged as better tellers and were chosen to learn and tell the stories of the group as a whole. This storyteller often became important enough to the tribe or village to be relieved of other duties in order to concentrate on the preservation of the stories. This elevation of the storyteller is a strong testimony to the power of storytelling (Sawyer, 1942). Because of superior communication ability, the person who performed this duty eventually came to function in such roles as historian, spokesperson for the group in encounters with other groups, and mediator between the group and its deities (Roe, et. al., 1998). The good storyteller was valued by his audience. Often people traveled to his village to hear him tell his tales and many became fundamental to the function of society as important members in the court of the chief or king. These royal sessions provided opportunities for storytellers to brag about the personal exploits, to pay

homage to ancestors, and pass along customs and rituals (Chambers, 1970; Maguire, 1985).

The storyteller's use of folktale and folklore did not only function as an important part of one particular social group. They served as a communicative resource between groups as well. The term *folklore* was not coined until the mid 1800s as a reflection of the people, their manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, tales, and proverbs. It is a broad term that encompasses not only traditional materials presented in words, but also traditional tools, physical objects, symbols, beliefs, and rituals (Goforth & Spillman, 1994). This form of oral ethnography was a useful tool in providing traditional cultural information one's own group, but it was an increasingly useful tool in providing that same information to other cultures as trade routes and outward expansion created the need to communicate and develop relationships with other societies.

Storytelling in the Classroom

Storytelling and folklore have provided a foundation for teaching that is both logical and innovative. The same principle is applicable today as children and adults discover themselves learning through oral tradition just as our predecessors have done since ancient times. We are surrounded by real-world occurrences and relationships that are best communicated to and from us by oral/aural sharing of information. As Paulo Freire (1987) has noted, long before we come to books and school we read the world, and such reading prepares us to read texts of all kinds.

A number of theorists have developed models of learning that encourage non-traditional teaching strategies including the use of drama and storytelling as a pedagogical tool. Some base their theories upon the Cognitive Theory of development

that establishes a framework for learning to take place even before formal and technical mechanisms are in place and continues to scaffold throughout childhood and into adulthood. One of the pioneers of Cognitive Theory was Jean Piaget. His researches in developmental psychology and genetic epistemology had one unique goal: how does knowledge grow? His answer is that the growth of knowledge is a progressive construction of logically embedded structures superseding one another by a process of inclusion of lower less powerful logical means into higher and more powerful ones up to adulthood. Therefore, children's logic and modes of thinking are initially entirely different from those of adults (Berger, 2001; Gruber, H. & Voneche, J., 1995). Some people might point out that Piaget has derived his theory from a study of play, dreams, and many other aspects of children's activity that are centrally concerned with imagination. The subject matter of his research has indeed included such material, but the aim has not been to study fantasy and imagination so much as to discover the logico-mathematical forms than underlie children's responses. Some of the Piagetian research has been negatively interpreted. Some researchers have claimed that, because the concept of historical causality, for example, is considered a "formal operational" concept in the Piagetian sense, children in elementary school should not be expected to display an ability to understand such concepts, thus, the curriculum should not include it. Egan (1986) proposes that, while the more formal logico-mathematical concepts of causality are rare in young children, a story-concept of causality is clearly common. He writes:

> It is clearly insufficient to do a research study that concludes that 'causality' is a 'formal operational' concept, in Piaget's sense, and that young children thus cannot understand or use it, and then infer further that curriculum content requiring or using this concept should be excluded from the elementary school curriculum (p. 22).

Unfortunately, there seem to be common instances in the early childhood education arena of using Piaget's theory to promote a more "objects and events" related curriculum for young children (Wadsworth, 1978, p. 186).

The human relationship with reality is heavily mediated by social relationships, tools, and artifacts (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotskian theory posits a strong, dialectic connection between external (social), practical activity mediated by the use of cultural tools, such as speech and writing, and individuals' intellectual activity (Ruddell, Ruddell, and Singer, 1994). Heathcote and Bolton (1995) remind us that:

> A readiness theory of learning (derived from Piaget and others) sets a false limit on a student's capacity. It ignores the Vygotskian observations on socially determined learning contexts: that in the presence of an empowering adult a child can reach beyond his own capacity in carrying out a task (p. 35).

Storytelling becomes a natural bridge given this socio-cultural theoretical stance which operates within the realm of humans' actual relationship with reality, in their social history, which is closely tied to labor and language (Luriia, 1981).

Over the years, a number of professionals have written about the centralilty of narrative, or story in people's lives (Bruner, 1986; Rosen, 1986; Witherell & Noddings, 1991). Their belief is that narrative is a fundamental process of the human mind—across cultures and individuals. It is a basic way of making sense of our world and our lives and assists us in relating our experiences to those of others (Moffett, 1985; Neumann & Peterson, 1977). Like life itself, a story mediates between two worlds. A world of concrete details—sights, sounds, smells, tastes, textures, and physical actions that an individual experiences. The other world is one of concepts—subjects, themes, thoughts, and theories that relate to common experience (Maguire, 1998). Storytelling, therefore, is

the natural way for people to learn about their world. We all have stories to tell, whether they are about something minute that happened yesterday or something having more significance such as saving a life, witnessing a criminal act, or participating in ceremonies and rituals with family and friends (Searfoss, Readence, & Mallette, 2001).

Jack Maguire (1985) suggests that the use of story provides the listener with the opportunity to use sensory mechanisms which have been set aside due to the volume of information with which we are impacted today. He states:

> Children today are immersed in an overtly visual world of television, computers, and video arcades, which is having a disastrous effect on their abilities to listen, to think in words, and to exercise the "mind's eye." Even reading aloud to children is frequently directing them to concentrate on what they can see; the book that contains the text of the story. Noting the rapid decline of language skills over the past two generations, child psychologists and educators are now actively championing storytelling as an ideal method of influencing a child to associate listening with pleasure, of increasing a child's attention span and retention capacity, of broadening a child's vocabulary, and of introducing a child to the symbolic use of language (p.13).

Technological advances have posed significant problems for teachers who find themselves having to compete against some of those electronic information systems for student attention. Many children may be offered few opportunities outside of the school setting to know what listening to a story and imaging the story with that "mind's eye."

Roney, (2001) writes that:

> Stories, particularly communicated through storytelling, are filled with emotion and generate an affective as well as a cognitive response in the listener. Thus, the learning that takes place through storytelling impacts one's knowledge as well as their attitude toward that knowledge and the learning process. Storytelling is a natural and enjoyable way for humans to teach and learn (p. 116).

The classroom is not the only place one might witness the power of story. Time spent around young children at play will provide evidence of their power to weave story through their imaginations and make a host of make-believe characters come to life. Children enter the world of narrative early. They develop expectations about how the world should be (Bruner, 2002). Make-believe truths are crucial in a child's psychological development. Whether or not they are presented in the context of storytelling, a child is bound to form personal fantasies about everything he or she experiences, on both conscious and unconscious levels. Storytelling gives children more scope for working out their dreamlike perceptions of life, for symbolically confronting its myriad opportunities and difficulties (Maguire, 1985).

The art of storytelling has structure. It is built along a continuum that begins with artful self-expression and ends in fine art. Through self-expression we engage in unrehearsed conversational anecdotes. Without a moment's notice, we produce stories for perfect strangers. It may be in line at the grocery store, in a hospital waiting room, or at a ball game, wherever it is, stories emerge whenever we want to make sense of our lives and offer a moment from our experience as evidence (Gillard, 1996). From this unrehearsed stage we move to the third, fourth, or hundredth telling of a story—one that is still told for fun or teaching rather than performance. The next stage is a performance stage. Any telling that takes place on a performance quality, e.g., for entertaining friends in a social setting or lecturing to an audience of peers in one's professional surrounding. Finally, the storytelling event might reach an enhanced performance level. Stage props, costuming, lighting, and other elements may be used during the performance. This final stage is usually well-rehearsed and polished to a performance level. On the continuum, if

visualized, the story moves from left to right—from the conversational level to the performance level—because, "as we retell the story we learn about its multiple meanings from the responses of different listeners." We begin to understand its unique and evolving interpretation for ourselves as individuals (p. 59).

Storytelling brings us together. We learn to see everyday things in new ways and to see not-so-ordinary things in new ways too. Storytelling brings us together, generating unique communities of learners and listeners (Schwartz, Trousdale, & Woestehoff, 1994). It is in coming together through personal narrative and the sharing of story that learning of self begins to take place. Greene (1994), states that:

> Many have begun to discover that they can best reach students if they try to do so against the background of their own life stories, their own narratives. Narratives are them means by which we gradually share meaning to the events of our own lives. There is a growing interest in narrative or storytelling as a mode of sense-making (Bruner, 1986, 11-43). Numerous education professionals are recognizing the importance of coming in touch with the patterns of their own self-formation if they are to make connection with others whose memories may link with theirs at certain juncture and, sometimes, seem totally alien at others (p. 14).

It is through the connections made at these junctures that a deeper, more comprehensive understanding can take place. These are the connections for which teachers should be looking. Greene goes on to say:

> Not only ought teachers to be seeking connection points (through art experiences and storytelling) between dimensions of their own personal histories and the personal histories of those they teach; students ought to be offered more and more time for telling their stories, sharing them with all of those around. Given an expanding consciousness of diversity and the importance of social justice and equality, their telling ought to be informed (at least now and then) with outrage at injustices and violations. Not only do teachers and learners together need to tell and choose; they ought to look towards untapped possibility, explore what it signifies to transform (p 24).

Greene envisions storytelling as a method of bridging the gap between individuals as well as social groups. She sees storytelling as a way to transcend social and cultural boundaries and to transform perceptions so as to combat injustice and inequality.

Kieran Egan (1989, 2005) encourages the development of course units as stories, complete with theme, climax, and resolution. This story framework approach could help teachers see their content in a broader perspective and help them realize that learning units could be looked upon more as good stories rather than a series of objectives to be reached.

Storytelling can play an important role in language development (Bruner, 2002; Egan, 2005; Koehnecke, 2002). During the 1980s academics and scholars such as Shirley Brice Heath (*Ways with Words*) and Carol Fox (*At the Very Edge of the Forest*) contributed to the literature on the role of story in children's lives. Fox presented a very powerful analysis on the importance of narrative in the development of children's imaginative, cognitive, and linguistic skills. Educators such as Vivian Gussin Paley in the United States (*The Boy Who Would Be A Helicopter: The uses of storytelling in the classroom*, and *The Girl with the Brown Crayon: How to use stories to shape their lives*) and Betty Rosen in England (*And None of It Was Nonsense*) also made significant contributions to an understanding of storytelling's importance in the classroom (Barton, 2000). Maguire (1985) writes:

> The specific educational and social benefits of storytelling from the child's point of view are numerous. In addition to increasing a child's vocabulary, concentration, and ability to think symbolically and metaphorically, they include: building a child's sensitivity to various forms of syntax, diction, and rhetoric, helping a child to recognize patterns in language and in human experience, stimulating a child's overall powers of creativity,

> providing a child with problem-solving and decision-making exercises, strengthening a child's capacity to form objective, rational, and practical evaluations, assisting a child to develop skills in dialogue and cooperative interpersonal behavior, familiarizing a child with the symbols, artifacts, and traditions that are part of his or her own cultural heritage and the cultural heritages of others with whom he or she shares the world (pp. 13–14).

In other words, he sees storytelling as a powerful tool for initiating, encouraging, and manipulating the thinking process in students. Students need to be explicitly taught how to receive information and process that information in a thoughtful manner. Then, the student must be challenged to communicate their thoughts and ideas concerning the information they have learned in a meaningful way within and between cultures.

Prior knowledge of words—a good oral vocabulary—provides a solid foundation when launching into reading and writing. Programs that provide students with plenty of exposure to storytelling, in-depth discussions, plays, dialogues, and lectures will assist in creating a strong foundation for literacy (Armstrong, 2003). Storytelling helps in exposing students to varied vocabulary and assists them in making meaning of that vocabulary as they become involved in lesson study.

Today's busy teachers often feel that learning stories to tell is too time-consuming, and they hesitate to add yet another task to their job. In an era of calls for accountability and high stakes testing, teachers are sometimes hesitant to take time away from directive curricula. Individual storytelling sessions can last anywhere from two minutes to an hour or more. Storytelling can be conducted on a daily basis or only on special occasions and can greatly enhance the time spent with children (Maguire, 1985).

In fact, though, it can be simple and enjoyable to add storytelling to the curriculum – it can even *be* the curriculum (MacDonald, 1994). Mason (1996) argues that the use of story in the classroom is a natural progression toward making the learning experience a valuable one for both teacher and learner. She writes:

> Stories teach values and perpetuate culture and heritage. They can be retold and changed and told again. Stories can act as a springboard for follow-up activities involving reading, writing, art, and music. They can be written down and read silently or aloud. A student may want to learn more about the times and people in a story and will be motivated to read books about them. Stories told in class can be written down and illustrated. Letters can be written to characters in the stories. The four whole-language functions of speaking, listening, writing, and reading are natural components of storytelling activities. The use of story goes hand-in-hand with dramatics to give additional kinesthetic feedback to the student and facilitate the learning experience (p. 3).

Stories and storytelling make available a multitude of possible uses in teaching and learning. The craft of storytelling and the art of story-listening opens new worlds to children and adults alike.

When students listen to a story they enter into a special state of perception, receptivity, and imagination. The participation of the students makes the experience even better as they contribute to the story by helping to tell it or create it and truly experience whole-language goals of choice, ownership, and relevance (Goodman, 1986). Storytelling is not a replacement for analytical thinking. It supplements it by enabling the student to imagine new perspectives and new worlds, and is perfectly suited to communicating change and stimulating innovation. Abstract concepts are easier to understand when seen through the lens of a well-chosen story and abstract analysis can of course be used to make explicit the deeper meaning of a story (Denning, 2001). The use of story provides a

"mental geography" of the abstract information that the teller is providing to the listener (teacher to student, preacher to congregation, speaker to audience, etc.)

Storytelling and story-listening assist in helping students understand the basic principles found throughout much of our written language. Stories are structured and organized in highly conventionalized ways (Searfoss, et al, 2001). In Western European tradition, they generally begin with an introduction of the characters and setting, proceed to a critical event or conflict, enter into a conflict resolution stage, and conclude. Students begin to understand this kind of structure which is so critical to constructing meaning. It is not because someone tells them about the structure of story, but because they experience it in stories (Applebee, 1978; Mandler & Johnson, 1977).

From the earliest years, children listen and listen intently. During their early years, especially preschool and primary-school years, children's imaginations and their ability to visualize are not hindered or suppressed by a rigid sense of reality. They are free to enjoy the mere sound of words and the way sounds blend together as they cascade off the storyteller's or reader's tongue. Hearing a variety of good stories can serve to expand children's reading interests, help to expand their vocabulary, and assist in expanding and enhancing the young child's exposure to literature. Beginning readers may not yet be capable of truly reading literature. They are too busy decoding words and sounds. In listening to a story they can feel the storyteller's or reader's affection for the material and begin to develop an appreciation for the written word (Denman, 1991). And that's where the storyteller comes in. It is not unrealistic to believe that the simple pleasures of participation in storytelling and story-listening can alter a person's view of himself and reawaken him to the miracles that can occur when people touch one another

with hands and eyes and words (Ross, 1996). Storytelling is anchored in language and personal communication that is reaching out to influence, inspire, and to otherwise make contact with others. It is not always about having to provide a reason for story. Every storytelling event does not have to end with an elaborate moral or in-depth discussion concerning the meaning behind the story and how that meaning might affect one's life. Wisdom to make good decisions and to indulge in good moral behavior does not necessarily come from the words one hears, but also by the deeds one witnesses. Storytelling without definitive referral to specific morals or meaning does offer the opportunity for listeners to process information and to create their own concept of what the meaning or moral of the story may be (Sawyer, 1942).

Though we may communicate much without words, spoken language is by far the most important medium through which we build ideas and tell others of them. (Ross, 1996)

There is much evidence indicating that children from birth undergo a multitude of language and life experiences that serve as a foundation for learning to read (Goodman 1986). For the first five years of life a child's language growth is entirely dependent on what people say to him-on how much they speak to him, about what things, in what dialect or language, and in what manner (Clay, 1991). Adults, therefore, are effective models for young children as they formulate their communicative skills and begin to expand their ability to comprehend their world. Preschool children learn to develop a "sense of story." They learn to tell stories about the events in their lives, incorporate the language of story books in their play, and develop expectations that their storybook characters will act in predictable ways (Peterson, 1991). Classroom teachers can provide much guidance in a child's literacy growth by helping them recognize the need for

flexibility in communication, control over linguistic features, and an awareness of book language. The classroom use of oral language techniques-conversation, story reading, and storytelling can serve as a means for assisting the child's literacy development.

Betty Rosen (1988) argues that if narrative is a powerful force, a liberating activity, a giver of articulateness and worth to students, why shouldn't it be for teachers? She points out that few teachers of language actually write or even consciously talk in the creative manner they expect of their students. In such surroundings, students tend not to develop their own language skills as they could. Neither do they surprise themselves by their own skills in manipulating words to creative ends. Telling stories around children – in which the teachers or others who are significant in the students' lives address stories of their own personal experience to other people in the child's presence - is relevant to children's self-construction. Through this event, children are exposed to narrated interpersonal dramas in which the mot important people in their lives communicate who they are. These stories make up a steadily available and constantly updated resource about those who are significant in their lives. Children who have attained a minimal level of oral story comprehension are able to gain access to sometimes inaccessible experiences (Mehler & Miller, 1994).

Educators should constantly look for teaching methods that will reach a variety of learning styles. Storytelling and drama both offer an opportunity for students and teachers to test their creativity and connect with a method of comprehension and meaning-making that is often overlooked in the typical classroom. Howard Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences describes different kinds of talents and abilities. He points out that most school systems teach, test, reinforce, and reward primarily two kinds of intelligence:

verbal/linguistic and logical-mathematical. These are the basic skills needed to read, write and compute in order to function in a literate society. He posits that there are at least five other kinds of intelligence that may lie fallow in students who do not have the opportunity to discover, exercise, and develop them. The other intelligences include visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Even though there have been thousands of books written on teaching the three "R's", not too many have been written on how to learn them through the other intelligences (Campbell, Campbell, & Dickenson, 1992). Much work within the Multiple Intelligences model involves drama, storytelling, and dance. All of the seven intelligences noted by Gardner can be easily woven into the fabric of the storytelling art.

Recent studies involving brain-based teaching techniques have pointed to teaching strategies that could make use of storytelling and creative dramatic approaches in the classroom. For most people, the left hemisphere of the brain specializes in coding information verbally whereas the right hemisphere codes information visually. Although teachers spend much time talking (and sometimes having their students talk) about the learning objective, little time is given to development of visual cues. This process, imagery, is the mental visualization of objects, events, and arrays related to the new learning. It represents a major way of storing information in the brain (Caine & Caine, 1991; Sousa, 2001; Sylwester, 1995). We use these mental images in a variety of ways. Storytelling also provides the opportunity to use metaphor, analogy, illustration, and example to create mental scenes for the purpose of transferring new knowledge.

By using story as an advance organizer, teachers help their students use their background knowledge to learn new information. David Ausubel (1968) states that advance organizers are:

> Appropriately relevant and inclusive introductory materials . . .introduced in advance of learning . . .and presented at a higher level of abstraction, generality, and inclusiveness than the information presented after it. The organizer serves to provide ideational scaffolding for the stable incorporation and retention of the more detailed and differentiated materials that follow. Thus, advance organizers are not the same as summaries or overviews, which comprise text at the same level of abstractions as the material to be learned, but rather are designed to bridge the gap between what the learner already knows and what the needs to know before the can successfully learn the task at hand (p. 148).

Story can preface the lesson and provide structure upon which students may organize new information in relation to prior knowledge and helps to prevent a disjointed approach to understanding unfamiliar concepts and abstractions.

Story and storytelling, therefore, is a powerful force and tool for use in the classroom. It has experienced overt and covert usage in parlors, churches and synagogues, town squares, dry goods stores, and around campfires and numerous other venues over throughout the history of humankind. By recognizing it as a powerful teaching tool, educators may be able to focus on its use in the classroom in order to strengthen their abilities to provide a means for students to better understand the lessons being taught.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter lays out the critical components of the research design and methodology used for this study. I discuss the research questions being investigated, design of the study, participant selection, data collection procedures, data analysis techniques, and look at the art of portraiture as a way to expose the data that were collected in a narrative form.

Research Questions

Data collection procedures for this study are designed to answer the following question: How does storytelling play a role in the contemporary classroom? Beneath this over-arching question are a number of guiding questions. What constitutes the use of storytelling in the elementary classrooms of teacher participants in this study? How is storytelling being used by these three teachers and what are their purposes for using storytelling in the classroom? What influences or prior experiences in storytelling inform their storytelling practice? I plan to address this research question and its sub-parts by exploring the experiences of three elementary teachers in order to discover some of their feelings, thoughts, successes, challenges, and concerns regarding their use of storytelling in the classroom.

Design of the Study

Many of the discussions I was engaged in the coursework during my doctoral program were centered on the use of qualitative research methods in the field of Language and Literacy. My background included little experience in conducting qualitative research and I had not fully realized the strength found in qualitative studies. It was necessary for me to convince myself that a qualitative research method would suit my needs and be appropriate for my own personality and philosophical stance. Therefore, I had to build a case for qualitative research design. In order to focus my study, I began asking myself a very basic question; why use a qualitative research method? I had to ask myself this question because I realized that my entire educational and professional career had been so greatly influenced by positivism and quantitative method.

My initial inclination to use qualitative methodological procedures in my study began with an investigation of my own worldview. In order for me to minimize the possibility of bias, it was necessary for me to explore my own feelings and beliefs regarding philosophical traditions or schools of thought in research prior to designing my study. Carr and Kemmis (1986), as cited by Merriam (1998) point to three basic forms of educational research; positivist, interpretive, and critical. After examining these three research paradigms, I found my own philosophical beliefs aligning more closely to interpretive research.

According to the interpretive philosophical orientation, multiple realities are constructed socially by individuals. Education is looked upon "as a process and school is a lived experience. Understanding the meaning of the process or experience constitutes the knowledge to be gained" from an inductive inquiry (Merriam, 1998, p.4). Crucial to

interpretivists, constructivists, and phenomenologists is the "social construction of reality" and that constructs are not fixed but can be altered through dialogue or over time and the alterations can lead to new constructions or views of reality and new ways of acting (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999). Positivist research considers education or the school to be the object or phenomenon to be studied. The knowledge that is gained is gained through scientific and experimental research that is objective and quantifiable. Reality is stable and measurable. Critical research draws from Marxist philosophy, critical theory, and feminist theory. Knowledge gained through this research is an "ideological critique of power, privilege, and oppression in areas of educational practice" (Merriam,1998). Studying and comparing these three orientations helped me to more clearly understand my own orientation toward the nature of reality, the purpose of my research, and the type of knowledge to be produced through my work.

There are a number of basic beliefs or assumptions that guide qualitative inquiry and, therefore, guided me as a qualitative researcher. Ontologically, qualitative research assumes that reality is subjective and multiple as seen by the participants in the study. Epistemologically, there is interaction between the researcher and that which is being researched. With regard to the axiological assumption, qualitative research is value laden and biased. Rhetorically, it is somewhat informal, decisions evolve, there is personal voice, and there are accepted qualitative terms. Methodologically, it is an inductive process with emerging design and patterns and theories are developed for understanding (Cresswell, 1998). According to Merriam (1998)

> The key philosophical assumption upon which all types of qualitative research are based is the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they

> make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world (p. 6).

Qualitative research was also considered because of the nature of the question. Questions in qualitative research often begin with “how” or “what” so that forays into the topic describe what is going on. This is in contrast to quantitative “why” questions and a tendency to look for comparison groups (Creswell, 1998). I also planned to utilize my own “why” question in my study in order to determine, not only the reasoning for use of storytelling during the classroom session, but why previous experiences might have guided the teacher participant toward that strategy. Was there a significant use of story in their childhood or college life that influenced their use of storytelling as a teaching tool?

Qualitative method is applicable when variables cannot be easily identified, theories are not available to explain behavior of participants or their population of study, and theories need to be developed. Its use is a necessity in order to study individuals in their natural setting, prompting the researcher to go out in the field of study, gaining access and gathering material. Qualitative research methods seek to discover the perspectives of participants in the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Seliger & Shohamy, 1989).

For the purpose of a longitudinal study, qualitative methods offer the researcher the opportunity to observe the topic of study over time, to observe and collect non-verbal as well as verbal behaviors, and to attempt to understand how respondents make sense of their world in a very holistic manner. There are disadvantages to qualitative method in some studies. Large-scale studies may not be studied effectively by observation and interview techniques due to sheer numbers. Some studies focus on product rather than process, thus requiring a more quantitative method to be used (Bailey, 1994).

After weighing these values and assumptions and comparing them to quantitative paradigm assumptions I had studied during the time I was completing my doctoral coursework, I concluded that qualitative research design was more closely aligned to my personal beliefs and preferences.

Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive naturalistic approach to its subject matter. It involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individual's lives (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.2). Along with deciding whether or not to use qualitative research design, I needed to determine which qualitative methods I would use in the process of my study.

Merriam (1998) cites numerous researchers in their attempt to label the variations of qualitative research methods. She lists, among the different approaches, traditions such as ethnography, phenomenology, heuristics, ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, ecological psychology, systems theory, chaos theory, hermeneutics, orientational inquiry, case study, grounded theory, portraiture, and a variety of other strategies of inquiry. Finally, she names five approaches that are frequently used in education. Those five are: the basic or generic qualitative study, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study. These approaches can be distinguished from each other, but they all share the basic characteristics of qualitative research. Their goals are to elicit understanding and meaning, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, there is the use of fieldwork, an inductive orientation to analysis, and the findings are presented using rich description (p. 11). Of the five approaches listed by Merriam, the

one approach that interested me the most is the case study, and appears to be a good fit with the questions I want to investigate..

Case study is the simplest form of fieldwork. The only requirements are a single informant and the researcher. Early models of case study emphasized a more structured approach to data collection, but current thinking favors a lesser structured and more narrative approach (Shank, 2002). Stake (1995) suggests that the basic purpose of the single case study is not to generalize to a larger population, but the case stands on its on:

> A case study is expected to catch the complexity of a single case. A single leaf, even a single toothpick, has unique complexities – but rarely do we care enough to submit it to case study. We study a case when it itself is of very special interest. We look at the detail of interaction with its contexts. Case study is the study of the peculiarity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances (p. xi).

While Stake speaks with vigor about the *single case*, it does not necessarily refer only to a single individual. A single school or classroom, or even a single work environment may all qualify as cases (Shank, 2002). Merriam (1998) sheds further light on case study in more general terms:

> Qualitative case studies can be characterized as being particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. *Particularistic* means that case studies focus on a particular situation, program, or phenomenon. The case itself is important for what it reveals about the phenomenon and for what it might represent. This specificity of focus makes it an especially good design for practical problems – for questions, situations, or puzzling occurrences arising from everyday practice. *Descriptive* means that the end product of a case study is a rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study. *Heuristic* means that case studies illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study. They can bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader's experience, or confirm what is known (pp. 29-30).

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) have given us a model that moves beyond the simple documentation of a case toward the more complex and rich notion of

portraiture. In their model, according to Shank (2002), the creation of an illuminating case is as much an artistic task as it is a piece of scientific reporting:

> A sure intention in the methodology of portraiture is capturing-from an outsider's purview – an insider's understanding of the scene. Portraitists try to feel as the subject feels and to represent that understanding in a portrayal that exceeds the level of literal depiction found in a map or plan (p. 25).

In my search for the appropriate method of reporting the findings of the study, I decided upon portraiture and narrative as a way to "tell the stories" of the teacher-participants in this collective case study. Portraiture allows the researcher and the participant to co-create a written portrait in the form of a first-person narrative. The narrative is shaped by both participant and researcher and encompasses the experiences of the participant along with the researcher's thoughts about those experiences (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Portraiture blends well with case study research in that both require field work and accompanying notation, both require that time be spent on site (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) even though portraiture does not require extensive amounts of time on site. I thought it would be interesting to combine portraiture and case study method even though researcher voice is not heard as much in case study research as in portraiture work. Lawrence-Lightfoot's portraiture methodology came about while conducting a research study that culminated in The Good High School (1983), a series of case studies that explored life in high schools that were deemed successful and innovative institutions. In her meetings with fellow researchers, she suggested that they develop pieces for the study and call them portraits because "it would allow us a measure of freedom from the traditions and constraints of disciplined research methods, and because I hoped that our work would be defined by

aesthetic, as well as empirical and analytic dimensions" (1983, p. 13). She acknowledges the influences of Geertz (1973), Polanyi (1958), and Eisner (1972) on her innovative approach to portraiture methodology. It was evident to me that creating a portrait of these three teacher-participants while providing some insight into the thoughts and feelings of the researcher could provide a multi-faceted insight for the reader.

Both of these approaches have played an important role in research during recent years. One should note that no two of these approaches are mutually exclusive and the case study researcher could benefit from examining both traditions (Shank, 2002).

A Framework for the Study

I took several months to reflect upon the information I had gathered about my own philosophy and beliefs and about the various research methods and made some decisions concerning the method I would use. I began formulating a plan for a study that would be a collective case study—looking broadly at teaching practices used by several teachers, but paying particular attention to the use of storytelling as it might be embedded within the instruction (Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) suggests that a case study is expected to "catch the complexity of a single case" and that we study a case when it is of special interest (p. xi). He goes on to state that the researcher may choose to study several cases, thus calling it a *collective case study*, not in an attempt to generalize or to be concerned with representation, but keeping in mind that "opportunity to learn is of primary importance" (p. 6). As a comparative analysis, I believed this research study would be used to study the use of storytelling techniques in the teaching practices of the teacher-participants while investigating the influence that storytelling and other similar events might have had upon those teaching practices. In completing the analysis, much of the

work was rooted in the art and science of portraiture and narrative inquiry methods (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1988).

Teacher-participants

During the past four years, I have had the opportunity to work in a regional educational service agency in the rural northeast corner of my state. During my years of working in a region populated by fourteen school systems, I have cultivated professional relationships with numerous primary, elementary, and middle school principals, assistant principals, and other education professionals. Principals are, many times, quick to point to exemplary teachers in their schools and comment about their particular abilities and unique techniques. Through this professional relationship with principals in several rural county school systems, I requested and received names of possible participants for my study. I asked the principals for their recommendation of teachers who, in their opinions, may be prone to use unique, creative, and engaging strategies—particularly storytelling—in their teaching. From the list of twelve or thirteen names given to me by those principals, I chose two participants. My other participants name came from a professional colleague of mine who is not a school administrator. She had seen the teacher in action at the school where the teacher is employed and took note of her storytelling ability. After my colleague told me about the participant I spoke with her principal to confirm the recommendation. The principal concurred. These participants offered a range of experiences that I hoped would provide me with data regarding what constitutes storytelling and how and why it is used in their teaching. Their selection was based upon a number of criteria: teaching experience, gender, rural environments, elementary

certification, range of grade levels, and convenience. These three teachers have a variety of years of teaching experience – the participants range in experience from four years to 26 years; personal background – all participants are female, one is African-American and two are Caucasian, and all live and work in rural settings; grade level – each participant is involved in teaching elementary or early middle school children; and convenience – all participants work within schools served by my employing agency and are within a reasonable distance of my home. Each participant has classroom space within the primary structure of their school building and those classrooms provided us a space to meet for interviews and conversations as well as a place for me to conduct my observations of their teaching practice. There were occasions when interviews were conducted in other locations – one participant came to my office on a holiday because it was convenient for her and another asked me to meet with her in the school media center on one occasion due to some maintenance work going on in her classroom that day.

Celeste

I had met Celeste a few years earlier. She attended a workshop I presented at the regional educational service agency where I work. Of the dozen or so people in attendance in the workshop, she was probably the most bubbly and talkative. She was at ease and comfortable from the very beginning and helped to make the workshop a success by readily taking part in all of the activities and discussions. One of the most fearful things about developing and presenting a workshop is that the participants would not buy into the workshop by taking an active part. From the outset, I could see that Celeste was going to play a pivotal role in the workshop. When it came time to share, she was one of the first to offer her thoughts. If there were small group activities assigned,

she worked with her partners as a leader and encourager. She was just a joy to have in the workshop!

Her principal and fellow workers also see her as an asset to the school community. As I began to look for participants in my study, I did not only ask individuals if they would be interested in participating, but I also asked teachers and administrators for their suggestions concerning possible participants – teachers who used story as a teaching tool. Time after time Celeste's name came up. The reasons were numerous. "She is such an enthusiastic teacher", "The kids just love her class", "She is such a pleasure to work with and to be around", and there were many more. For the year or so prior to beginning my research, I kept in touch with Celeste and let her know that I was planning to include her in my study. Her response was always positive and she seemed as though she was anxious to help me in my endeavors. I found her to be quite easy to interview. Our discussions were comfortable interchanges about a topic which means a lot to both of us. Her willingness to share of her time and experience made my work much easier than I had imagined.

Vanessa

Not too long before I began putting together the proposal for this study, I was chatting with Mrs. Whittington, the principal of a small elementary school located in the service area of the educational service agency where I work. Our conversation, at first, surrounded the needs of the school and some of the initiatives the principal was going to pursue during the upcoming school year. The conversation soon turned to innovative teaching strategies and the talented staff teaching at her school. I had informally polled a number of principals about possible candidates for my study and had mentioned the fact

that I was looking for teachers whom they might consider to be innovative in their teaching practice. As I had done numerous times before with other principals, I asked this principal if there were any teachers who were strong in storytelling or the use of narrative as a way to convey lessons. The first name that came from her mouth was Vanessa's. Mrs. Whittington was quick to point to Vanessa as an especially talented teacher who used a variety of strategies, especially story, in her teaching practice.

I was pleasantly surprised that Vanessa's name was the first mentioned during my conversation with the principal at her school. Even though Vanessa was very new to the profession, the principal spoke of her as if she were a seasoned professional. I was not surprised that she was well liked by the students and staff at the school and I was very pleased to think that I was going to be able to do some follow-up work with one of my former students.

I had forgotten that Vanessa was even teaching at that school. Vanessa had been a student of mine in a foreign language class I taught for a local private college not too far from my hometown. She and I had communicated via e-mail occasionally after she completed the class and I had heard about her accomplishments through mutual acquaintances. I was pleasantly surprised to hear her name mentioned as a possible candidate. Soon thereafter, I called Vanessa by phone and told her about my study and asked if she might be interested. She was thrilled to be a part of the work! I was pleased that we had once again established communication and that I would be able to see Vanessa in action in the classroom.

Renee

I first met Renee in a workshop preparing teachers to conduct a summer school program for at-risk kids. Her name was given to me by a colleague of mine who was in charge of planning and delivering the training to the group of teachers. My colleague had been doing some work with the group prior to my session with them and had noticed Renee's propensity toward the use of story in her talks with fellow teachers. In a conversation with me at our office headquarters, my colleague suggested I get in touch with Renee to see if she might be willing to participate in the study. After numerous attempts, I was finally able to get through to Renee at the school where she works. When I explained to her what I was doing, she expressed a great deal of interest in the topic and the process of the study. She expressed her excitement at being able to be a part of something that might promote the use of story as a way to learn and understand because she had spent a number of years using story as a part of her regular classroom methodology. After our conversation, I was able to speak with Renee's principal, Mrs. Woodruff, one of the assistant administrators, and other teachers at the school and explain to them the objective of my study. They all confirmed that Renee would be an excellent person to interview and to observe during such a study. It was not until I met Renee for the first time that I came to the conclusion that they were correct. Renee has a unique ability to capture one's attention and focus. She had, according to our initial discussions, much life experience that she was able to translate into material suitable for use in the elementary classroom. I was looking forward to watching her and listening to her at work.

Setting

Teacher-participants work as classroom teachers for public elementary schools in a rural area. Each elementary school employing teachers who participated in the study is composed of a student population with similar demographics – each school has a relatively high poverty rate [40 – 60 % free and reduced lunch rate for students], similar statistics with regard to diversity in two of the schools [2 – 5 % minority and limited English proficient population] with the other school having experienced an influx of Hispanic students [20 – 25%], and the number of students in each school is similar [450 – 550 student population]. Not all elementary schools in Georgia follow the same structure. Some elementary schools include kindergarten through fifth or sixth grades, others only house second and third grades, and still others will have different configurations. While schools employing the teacher-participants in my study are structured somewhat differently, they still are categorized under the umbrella of early childhood education according to state criteria.

Data Collection

In this study, I collected several types of data: interviews and conversations with teacher-participants, classroom observations, analysis of lesson plans and other documents that emerged as being pertinent to the study while I was in the field. Patton, (1990) suggests that qualitative data consist of "direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge" obtained through interviews; "detailed descriptions of people's activities, behaviors, actions" recorded in observations; and "excerpts, quotations, or entire passages" extracted from various types of documents (p.10). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state that " . . .life—as we come to it and as it

comes to others—is filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities (p. 17). I understood that the data that I would collect would be fragments of the phenomena under study; however, these fragments were analyzed and put together in a narrative that, hopefully, offers one an understanding of the setting which I was studying. Because portraitists look "carefully, absorbing details of sight, sound, and ambiance—always collecting more information than will find its way into the final portrayal" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 61), I worked to acclimate myself to the school's culture and environment, noticing as much as possible, and making note of my thoughts and feelings as the researcher within my notebook designated for field notes.

I entered the field equipped with research questions that focused on the topic of the use of story in the classroom. As I investigated and sought for answers to these questions, other case-specific questions evolved and I was able to collect a great deal of data relevant to the participants in the study and their teaching practice. I have also collected both observational and interview data to answer the questions (Meloy, 1994).

Interviews

I conducted three semi-structured/informal interviews with the participants. Seidman (1991) provides an outline for phenomenological interviewing involving conducting a series of three interviews with each participant. The first interview establishes the context of the participants' experience. The introductory interviews in this study were conducted initially in order to discover as much as possible about their biographical and experiential information. In this interview, I posed questions in order to ascertain how the use of story had impacted their lives and teaching from their own

personal, autobiographical perspective. This interview, in part, allowed me to understand one of my guiding questions "Are there elements of prior experience in storytelling that these teachers share?" The second interview gave the participant the opportunity to concentrate on the concrete details of their present experiences in the use of storytelling in their teaching practice. I posed questions such as, how do you perceive your use of story in your current classroom procedures? What causes the "opportunity to use story" during your teaching? This interview, in part, offered me insight into three questions guiding this study: "What constitutes the use of storytelling in the elementary classrooms of teacher participants in this study? How is storytelling being used by these three teachers? What are the teachers' purposes when using storytelling in the classroom?" In the third interview, I encouraged the participants to reflect on the meaning their experiences in using storytelling in the classroom holds for them. I had hoped that, after discussing, during previous interviews and conversations, the role of storytelling in their own experiences as students and their use of storytelling as teachers, the participants would be able to look at the practice from a slightly different perspective. This final interview gave me the opportunity to enrich each participant's portrait with words that evolved from her personal experience and reflection as a storyteller/story-teacher. Once each interview was completed, I planned to transcribe it, re-read it and add researcher notes about the themes that can be extracted from the data. Following the first round of interviews, I found myself overwhelmed with the amount of transcription work that had to be done. I was working my full-time job as an education consultant and having to attend numerous training sessions, conferences, and other events. Aside from my daily workload, I was also teaching one of the evening classes offered as part of my agency's

professional learning curriculum for teachers and I was teaching another night class, as I have done for the past six years, for a local college. With my work load and family responsibilities bearing down on me, I decided to seek the assistance of a graduate assistant. I asked her to complete the initial transcription, and then I re-read her document while listening to the interview tape. This enabled me to correct errors, make further notes about the interview from memory, and create a list of questions that might be necessary as follow-up questions during the next interview. While conducting the introductory interviews with participants, I arranged tentative schedules for classroom observations of each participant. I conducted other, less-structured, interviews because what I saw in the classroom brought about questions about happenings that I needed to better understand. I conducted these informal conversations with each participant, and recorded their comments through my researcher's notebook where I kept field notes. These interview transcripts and observation notes played an important role in the triangulation of data.

Classroom Observations

Another set of data included in this study were the classroom observations. I observed the participants as they taught and as they interacted with their colleagues and students. My first thought was to schedule a couple of hours per visit that would extend over a period of several months, but I decided to spend a couple of full days with each teacher at the outset of the study in order to get a feel for what her day was like. It was also helpful in finding out when were the best times to observe each teacher's teaching practice with regard to her use of storytelling. Some teachers were involved in "scripted" reading classes that would not easily allow for teacher-created activity or discussion.

Observing those classes would not have been productive according to my participants, therefore, I chose to use that period of time for other purposes. I was then able to schedule my observation visits for times of the day that would be more conducive to gathering data. I began classroom observations in the participants' classrooms in November and continued that process until the following May. I conducted observations of each teacher as our schedules allowed, spending the day or part of the day in the classroom and then going home to reflect upon and clarify my field notes. Following the initial day-long visits and several shorter visits I discovered that little information was being added to the data that I had already collected, and I realized that it was time to end the observation process. Conducting observations of the participants was in important piece of the data collection process. It allowed me to enter into a part of their worlds (their classrooms) and experience first-hand the interaction with their students. The essence of the observations changed over time. At first I was focused observing the settings, tracking events and event sequences, counting, and searching for indicators of socioeconomic and other differences (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). As my time in the field progressed, I was able to focus on my primary research question and its guiding questions. Even though observation of the settings and events was still important, it became of lesser importance because I had established a general picture or feel of the teacher participants within their own classroom settings and with their student groups.

According to Stake (1995), observations work the researcher toward greater understanding of the case. There are a number of reasons for conducting observations. As an outsider, the researcher-observer, will notice things that often are or become routine to the study participants. This fresh-eye perspective and observation may lead to deeper

understanding of their use of story as a strategy for instruction. In conjunction with interviews, both structured and informal, my observations provided me with another set of data to assist me in confirming my findings. They also provided incidents or behaviors that were used as reference points in subsequent interviews. Finally, observations serve to provide information that is not forthcoming when participants are not able or are unwilling to discuss the topic under study (Merriam, 1998). During observation, a case study researcher "keeps a good record of events to provide a relatively incontestable description for further analysis and ultimate reporting" (Stake, 1995). As a researcher-observer, I gathered information about the intimate setting within which each participant works and was able to document through field notes, situations which lead to the use of storytelling in these settings. Field notes come in many forms, but at the least they include descriptions, direct quotations, and observer comments (p.111). Observation helped me to describe the physical setting, the participants, the activities and interactions, subtle factors that arose, as well as my own feelings and interaction to the observation (p. 98). While specific attention was paid to the teachers' use of storytelling, there was a need to describe elements of student reaction and/or interaction to the teaching practices used. Livo and Rietz (1986) suggest that:

> Audiences are usually ready to become directly and physically involved in a story. They seem to understand that a storytelling is not a spectator experience. Audiences who are truly in the story are most likely to respond overtly during the telling. The more mature and experienced the audience, the more ready listeners are to "jump in" spontaneously. A storyteller must be able to incorporate spontaneous audience interjections into the context of the telling (p 99).

I noted specific details concerning what student response was before and during storytelling episodes so that I could discuss the response element in depth with the

teacher. I wanted to see if the teacher was aware of student response and, if so, what was their perception of such response. I was able to spend from eighteen to twenty-four hours of observation time with each teacher examining classroom activity and holding post-observation conversations with the participants to discuss those observations in greater depth. I was prepared to schedule more observations if I thought that more needed to be understood in terms of their use of storytelling in instruction, but the time allotted to observation seemed to be sufficient. I was beginning to notice repetitive patterns within my observation notes. After my collection of data, I conducted follow-up informal conversations with each of the participants in order to discuss the observations and clarify researcher questions.

Another layer of data that was useful was the collection of teacher-constructed documents. I asked each teacher-participant to provide student artifacts and teacher-constructed documents related to their classroom teaching practice. Such data included lesson plans and student work samples. I examined those documents for information that might help me understand how storytelling was documented in the participant's system of planning and recordkeeping. I asked participants to share a small sample of documents that reveal their personal experiences with oral narrative from their own educational experiences, family relationships, and other sources. I thought this information might be helpful in formulating further interview questions and in piecing together the teacher-participants' biographical portrait.

I maintained audiotapes of the interviews and conversations with teacher-participants along with a field journal for the duration of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). I also asked for permission to take photographs and video to assist

me in creating the descriptions of the events and allow me to return to the data on multiple occasions to more thoroughly study the data. This data allowed me the opportunity to more closely examine the vocal inflections, body language, gesturing, and other unique features which might add to the thick description necessary in conducting and reporting qualitative inquiry.

Duplicate copies of my field notes, copies of interview transcripts, and teacher artifacts were collected into binders reserved for each teacher. Copies of these teacher documents were made and kept along with copies of the audiotapes in a secure location.

Data Analysis and Management

Data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data, to sort out the structures of signification, and to tell a story about the people or group who is the focus of the research (Geertz, 1973; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; Merriam, 1998). Two strategic ways that researchers reach new meanings are through direct interpretation of the individual event or instance and through the collection or aggregation of instances until they can be addressed as a class (Stake, 1995). Merriam (1998) outlines a variety of techniques for analyzing data ranging including ethnographic analysis, narrative analysis, phenomenological analysis, constant comparative analysis, content analysis (pp. 156-160). My study employed the constant comparative method of data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In constant comparative analysis, the researcher begins with an incident from interviews, the field journal, or other documentation and compares it with another incident in the collected data. Comparisons lead to categories that are compared to each other. Comparisons are constantly made until a theory can be developed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 1998). Moving beyond a basic descriptive account of my study, I

looked for emerging themes and recurring patterns as data was collected, constructing categories to be compared, classified, and coded for the purpose of making sense of the data and developing theory (Merriam, 1998, p. 185-187).

A variety of data sources—interviews, observations, and artifacts—provided evidence that allowed me to triangulate the data and strengthen reliability and internal validity of the study (Merriam, 1998). Triangulation involves confirming or cross-checking the accuracy of data obtained from one data source with data collected from other, different sources (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999).

Reid (1992) classifies data management as three phases: data preparation, data identification, and data manipulation. Data preparation involves the transcribing of interviews and notes as well as the documentation of other information collected from artifacts and other materials. Data identification is the process of arranging data into meaningful and locatable segments. Data manipulation involves labeling passages according to content and retrieving similar passages in the process of coding and classifying for the purpose of detailed analysis and building theory (Merriam, 1998). Creswell (1994) writes that "data generated by qualitative methods are voluminous" and he suggests that data analysis be conducted as an activity simultaneously with data collection (p. 153). I purchased recording and computer equipment to assist my data collection and data preparation efforts and I also acquired qualitative software to aid me in the identification and manipulation necessary to analyze data for the study. Even though I did use the software as part of my process of analysis, I soon found myself in a more hands-on mode of conducting analysis. I began by color-coding the responses given by participants in the transcriptions of interviews. Then I physically manipulated the

coded statements into categories, sometimes condensing as I went through the process. I found the hands-on approach to be easier to visualize. I laid paper on a table or, at times, on the floor and was able to stand above it so that I would be able to notice the threads of color emerge. As other data became available, I began to process the data by sorting them into various categories, coding these categories by using a variety of color and/or other unique descriptors, and reconstructing them to discover the emerging patterns or themes. Toward the end of my data collection and on-going analysis, I had covered two walls of my home office with chart papers filled with color-coded data categories in order to better visualize the work as it progressed. During my very first read-through-listen-to session with the interviews, I began to notice some broad themes beginning to emerge. These themes were, simply stated, the what, why, and how information most interviews tend to uncover. I began making notations along the margin of the paper and labeling those pieces with the simple words, “what”, “why”, and “how.” Upon re-reading the transcript, I began to note other patterns that were subtly couched within the major elements or themes. These emerging patterns or themes were then disaggregated into sub-categories for more in-depth analysis. Table 1. provides an example of what the initial process looked like as I began to process the data into preliminary categories and then to refine those categories. Broad questions became one-word categories with sub-categories. As the sub-categories began to surface, I was able to formulate new questions for the participants designed to provide more information with regard to the apparent motives and methods for the use of story in the classroom setting.

Table 1

Categories

What does story look like in the classroom? ▼	**How** is story used in the classroom? ▼	**Why** does the teacher use story? ▼
Type: ↓	Method: ↓	Motive: ↓
autobiographical; biographical; fictional; historical; character/moral; exemplary; anecdotal; metaphorical	Hook; transitional; summative; management; informational; informal assessment; student generated	Student engagement; motivation; classroom management; entertainment; illustration; explanation; clarification; stimulates creativity; developing empathy; provides a relative point of reference; model for student product; vocabulary building; building comprehension; critical thinking skills

The following are some examples showing information emanating from one of Celeste's interviews that was compiled into the "Motive" category in the working document after my first visit with her.

1. Celeste told me that she originally looked at story as a "way to get them interested, engaged in, and focused on what we were getting ready to do . . .what the lesson was going to be." She also had begun to see that it was not only a viable tool for motivating the students, but it was also a great way to make the lesson progress to a different level and to help students think about what they are studying and relate it to everyday life.

2. "I think story is a great teaching tool because it gets the students interested, it stimulates their creativity. You can often use story to help them understand why something is important."

3. Celeste expressed her feelings about storytelling helping students who were having trouble with reading comprehension. She thinks it help "especially with students that have a hard time gleaning just from reading a text. I think it

makes it more real to them. It's not just real cut and dry. It's not just data they're having to put into their heads. If they hear it as a story, they hear it as something delightful and something they will remember without realizing that they've learned something."

4. "And sometimes, if the student comes back to you later and tells you that he or she liked a particular subject this school year, then you feel like you've done something.

5. Celeste feels that some of the content she covers might not be as interesting to the students without "throwing in" some of the stories she uses. During one of our conversations she shared with me that the stories serve to "catch the students' attention even though sometimes they think the teacher is getting off track. She said, "When they're learning through story it's possible that they're not realizing that they are learning." She pointed to the fact that she would be discussing an event which was previously covered in a lesson and students would remember the story she had associated with that lesson. They wouldn't remember the whole story, but they were able to remember what happened and why it happened.

6. When asked why student seem to have a richer dialogue with her when she is using a story versus reading the same information in a text she replied: "Because it's entertaining them. Especially today, kids want to be entertained and I don't think that's necessarily a good thing, but it's just a fact of society today and kids want to be entertained."

7. New teachers would benefit from the use of stories according to Celeste. "I think they'll find out that they have, not only more attention from the kids, but the kids will put more input into the lesson themselves. Because a lot of times they'll think up big questions about why did this person do this or why did they do that or why didn't they do this instead, and so on. Or, like when we were talking about Hannibal and coming over the Alps, well, what would have happened if he hadn't done it in the winter? And that makes them think about what's happening."

As I read through the transcripts, listened to the taped interviews, and reviewed my corresponding researcher notes, I was able to position segments of the data into single and, sometimes, multiple categories because of some overlapping that seems to occur in collecting qualitative data. The process of analysis was also aided by the use of peer debriefers who were asked to assist by looking at the data and providing input and advice.

Member checks on interviews and field notes to establish credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) allowed the teacher-participants to check the accuracy of my interpretations, correct error of fact, and to clarify interpretations as well as offer additional information. Each participant was asked to read transcripts of interviews and make any modifications necessary. Interviews and conversations were audio-taped in order to assist me in my descriptions of the events and allow me to return to the data on multiple occasions to more thoroughly study the data. Audio and video-taped data allows the researcher the opportunity to more closely examine the vocal inflections, body language, gesturing, and other unique features which might add to the thick description necessary in conducting and reporting qualitative inquiry. Rich, thick description is defined as providing enough

description so that readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match the situation being researched, and whether findings can be transferred (Merriam, 1998).

Portraiture as a Genre for Study Write-up

In the portraiture method, the key elements of data analysis are coding and categorizing data and discovering and describing broad themes (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Wolcott, 1994). It was my hope that three stories would emerge from this study that would provide some insight into the thoughts and feelings of teachers who use storytelling in whatever forms it is found to aid their teaching. I expected to hear, through their voices and recollections, something about the way they use story as a teaching tool, what has influenced them to use it, and why they currently continue its use. If these three teachers have experienced success in their strategic use of oral narrative in their classroom instruction, then they may, through this study and my fashioning their individual portraits, influence future success in the classrooms of others. With this in mind, as I explained earlier, I employed the art of portraiture as a way of reporting my findings.

Given my interpretive stance as a researcher, there were several factors that had to be considered when working in classrooms and writing it up as portraiture. As stated earlier, portraiture captures-from an outsider's purview – an insider's understanding of the scene. As a portraitist, I had to attempt to describe and represent the thoughts and practices of each of these participants regarding storytelling in their classrooms. This description will add a level of "literal depiction" and, hopefully, will achieve a more aesthetic sense of this setting for the readers.

To accomplish this task and offer the reader a sense that I was in the field, I have attempted to establish, through rich description, the quality of the data I collected. My narrative approach in writing portraiture mandated that I thoughtfully analyze my recorded interviews, observations, and questions based upon this data. The process of analysis in writing portraiture required that I develop emergent themes in order to bring interpretive insight, analytic scrutiny, and aesthetic order to the data. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) explains that:

> This is an iterative and generative process; the themes emerge from the data and they give the data shape and form. The portraitist draws out the refrains and patterns and creates a thematic framework for the construction of the narrative (p. 185).

The process is a disciplined, empirical process of describing, interpreting, analyzing and synthesizing. The process is also aesthetic in the narrative production. The process called for gathering, organizing, and scrutinizing the data as I searched for convergent threads, illuminating metaphors, and overarching themes. I sometimes had to construct coherence out of themes that the participants in the study considered incoherent. For example, each of my teacher participants found themselves using forms of storytelling in the classroom, yet they had not identified their methods as storytelling.

Further, portraiture requires that I show through my description and analysis my determined and thoughtful attention to data to create a sense of understanding to the readers of this study. During the course of the six-month study, I sought to establish, through prolonged engagement— six months of work in the field, persistent observation— conducting nearly sixty hours of classroom observations, triangulation of data— through interviews, observations, and teacher documents, member checks, and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998), that my findings were, indeed,

founded on good, strong and reliable data. To further support my findings, I have attempted to express my own assumptions, position, and theoretical stance behind the study. I also, using multiple methods of data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998), created an audit trail so that the reader might understand how data were collected, how categories were determined, and how decisions were made during the course of the study.

Stake (1995) argues that the purpose of case study is not to generalize but to study a phenomenon in depth. This seems to defeat somehow the purpose of doing interpretive research. Eisner (1991) offers another way to examine how interpretive research might be generalized. He argues that to generalize is not always the purpose of the researcher in all interpretive studies; the reader of the interpretive study also has a responsibility to generalize this study to her or his setting. This distinction offers me a way to see that portraiture, although it may be more individual in its approach to description, also has the potential through my writing up of this data to reach a number of researchers interested in storytelling. This readership will offer a sense of generalization.

CHAPTER 4

THE PORTRAITS

"Talent is always conscious of its own abundance, and does not object to sharing."
—Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

"We're going to visit a very interesting place": Celeste's Story

Celeste Carter stands at the front of the room. Her arms seem to hug the top of the podium as she looks around the room. Her infectious smile says goodbye to the students from her home room group and greets the next group of eager learners. It is time for Social Studies and Celeste is the person they come to for instruction. In the past, Celeste has divided her teaching time between Language Arts and Social Studies, but her school has opted to "departmentalize" to a degree. Instead of planning and delivering material for two content areas, Celeste and the other teachers are now concentrating on one specific content area and one reading class. Celeste likes the change. She liked teaching Language Arts, but teaching Social Studies gives her an opportunity to incorporate another of her passions, History. There are twenty-four students who have just cruised through the doorway and are busily landing in their assigned locations. A couple of them approach her with paperwork to be signed or with questions in need of only her answer while the rest of the students move with fluidity throughout the classroom toward their assigned spaces. These twenty-four sixth graders, boys and girls, tall and short, dressed in a variety of styles and colors, are all eagerly moving into position for the day's social studies lesson.

The room is one of the last two classrooms at the end of the long hallway that leads from the media center and the administrative offices to the wing which houses the upper grades of the school. The brick and concrete block school, built sometime in the 1950s is soon to be replaced with a new building being constructed on the other side of the county, but, for now, it is home to nearly seven hundred students in grades one through six. "We're excited about moving to our new school" she told me before class began. She 'scrunched' her shoulders upward in excitement and displayed a wide grin when she shared the information with me. "It's going to be a real boost to everyone – getting out of this older building." I could remember my own experiences in moving from old buildings to new ones. It does seem as though it gives a school faculty a fresh look at things.

The squeaking sound of tennis shoes on the linoleum floors of the hallway is heard regularly throughout the day as the sixth graders scurry from classroom to classroom. The narrow hallway is lined with bulletin boards filled with student work and decorations about the various units being covered in the different disciplines. Overhead, exposed pipes and conduit snake throughout the building and serve as constant reminders of just how old the building is. They pay no attention to such reminders. For most of them, this has been their school since they can remember and right now the only thing on their minds is getting from one classroom to another. Theirs is the only schedule at the school calling for a change from one classroom to another throughout the day. The sixth grade in this school is served by a team of teachers; each teacher specializing in one subject area. Next year, they will join their peers at the county's one middle school where such class change is the norm.

There is a white board behind her. Today, it is serving as a giant graphic organizer – a chart that will soon be filled with information about the continent of South America. To her left, just beyond the door to the classroom, is a bulletin board decorated, not with student work or drawings, but with helpful reminders directed at assisting the students in thinking through their work. Directly facing her, along the rear of the room, are a few tables with computers, her desk, and several bookshelves. Behind those items and along the foam-green painted walls there are storage cabinets, a place for coats to hang, a large world map situated high on the wall, and a sink. From her vantage point at the front of the room, along the wall to her right she can see two sets of windows with another bulletin board and an air-conditioning unit situated in between providing heat in the cold mountain winters and cooling for those hot, humid days at the very beginning and end of the school year. The bulletin board contains student writing samples.

The fan in the heating and air-conditioning unit clicks on occasionally and stirs the many flags – some commercially made, others home-made – that are hanging from the ceiling. The colorful flags represent countries that have been the focus of study in her Social Studies classes over the years. In between those four walls and underneath the colorful banners they have taken their seats, adjusted hair and clothing, borrowed the necessary paper and pencils, stowed the book-bags and purses, and have begun to settle in for a day's lesson on the wonders of South America. A few students are still moving near their desks, opening books, interacting with classmates. One boy stands at the pencil sharpener, his right hand grinding away at the machine while he looks about the room. Several of them glance in my direction at the back of the room. They've been told to expect me, but it is probably still somewhat unnerving to suddenly notice a strange man

typing away at a laptop computer while peering over the short bookshelf that separates my observation post in the storage area of the room from the rest of the classroom. Nevertheless, they go on about their business of getting settled.

"Today, we're going to visit a very interesting place," she says with a booming voice that commands the attention of the still-fidgety group, "we are going to talk about some things that you may have heard of before and, hopefully, we are going to discover some things that are totally new to you. We're going to begin our exploration of South America – its jungles and rain forests, its mountains and grasslands." The students are still transitioning from noisy hall-way to classroom. Some are whispering to their neighbors while others are sending silent signals to friends across the aisle. Papers rattle and book pages can be heard turning during her introduction to the work of the day. "But first, I want to share something with you," she says, still hugging the podium's top. Everything begins to come to a halt. The ensuing silence is deafening. It seems as though the heater fan has even turned off on cue. Papers have hushed and book pages are no longer being turned. All eyes have turned toward her and any wriggling in the student desks seems to have become purposeful. They anticipate something special.

"When I was a little girl, I was a Girl Scout. Are any of you familiar with Girl Scouts? Have any of you ever been in Girl Scouts?" she asks. Several hands shoot up, some waving back and forth in exaggerated arcs and others atop arms that seem to pull the students' bodies upward from their seats. Stevie, one of the boys who seems intent on capturing the attention of the girls in the class, raises his hand and receives the attention from the class he is probably seeking. He also receives a look of admonishment from the teacher. He puts his hand down. As the laughter dies down she continues her narrative.

"When I was a young girl, I was a Girl Scout. Sometimes we would go up to the mountains for a camping trip. I remember one time in particular that I will never forget." They sit spell-bound, listening to her tell them of a camping trip she and her fellow scouts had taken when she was around their age. Celeste tells of "roughing" it and how they had to sleep in tents. She explained the necessity of having a latrine and engaged the help of a few students in the class who were able to graphically describe such a device, as well as its purpose. Laughter and giggling once again fluttered through the classroom. Then, she gets to the heart of the story and tells of her misfortune as she and a couple of other scouts found themselves having to visit the latrine in the middle of the night.

"I wasn't too scared to go to the latrine, but some of the girls were. We decided to make it a 'group trip' and started out along the dark path. Flashlights in hand, we were making our way to the 'potty' when, suddenly, one of my tent-mates screamed and shone her flashlight onto the front of my night-shirt. 'You've got spiders on you!' she yelled. The other girls with us started screaming and beams of light from our flashlights were dancing all through the darkness. I didn't know what to do. Beams of light were piercing the darkness and bouncing off tree limbs and leaves. Light beams were shining onto our faces, temporarily blinding us and adding to the chaos of the moment. I immediately looked down to check the front of my shirt. I was afraid that I would find myself covered with all sorts of nasty creatures from the out of doors. Before I could determine just how much danger I was in, my screaming tent-mate began trying to brush the creatures off the front of my shirt . . .not just with her hands, but with the flashlight she was carrying. Over and over, the tent-mate continued to beat away at the creatures on the front of my shirt until, finally I, the true recipient of the beating, realized that there were no spiders on the

front of my shirt at all. I knew I had to halt the assault on me and my shirt by somehow managing to calm the still-agitated tent-mate. I put my arms up in defense and yelled at her to stop her attack. Others realized what I was doing and a couple of the other girls standing on each side of her tried to get her to relax. Over-reaction is not uncommon among a group of scared teenagers. There, standing somewhere in the woods between our tent and the latrine, I pointed my own flashlight at my pink night-shirt to reveal the image of a cat's face that covered the entire front of the shirt."

The students cast wide-eyed glances around the room as though they wanted to invite their classmates to join them in enjoying the unusual story. A few of the students looked back at me to see what my reaction was. I was, of course, enjoying the moment right along with the rest of the group.

"My mother had given me this really cute night-shirt with a drawing of a cat's face on the front. The outline of the kitty's head was all done in fabric paint or screen print," Celeste explained to the students as they listened intently, "but the eyelashes of the cat were pieces of fabric which had been sewn to the shirt. The pieces of fabric were cut and curled outward – taking on the appearance of spidery tentacles, especially when lit by the light of several flashlights."

Many of the students began to understand what had happened amidst the confusion in the darkness. They glanced around the room making eye contact with others who had also made the connection.

"When the light from the flashlights shone on the front of my shirt," Celeste explained, "the shadows cast by the fabric eyelashes seemed to dance across the front of

the shirt creating the appearance of dark spidery legs crawling across the light-colored fabric."

The students howled with laughter. "I bet you were black and blue from that beating," one student said. Others turned and acknowledged the smiles and laughter of others. Stevie cast a sheepish grin toward one of the girls.

Celeste then turned and reached into a small cardboard box near the podium. From the box she drew a bundle of pink fabric and began to unfold it. Then, she shook it a couple of times revealing a child's tee-shirt. It was the pink night-shirt from the story. The cat's face, complete with long, black eyelashes, still adorned the shirt.

"You mean you still have the same shirt", asked Claire. The students seemed to be astounded that someone so "old" as their teacher could still have possession of a night-shirt that she had worn as a child. The students' questions about the incident were probably typical of sixth graders. "What did the girl do when she found out that she'd beaten you up because of some little shadows?" "Did you feel like smacking her with you flashlight?" Laughter rippled across the room with each question. The students' curiosity about the incident indicated that they were fully engaged in the storyline and that they could relate to the humorous incident.

Curious myself, I couldn't yet see a connection between this trip to the latrine and South America. With the shirt still in hand, Celeste then began to tie the story to the lesson.

"Do any of you know what a Tarantula is?" she asked. "Do you think you might be frightened by a Tarantula if you saw one?" She skillfully equated the fear she and her friends had felt during this Girl Scout outing to the fear one might encounter in the

jungles of South America. She began to talk about some of the creatures one might find in the jungles of South America. She polled the audience, asking them what might be found there. There was the expected mention of Pythons and Anacondas along with other reptiles. Students were quick to mention the Piranhas of the Amazon River and provided some graphic details concerning their ability to devour large animals within short periods of time. The discussion quickly returned to Tarantulas and other exotic spiders and similar creatures.

"Yeah, Tarantulas are huge spiders with big fangs and they come out at night and bite you and you die," Stevie commented. Some of the girls exhibited a visible shudder at such a thought. Stevie's mischievous grin and quick glance toward some of the other boys in the room validated the fact that the girls' reaction had been just what the he had desired.

Celeste was undaunted by the informal conversations which were taking place around the room. The students were not at all off task, in fact, they were busy making comments to their nearest neighbors about the topic at hand.

"My cousin had a pet tarantula one time." Shari, a tall, dark-haired girl told Claire, "He used to let it crawl up his arm and sit on top of his head while he watched television." Claire shuddered at the thought.

"I'd rather have a snake." Josh reported to the entire class, "They *eat* spiders!"

The students continued to make connections to the topic by sharing events in their own lives. Discussion as part of a story follow-up is important in helping students understand the story and to make the story relevant to the lesson as well as in their lives (Gillard, 1996; Roe, et al, 1998). This relevance to the reality in the students' lives

creates a significant bridge toward a deeper understanding. Bruner (2002) states that "narrative, including fictional narrative, gives shape to things in the real world and often bestows on them a title to reality (p. 8). Through discussing the story and the new information, the students were able to begin constructing new understanding based on the foundations of their prior knowledge and experiences. Celeste continues to monitor the conversations. She has used this strategy many times as a way to introduce ideas, concepts, vocabulary, and course content as she prepared her students to learn the new material.

"OK, let's get serious," Celeste says as she began to re-focus the group's attention on the intended topic, "I know we can imagine all sorts of gross things, but we'll have time for that later."

The lesson progressed and they filled in the graphic organizer with more information – they listed plants and animals that might be found in the jungle, they talked about possible dangers to humans, and throughout the lesson they continued to somehow associate the camping story with the classroom discussion they were having. Sometimes the camping story became the primary topic of discussion, but Celeste would skillfully redirect the conversation and bring the students' focus back to the task at hand. "You find out that you are not the only one telling a story," she explained to me during one of our interviews. "They have stories they want to tell too and you can't let every student tell every story they want to tell. I think that allowing two or three helps the students to see that what we are learning can relate to something in life and so, it does have purpose."

Celeste's belief in students' stories arises from Paley (1995) and Maguire (1998)'s argument that humans – young or old – tend to want to share stories when the opportunity arises. There is significant value in allowing students to tell stories. The true value in the process is that of making the connections that the learners need to make in order to understand, respect, or at least empathize with another. Their storytelling "and their joining together may be informed now and then by outrage—outrage at injustices and reifications and violations. Teachers and learners need to share their stories in order to look "toward untapped possibility – to light the fuse, to explore what it might mean to transform that possibility" (Greene, 1995, p. 42). Students can be afforded more time to tell their stories or perform them in other ways; dancing, singing, or painting. Whatever the method, they also have a desire express themselves through a "telling" of their own.

Celeste had just demonstrated her ability to implement the use of a "hook", a device, in this instance, she says she uses to "reel in" student interest into the lesson. The story did not take place in South America, nor did it offer any particular facts about that region of the world. The story tool simply served to gain the attention of the students in a way that was interesting and entertaining. It drew the students into the story and made them want to participate in a variety of ways – listening, imagining, and even telling something of their own experience. The story took information that was common to these students in rural northern Georgia; that spiders, snakes, and other night creatures exist all around them, and helped them to wonder about the types of creatures that inhabit the nightlife of the region being studied. These hooks are only one piece of her storytelling system. "I originally looked at the use of story as a way to get them interested and focused on what we were getting ready to do. It was a way to tell them what the lesson

was going to be," she explained to me in one of our afternoon conversations, "But I've become so much more conscious of it now that I see it more as not just a tool to motivate getting started with something, but as a tool to make the lesson progress, as a tool that makes the kids think about what their doing, and to help them relate the lesson to everyday life."

Egan (1992) emphasizes the use of such hook devices in classroom lessons. These devices are in the form of a "clear and coherent narrative that stimulates the students' imaginations (p.137). This stimulation is important, especially during the more formative, early childhood and early adolescent years. Imagination and the processing of information through the formation of mental models is a powerful tool and is especially powerful in those years (Egan, 1986). Storytelling provides the teacher with a method of helping students create mental images that act as a bridge between new information and prior knowledge. Sawyer (1942) argues that within storytelling "lies much to quicken the spirit" and to keep alive "those experiences and imaginings which have made possible the eternal re-births of the human race in the midst of maraudings, conquerings, subjugations of tribe by tribe, nation by nation" (p.29). Maguire (1998) writes that "we listen to other people's stories with more curiosity and attentiveness, and we find that we remember these stories and the events surrounding them much more vividly (p. 29) By painting these verbal scenes across the mental framework of each of her students, Celeste is engaging the imaginative processes and building bridges linking new information with old (Ausubel, 1968).

Celeste's system or method of using story as a "hook" did not arise from an intentional pursuit of the use of storytelling in her teaching practice. It evolved over time

and due to a variety of reasons. Good teachers increase their chances for success by taking chances in their practice. They develop methods of delivering information that is suitable for that moment in time. It is that ubiquitous, teachable moment for which we should prepare ourselves. Vivian Gussin Paley, in a foreword written for William Ayer's book, *The Good Pre-School Teacher* (1989), says that teachers often learn the art of teaching by studying "faceless" children whom they expect to identify and label when they walk into their classrooms (p., vii). But, in reality, teachers have to re-write the script of their teaching expectations each time they greet a new student. Good teachers and curriculum designers are not necessarily influenced and guided in their teaching practices solely by research studies or theories. Teachers compile their views over time and eclectically choose from a varied range of theories and research findings, constantly measuring them against their own experiential conclusions.(Egan, 1986) There is no particular mold that makes one method or teaching style absolutely correct for a particular subject area or topic or for a particular group of learners. Teaching involves a great deal of flexibility and the need for teachers to exercise creativity.

Celeste not only hooks student interest, she propels her lessons by using story as a guide to other levels and topics in the lesson or unit of study. During the classroom discussion surrounding the geography of South America, someone mentioned the Andes mountain chain. "The Andes range is a treacherous mountain range that runs along the border of Chile and Argentina," she told the class. "Back in the 70s or 80s there was a soccer team that was traveling to Chile to play a game and their plane crashed high up in the Andes Mountains." Celeste expressed her hesitancy to tell the whole story, but continued following a warning to the class that the situation was a difficult one. "There is

a book about this and a movie about it too. Some of you may have heard the story." Nobody acknowledged that they knew what she was talking about. "Surprisingly," Celeste continued, "many of the people on the plane were not killed in the crash. Some were injured and others were not hurt at all. They had to huddle together in the hull of the crashed plane to stay warm and they melted snow in the sunlight so they would have water, but the only food they had was a few chocolate bars somebody had brought with them." She continued telling of the event as the entire class sat in almost reverent silence. "After some time on the mountain, other people died from their injuries and before they died they made the other people promise that they would use their flesh for food it they needed to." Some of the students expressed shock at the idea, but they continued to listen intently. "After spending many days and running out of chocolate there was little else to do but to honor that request. They had buried the bodies out in the snow near the plane and some of them would go out, uncover a body, and bring back pieces of muscle to use as food." She continued the story and told of how some of the soccer team members were sent to try and make it to civilization in order to lead a rescue party back to the plane. After finishing the story, the students talked about how difficult it must have been for them and, even at a sixth grade level, what they might have done if they had been in the same situation. Celeste gathered them back to the topic. "Anyway, when we read and talk about the Andes Mountains I want you to think about how rugged they are and how dangerous they can be to try and cross." She continued the lesson as they talked about other geographical features of the continent.

Celeste's use of this real-life story was not pre-planned. The story came about as a result of a thought or image she had when the Andes Mountains were mentioned during

the lesson. Although it was an impromptu act, the story gave the students a vivid mental picture of another type of danger that dwells in South America. Now they will be aware of jungles, rain forests, and high mountain ranges as they think about what that distant land might look like.

"Searching for, drawing out, and growing artistry": Celeste's Background.

There are a number of elements in Celeste's life that have contributed to her development as a storyteller. Celeste was born in Atlanta where she and her parents lived until she was seven years old. Looking to escape city life, the family moved to a more rural environment. They built a house in nearby DeKalb County. At that time she was probably considered to be a country girl, but the area has since grown by leaps and bounds to become a major part of the Atlanta community. She laughs as she thinks about their escape efforts and how the property they once owned would probably fetch a "hefty sum of money" since it was now surrounded by shopping malls, subdivisions, and all of the trappings of urban life in the big city.

Celeste attended schools in a metropolitan Atlanta school system until her junior year in high school when she felt the need to change her direction and she switched to another school. "I actually finished school in the adult education division of my high school. It was called Open Campus High School. I had gotten to a point where I wasn't real happy at school. Going to Open Campus was like going to . . . it was actually like college. You had your classes, you went to your classes, and there was not a lot of social competition. I felt like I could really work better to my potential in a situation like that, a setting like that. I really enjoyed my last year. I guess I went about a year and a half of

high school then I went on to Yancy College for two years then I finished out at Granger College."

Celeste graduated from college with a degree in middle grades education and later became certified to teach gifted students. Celeste and her husband now live in the rolling hills and mountains of northern Georgia. She has been teaching for 26 years – 25 of those years have been spent at the sixth grade level. Much of that time has been spent teaching both Language Arts and Social Studies. Middle school teachers usually have two concentrations on which to focus. Some school administrators choose to allow teachers to pick one content area to teach during the entire school year.

She expressed to me her thoughts about being able to concentrate on a particular area of teaching. "My own concentrations are Language Arts, and Social Studies; those are the things I love to teach. This year I'm just teaching Social Studies, we have four teachers on our team this year, and I really needed a break from Language Arts too because I've taught it for so many years. I was beginning to feel totally burned out."

From our previous encounters in workshops and other professional development settings, I knew that she would probably be the type of person who would not let burn-out get the best of her. She always seemed to be on top of things and capable of devising a plan to overcome obstacles.

"I went through a period of time like that with Social Studies several years ago. I let another teacher take it over for a year because I was feeling a little stale with it and it helped a lot to just back off and not do it for a year." Celeste sighed deeply, "But Language Arts and Social Studies are my two true loves. I really enjoy teaching those."

Aside from her teaching career in Language Arts and Social Studies, Celeste finds time to do what she would probably call her "third" true love – writing. She often talks about her writing projects, especially about a recently written and published book.

"When I was in high school, I liked to write a lot. I always did well in writing. I won a blue ribbon in Dekalb County - first place at Dekalb County Language Arts Festival in high school" she said proudly. "It was just a book of original poetry and illustrations that I did with a couple of little essays in it."

I could tell that writing was an important aspect of her life even at our first meeting. In conversations during the storytelling workshop Celeste would refer to "keeping a journal" and provide other hints that writing was important to her. Never did she even mention the fact that she had authored a book. It was not until very late in our first meeting that she told me.

In 1996 she put the finishing touches on her first book, a historical fiction piece that reaches back to the Civil War with threads of her own family history. It started at a writing workshop she had attended at the local regional educational service agency as part of professional development for teachers in the area. She began piecing together a storyline from memory that involved family members and their participation in the war. She was thrilled when she received encouragement from the workshop instructor and her peers to do more with her story idea.

"We had to write a story to tell the class, and then we got our credit by telling it to the class at the end of . . . ever how many weeks the workshop lasted" she explained. There were some workshop participants who said, 'Celeste, you need to write more to this!' I had never really given it a thought, and I don't know what made me say, 'Do you

really want me to? I'll do it!' It was like a spur of the moment thing," she laughed as she thought about the process, "I'd go home at night and I'd write. I'd write two, three, sometimes four hours at night, just sitting in my chair in the living room just writing. Then, I'd have maybe fifteen minutes worth to read out loud to them the next day and sometime in between that I'd get it all typed out on a little word processor program on the computer and it took me nine months to finish it. I literally finished the night before the last day of school of that year. That was in 1996 and I enjoyed it because the kids got so much out of it. It was really a gift to me and I read it to the next several classes in the following years and every year the response was the same . . . you need to get this published!" Celeste had found a way to use her writing skills and storytelling skills for the benefit of both teacher and student. At times she would simply tell portions of the story to the groups in order to see their reaction. The students were enthused by her telling and her reading. "They would come in and say, 'Are you going to have time to read to us today?' It was really fun to me to be doing that for a group and with a group and sometimes I'd ask them, 'What do you think should happen next?' Because actually it is all based on fact, but sometimes they had good ideas as to how you would sometimes have to deviate from the true story and get back on path latter just to help the story progress and fill in gaps, sometimes they came up with some good ideas about things." Just like Celeste's use of oral storytelling in the classroom, her writing is another element of her storytelling skill. Her explicit modeling of the process also served as an method of teaching writing skills to her students. They were able to listen to pieces of her story and see how she shaped those pieces into a larger framework which eventually became a book.

Storytelling is not consigned to the realm of oral presentation. As I use it in this work, the term "story" is equivalent to "narrative." *Webster's New College Dictionary* defines story as the narration of an event or a series of events. Therefore, someone who narrates is equivalent to a storyteller. Donald Polkinghorne (1988) writes that the term "narrative" is quite ambiguous. "Narrative can refer to the process of making a story, to the cognitive scheme of the story, or to the result of the process—also called 'stories,' 'tales,' 'or histories" (p. 13). The most inclusive meaning attached to narrative refers to any spoken or written presentation. Stories are events that take place in variety of venues and for a multitude of purposes. Stories, whether their purpose is entertainment, information sharing, educational, or some other reason, are a part of everyday communicative activity in homes, schools, work places, shopping malls, hospitals, and so on (Abbott, 2002, Barthes, 1966, Bruner 2002, Egan, 1986, Heath, 1983, Polkinghorne, 1988, Sawyer, 1942, Scholes, 1981). Webster's Dictionary also supplies a simple definition of storyteller as "one who tells or writes stories" (p. 1088). Storytelling, through Celeste's writing, has become another way for her to express herself and it has also proven to be a way she can engage students in her classroom by tapping into the creativity therein. By weaving information she has gained through personal experience and through the "second-hand" experience she learned by means of her mother, grandmother, and others, she is able to paint a broader picture of life as she sees it. Her storytelling through writing is a way for her to extend and refine student knowledge. She has received strong accolades from professional colleagues about her use of such enriching experiences as a classroom teacher. "The art of storytelling lies within the storyteller, to be searched for, drawn out, and made to grow". Whether it be through oral,

visual, or written telling (Sawyer, 1941, p. 26). Celeste has searched for, drawn out, and grown her own artistry as she tells stories through her writing and through oral tradition in the classroom.

"There were lots of stories that were passed around": Family Influence

Story has played an important role in Celeste's life since childhood. Members of her family contributed to her knowledge of family history. Extended visits with her great-grandmother, who lived to be 93 years old, were filled with stories. Her great-grandmother's life was a difficult one. She was born in 1875 to a former Confederate soldier who was making about twenty-five dollars a year as a farmer. She would tell of the day-long journeys by wagon to visit relatives only a few counties away. Her great-grandmother's stories impacted her life in a personal and professional way. She appreciated the gift of story as a way to empathize with another's way of living and she also began to realize the importance of passing one's story along to other generations. These episodes influenced her as a teacher and as a writer.

"I know it (her grandmother's storytelling and sharing) painted for me a picture of a whole, a whole different life, a whole different life style, a whole different culture, and for some reason it fascinated me. I'd say I grew up having a love for the Civil War and I know that was from her and the stories she told me. I can't remember a time in my life that I wasn't fascinated with that. I know it's because of the stories she told me about her father as I grew up. There were lots of stories that were passed around through the family and you'd think this didn't really happen and that it was just too far fetched." A sense of excitement filled her voice as she shared with me what happened next. "But then, I found some newspaper stories that were written and published in a local, hometown newspaper

in1891. They were written by a man that had been in his regiment some 30 years after the war. But a lot of the things he told in that paper were the very stories that had been passed down to us and you'd think, 'hey these are really true!' because the writer would mention my ancestor. He's mentioned by name in several of the stories." Celeste displayed a big grin. "And that was really thrilling to know that things that seemed to far-fetched maybe really did happen. I think so often about the book I've written how thrilled my great-grandmother would have been to known that her father's story was used as a basis of a book. It just makes me smile to myself sometimes to think about that because she was real proud of her family and she was real proud of the life she led even though it was hard. She had a lot of love for everyone in her life."

Some of those contributions had a direct influence upon some of the decisions she made as she grew older. Even the fact that she attended college can be attributed to the influences of her grandmother's shared stories.

"My grandmother told a lot of stories about growing up too and she was born in Cleveland and grew up there and my grandparents actually meet at Yancy College in 1916, 1917 so I heard about that place all my life for the first time I set foot at that campus I knew that was where I was suppose to go. But I think it's probably little things like this that made history interesting to me."

Along with her grandmother's gift of stories, Celeste's mother also contributed to her love of story, but in a different way. As she reminisced about her early years, she recalled that her mother was not "much of a storyteller." But her mother did create a culture of oral language in the family that was founded through regular sessions of reading. Celeste and her mother would journey to the local library on a regular basis to

forage through the offerings to find just the right books. Then, they would make their way homeward to delight in their findings.

"As I grew up, my mother would take us, when we were too young to read, down to the public library on Harland Avenue in Atlanta and get us books and I would be asked to be read to so much that there was one, she tells me, I just learned. I wasn't actually reading but I could turn the pages and read just what was there just from hearing it so much. I grew up loving to read. And I know that has had to have some influence. I loved the old books we had. We had this big green fairy tale book that I've kept all these years because it triggers in me some kind of very comfortable memory of being young and being fed these stories. I asked my mother if I could have that book. I wanted that book and it's kind of like a little treasure to me and I know that comes from being read to".

When her parents were out of town attending meetings and conventions related to her father's work she found herself staying with her grandmother. While her grandmother continued the reading tradition, she would also tell stories. There is a close connection to "story-reading" and "story-telling." The distinction between the two is sometimes blurred by those who use both techniques. The use of story, both read and told, has potential power to engage listeners. Celeste found that being read to was key to her own appreciation of and foundation in literacy, but she was also influenced by the stories that were told to her. While I was interested in knowing more about reading to children, my primary purpose for this study was to look at storytelling.

Much of Celeste's experience with story was a mixture of being read to or being told stories from a written source and occasions when factual events were relayed to her. As I listened to Celeste talk about her experiences with story as she was growing up I

reflected upon my own experience. I could form a mental picture of her sitting with her grandmother, listening intently to her stories. I could see her sitting next to her mother as she read fairy tales from a huge, seemingly magical book. I could see it all because I had experienced some of the same events with my own family. We shared a similar background. Her family and mine could afford books and other resources that were ultimately used to inspire us. We were also treated to many "true" stories that helped to influence our early lives.

I was reminded of Heath's (1983) work in Roadville and Trackton where the Roadville children, who were born to somewhat more affluent families, were exposed to stories retold from books and to factual (true) stories. The Trackton children, who were from a lower socio-economic background, were more often exposed to the factual story. Heath writes, "to Trackton people, the 'true story' is the only narrative they term a 'story,' and the purpose of such stories is to entertain and to establish the storyteller's intimate knowledge of truths about life larger than the factual details of real events (p. 188). In Roadville, children come to know a story as either a retold account from a book, or a factual account of a real event in which some type of marked behavior occurred, and there is a lesson to be learned" (p. 187). Both sets of children were being influenced, perhaps we could say entertained or educated, through the use of some story form being shared by a story-teller. All of their experiences with story in the familial setting provided a foundation for their perception of story as they experienced it in the school setting.

From listening to Celeste's account of her experience with storytelling during her childhood and comparing her experience to my own, I determined that we both seemed to share an experience quite similar to Heath's Roadville group. We were raised in a

middle-class setting with parents who were educated or who appreciated the opportunity to get an education. We both had resources that enhanced our literacy; books, trips to libraries, excursions to places of interest, and other things that some children do not get to experience. We had also enjoyed the influence of storytellers in our families.

"Fairy tales and wooden shoes": Teacher Influence in Celeste's Storytelling

Along with family members, Celeste was also influenced by a number of her elementary grades teachers, especially, her sixth grade teacher. "My sixth grade teacher is probably the reason I decided to become a teacher and teach at this level," she said during one conversation. "I thought that teacher was God's gift to the world," she told me. It wasn't so much what that teacher did that influenced Celeste's use of story in the classroom as it was another individual.

"I had several teachers, my fifth, sixth, and seventh grade teachers, whom I truly loved. I think it was especially my sixth grade teacher who did all types of things like bring in resource people. I remember one person in particular, her name was Henrietta…..I can't remember her last name. She's the one I was telling you about earlier, she came two or three times a year and told stories about different things that related to what we were learning."

Celeste's use of story in her teaching practice has been shaped by years of exposure to the use of story. As Heath (1983) found in the communities of Trackton and Roadville, story and storytelling come to us through a variety of experiences and in a variety of venues. Celeste's experiences were closely related to the oral traditions of Roadville where stories were shared by invitation and in a somewhat formal setting. Her teachers used storytelling or provided storytellers in order to present information,

demonstrate oral presentation, teach character lessons, and to entertain. Through story we are ingrained with our culture. Our culture shapes our lives and provides an interpretive system through which we make sense of our world. Patterns inherent in our culture's symbolic systems of language, discourse modes, and communal norms are the molds which shape our lives (Bruner, 1990). Patterns of interaction, of course, vary according to the surroundings and not all storytelling experiences are formal. Celeste's experiences with story included parents, grandparents, teachers, and members of the community who volunteered time in the classroom.

The sixth grade teacher wasn't the only teacher who had influenced Celeste's life with story. There was a long line of educators who had used the craft in a variety of different ways. As we sat in Celeste's classroom one afternoon following the students' dismissal, she began to think of a number of people who had influenced her life with story.

"There was the second grade teacher who told a fairy tale to the class," she almost whispered as she thought about her childhood elementary school. As we sat in the quiet of the afternoon, memories began to return to her about the event.

"I can't even think of the name of the story but I know it had to do with a pair of red shoes, and it took place in Holland and it made me fascinated about that country. I wanted to go and learn everything that I could about this setting just from hearing this particular story. It fascinated me so much about the windmills, and why they had to wear the wooden shoes and I, to this day, I can't tell the character's name, I can't tell you the name of the story but what I remember about it, the curiosity it peaked in me to learn

other things. I hadn't thought of that in years," she laughs, "I really hadn't until just now."

Elementary school was not the only venue for story in Celeste's life. As we continued our conversation that afternoon she began to remember other educators who had employed story as a means of making a point or illustrating a lesson. One high school English teacher had apparently made quite an impression upon Celeste. Her use of story gave her a foundation upon which to build Celeste's own writing skills.

"I'm trying to think. In high school I did have one teacher it was my ninth grade English teacher….that told stories and ….seems like most of the short stories she told us. I don't remember if she wrote them – I don't think she read them to us I don't remember her actually reading them to us but they were always stories that had to do with 18th and 19th century England and France. I remember when we had to write a story one time about the French Revolution. I remember taking a lot out of things I had learned from what she had told us and putting them together to make up my story." Following one story-writing assignment, Celeste fondly remembered the nurturing she had received from the teacher. "I remember she wrote a comment on the assignment under it, it said, "you have such an unusual talent for writing for a ninth grader", and I wanted to say, 'but it's because I've listened to you!' I remember how excited that made me feel!" Celeste chuckled, "I guess that was encouragement she gave me that she probably has no idea she ever, ever did. But that was – that was a lot of encouragement to me. I hadn't thought about that in years either . . . the fact that she used to tell us those stories about life in England and France during those time periods. It had to do with the different literature that we studied."

The influence followed her into her college career. Yancy College is a small, private college located in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. There was already a family connection that drew her to the college and at least one of its faculty members managed to make a long-lasting impression on her.

Celeste told me of some of her experiences at the small college. "As I think about storytelling, that's probably one of the things that's tuned me on so to history. Now I tell you it was always American History with me until I went to college and had a wonderful professor who told stories. This professor came in dressed as Socrates during our one of our Western Civilization classes. I found it fascinating. He put a love for world history in me that I never knew was there. And he told me he would come do it for my class if I can seem to get the schedule coordinated. He's a retired professor from Yancy College now, but he still lives over there. He told us lots of stories. I hadn't thought about that much either until now. But that was his way of teaching."

It was clear that Celeste had been influenced by a number of teachers, in a variety of ways, throughout her educational career. From that second grade fairy tale to her professional development workshops during her own teaching career, Celeste was able to share a wide variety of experiences that shaped her practice of storytelling.

"It's more than just getting up and telling something": Storytelling in the Classroom

From my first visit, I was able to observe Celeste's use of story in her teaching. As I walked into her classroom for my first observation, she was surrounded by students who wanted information about an upcoming field trip. She filled their needs efficiently by answering their questions and providing the specific information they were looking

for, but before they got away from her desk, they were also treated to a brief talk about the previous field trip taken by last year's class.

"You'd better be ready to do some walking!" she exclaimed. "And you'd better wear come comfortable shoes! Some of the kids wished they had listened to that advice last year! You'll have so much fun though. You'll get to see lots of things and you'll learn a lot about the place. I think we took three bus-loads of students and they all had a great time. One kid was so excited about going on the field trip because it was the first excursion like that he'd ever been on. He had just come to this school from Mexico and he was thrilled. I think all the kids tried to help him enjoy the trip because they knew it was so special to him."

As she continued, she provided examples of happenings during the field trip, happenings that also touched on some of the questions that had been posed by her students. Not only did she provide answers to their questions, but it seems that she also provided, through her use of story, some "mental imagery" as well.

That was just one instance of her extemporaneous use of story that seemed to have sneaked up on her. In later conversations, she confided in me that she didn't even realize that she had relied on story with the students. In fact, she began to think about other instances in which she had done the same.

"I've become so much more aware of the fact that storytelling isn't just telling a story," she told me, "It's simply relating something that's a very…quick telling of something that happened on a particular day or a certain morning last week or ten years ago, that you don't think about being a story, but it actually is, and I think teachers use story as a teaching tool without being aware of it. Even though I've always tried to

incorporate some of it…I've realized, through the work you're doing in your study and in just our conversations, that it's more than just getting up and telling a story." Celeste's immediate connection to the power of story offered me a stronger understanding of its importance to teaching and learning.

During the course of my interviews with Celeste, it was as though she had begun taking mental notes of storytelling episodes that were occurring during class time. She was amazed at how many times she had used informal illustrations to make a point that was associated with the lesson at hand. She was becoming aware of the role that story was playing in her own practice and was convinced that it must be something that happens in other classrooms as well. As Celeste puts it, "It's something you do and don't even think about it! I know if I do it…the other teachers…most other teachers have to be doing that too. Just to use some daily event to help the students relate to what's happening here and now with what they're studying." Her eyes sparkled as she thought about the concept. Through the process of our interview sessions she was becoming much more conscious of how she was using story in and around the classroom setting.

Celeste's reflection on her teaching practices demonstrates her willingness and ability to develop professionally. Reflection "engages one in consciously thinking about experiences and it provides an opportunity for them to examine and question values and beliefs" (Silcox, 1993, p. 46). Reflection can engage educators in a process of examining their professional pathways and causes them to sometimes question the underpinnings they received in preparing to become a teacher. In some cases, researchers have found that some institutions did not create an atmosphere conducive to sharing teachers' stories of their learning, their beliefs and values, nor their reasons for wanting to become

teachers (Delpit, 1995). Celeste was not afraid to take a critical look at her own practice and, through this reflective process, ask herself what she might do to make her practice better.

"Looking for unusual things": Focusing on the Lesson

Using story as an introductory piece is an ideal way to provide the hook or focus point for getting into the lesson. It is also a means to looking at a particular topic in depth; to understand broad concepts, historical events, or the lives of people.

Celeste is energetic in her teaching. She demonstrates through her detailed lesson plans and her delivery in the classroom that she has done her homework prior to standing before the class. "Sometimes I look for stories about people if we're doing a new lesson or new era in history. Sometimes, I've learned something new, I've tried to relay it to the kids, but many times, I will actually go looking for unusual things about that person because that helps the students to get interested in what your talking about…who your talking about, and if they get interested in who your talking about, they're going to be interested in what they do," she explained. "Sometimes you can find little things in your text book, but a lot of times it comes just from a broad range of knowledge that I've gained from my everyday reading or listening to other people."

There are other techniques, aside from her idea of using story as a hook, that help to make Celeste envision story as a vital part of teaching. As a transition, she has used story to create a bridge from one day's lesson to another. The modern day teacher is faced with a number of things competing for the attention of the student. Television has often used the "cliffhanger" concept to attract viewers to subsequent episodes. Both television and movies have spent much time and money to promote future attractions and

vie for the attention and patronage of today's consumer. Teachers are sometimes finding themselves forced to use some of the same tactics.

"I do some research to find some interesting tid-bits of information to share about people or places in our lessons. If we were reading it out of a book, they wouldn't have found it nearly as interesting. Near the end of the class period I'll say, 'we're going to have to wait till you come back in here tomorrow to find what he decides to do about this,' and the kids will complain, 'Oh, you always stop before you tell us the good stuff!' But then it makes them *want* to come back the next day."

"It's not just meaningless data": Comprehension and Vocabulary

The longer we talked the more ideas she began to have regarding the possible values of storytelling in the classroom. There was a certain "discovery process" that was taking place during our visits. It was not so much that her use of storytelling was so surprising, but she was beginning to connect the use of story with a variety of targeted outcomes that she wanted to achieve. Aside from creating an enthusiasm for the subject material within the students, she was beginning to realize that some of her storytelling skill was achieving some other goals. As a teacher, she had sought ways by which students would heighten their comprehension of the materials being covered. I asked if she thought comprehension was increased through the use of story. "Oh, definitely!" she exclaimed, "especially with students that have a hard time gleaning just from reading a text. I think it makes it more real to them. It's not something just real 'cut and dry.' It's not just meaningless data that they are cramming into their heads. If they hear it as a story, they hear it as something delightful, and something that they will remember." Her ability to help students understand a concept or some abstract idea was evident as she

shared information with the class about her writing career. Some students may not view writing as an integral part of their academic careers. They might not understand how important it will be to them as adults. Teachers may assist students in making this connection by allowing the student to hear of their own experiences and processes in the craft. As a writer, Celeste stresses to her students the need to hone their writing skills in all their subject areas. "When I write," she explained to one group, "I have to be careful to step back and make sure what I'm putting on paper makes sense. Most of the time, I will ask someone to read what I've written just to see if it makes sense to them. If something isn't clear, then I go back are work on it some more. One time I wrote a paper for a class and I thought it made perfect sense. I typed it up nice and neat and turned it in to my teacher. When I got it back, after it was graded, it had red ink all over it. My teacher couldn't understand what I was writing . . .it didn't 'flow.' There was a note on the paper that I needed to re-write it and there were arrows showing where I might move certain paragraphs so they would make more sense."

"Is that why teachers make us revise our papers?" one girl asks.

"That's one reason," Celeste answered. "Revision is an important part of the writing process. It gives you an opportunity to 're-envision' or 're-view' or, in other words, 'look at your writing' again to see if it makes sense."

The student nodded to signify her understanding. There were probably other students in the room who were also in need of the reminder, but only the one girl posed the question. Celeste's explanation and story about her own experience provided an opportunity to help her students comprehend the need for revisiting a piece of writing and seeking ways to make its content clear to the reader.

Celeste also employs story to help students "see the big picture" concerning topics she is covering. Her story about the camping trip helped students to realize that there are similar dangers and fears in life experiences for people from their culture and community and people from other regions of the world. She feels that there is a certain amount of 'passive' learning and comprehension that stories promote. "Many times through listening to a story, they internalize the information without realizing that they've learned something," she said. "I think that's one way it really works out. I think it's especially true of those students that have a harder time with reading comprehension, and this is sometimes the case with your lower level students do in social studies if there is a lot of reading involved."

Another thing I had noticed in my observation of Celeste's classroom was the level of conversation taking place between teacher and students. There were times when extensive use of new vocabulary was the norm with some traditional identification of new terms and the teacher or text book providing definitions. Other instances called upon the students to attach meaning to vocabulary they had already covered. During some of the story sharing time, there were instances when new vocabulary was introduced within context of the story being told. Once again, my thoughts return to the camping story and how she attached relevance to it by connecting the lesson on the Amazon River basin and the creatures that inhabit that area. New vocabulary, like Tarantula, Anaconda, and Python, was introduced in association with the vivid imagery used in her opening story and during the ensuing discussion. Associating a new word with an image is one of the best ways to learn new vocabulary. Imagery based techniques, especially through the use

of rich narrative, are more highly effective than non-imagery based techniques (Powell, 1980, Marzano, 2001).

In one conversation I had with her prior to my visiting her classroom, I asked her if she used story for the purpose of teaching new vocabulary. She replied, "Absolutely! Sometimes I've actually had them say to me, when I'm telling them about something, 'Speak English Mrs. Carter!' Or if I know I'm using a new word, I'll stop and say, 'Can you tell me what this means?'…just like…there was a word in our lesson last week…isolated…and there was one class that I could tell they had no idea what that meant, so I backed up and said who knows what it means to be isolated. I would have to say that vocabulary through story…it's a great way to teach vocabulary." Because they will say sometimes, 'Wait, what does that mean?' And it is, perhaps, a word they wouldn't have heard if I had not been telling them a story about something."

"I love her stories": Affective Connection to Story

Celeste often uses terms that refer to the affective or emotional connection that is made between teacher and student when story is used. Students tend to use emotional words to express to her their enjoyment of her use of story within the lesson. During a transition between classes one day, I asked a student her thoughts on her teacher's storytelling.

"I love her stories," she said with excitement, "she knows how to make things interesting!"

Celeste explained to me her perception of this emotional connection or rapport she experiences with her students. She spoke emphatically about story's ability to connect.

"I think using story absolutely reaches the kids. And I think it also establishes a rapport between me and my students when they realize they're learning things through just stories I tell them. And it excites me when they can come back with a fact that they learned because of a story I told them; when they come in the next day and before they even get seated somebody's saying, 'now you promised you were going to tell us what happened next' referring to a story from the previous day. The use of story is a great hook!"

In order for a lesson to be effective it should be affective (Jackson, 2001; Marzano, 1992). Human beings learn best when concepts, ideas, or information are related to us and connected to our emotions. Content taught in the classroom, if it is to have interest for students, has to evoke, have, or relate to some emotion or affect. What is important to students should be important to teachers. It is through emotional connection that students become more attentive and motivated to learn. Memories are contextual and if school activities draw out emotions through storytelling, simulations, role-playing, and cooperative projects students will be provided contextual memory prompts that may help them recall the information. Through the telling or reading there must be a trigger to release a response within the listener or reader (Blecher & Jaffee, 1998; Bruner, 1986; Egan, 1992; Seeman, 1994). For this reason, emergency drills are practiced in order for one to react appropriately in the event of a real emergency (Sylwester, 1994). If a teacher proposes to teach students the term Capitalism, for example, and only provides the term and a simple definition, then the student only has a series of labels or words that they are to associate to each other from which they must create understanding. If Capitalism, however, is associated with a story of the success of a small business in the community or

the arrival of a penniless immigrant to the United States whose struggle leads to financial success, then there is more opportunity for a deeper understanding by the student and a possible link to some experience in their lives.

"Keeping their attention": Student Engagement

Celeste is aware of her need to maintain an orderly classroom and, in her opinion, "order is sometimes measured by just how involved or engaged the students are." Our discussions often touched upon "keeping the student interest" and "doing things that keep students from being bored and becoming disinterested" with the lesson at hand.

During the course of my visits, Celeste began to realize that she had also been using story as a means of managing the classroom. She mentioned the use of anecdotal pieces – unplanned short stories that just happen during the course of a lesson. My own experience in teaching has shown me that when student attention is not on the lesson, the chances of behavior problems significantly increase. I recall using a quick story as a method of bringing everybody back together.

During a lesson focusing on a coastal area in South America it appeared that students were beginning to get a little restless. There was some squirming in the seats and a few whispered conversations were taking place in various parts of the room. Celeste seemed to break totally away from the topic to ask the class a question. "How many of you have ever been to a beach in Florida?" she asked the group. She was hoping to get the attention of those whose interest in the lesson seemed to be waning. Hands went up across the room and students began to engage in those physical movements and sounds that evoke the need to share information. "I remember going to a beach in Florida and the

first jelly-fish I ever saw and I thought it was one of the ugliest creatures I had ever seen," she told them.

"I've been stung by one," one student proudly exclaims. "It hurt and they had to scrape the little stinger things off my leg."

"Well," continued Celeste, "the text book says that there are some pretty big jelly-fish in this area. Let's see if we can find out more."

With focus on the lesson re-established, she proceeded to explore more of the textbook's information on sea creatures found in the tropics. It only took a moment of re-engagement to bring the students back to life. Whispering between students, fidgeting, moving, and other activities that distract others and signal that students are off task disappeared and they were now paying attention to the lesson.

This was just one example of many anecdotal "mini-stories" Celeste uses during the course of a day. "What do you see as the purpose of the anecdotal pieces?" I asked. "To keep their attention on what we are talking about," she replied. "Do you see this as some sort of attempt at classroom control or management?" I asked. "I have actually never thought of it like that . . . as classroom management I mean, but I've seen it work like that now that I've become more aware of what it does. Yes, I suppose you could say it's definitely a management tool," nodding her head as she spoke. "Especially if you can come up with some good things to start with and they know that your going to tell them some good stories, then they'll tune in to anything you say hoping to hear that one really good story again. Some things aren't going to be as interesting to others as they are to some children because the kids vary in their own interest and their attention spans. It's

hard to teach social studies for fifty minutes, and have them interested in everything you're doing."

Much like my own experiences with story transitions used by my childhood preachers during a sermon, there is a general response by students as Celeste introduces story during a lesson. Whether it is a planned story or an extemporaneous one, she is aware of certain student behaviors or "reactions" that take place. If students are moving around, movement stops or becomes minimal. If there are undue conversations taking place in the room they tend to stop. During most of my visits to her classroom, I noted that students' behavior improved and they became more attentive when story was introduced. I thought about the comments she had made previously about managing the classroom using story as a way to re-focus the group.

The students were busily working in small groups. The project they were working on was keeping them busy, but they were getting quite noisy. Celeste elaborated about the group that was in the room with us. "This has been the most talkative group of kids that I've had this year that I have ever, ever taught! This is a group they just," she searched for the right explanation, "they never get quiet, which makes anything you do hard. If I employ the use of a story of some sort they will stop what they're doing, they will get quiet, they will look at you, and you can tell they're hanging on every word your saying."

I make note of her management strategies as I watch her work. The use of a story "moment" is not the only method she uses to keep order. She pays close attention to the students as they work. The occasional occurrence of misbehavior is dealt with quickly and effortlessly. Almost without missing a beat in the lesson, she applies the necessary

corrective measure – physically drawing close to the perpetrator, a fitting facial expression, a quiet verbal reminder, slipping into an appropriate personal narrative, or whatever is needed to get the attention of the errant child and refocus the class efforts toward a productive lesson.

"I have stage fright": Student Stories

Storytelling is not only for the teacher. Celeste uses every opportunity to allow students to use their creativity. Both written story and oral story weighs significantly in her teaching practice. It is especially important for her students to bridge the gap between talking and presentation in the classroom setting. She offers her students the opportunity to stretch and grow in a literary sense.

"Do you promote student storytelling," I asked.

"Yes, to get them up in front of the class because many kids hate it until they try it. And they find out it's not so bad and if the class responds to them in a positive way….then it really breaks that shyness barrier down in some of them," she answered enthusiastically. "They realize that they can get up in front of a group and make people laugh or make people give them their attention. I had a girl one year that was an incredible writer and everything she wrote the class wanted her to read it to them. They didn't want to read it they wanted her to tell the story to them."

One week's series of classes was filled with student presentations of their story-writing. Small groups had been assigned the task of writing stories that would depict typical happenings in specific geographical areas of South America. Cards containing the names of the geographical areas were nestled in a small basket in the front of the room

and one member of each team "drew" a card from the basket in order to determine the group's topic.

Celeste gave each of the student groups a graphic organizer to use for their pre-writing stage and they worked within a short amount of class time to prepare their piece. The presentation segment was not a read-only segment. The students were asked to somehow incorporate some sort of performance technique that would allow each member of their group to participate.

When it came time for the presentations, there were the typical disgruntled expressions from throughout the classroom. "I don't want to go first, I have stage-fright!" said one girl at the prodding of her teammates. Despite the hesitancy of some of the teams, the presentations proceeded in a timely manner.

One group produced a fictional story of life in the Pampas region of Argentina. Their scenario included pieces of narrative that Celeste had used in a previous day's lesson. It seems a giant Tarantula from the jungle region had invaded the Argentine grasslands and was attacking the cattle herds that roamed the area. Another group portrayed a discussion between a paleontologist and her team who were adventuring through the rain forest. Some stories were more along the lines of non-fiction as they described for the audience a day in the life of a Gaucho (Argentine cowboy). Each presentation was entertaining and informative as I listened to their dialogues and watched their movement across the front of the room. The classroom would erupt into applause and the end of each presentation and the students, even those who were shy at first, would accept the applause with warm smiles of relief.

It does not have to be a "formal" act of storytelling in order for students to get an opportunity to overcome stage-fright. When Celeste finishes a story in class she is, many times, bombarded by requests to be allowed to share a story. "When there is time I let them," she says, "and they all enjoy hearing what each other has to share."

"This kid just took everything in": Student Response to Story

In our discussions during the course of the study, she shared with me some of her thoughts on how the use of story elicited a positive response from students in her classroom. A vital role in maintaining classroom management is the teacher's ability to monitor the classroom activity and redirect that activity whenever it strays away from the tasks necessary to complete the lesson objectives.

"Do you feel that response to your use of story is evident in the classroom," I asked one day as we were walking down the hallway toward her room.

"Oh you can't help but notice," she answered without hesitation.

"And how to you see that response? How do you describe it?" I asked.

"I describe it as a current of excitement that runs through the room. It's not as visible sometimes as it is other times, but it always make them stop and listen to what you are saying. I think maybe it's because they're thinking it's another story." She thought for a moment and shared with me one example of success she had experienced. "I had one student recently that actually had a little piece that he wrote accepted into the *Mindscapes Magazine*, the one that's put out by the Georgia Council of Teachers of English. I had no idea he had taken so much in when we studied Alexander the Great, and a lot of what I told them was just stories about Alexander…about…I took the fact, and one thing I guess I do try to do is to take a fact…instead of just spitting it out as just a fact…turn it into a

story, so that they can better relate to it. This little kid just took everything in like a magnet, and I didn't know he was doing it. Then when I gave them a writing assignment to do, he wrote this wonderful little story as though he were Alexander the Great, and it was so good that when I read it to …the faculty as part of a writing workshop…writing for the curriculum workshop we were doing, everybody really enjoyed it, and they were so shocked when they found out which student it was, and he was simply telling the story about something he'd learned as a historical event. And so I decided to submit it, and he won, and it was published in their magazine. I'm real excited about it for him!"

"Aside from just telling the story or giving the illustrated example, is there anything else that might enhance student response to the story?" I asked.

"Using expression," she replied. "Using expression helps a lot, but I don't think it's necessary to be an actor or actress to be able to tell stories that they'll be interested in. They just focus on me. That's probably the best physical response you note. They just quit what they're doing and they will put their eyes on you, and you know they're listening because they're not doing anything else." Expression is an extension of the storytelling event that attracts the listener both visually and aurally. Expression, through vocal intonation or through physical gesture or movement can, many times, mean the difference between a "good" storyteller and one who is just "acceptable." In some cases, it is appropriate for the storyteller to utilize his or her body to present the full image of the character in the story. Character posturing, vocal qualities, and facial expressions all come together to create a visual image for the story listener which makes the story itself come to life (Lipman, 1999; Livo & Rietz, 1986; Maguire, 1985; Rony, 2001; Ross,

1996; Sawyer, 1942). If a good story is the "cake," then an expressive delivery might be considered the "icing."

"Getting off track": Tensions in Storytelling.

Despite her enthusiasm about the use of story, Celeste also points to some negative elements that must be addressed. Students, after all, are kids and kids will sometimes try to pull the teacher away from the subject in order to talk about other things. As we discussed this point, I was reminded of my own teaching practice and how often my students would make an effort to get me off the subject. I was also reminded of my days as a student and how I was a party to such activity. In Celeste's opinion, there can be such a thing as too much story and story can serve to take away from the day's topic instead of enhance it. A sparkle comes to her eyes as she thinks about how manipulative sixth graders can be.

"It can become a slight hindrance if you let it get off track. If you veer away from your purpose for it, then they will try sometimes to get you off track and find a way not to have to do the lesson, but I'm not one who gets off track very easily" Celeste was quick to say. "Sometimes a topic might arise in class and I might feel like it is important enough to get off of track to impart those facts to them, but otherwise they pretty much know my limit. You have to cut them off at a point too because they always want to relate stories to you and the class." She thought for a moment, "I think you need to allow them to have that feedback, but that can go over board too, and you end up just listening to a lot of stories, and the more you listen to the less and less they had to do with what you're really focusing on." Celeste summed up her thoughts, "The farther and farther away they might get from what you're trying to impart to them as a teacher. Yes,

storytelling might not be so constructive in that way. Especially if the story is not interesting, or if that was all you did it, like anything else, could become boring cause they want to be entertained, but too much of one thing will make them 'change the channel' and tune you out."

Her use of a "television" term was interesting to me. She and so many other teachers with whom I have had conversations believe that the entertainment industry continues to have a great affect upon education. Especially in the way students expect to receive information. As Celeste said in one of our conversations, "It's sad, but they want to be entertained and storytelling is about the best way to entertain them and introduce material in a lesson."

Celeste - A Storyteller

Many times, people will not identify themselves as storytellers. They think they have to have some special training or gift in order to label themselves as storytellers. When I asked Celeste if she considered herself a storyteller, she answered with a quick, emphatic, "Yes!" To some, a storyteller is an entertainer while others might attach more meaning to the term.

"How do you describe yourself as a storyteller?" I asked.

"Myself as a story teller?" she asked as if to force herself to look at her practice from another perspective.

She sat quietly for a moment, tapping her chin with her right index finger, eyes toward the ceiling. After her thoughtful pause, her eyes met mine and she answered my inquiry in a quiet voice.

"Using events that have happened or could happen in life to help people relate to other people, other things, and other times. I guess that's the best definition I can come up with. I guess that's the way I look at it. It's a great attention-getter. I also think it helps people learn about you. And of course when you're up facing a bunch of students everyday. There's nothing better than telling stories to help them make an entertaining connection with their lesson because that's what they want today. As sad as it is, they want to be entertained and story telling is to me about the best way to do it."

"I enjoy telling stories," she continued, "because I have a lot of 'the actor' in me, and I can really get into the stories that I tell, and when I have my students' attention I love it because I know they're learning something, and they're learning it and not realizing that they're learning it." Just talking about it made Celeste get stirred up. She seemed to bubble over as she tried to explain her feelings.

"The use of story excites me because I get into it…I can really get into it. It's almost like role playing; acting things out using the expression in my voice and the gestures that help get the ideas across. I have fun doing that."

And fun she has. As she tells her stories, she moves around the front of the classroom, brandishing props if necessary, to make her point. Students roar with laughter at the funny stories and the classroom is blanketed with a pall of silent contemplation whenever the story is of a serious nature. Even though it is fun to integrate story in the lesson, she realizes that her teaching style is only one piece of her purpose – to help her students to learn and make sense of what they are learning. One afternoon as we were ready to wrap up one of our discussions on the use of story, Celeste shared with me one of the "a-ha" moments that came to her as a result of work. "I think the power moment

for me came, oh, I bet it was 12 years ago, was when Joe, one of my struggling students, looked at me and said, 'I love it when you tell us stories like this.' It really excited me because I hadn't really thought about the fact that that was what I was doing. I didn't ever do it with the intention of telling a story."

Celeste's face beamed as she leaned back in her chair, clasped her hands together, and grinned. "It wasn't a part of my conscious plan or teaching strategy. When Joe said that to me, his eye's lit up." She grinned and continued, "That was a defining moment to me because I hadn't really thought of the fact that that was what I was doing, but it was."

Using art forms such as storytelling and drama as a teaching activity has not always been looked upon with regard in the academic community. There have been volumes about the role and importance of employing arts-based techniques in education (e.g., Courtney, 1982; Heathcote, 1984; Wagner, 1976). Celeste remarks, "When I came through school to become a teacher we didn't talk about storytelling. I had been doing it before, but just not realizing it because it's just the way I teach things. I want to make something interesting to them that other wise they might find dull. So I'm always saying, 'before we go there I've got a story to tell you about this' and I never really thought about it until that day when Joe said that to me. I thought to myself, 'I'm really getting something across to these kids.' That moment has really stuck with me."

"Storytelling is a way to create relationships": Reflections on Current Practice

We had numerous conversations about her various types of storytelling and, particularly, the use of personal narrative in teaching during the course of this study. Celeste is convinced that storytelling is a tool that cannot be ignored by those in the teaching profession. Her own experience has taught her that, through story, her students

are provided with a scaffolding for better comprehending and understanding the material being covered because they can somehow attach personal meaning to those concepts being taught.

"Storytelling is a way for me to create a relationship between me and my students", she told me in one of our conversations. It is through that ability to make connections with the students that many teachers begin to see positive responses occurring in the classroom. Some responses include the students' abilities to function as a participant in the classroom. Many students have difficulty sharing or presenting information in front of the class as a whole. Celeste built in opportunities for her students to participate in the telling of stories as a way for them to overcome stage-fright and timidity. Her lesson plans reflect her allowance of time for students to prepare stories in various forms; written, drawn or painted, hand crafts, and theatrical. Her use of variety functions to allow student success by permitting students to excel in whatever way they function or perform best.

"One thing I've always done in Language Arts, as a Language Arts teacher, I have required my students to tell the class an anecdote. That was always one of our assignments. I tell them, 'you go home and you find a story you can tell to the class . . . something that really happened to you or someone in your family' and some of them have come back with some great stories. Some students, you could tell, had to really hunt to have anything to tell, but that got a lot of them interested in telling stories. And then they would say 'when can we do this again?' or 'are we going to be able to do this again?' Some of those who didn't want to get up in front of the class at first would come back the next day and say, 'I have another story to tell will you let me tell it?' I think it's

a good way to get kids to express themselves and 'tune in' with their own minds to what has happened in their past or maybe whatever goals they might have in the future."

Her students weren't the only ones Celeste would like to see capable of performing in front of the classroom. She also sees the need for new teachers to recognize the power of story and understand the impact it can have upon the teacher's ability to connect with students.

"It's amazing how you can get their attention in using something so simple as story" she explained, "sometimes it does depend on your delivery of things. Nobody is going to be interested if you stand up and speak in a monotone and never use gestures or never use any kind of inflection in your voice."

When asked what advice she might give new teachers concerning becoming comfortable with the use of story and personal narrative in the classroom, she replied, "I think the use of story a tremendous tool. I wish there were more information out there to let teachers know that it is a tool they have right there in their hands. And I think any of them can do it with a little practice and maybe they won't feel like they have to be so regimented all the time."

As Celeste said this, I reflected on my own experience as a student throughout my educational career. I remembered those regimented teachers who probably taught the way they were taught, but lost my attention to more interesting distractions. If only they had attached some story or illustration to the lesson. Their teaching styles could have then made a marked difference in my learning.

There are numbers of proponents of the use of reason and story in teaching practice. Gary Fenstermacher and Virginia Richardson's (1993) work on practical

arguments, Lee Shulman's (1987) wisdom-and-practice studies, and Hugh Sockett's (1987, 1989) call for an epistemology of teaching practice. All point to practical wisdom through the use of story in education to be considered good practice.

"This is a great area to be explored. I'm glad you're doing this because…I don't think it's used a whole lot, but I think there is so much potential in it. Maybe I'm wrong, maybe you've discovered that it is used a lot more. I don't know of any other teachers that I work with that use story a lot. And it isn't that it's something that I do that's so great, it's just a tool that I found that works. I think a lot of people feel like they are being foolish if they do this in front of a group of students.

Celeste as Storyteller

To Celeste, storytelling plays a vital role in teaching. Storytelling serves as a cognitive element of her classroom practice in a variety of ways: 1) as she teaches content and facilitates the process of her students acquiring new knowledge, 2) story acts as a hook to connect to students' prior knowledge, 3) by developing and sharing storied events with students, Celeste also believes it to be instrumental in extending and refining new knowledge, 4) storytelling also serves as a scaffold to underpin student writing and oration.

Social Studies content lends itself readily to the use of story. History *is* story and the historical threads that run through the Social Studies curriculum are significant. Celeste integrates story into the curriculum biographically through telling about historical figures. She enjoys sharing the adventures of such figures as Alexander the Great and Hannibal and then opening a discussion with her students concerning some of the choices they made during their exploits. Celeste also teaches new vocabulary through her use of

story. Her tale of the Girl Scout camping trip led into the discussion of creatures that inhabit the jungles of South America and about some of the creatures living in our own back yards. To some, words like tarantula or python are new or somewhat unfamiliar terms.

Storytelling in Celeste's classroom allows her students to make connections to known experiences. It was evident, by the student response to Celeste's camping story, many students in the classroom wanted to share their experiences in similar situations. Ulrich Neisser (1976) suggests that perception is a fundamental cognitive act. When seeing or imaging and hearing are coupled with memory, the human receiver is able to make sense of new experiences with the aid of previous knowledge. Upon hearing Celeste's story her students were able to see or imagine the details of her experience through their particular frame of mind and their perceptions were, in some cases, similar to those of Celeste because of their previous experiences.

Stories are a way for Celeste to extend and refine student knowledge. Celeste's story to the group of students who were asking her about an upcoming field trip served to answer their questions and give additional detailed information they would be able to use in order to prepare them for the trip. Her story about the soccer team's plane crash in the Andes Mountains led to a discussion allowing her students to think critically about options and decisions in life and death situations. The story also expanded the students' image of South America as a continent with a wide range of topographical features. They would not only know it as a place of extreme hot temperatures, but extremely low temperatures as well.

Since writing is an important element in Celeste's life. She acknowledges that one purpose for using story in the classroom is to influence and encourage student writing. She proudly shared the story of her struggling student who, after hearing her stories about Alexander the Great, produced a writing piece which was to be published. She pointed to the times she shared pieces of her own writing and allowed students to give her suggestions as to how to continue her story line. By modeling this cycle of thinking, writing, reflecting, and revising, Celeste was giving her students an opportunity to experience what writers do in order to produce good writing.

Celeste believes that her students should prepare themselves in the arena of presenting and public speaking. As her students leave her grade level and progress through the middle and high school levels, they will probably be given assignments that will require public presentation. Celeste models storytelling to ready them for such assignments.

Through the use of her energetic and entertaining stories, there is an affective aspect to Celeste's utilization of storytelling in the classroom. When students are interested in the lesson they will be more likely to participate and learn. Celeste possesses the ability to engage them through entertaining and enlightening stories that are tied to her lessons. Her animation, humor, and detailed storytelling style leads the listeners into a learning mood. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1996) writes, "If we want to learn anything, we must pay attention to the information being learned. And attention is a limited resource: There is just so much information we can process at any given time (p.8). Storytelling is a way for Celeste to invite her students into an atmosphere of enjoyable learning by appealing to the focusing of their attention to the topic being taught.

The storytelling environment promoted by Celeste is not only inviting, it is safe. Students listening to her story of her camping trip, as well as the story about the plane crash, were not hesitant to share their own ideas and stories in the discussion time that followed. Storytelling allows for such safe discussion. As students respond to stories being told, they can tell their own stories and explain and extend the meaning that is being constructed (Mills & O'Keefe, 1999, p. 44)

Another purpose for Celeste's storytelling lies in building rapport with students. To be a successful teacher takes more than content knowledge and physical stamina, one must believe in their own intellectual capacity and that of their students, act to develop those minds, and continually reflect on the actions they take in preparing for and teaching lessons (Kirby & Kuykendall, 1991). Celeste share stories, gives advise, and models her writing of stories in order for students to understand her thought process. In such sharing, she is demonstrating to her students that she is just like them in her struggle to create. She is not afraid to tell them stories like the camping story which allowed the students to know some of the silly things that happen to many humans in childhood. They are afforded the opportunity to know their teacher on a personal level through the use of her stories.

Summary

By the time I had completed by interviews and observations with Celeste, I really felt I was right about my first impressions of her. She truly was a highly motivated teacher; always putting forth a great deal of energy in order to make a difference in the classroom. The comments made by her principal, peers, and friends were certainly validated by my own interaction with her during the course of this study. I was able to

witness much of what she had shared with me in her interviews and I was also able to gather information that broadened my own concept of the use of story in the classroom. There were areas of her experiences with story that coincided with my own; stories being shared by grandparents and other family members. There were some of the same connections I had experienced with educators in a variety of levels – elementary through college. Other elements of my own experience were missing in hers. Nevertheless, we both shared a passion for the use of this "tool" for the purpose of reaching our students. We both recognize the importance of storytelling with reference to writing. And we both share some of the same vision about the need for new teachers to be aware of the power of story.

"We learn by experience. All that we ever learn comes our of that everlasting process of taking in, assimilating, and giving out" – Ruth Sawyer

"Professional, practiced, and smooth": Vanessa's Story

Vanessa Cochran moves through the classroom with an air of confidence. Her tone is mild. Her movement is fluid. She seems to be keenly aware of everything that is going on even though the classroom is filled with highly energetic fourth graders. She has only been teaching four years, but her style is meticulously professional, practiced, and smooth. There are no hints of the vulnerabilities and uncertainties sometimes found in teachers who are in the early years of the profession. I first got to know Vanessa several years prior to this study. She was a student of mine in a college class I taught for a small private college. At that time, she was just beginning the struggle that many adults have when they find themselves in the process of changing careers. It was her desire to become a teacher and she was busy balancing her life as a non-traditional college student with that of a wife and mother. She was always pleasant to me. In fact, we continued to exchange e-mails long after she finished my class. We communicated the birth of grandchildren and other special events and there were occasions she would just e-mail me to let me know about her academic progress. I was really pleased to hear that she had finished her degree and had gotten a job as a teacher in one of the elementary schools in her community. I was especially pleased to hear her name mentioned during my conversation with her principal as we discussed possible participants for my study.

The trip only takes me a short while to drive from my home to the school where Vanessa teaches. I thought about the questions I had lined up for our first visit as I made my way around the curvy two-lane road. The road took me past nice brick houses,

trailers, and small farm houses nestled in the trees on the sides of hills which quickly become mountains. At least, they are what people in this part of the country refer to as mountains. They are really more like rolling hills. They make up the very first hills and mountains that, if one travels farther to the northeast, become the Appalachian chain. It is a rural atmosphere where there is a friendly wave of the hand or nod of the head to people when they pass by, even if you don't know who they are.

By the time I got to the school, the buses had just pulled out of the long drive that leads from the main road to the school grounds. I drove through the front gate which is decorated with metallic figures of the school mascot, the cougar. From there, the newly paved driveway winds up a slight incline to the brick and stone two-story building. There were still plenty of cars in the parking lot and moving along the driveway in front of the building were quite a few cars belonging to parents of students who are not bus riders. The afternoon sun reflecting off the windows of the building caused me to lower my car's sun visor momentarily as I made my approach. I parked my car and retrieved my bags filled with tape recorder, notebook, tapes, and other materials I had packed for my interviewing sessions and strode into the front entrance.

The structure is brand new and the building and the grounds are immaculately kept. The entire school population was moved into the building during the winter break. The old building, closer to town, was showing significant signs of disrepair. Everyone who works with Vanessa seems to be very proud of the new facility. When I arrived for my first visit to Vanessa's classroom, the principal, a petite woman in her early fifties named Mrs. Dill, insisted that she show me around the campus. The school is home to slightly more than 560 students and 45 teachers. It is located several miles from one of

two small towns in the county and is situated on a large wooded lot at the foot of a mountain. Even though the demographics in the area are beginning to change, ninety-four percent of the school's population is White; fewer than four percent are African-American and Hispanic. The school population tends to come from rural areas of the county and the poverty rate is somewhat less than the state average. The "free and reduced" lunch rate is around 44 percent. While tourism and small industry provide a great many jobs in the area, a high number of residents have to commute from this community to larger towns in neighboring counties to find employment.

Like the front gate, the school is decorated with pictures and statues of cougars, the school mascot. It is one of the most secured buildings I have seen in my visits to schools around the state. Visitors enter the reception area and have to be "buzzed" through doorways in order to enter the office or classroom areas. Video cameras keep a silent eye on hallways and entranceways and a bank of black and white monitors attached to video recorders work just as silently in a small room off the reception area. As a parent, I would probably be pleased that the school has implemented such measures. There are many instances of crime and violence occurring on school campuses throughout the nation and some of them are probably related to public access to the buildings. Schools have always been viewed as a part of the community in which they are located. It would be interesting to see how the parents of kids who are growing up and attending school in the era of heightened security view the school community and the security measures that have been implemented.

The building is beautiful. It's a real change from their old building which was attached to the county's only middle school and had been in operation since the late

1950s. The move to the new building seems to have happened without too much disruption. According to the principal, the students, parents, and staff communicate a great deal of pleasure in their new surroundings. I would have loved teaching in a facility like theirs when I started teaching. My first classroom was in a trailer which I lovingly referred to as my "learning cottage." Vanessa's classroom is located on the second floor of a wing that houses all of the third and fourth grade classes.

Vanessa is a tall, attractive, African-American woman in her forties. She is a kind woman. Her calmness seems to serve as a soothing force within a classroom of fourth graders who are always somehow moving, fidgeting, or talking. Classroom management does not appear to be a problem for her as she strolls throughout the room, monitoring student progress on small-group work and providing attention to specific needs of individual students. There is an atmosphere of excitement in the classroom as they settle into their daily activities. The students glance in my direction from time to time just to see what the visitor, whom they have been told to expect, looks like. Despite my presence, they manage to focus on the tasks at hand.

The room is roughly twenty-two by twenty-three feet with sea-foam green walls, white ceiling tiles, and off-white floor tiles. The teacher's podium is located in front of the room and a few feet in front of the white board above which are a couple of pull down screens and maps. There is also a television and a telephone mounted along that wall. Vanessa stands at the podium with her teacher's manual open. On this day she is wearing a white shell underneath a denim "shift" with comfortable looking shoes. As I noticed what she was wearing, I recalled that I had seldom seen Vanessa wearing "dressy" clothing. Her casual dress seems to reflect her demeanor.

The room is nicely decorated. There are several decorative umbrellas hanging upside-down from the ceiling. “Those are just for looks,” Vanessa said to me. She didn’t really offer any reason for having umbrellas as decorations, but they did provide some extra color in the room. “Somebody gave me one and I’ve collected the others. This one,” she said as she pointed to the bright red one with strange gold markings, “is from Japan or China I think. When we moved to this new building I decided to use them in the classroom.” One wall is covered in inspirational sayings . . .”Don’t get bitter, get better;” “I may not like your behavior, but I LOVE YOU,” “Don’t sweat the small stuff,” along with quite a few others. The twenty-four students are situated in chairs in groups of four around tables. The room is very clean and very inviting. One wall has numerous posters of famous Black Americans. Rules are posted about the white board for everyone to be able to see. The daily schedule is also prominently displayed. With right hand held high in the air Vanessa counts down, “five . . .four . . .three . . .two . . .one”, to get students settled during transitions between subjects, a time when the students are getting their books and putting unnecessary things away.

Students quickly become involved in a discussion as the day’s lesson on machines and force begins. She is encouraging them to participate, but they seem to be inclined to do that anyway. Vanessa’s students have become accustomed to her expectation of their attentiveness and active participation during a lesson. At one point during the discussion she strides over to the storage cabinet and brings out a broom for demonstration purposes. Meanwhile, she begins a conversation with the students about work and movement and what it takes to get things done. She starts to share memories of work she did as a child and of work that she has to do as an adult. “When I was growing up, I remember my

mama telling me to 'get the broom and sweep the floor!' I would get the broom and I would help my mama with the housework by sweeping." Vanessa's voice rises and falls as she accents her words to emphasize of the tale. "Do you know what I became?" she asked the bewildered students who were not quite sure where this series of statements was going. "I became a sweeping machine!" The students giggled as she referred to herself as a "machine." "I took the broom in my hands and began to move it in such a way as to make the dirt pile up in little bitty piles." Her broom-filled hands swayed back and forth in a sweeping motion across the front of the classroom. Suddenly Vanessa stopped moving around, put one hand on her hip while the other held the broom perpendicular to the floor. "When I was your age, I didn't have time to watch television or play video games. We didn't even have video games then! My mama told me to get the broom and sweep the house and that's what I'd have to do. I helped clean house and cook and do things that a grown-up would have to do." The example Vanessa presented to the class was unique. She might have talked about some of the real machinery available for housework. Instead, she chose to include herself in a "picture" painted with words. Her example did, however, attempt to explain to the students that human beings do function as mechanical engines in order to do work. "That broom could have stayed in the closet all day and none of that dirt would have been gotten up off the floor!" she exclaimed. Her story immediately began to spark memories and personal experiences of the students and they begin to share with the group.

"I helped my dad dig a ditch one time," one sandy-haired boy said. "I guess I was like one of those things on a tractor that digs holes." His comment prompted a couple of

the other boys to mimic mechanical movement similar to that of a steam-shovel as they sat at their tables. The girls who were watching them didn't seem too impressed.

Vanessa continued her lesson and connected her experience as a human machine to the marvels of modern machinery and how such machines use force to accomplish their work. Through her use of story to tell her own experience, she acknowledged a learning principle that new knowledge is made relevant by attaching or connecting it with "material of ordinary acquaintance" (Dewey, 1916, p. 258). It is making an association between what is being taught in the unit or lesson and the students' everyday experience, environment, or area of interest. It is through this transfer of information – from the abstract to the concrete - that we make sense of the concept that is being taught. In this case, the student makes a connection between the human body and the broom as they come together to produce work and a desired result.

During one of my visits to Vanessa's classroom I situated myself in my usual spot – just to the left of her desk in the back of the room. The students had just come back from their specials classes (Art, Music, Physical education). They were settling into their places in preparation for the lesson. The projection screen had been pulled down over a portion of the whiteboard. Light from the overhead projector filled the room as it bounced off the white, acoustic tile ceiling and the bright whiteness of no image was being projected onto the screen. The sound of pencil sharpening and rattling paper could be heard. Vanessa stood in front of the room looking at a white paper she held in her hands. "There will be a boy's basketball game next week," she read from the announcement sheet. "Anyone wanting to buy tickets needs to check with the office." The students are not fazed by the news as they continue their quiet conversations and

preparation for the lesson to begin. As soon as she glanced over the paper and laid it on top of the materials which were already atop the podium, Vanessa scanned the classroom and asked, “Has anyone in here ever been lost?”

Hands went up, as they usually do when she asks such questions, and I could hear vocal noises signaling the urgent need to share an experience. “My mama got lost when she was a little girl,” she continued in a hushed tone despite the still upwardly-stretched arms of several students. When she continued the story, students’ hands went down and the students listened closely to what Vanessa was saying. “She had decided to go for a walk in the woods with her dog one afternoon and they walked and they walked until she didn’t really know where she was. She didn’t know how far she had wandered away from home and nobody knew that she had taken off!” Vanessa moved away from the podium and stood closer to the middle of the room as she continued her story. “Well, she didn’t know it at the time, but her folks were already looking for her. They looked all through the house and around the house and they were starting to look in the woods.” Vanessa’s voice changed to accentuate certain parts of the story as it progressed. She looked around the room, making eye contact with as many students as possible. “It wasn’t dark yet, but sometimes, when you’re walking in the woods and there are a lot of trees that block out the sun, the shade can make it seem dark.” Vanessa paused and looked around, “Suddenly, there was a crow that flew overhead,” she said, and in a loud, shrill voice she mimicked the crow, “CAW . . .CAW . . .CAW!” Some of the students jumped in their seats, startled by the loud bird calls. Giggles filled the room as they realized that some of them had been scared. “Her mom and dad had noticed that the dog wasn’t at the house and they figured the only way they could find my mother was to find the dog. They

started calling the dog. I don't know what the dog's name was, but they started calling it. Soon, they saw the dog bound over a log and through some bushes and out of the woods." Some of the kids almost began to applaud. "Pretty soon they saw my mama walking toward them. She hadn't gotten too far into the woods, but I'm sure it seemed like a long way for a little girl! Now, let that tell you something. You have to be careful and take care of yourself. You can't totally rely on other people all the time. You've got to take care of yourself." With that statement, Vanessa began strolling around the room. "Now I want you to write a story for me about something that might have happened to you. Do you remember some of the words I used in that story to make it interesting?"

"You said the dog 'bounded' over the bushes," one girl said.

"Exactly," Vanessa replied. "The dog bounded over a log!" she repeated. "Now, I want you to use some really good words to help me get interested in your stories. We'll start writing today and work on our stories and share them later this week." She went on to explain the length of writing she expected and told them how much time they had. The students got to work quickly. Most of them had pencils to paper right away, and those who were having trouble getting started soon got some assistance from their teacher.

Vanessa incorporates stories into her lessons across the curricular spectrum. Just as she used the story of assisting her mother in cleaning the house as a way to introduce a scientific concept, Vanessa finds a way to connect personal stories to other subject areas as well. Vanessa's purpose for her use of this personal story was evident as it served as a template for the young writers. Now it was their turn to produce. It was Vanessa's goal to give them an example of how a short, personal story might sound. "They need to learn

how to put their ideas on paper," Vanessa said to me after the class was over. "It's not only so they can pass the writing test, but so they can just learn to communicate!"

"Stories were how we made it": Learning Story as a Young Child

Vanessa was born in rural northern Georgia in the early sixties. She was an only child for most of her youth until she began discovering, through parental revelation, that she actually had a number of half brothers. It was a revelation that brought with it some discomfort, but she began to realize that having those "unexpected" siblings just made for more cousins to grow up with. She was the oldest of the cousins and found herself being spoiled by the adults in the family. When it came time for her to assume some of the duties of early-adolescence, she became the group leader and made sure the younger ones were all fed and taken care of while the adults were busy with other things. Her youthful years were spent in a caring environment, but there was not a lot of money for material possessions and children's toys.

"I pretty much raised a lot of my other cousins, and there were times they didn't like me because I tried to be mean or stern with them," Vanessa explained with a furrowed brow. "I guess I've always been a caretaker. Especially during the summers because I would be the one to make sure they were all fed and that we had something to drink when we needed it. We played and we told each other stories," she recalled as she sat opposite me at one of the tables in her classroom. "Actually, stories were how we made it. We used to make up our own stories and sometimes act them out because we didn't have a lot of toys, and telling stories was one of the things we *could* do. We had hop scotch, and all kinds of games that we played, but we enjoyed making up our own stories."

Her recollection sparked memories in my own life and I could certainly understand what Vanessa was telling me. Stories are meant to teach humans about life and children have a natural inclination to be drawn to narrative (Cooper, Collins, & Saxby, 1992). Many times I found myself spending much of my summer vacation from school with my cousins. We would have to improvise in our play time. Our imaginative play would be filled with all sorts of story plots in which we would become active participants. Like Vanessa, we had no video games or computers with which we could challenge our minds. We depended upon our imaginations in the creation of story scenarios to be played out in the woods and fields near our homes. Whether we cast ourselves as heroic soldiers on some South Pacific island, or as cowboys trying to tame the wild west, we made up for our lack of modern technology through the creation of storylines and role play. We were at the mercy of our own creativity.

"I used to love hearing stories": Storytellers in Vanessa's Life

Life as a child was somewhat difficult for Vanessa. There were many obstacles that Black children faced as they grew up in the rural South in the sixties. One of the earliest instances of storytelling in her family that she mentioned to me during our interview sessions had to do with her grandfather's ability to tell tales. On more than one occasion, he shared a story about his involvement with a well-known civil rights activist who orchestrated a march in a neighboring county which had a reputation for racial discrimination.

"I used to love hearing stories. My grandfather was the storyteller of storytellers. People used to listen to him tell stories knowing he was lying, but they listened and enjoyed his stories anyway. I remember him telling a story. Do you remember when

Harlan Walters and all those marchers went to Whitcomb County?" she turned and asked me. "Yes," I replied. Harlan Walters was a long-time Civil Rights activist from Atlanta. He was a familiar face on the television news for a number of years. I remembered seeing news stories on television about the marchers and their journey through that county. "Well, he told us a story about Harlan coming up and asking him to go with him, and I remember everybody just laughing and asking him to tell it. We knew he was lying, but he was just a good story teller. He used to run liquor, he and my mom. I used to love hearing stories of them bootlegging and the police getting after them. It was something!" she laughed. "I guess my life is a story!"

"Wow!" I thought to myself, "what a life story Vanessa has to tell!" I could not help but think about the wealth of Vanessa's experience and how relevant her stories were for children growing up today. She had lived through a period of time in which African Americans struggled for basic human rights. Her stories of growing up and her daily routine of living and being surrounded by aunts, uncles, and cousins were intricately woven within historical fabric.

Even though much of what Vanessa shared with me about her childhood included humorous stories which painted vivid pictures of a large, loving family, she also shared with me some of the difficult elements of her life. Vanessa looked down. She clasped her hands together on the table and her facial expression changed. All of a sudden, her eyes didn't seem as bright and cheerful any more. A pall seemed to fall over our conversation.

"Growing up, I was surrounded by…" her voice grew soft, but she cleared her throat, searched for appropriate words, and continued. "I guess you could say I grew up

with alcoholics... you know, there was always a lot of drinking and fussing. I feel that I'm very blessed to be where I am today, especially with all that I grew up with."

Her voice perked up as she assured me that her past was not a total loss. "That's not saying that I wasn't raised right, because I was!" she said emphatically. "I was raised to be respectful, and to mind my manners and respect elders, but it wasn't the happiest of places. Now, when I look at the things that these kids have" she motioned with her hands as if pointing to her students, "the child abuse and drugs and all that, my childhood wasn't that bad."

There were other family members in Vanessa's family who were noted for their storytelling abilities. She displayed a wide grin as she thought about the other instances that had exposed her to stories as a child. Many of the stories were simply exchanges one might hear as family members and friends gather together for a summer afternoon visit on the front porch. Others were storied events aimed at providing the listeners with specific information about events that were important, if not crucial, to the family or the community itself. She fondly remembered some of the instances of storytelling within her family setting. "I had an uncle, and he was a good story teller too!" Vanessa exclaimed, "He would tell us stories about the places he'd been, and I remember him telling us about eating crocodile, alligator, and all this stuff. And then, of course, he'd get a little intoxicated and then he *really would* tell some stories."

The more we conversed, the more she remembered about those brief instances when story would present itself as a way of sharing life experiences, both within the context of family experiences and within the context of experiences that were a part of "movements" which helped to shape history. Vanessa learned much from parents and

elders that informed her sense of cultural heritage. Children are exposed to cultural traditions both inside and outside the school walls and those traditions are learned through an "understanding of and participation in their culture's arts and ceremonies" (Joseph & Efron, 2005, p.526).

"Of course, I had relatives in Atlanta and they would tell us things. When I would go down there, I'd get them to tell me about Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights movement and all that," Vanessa stated. I could only imagine how important and interesting that sort of information would have been for someone, especially an African American child, growing up in that era.

As a White, middle-class male from the rural south, I could not fully understand how important those stories might have been to Vanessa. I could hear a sense of pride in her voice that she considered herself to have been in the middle of some of the historic changes that swept through the south during those years. Those stories of struggle, especially from people who were near to the center of the "movement," as Vanessa referred to it, must have been a source of encouragement and hope for the rural Blacks in north Georgia who were somewhat isolated from the larger African-American community.

I was reminded of Trackton residents and Heath's (1986) description of the families in that community. "Most households have a double portrait of Coretta and Martin Luther King, often with small school photos of the household's children stuck in the bottom edge of the same frame" (p. 55). There was a great importance placed upon the "movement" and the changes that were taking place as a result. I could only imagine

how it might have felt to Vanessa as she grew up listening to conversations and stories that were based upon powerful forces working to shape her life.

Asked if there were others in her family who influenced her tendency to employ storytelling, Vanessa shared with me a glimpse of her grandmother's persona. "Oh, I remember stories my grandmother used to tell us. I was scared to death of Martians and my grandmother was scared by the news we saw on television about the space program." Vanessa grinned and laughed softly as she told me about this. "When man went to the moon, I can remember I was a little thing. It was 1969 and I was eight, I can remember my grandmother being scared to death. 'If God wanted man to go up there,' she would say, 'he would have put a highway up there!' She and some of our other relatives and friends would sit and just talk about what's going to happen. 'They're going to bring these moon men back!' or 'they're going to blow up the world,' my grandmother would say. Every time they (the National Aeronautical and Space Administration) would send somebody up, I would shake. I wouldn't sleep because I would think about what grandmother and the other older people were saying. I'm sitting waiting for the world to blow up. Sometimes I would just put my hands over my ears or leave the room because of the wild stuff they would talk about!" Vanessa shook her head slowly, "That's just an example of all those old superstitions that they had back then." I had heard my share of the same types of stories. It wasn't uncommon for my own grandmothers to make similar statements about a "Godly purpose" for reaching the moon or for even deploying satellites. Nevertheless, those are the types of statements and beliefs like that give us, contemporary storytellers, even more informative and entertaining story pieces for use in the classroom and elsewhere.

Not all stories in Vanessa's life were for entertainment or encouragement. Many of the storytelling opportunities which were used by the adults in the family for sharing information were not open to younger ears. She spoke of those instances when the children would be sent outside or to another room to play while adults would "tend to their business."

"We weren't always allowed to sit around grown people," Vanessa said as she tried to explain to me the hierarchical structure she witnessed in familial storytelling sessions. "They'd be talking and a lot of times they'd be telling stories and we'd go play to get out of the grown folk's business. Kids today, you know, sit and 'look at you in the mouth,' we weren't allowed to do that." Vanessa looked at these "grown folks" sessions as "business." They were not spent on foolishness. They constituted an important part of discussing important issues facing members of the family, close friends, or the community as a whole. These serious events served as a way to solve problems in much the same way early humans may have called together tribal or community councils to make decisions and confront difficulties that faced them. Vanessa and her cousins knew when they needed to excuse themselves from the conversational setting. "A lot of the times when they were talking and telling stories about things that were happening or had happened," Vanessa explained to me, "you just weren't allowed to sit around and listen. There were certain things the children just didn't need to hear."

There were times when everyone was allowed access to stories that were being told – work time. "Now, if it was bean stringing or corn-shucking time or shelling peas or something like that," Vanessa explained to me with great expression in her voice, "you would be allowed to stay with the adults and listen to them." She had apparently

experienced some of the same labor intense days my cousins and I had endured as we grew up in a rural farm setting. They were times to look back on with some amount of fondness, but at the time one would think of it as being quite unfair to kids who would rather splash and build earthen dams in the nearby creek than work in the garden or chicken house.

"*I had teachers who were into telling stories*": *Story in Education*

Although she did experience some storytelling in her grade school years, story was not an influential part of Vanessa's school life. Much of the storytelling she had experienced as she grew up had come from family and friends. She remembers several of her teachers' use of story in a variety of ways. Some of them were good, others not necessarily as positive. One of her middle school Language Arts teachers did manage to use story from time to time in a way that apparently made an impression on the young Vanessa.

"I had a teacher in seventh grade English, Mrs. Payne." Vanessa explained to me, "She told us stories constantly. We read a lot in her class and her big thing was poetry. I guess that's where I really became interested in English. I like Language Arts. I really do."

Some of her other teachers seemed to be easily influenced by the students' desires to hear stories that were not necessarily attached to the day's lesson. Even though the story may have helped to enlighten the students' understanding of a particular topic, that topic was not the focus of the teacher's lesson and would have been considered a distraction to the lesson at hand. The storytelling events managed to provide some information that intrigued Vanessa enough to make her remember those occasions.

"We had our Biology teacher who was in World War II and we'd get him off on his stories, just because we wanted to hear about it. He'd just go on and on and I mean the whole time!" she laughed as she remembered the class. "And I would sit there just in awe about it because I didn't know anybody who had ever been in that war. None of my people went… my grandfather…no one went, so it was something different from what all of us were familiar with. He would tell us about the war and the effects that it had on him. So some of my teachers told about things that were not necessarily related to the day's lesson, but even in that capacity, I had teachers who were into telling stories."

Just like my own ignorance of the Civil Rights movement and the meaning attached to the stories Vanessa had heard from friends and relatives concerning that struggle, Vanessa was awe-struck by a teacher's tale of his experience in World War II. She was drawn toward a new understanding by the shared story of a teacher. As Witherall (1995) reminds us, stories provide us the opportunity to "imagine and feel the experience of the other – to leap into the other. Through stories we envision, with our students, new possibilities for human action and feeling, new horizons of knowing and understanding, new landscapes of engagement and even enchantment" (p. 41). As I first read those words, they served to help define for me one of the purposes for the use of narrative in the classroom. It is Vanessa's use of a story framework that allows the students in her classroom to sample, to some degree and through the use of their imaginations, the feelings of others. The students, thus, begin to become aware of other avenues leading to solutions to problems, other ways of viewing obstacles or difficult decisions, and even some elements of enjoyable entertainment. It is her hope that their critical thinking skills might be awakened and exercised through the sharing of the experience of another.

Vanessa provides for her students the opportunity to create mental images through their experiences in story. Those images are responsible for an emotional reaction or a "conscious product of an unconscious process" that is triggered by associating one's own experience with that of the storyteller (Sylwester, 1995, p. 72). Because memory is contextual, sharing of a story can be a powerful experience for the listener because they can provide contextual memory prompts that may assist the student in recalling information and possibly affecting the decision-making process in the students' future.

Unlike middle school, elementary and high school did little to motivate Vanessa. She found herself somewhat isolated at times by even her closest friends. Many changes were taking place in public education in the 1960s. Schools in the South began the process of desegregation and the effects were especially difficult for African-American children who were in counties with fewer numbers of African-American residents.

"The percentage of Black residents in our county at the time was probably about the same ratio as now, Vanessa told me." "It's probably somewhere around two or three percent at present. There were more (African American kids) in my class than any other in elementary school. It was just the local kids and everybody I was kin to. I guess there were about six of us that were in the same grade. They split us up" she said, shaking her head. We used to ask 'why? Why aren't we put in the same class?' I understand more now."

Vanessa spoke as if she were undergoing a catharsis of sorts. From time to time she would stare into space as she remembered some of the events that took place in her childhood. I was caught up in seeing how Vanessa was somehow experiencing her own

story. Her story of becoming a successful student and finally a successful teacher was a powerful one.

She continued telling me about some of the steps that had brought her to this point in her life. I listened. It was as though I were her counselor. I felt somewhat like a voyeur – peering into some of the most intimate corners of this person's life.

"And the funny thing is," Vanessa continued, "once I got to middle school and I was able to make my own choices, I hated it because they (the other Black children) would goof off a lot. So I was picked on a lot because I was pretty smart and I always wanted to do well. For that reason they picked on me a lot." Vanessa's drive to succeed had caused her peers to feel uneasy.

She paused and took a deep breath as she thought of those difficult times. "You know, you do what you need to do," she stated frankly as she looked into my eyes. It was a look of determination I saw in her eyes, probably the same look others saw in them during those years we were discussing.

"All through high school I was a good student. I graduated as an honor graduate, but I never took the high classes like I always wanted to take; pre-calculus, and calculus and all that stuff." Vanessa leaned forward in her chair, "I didn't take those classes because, when I think back on it, I think of the stereotyping that was occurring. It was my own friends doing it! They already picked on me and called me names, and I just didn't want that. That's one thing I regret not doing…taking the more advanced classes; those few that were being offered back then."

After she finished high school, Vanessa married and began taking care of her own family. She had had her first child early in life but she maintained a keen desire to pursue

an education. Even though she knew it was not going to be an easy task to balance family duties with academics, she applied to and was accepted to a small community college located within a few miles of her home. After a semester, she dropped out and looked for work with one of the area's top employing industries, poultry processing. It didn't take long for Vanessa to realize that she had made a mistake. Work in the poultry processing industry is hard, sometimes dangerous, work. Pay at the entry level is not always commensurate with the level of labor demanded of the workers. She made another change. She enrolled in a nearby technical college and began to study accounting and business systems. "That was the first time I even touched a computer," she told me, "but I realized that working in the poultry plant was not for me and I needed to learn a trade." She earned a diploma from the technical school and started looking for work. She soon found work in a larger city located about an hour away from her childhood home and, within a couple of weeks, she moved to be closer to her work.

Vanessa's job was administrative in one of the offices of a large university. During the six years she worked there, she attempted to make her way up the ladder and as she sought better positions. Everywhere she turned there was one obstacle that kept her from moving upward. She needed a degree. Faced with the reality of her need for a better education, Vanessa again enrolled in a private community college just outside the city and began to work on a degree there. She attended classes there for some time, but the expense of taking classes at a private college compared to a state university became an issue. She transferred to the university and was once again faced with difficulties. She shared one of her problems with me during one of our afternoon meetings. "I transferred to the university. Bad mistake!" she rolled her eyes and chuckled, "Three hundred people

in a class was not for me! I mean it was just way too distracting! All of the issues and the people, and I'm a people person! I like watching people, and all of a sudden he'd (the professor) say, 'Class dismissed', and I'm looking at somebody's hair or their clothes," Vanessa laughed hard as she remembered how immature she had been. "It just wasn't a good situation for me because there was just too much going on around me."

After studying for a few semesters there, she and her family moved back to her home town and she, once again, made an attempt at continuing her education. This time was different. She had studied business systems at the technical college and gotten sufficient experience as an office worker at the university. An employment opportunity arose and she was able to get a job at yet another private college near her home. This offered her a break she had not found elsewhere. Employees of this college were allowed to take classes free of charge! She was finally working earnestly at completing the degree she knew she needed. She was proud of her hard work. After nearly twelve years of attending various schools, she graduated with her degree in Early Childhood Education. It is an honor of which she is very proud.

"I am the only one in my entire family with a college degree," Vanessa told me with a wide grin, "My mother was actually very intelligent and very bright. She was able way back then to skip a grade way back then. I think it was her ninth grade. She went up from eighth grade to tenth grade. Even though she was smart enough to have skipped the ninth grade, she met my dad, got pregnant, and that was the end of that. So as I grew up, school was always there…always an issue. I was always pushed to do my best." Vanessa was fortunate to have someone providing that push she needed in order to be successful.

I kept on posing questions to her as we worked through this afternoon's session. I wanted to know why going to school and getting an education was so important to her and I wanted her to tell me why she liked school so much. "I always liked to learn, and have always especially enjoyed reading," Vanessa told me, "I've always liked to read. There was one thing my mother always did every summer; she would order a subscription to *Weekly Reader* for me. Every summer I'd wait on my little package come and, once it did, I would read those books with a vengeance and then she would order me more. We really never went to the library." Vanessa pondered momentarily, "I don't even know if we *could* go to the library." She thought about it for a moment. "Well I'm sure we could," she reminded herself, "but I don't remember going to the library as a kid. Back then things were still kind of tense—racially you know. So I don't remember going to the library a lot, but I always liked to learn."

Here Vanessa was sitting in her very own classroom and telling me her story of her struggle to get a degree. While she was one of my students, I knew she was driven to do well, but I had not been fully aware of her tenacity. Her story was impressive and I could see how her experiences could be a rich source of information to be shared with children sitting under her instruction.

"I use story as a teaching tool": Story in Vanessa's classroom

As I continued with my interviews, Vanessa told me that she had really been surprised at the episodes of story usage she was beginning to notice in her practice. Her class was at "specials" at the moment. Specials at her school are the Art, Music, Physical Education, and other classes her elementary school provides for the students. Regular classroom teachers are, during that time frame, given time for planning, grade-level

meetings, and for doing what Vanessa was engaged in as I walked into her room that morning. She was working at her computer, putting in grades on a project the students had done during the past few weeks. The room was quiet and the overhead lights were off. Light from the morning sun filtered through the window blinds casting a soft light throughout the room. She finished putting grades into the computer and she casually worked at straightening up things on her desk; she chatted with me about my study. Vanessa began to share with me of some of the thoughts she has had since we began talking about the use of storytelling several months earlier. "I've begun to realize that many of the 'stories' I use are personal experiences. I never thought of personal stories or examples that I use in the classroom as storytelling." She got up from the computer table and carried a stack of papers to her desk where she tapped them on the desk to get them neat and even. After putting the stack of papers in a folder, she came over to the table where I was sitting and sat across the table from me. "I have used stories in my teaching. I'd just tell the students something that happened to me, using my story as an 'example' to tie it to the lesson. I just never connected that with storytelling in teaching. But, that is what I'm doing."

I was excited to think that I might have been asking questions and probing into an area of Vanessa's teaching practice that may be causing her to reflect upon it. As teachers begin to examine their practices, they begin to develop an overarching perspective which can serve to guide the evolution of their practices. Through this process of reflection, through such means as dialogue, journals, and discussions one might edify learning through experience (Perkins, 1995). Some of my most meaningful professional learning came when I had the opportunity to examine my own practice, talk about it with other

professionals, and open my mind to alternative methods. Even so, I was glad to see that she was contextualizing the importance of story in teaching. Our relationship as professor and student during the class I taught several years earlier had been a good one. Vanessa was not reluctant to share her thoughts and feelings and was busy making new connections between her use of story and her apparent success as a teacher.

As I observed Vanessa's classroom over time, I paid close attention to her use of "examples" as she called them. They were not stories in the sense of traditional story structure. They did not necessarily begin with "once upon a time" or "let me tell you about the time" or any other traditional story starter, but they were brief insights into Vanessa's personal experience as she remembered it, like her use of the broom the her housecleaning work as a way to examine machinery and movement. They were vignettes of personal experience. She was using those insights, those vignettes, to build connections with the students. Vanessa slips into her story events, not with a grand fanfare announcing the fact that she is going to tell a story, but with almost gossip-like statements; "My mama told me . . .", "I had a teacher one time who would . . ." or "Have you ever heard somebody say . . .?" The students probably do not recognize Vanessa's shared experiences as an instance of what I would refer to as the formal Storytelling (with a capital S). This formal or performance storytelling is usually planned, rehearsed, and staged in such a way that the storyteller is seen as a performer and the central purpose of the event is presentational. Instead, they are just tuning in to an informal example, illustration, parable, or, simply stated, the sharing of one's life experience through storytelling (lower case S) providing sometimes subtle connection to one's feelings, understandings, and emotions. This informal approach to telling stories tends to be more

extemporaneous in nature. The story is not necessarily rehearsed; instead, it may be a remembrance of some experience that just comes to the mind of the teller as they make connections to the subject matter being discussed. It is, as Witherell (1995) puts it, through these "moments of connection", that "attach us more deeply to our surroundings, to others, to our own history, and future possibilities." They are, perhaps, the "real texts of teaching and learning" (p. 42). In other words, real-life texts to which we can attach our personal meanings help one to develop personal understandings. Frank Smith (1998) states that:

> The official theory of learning says that we have to learn something in order to understand it. Once again, this is totally contrary to fact. We have to understand something in order to learn it. We have to make sense of it. And once again, because individuals differ in what they know, in what they are interested in, and in the way they understand things, there is no way that the official theory can cope with approaching learning through understanding (p. 35).

Through the connection-making activity of storytelling Vanessa is providing a platform for learning through understanding. Students are invited to engage themselves in some of her experiences and, through those experiences, to make meaning in relation to their own experiences. She realizes that her students will soon put away nonsensical and non-meaningful information, therefore she employs strategies such as a brief story that will appear unique or surprising and, thus, attach itself to the students' long-term memory (Schank & Abelson, 1995).

One of Vanessa's main purposes for using storytelling in her teaching practice is to develop empathy between her and her students. "I think that I use story as a teaching tool mostly for students to empathize with me or for me to empathize with them because once they know that you're going through what they're going through or that…you've

done what they've done…then I think you're building those connections that are so important." As Vanessa spoke those words, I recalled some of the brief "examples" she had used during my observation of her classroom. For Vanessa, it was occasionally through stories about troubles she had gotten herself into as a child, the not-so-ideal surroundings she grew up in, and other stories. "Sometimes, I really didn't realize exactly what I was doing" she said with a chuckle. "I guess when you teach you just use whatever you can to get your point across!"

Vanessa measures her success by the feedback she gets from students, both past and present. "I've had a good rapport with my students. They'll tell me, 'Mrs. [Cochran], I remember when you told us about so and so.' A lot of times I'll tell my students some stories about my children. I say to them, 'Don't tell my kids I'm telling you this!' Then when my kids will come in to visit me the students will say, 'Oh we heard a story about you' and they'll share it. Then I have to justify it with my kids!"

"As a parent and a teacher," Vanessa continued, "I can empathize with my students about why their parents do certain things if they (the kids) get in trouble. Sometimes I will tell them a story about something I did as a kid and how I was spanked because of this or that. I also want the students to empathize with me; I want them to have a deeper understanding of the things we discuss in class." It is through this empathetic journey in someone else's footsteps that Vanessa hopes to generate an affective reaction within the students that will begin to produce what some would refer to as understanding. By developing that appreciation of another's situation, one can transfer that appreciation into an enduring and meaningful learning experience (McTighe & Wiggins, 1998).

Through the use of story as a means to create empathy in the minds of her students, Vanessa attempts to bring those students to a deeper understanding of the lesson being taught. The ability for a teacher to create a sense of empathy is especially useful in the area of Character Education and teaching values. Some of Vanessa's stories are aimed at allowing others to walk in her shoes. By creating and sharing stories from her memories, she is allowing her students to experience a sense of empathy. Experiencing empathy can affect student choices and influence their long- and short-term decisions and the effects of those decisions on their lives. Noted brain researcher and professor of education, Robert Sylwester, in (Brandt, 2001), states:

> Researchers have found that stored memories of our experiences include an emotional component, so even reasoned choices are probably influenced by associations we're not aware of. What we call emotions is at the heart of an unconscious arousal system that triggers all sorts of conscious cognitive activity. It's a sort of biological thermostat that activates attention (our focusing system), which then activates a rich set of problem-solving and response systems. The various emotions (such as fear and pleasure) probably provide an important initial response bias that speeds up and enhances the response (p.171).

Storytelling, as Sylvester's research suggests, serves a cognitive function that enables humans to respond to events and situations in life, as well as to problem-solve. The emotional component is not consigned solely to the story listener. Story is playing a role in informing and shaping Vanessa's teaching strategy. As Vanessa progresses into a story, she is responding to her students via the recollection of memories from her own

educative experiences. As a result of her own experience, Vanessa is recognizing the students' need for comprehension or understanding of some element of the lesson. This recognition triggers the problem solving skills Vanessa has learned over the years and she employs storytelling as a method of uncovering memorable experiences. Storytelling, and its use of memorable experiences, provides Vanessa a unique opportunity to move her students toward better understanding overarching concepts and themes in the curriculum and in life itself. For example, by examining decisions one has made and actions one has taken, even through examining the actions or decisions of others, one should be better able to more effectively plan a future course of action or more make a more profitable decision when the occasion arises. Does one climb the mountain using the worn path or does one create a new one? Vanessa shares with her students some of the paths she has taken and, through some of her stories, explains the rewards or consequences that followed her decisions. When one hears the story, they may be able to relate to it based upon previous experience or they may not use the information until a future choice or decision has to be made. Then, if the story is stored in their long-term memory, they can use it as a possible resource. Drawing from the memory is at the heart of the storytelling craft and "memory is contextual and the context of an experience often triggers emotion" (Sylwester, 1995, p. 77).

The emotional connection that is made transcends many of the obstacles, cultural and experiential, that prevent understanding. Caine and Caine (1991) refer to that emotional connection as "felt meaning" or an "aha sensation." One might experience this type of sensation when one perceives a "gestalt" or a "coming together of parts in a way that fits" (p. 95). Empathy promotes a sense of self-realization that promotes meaning

and deeper understanding. Vanessa's use of story sometimes initiates emotional responses from her students and from other children who know her. "I get a lot of respect from my students and from kids in my neighborhood," she told me. "I'll be walking down the street and they'll call out to me, 'Hey, Ms. Vanessa, what you doing?' I will say something to them or ask them a question and they might answer back with a 'yes, ma'm!' Yes, ma'm . . .that's something some of them don't even say to their mamas! They say it to me though because I have made a connection with them and they respect me. They don't find that at home. Their parents drink with them. They smoke with them. That's something that didn't happen in my family." Vanessa exhibited a sort of confidence in her statement. Sure, she had been through some difficult times in her life, but she was able to rise above it and make something of herself. Now, she was hoping to help those in her charge do the same. She challenges herself to make emotional connections with children and help them to at least see a glimpse of other avenues, other choices.

During one of my observations, Vanessa demonstrated her ability to "empathize" and to use her storytelling ability to re-direct unwanted behavior. I was not sure how it connected with the day's lesson or even if there was a connection, but later I found out that there was a purpose.

"When I was a kid, I learned the hard way that I wasn't supposed to take something that wasn't mine." She walked around the room, weaving through the spaces between the students' tables. "I remember going to town with my mama one day. We went to the dime store. Nowadays, things are different. We didn't have Wal-mart or K-

mart like we have today. We had smaller stores called ‘dime stores’ where you could buy the same sorts of things we find at Wal-mart now.”

“Yeah, like on ‘Little House of the Prairie’ on television,” one girl said. “They had a store where you could buy stuff you needed, but it wasn’t a big store.”

The comment surprised me to an extent. I began to feel a little old as I realized that kids today do not have the same experiences I had when I was growing up. There are few corner drug stores and dime stores like I had in my childhood. Vanessa’s efforts to create some sort of connection within the minds of the students many times had to be routed through visual images they had received via television programs or movies.

Vanessa continued. “I don’t know why I even wanted it. I really didn’t know how to use it or what it was for, but there was a pack of modeling clay I saw while we were at the dime store and I decided to take it.” A couple of the kids in the classroom glanced at each other with pursed lips as if to say “uh-oh.” Vanessa continued her walk through the classroom. It was a slow, steady pace that emphasized the deliberateness of the message. “Anyway, I slipped the small package into my coat pocket,” she almost whispered as she pantomimed the action of her putting something into an imaginary pocket. “I continued to follow my mama around while she shopped for things she needed, and later we went home.” Vanessa stopped at the front of the room and, pivoting on one heel, turned to face the statuesque figures sitting in silence at their tables. “Guess what happened!”

“You got busted!” Aaron, one of the livelier of the boys, said. There were muted comments and gasps all around the room as the students began to express their shock that their beloved teacher would commit such a crime.

"Yes!" she exclaimed, "I got caught red-handed!" With that, both hands went to her cheeks. Her face was awash with a look of dismay. The actor in Vanessa was certainly coming out during this tale and the students were watching her every move. The room came alive with gasps and giggles. Even though the story was serious in content, there were numerous instances of shared smiles between small groups of students. They realized the humanity of their teacher and could understand the concept of being caught in doing something that was expressly forbidden. Like Vanessa and her students, this story reminded me of a time I had been caught trying to buy a pair of goggles that had been obviously mispriced. Vanessa's revelation had made me live through those horrifying minutes all over again! I experienced empathy by means of her story which allowed (or forced) me to examine my own painful experiences of my youth. How different, yet alike were the experiences.

Stories such as those that Vanessa told and which lead to empathy moves listeners, like myself, to tell our own stories. When we listen to another person's story, we often realize a connection to a similar experience. Often that realization makes us quit listening to the other person's story and begin to reflect upon and shape our own story so that we can insert it into the conversation as quickly as possible (Sylwester, 1995). Schank (1990) argues that we do not listen to the stories of others to gain knowledge of their experiences, but rather we expect that the interaction will enhance the maintenance of our own associated memories. In other words, we validate elements of our existence through the experiences and existence of others.

Vanessa continued her story of being caught. "I went to my room as soon as we got home and sneaked that clay out of my pocket and began to play with it. I squished it

and rolled it and was having a pretty good time when, the door to my room opened up and in came my mama."

'What's that?' she asked me, 'where did you get that?' she questioned as she came over and took the lump of clay out of my hand. I shrugged my shoulders. If I lied, I'd be in worse trouble, so I didn't want to say anything."

"After a session of questions and answers at home, my mama promptly put me back in the car and away we went, back to the store. She made me take the clay back in to the person at the counter, apologize for taking it, pay for it, and then, right there in front of the store clerk, she spanked me!" Vanessa went on to explain how such punishment was more readily accepted in that era than in the present. The students seemed to quietly accept the lesson and they probably applied it to something they had either done or thought about doing.

Later that day, she explained to me her motive for telling that particular story. "We've had a problem with people taking things, and so I told them a story about when I stole the modeling clay." Her hope was that the students would realize the importance of respecting the property of others and "get their act together" before any of them landed in trouble at school. Without overtly addressing the problem that stealing had been taking place in her classroom, Vanessa offered a story that allowed the students to assess their own behavior. Storytelling invites reflection and introspection. Through story, Vanessa's students were offered ideas about how to conduct themselves in real life situations without being place in a confrontational setting.

"What is so important about trying to establish empathy with the students?" I asked Vanessa. I wanted to know more about her need to make those connections with the kids.

"Well if you don't," she retorted, "then you've just got a classroom without a lot of life. I've done observations of classrooms and, you walk in and look at the students, you can tell that they are not really engaged in the lesson. I don't want that for my kids. I want them to understand the lesson and approach it in a meaningful way, whether it is a lesson in the content or subject area or a lesson on morals."

Her point was well made. I, too, had witnessed plenty of classroom teaching that called for students to be passive learners. My most vivid memories of learning, both as a child and as an adult, were in situations that required hands-on activity or some sort of involvement that made learning enjoyable. As a teacher, I also realized that it may not always be possible to perform in such a way, but it could be done more often than not. I also reminded myself that, through the use of story, teachers might be able to substitute "hands-on" experiences with what might be referred to as "minds-on" experiences. Students don't necessarily have to physically live the experience to learn from it. By sharing teacher-to-student and student-to-student stories through telling, writing, or even creation of visual art, we are able to transfer knowledge through personal experience. As Carol S. Witherell (1995) states:

> I have found that student of all ages – primary grades through post-graduate years – respond energetically to activities such as writing workshop and reader response groups as ways to discover, construct, and imagine their worlds and themselves. Events once considered strange and persons once considered strangers are met as wise teachers and companions once the barriers are traversed. Through such actions we look into the heart of wisdom. It is a wisdom of one-heartedness, of co-creation of our world, and it is within our reach as teachers and learners (p.44)

In Vanessa's teaching practice, she traverses the terrain of time by engaging her students in storytelling and other exercises meant to help the student make a psychological and social connection through which they may make meaning. She is not assuming the position of philosopher. She does not place herself on a pedestal waiting for students to come and sit at her feet for knowledge. Vanessa is working on the level of the student. Always milling around, moving through and around the tables being used by the students while she thinks of ways to connect to her students. She is consciously and constantly looking for ways to connect life to life, event to event so that her students are thinking about what they are learning and manipulating those thoughts in such a way that they will internalize some of the thought processes, hopefully to the point of automaticity. Vanessa as a story-teacher, is the wise-other who, in the same vein as Socrates, is looking for and trying to ask the right questions rather than simply providing all the right answers. She employs unrehearsed conversational anecdotes as well as polished stories which have been used before (Gillard, 1996). Her technique would not be considered professional in the sense that it is not endowed with additional elements (costumes, technological support, staging, etc.) that enhance her performance.

Vanessa sees her role as teacher as one who facilitates the understanding of more than just content-related material among her students. It is her goal to remain approachable and to create a communicative classroom environment. "I want for them to be able to talk to me," she told me. "I want them to be able to, if they have a problem, come to me. Even though I may seem to 'lose it' from time to time when problems come up and I am not perfect in the way I address difficulties, they know that I'm there for them." To Vanessa, if there is not that emotional connection between teacher and student,

then the classroom is "like a little drill camp…where everybody has to react the same way," Vanessa explained. "Within my classroom, I try to learn the different personalities of the students so I know how to connect with the kids. You sometimes have those serious kids who just are so 'on the edge of their seat' all the time, and it's nice to connect with them, to see them relax, and eventually feel like they don't have to be that rigid anymore. I like that."

Vanessa sees value in her role as a teacher and facilitator of learning, not only to focus on subject area content, but to provide emotional support and guidance to her students. Schools, more specifically classrooms, just like society, have an inherent need for meaningful communicative elements for the purpose of transmitting the mores of the classroom or those of society. According to John Dewey (1916), education itself is a necessary component of societal existence and that "all communication – and hence all genuine social life – is educative" (p. 5). Dewey writes:

> There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication. Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common. What they must have in common in order to form a community or society are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge – a common understanding – like-mindedness as the sociologists say. Such things cannot be passed physically from one to another, like bricks; they cannot be shared as persons would share a pie by dividing it into physical pieces. The communication which ensures participation in a common understanding is one which secures similar emotional and intellectual dispositions – like ways of responding to expectations and requirements. Not only is social life identical with communication, but all communication, and hence all genuine social life, is educative (pp. 4 - 5).

Dewey suggests that a teacher's use of narrative as a means to enhance student understanding of a concept is a basic building block of society. Storytelling is one way to express moral or academic expectations or requirements to students in the classroom as it

promotes a common thread of understanding. Human beings are continually making connections between the experiences of others and their own experiences through narrative exchanges. It is a common, if not the most common, form of the basic educative process – the verbal sharing of one's vision, plan, action, and consequences of that action. Through storytelling, Vanessa provides explicit and implicit instruction of issues that concern the students in her classroom. Coles (1997) asserts that children can become smarter in a moral sense through explicit dialogue about moral issues. Schools as caring communities provide nurturing, respectful, mutually supportive relationships with a sense of closeness and emotional attachment (Joseph & Efron, 2005). Character education is prominent in the curriculum of today's schools. Throughout the early grades and middle grades in Georgia there are initiatives in place promoting Character education as a method of developing empathy and respect among students. Vanessa, through her use of personal stories and examples from her past, is providing some of that explicit dialogue through which her students might develop social skills and responsibilities.

Vanessa's motive for telling of her youthful experiences was not only to influence and instill moral values in her students. It served a more immediate purpose because she believes story has a prominent role in maintaining classroom discipline.

"One story I tell my class is about the time I got in trouble in elementary school. My fifth grade teacher was one who didn't put up with much foolishness in class, but one day I had taken about enough of one of my classmates ribbing about something. I don't even remember what it was. Anyway, I tore off a nice piece of notebook paper and wadded it into my mouth and chewed on it till it was nice and wet. As soon as it was ready and the teacher's back was turned, I let it fly right at the back of that boy's head.

The only problem was that it missed and went flying right up to the front of the room. It stuck on the wall about half-way between the bottom of the chalkboard and the floor." Vanessa produced a hearty laugh, "Of course, I should have known that somebody was going to tell. It was devastating for me to walk in the room and see my name written on the board. It scared me to death. Of course, the bad part was that I got a spanking at school and I got another one when I got home." She laughed even harder as she said that, but I could tell she was still well aware of the fear that she felt that day.

"I let the students know that after putting myself in that bit of trouble, I learned how to think about how not to get into that situation again," Vanessa explained. "I want them to know that yes, you might make mistakes, but you have to ask yourself, 'what can I do so that this doesn't happen again?' By telling them that story, they know I made a mistake, but I learned a valuable lesson and didn't repeat such foolishness." Vanessa enjoyed telling her story even without a large audience and I enjoyed hearing it. She seemed to have a profound belief that such a story could make a difference in some future decision one of her students would make. While telling her stories, Vanessa sometimes uses a touch of humor, but even the soothing feel that humor gives to the listeners of her stories cannot soften the sharp edges of some of her stories' lessons.

Vanessa propped her elbows on the table, interlaced her fingers, and rested her chin atop them as she thought about her discipline "examples." "I didn't really think about having used story as a management tool until our conversations. I never realized how powerful a tool it is to use in the classroom. I've seen behavior straighten up just with a story. It just turned around. I tell them, 'think about that story I told you the other

day about so and so. '*Oh yeah*,' they say, and you immediately see it come back to their minds. Even after a week or two it starts creeping back."

During one of my observations in her classroom, she had referred back to a previous story in which she had explained how a former student had not done well on a test because he had not followed her suggestions in how to prepare for the exam. "Remember that story?" Vanessa asked them during the discussion. "Yes ma'm," they answered almost in unison. "OK then, you don't want that to happen to you do you?" she questioned. "No ma'm," they replied.

"You know, stories stick in your mind. Other situations just sort of leave, but a story, if it paints a familiar picture, will be remembered for a long time." Vanessa paused for a time and thought about what she had just said. She was right. There was no telling how many stories we both had stored in our heads just waiting for the right teachable moment. Perhaps our excursion into the world of storytelling and teaching will prompt her to make use of more of her stories.

"What is your wildest dream?: Student Storytelling

Story serves the purpose as a model for students to follow in their own venture into storytelling and public speaking. Children are asked or even required to listen a great deal in school, but they are not often offered many chances to be listened to (Gillard, 1996). Vanessa is well aware of the need for students to tell and to re-tell stories. She creates assignments that are storytelling opportunities. Her lesson plans reflect her awareness of the necessity of building storytelling skills through writing – both through creative writing and through the re-telling of historical events. There were no real storytelling terms within the formal lesson plans that were overtly evident, but many of

the activities required the use of storytelling elements. “I let the kids choose a famous American to write about. It could be a sports star, a political personality, or anyone whom they consider important in our society.” She gives the kids time to research the topic and produce a piece of writing that is shared, either by oral presentation or by a published document, with the rest of the class. They are, in essence, telling the story of the person whom they chose for the assignment. This traditional research paper or essay is probably one of the more common approaches used in classrooms allowing students to share their ideas about particular topics, but many times the reading audience can be quite limited. These approaches also allow students the opportunity to experience some of the same elements of preparing for storytelling that a storyteller would experience. They must research and discover background information, arrange that information into a logical sequence providing sufficient details so that they can paint an accurate picture of their subject, and publish their work in whatever method necessary in order to reach the audience. In this case, writing. She challenges her students to use their other creative abilities too. Students are encouraged to do such things as illustrate their writing assignments and perform skits or role-plays.

Vanessa believes that she should prepare her students to perform before an audience. Just as she guides them in preparation for teacher-created writing assessments and for state-wide writing assessments, she also allows them the opportunity to polish their speaking skills through the sharing of stories. During one of my visits, students took turns getting up in front of the class to tell about their future dreams. Since they had been studying a number of famous people during their Social Studies segment and Vanessa wanted them to begin to think about their own potential. “What do you see yourself doing

when you get older?" she prompted them. "Where would you like to go, what is your wildest dream?"

Students were given time to prepare brief presentations and were provided a rubric or scoring guide to inform them as to what was expected from them in the assignment. They were to write their response to the prompt and prepare to deliver that response, in a two or three minute time frame, to the entire class. They worked feverishly to accomplish the task. This classroom sharing exercise and the sharing of personal experiences that have already occurred may not be considered by some to be true storytelling. Students are sometimes given opportunities during the course of the school year to orally share information about things that have happened in their lives; vacation trips, birthday celebrations, the birth of siblings, etc. The type of narrative that emerges from such sharing is akin to what Miller and Mehler (1994) call "conversational stories of personal experience – oral stories in which the narrator re-creates a remembered experience from his or her life" (p. 38). However, Miller and Mehler (1994) also suggest that the way these personal experiences are presented in the classroom setting, more often than not, are much less complex and are in a more fragmented form than when told in non-school contexts.

There was a combination of futuristic thoughts and desires with practical information about what was entailed in some of the jobs the students described. Their responses were mixed. "I want to be a nurse," Kendra, a tall, thin, blonde-hair girl explained in part of her presentation, "because my mom works at a doctor's office and she helps people." She explained to the group what a nurse at a doctor's office did and gave them some information concerning the educational requirements in becoming a

nurse. She went on to re-tell a few experiences her mom had shared with her so that her classmates would have a clearer view of what a nurse in a physician's office might do during the workday.

Clayton's dream was more toward the other end of the spectrum. "I plan to become a really big television or movie producer and make reality shows about students who take over the teachers' jobs," he boasted. Even though his plan drew some giggles from some of his classmates, he did fulfill the assigned task given by his teacher to "use your creativity to the fullest." He drew his information from his own perception of television and film work based upon what he had learned through those very media. Nevertheless, he used a great deal of imagination to put together his future story and share it with the others.

One by one, the students situated themselves in the front of the room to make their presentations. Some seemed quite comfortable in the role of presenter; others were more reserved and shy. Vanessa's purpose for the assignment was to help prepare her students to express themselves in a variety of settings. "They have to write for the fifth-grade writing assessment next year and they need to be able to say things to people and to express themselves well. And they need to stretch themselves – to reach out there and use their imaginations from time to time," she explained. Vanessa wants to provide every opportunity possible for her students to express themselves— orally and in writing— so that they become good communicators. Vanessa was providing a safe environment in which her students could get a taste of the writing assessment and, indirectly, what it is like to perform for an audience as a storyteller. Even so, there are limitations to such activities in many classrooms due to elements generated by the teacher's use of rules. In

order to stay within a certain time frame, teachers sometimes impose a structure for the activity which may include such elements as assigning turns (only one speaker at a time can perform, therefore, there must be an order), limitation of time or the number of events that can be shared, and rules emphasizing the importance of how the story is told i.e., maintaining a logical sequence, providing sufficient character descriptions, etc. (Murphy, 2003).

"I'm going to tell you a story," she told the group as they began the Language Arts segment of the day. "Now, if I make any major changes in the direction of the story, I want you to tell me, OK?" Everybody agreed.

"There was this man who lived not too far from here. He had this old car he wanted to get rid of, so he called down to the local newspaper and told them he wanted to place an advertisement in the paper. The lady at the paper took down all the information and read it back to him and then she told him how much the ad would cost. The next week, a woman walked out to her mail box to get her mail. The newspaper had come to her in the mail and . . ."

A few hands went up in the air. "You changed the story," one girl said. "You started talking about a lady going out to get her mail," said another girl.

"Well, if I were writing that story, what am I going to have to do?" she asked. "What have we talked about before? What should we do when we make a change like that in our written story?"

"We probably should start a new paragraph," Laurel said. Others seemed to be in agreement and nodded their heads at the answer.

"Right," Vanessa responded. She then went on to present a quick review of forming paragraphs in writing. She used the story as a way for everyone to focus on the structure of writing. "I try to tell them that telling a story like that is just like writing. If you start out talking about your dog, you put that information in a paragraph, but if you start talking about your cat, you need to start a new paragraph."

Vanessa wants to expand her work in writing. "Next year I plan to get the kids to do more with journal writing," she told me, "I will probably give them an opportunity to start out by telling things in class. Once they have 'opened up' some, I will have them put those things down on paper in journal form. I do that now, to a degree. I give them journal topics and have them write and share, but I'm going to do more with it next year," she added. Like Celeste, Vanessa looks at experiences with storytelling as an avenue toward creating good writing. Both teachers encourage students to write and tell stories for their peers.

Vanessa, the Storyteller

Vanessa's use of storytelling serves both cognitive and affective purposes. Eisner (2001) writes that cognition is a "process that makes awareness possible" (p. 311). Cognition is the human way of noticing, recognizing, perceiving, and making meaning of the essential and complex process of the qualitative world we live in. Cognitive skills are widely varied in scope and include such skills as; identifying problems and opportunities, prioritizing competing options and information, making new connections, discerning criteria, and elaborating, extending, or refining ideas, situations, or plans (Puccio & Murdock, 2001, p. 70). Several important cognitive purposes in Vanessa's storytelling include the following: 1) to teach content, 2) to teach strategy instruction, 3) to manage

the classroom, and 4) to teach moral lessons. Storytelling also serves the affective in several key ways: 1) story as natural and engaging/lived experience; 2) to develop a sense of other through empathy; 3) to create a safe and comfortable environment for learning; 4) to aid in building teacher/student and student/student relationships. How Vanessa uses storytelling to develop both students' cognitive and the affective learning is described below.

Storytelling Serves Cognitive Purpose

Vanessa's use of story as a strategy in teaching content has enriched her classroom teaching repertoire. Vanessa gives every impression of being a seasoned teacher even though she has only been teaching a relatively short period of time. She is continually looking for better instructional strategies and realizes that the art and science of teaching is a process. An integral part of her instructional technique is the use of story to introduce content-related concepts and information and to embellish upon information provided through subject-area textbooks and other curricular resources. Although there was little instance of documentation in her lesson plans that reflected her use of storytelling during instruction, classroom observation revealed that she employs the technique as needed and with relative ease. When Vanessa introduces machines through her use of the broom, she attaches a personal perspective to expository and technical information introduced to the students by means of the textbook. It is her attempt to bring learning to a personal level with the assumption that understanding is a function between present information and activated knowledge (Bransford, 1979). Her constructivist approach parallels Piaget's (1971) conclusions that the growth of knowledge is due to the individual connections or constructions that her students make. Piaget writes:

> The current state of knowledge is a moment in history, changing just as rapidly as knowledge in the past has changed, and in many instances, more rapidly. Scientific thought, then, is not momentary; it is not a static instance; it is a process. More specifically, it is a process of continual construction and reorganization (pp. 1-2).

Vanessa's approach to helping her students to establish connections between new information and their prior knowledge is founded upon her belief that she is continually constructing and manipulating the curriculum to meet the students' needs to internalize and to understand what is being taught (Bransford, 1979). When Vanessa relates her story of her grandmother's fear of things that were happening in the space program to history, she is helping them to understand how new knowledge and new concepts can sometimes be uncomfortable and difficult to accept. Vanessa introduces the implicit notion that learning can produce change and accepting change is not always easy. The process of student learning is not static, but is constantly evolving. Students are also introduced to the fact that the advances of technology in the 20th century superceded the imagination of much of our society and have made radical differences in the way we conduct business and industry.

Part of Vanessa's purpose for using storytelling is to teach learning strategies. Story is sometimes presented as a mnemonic in which her students both connect story with content as well as with events in social studies outside their realm of experience. It is a strategy which is one of the primary elements of storytelling and assists in making the event memorable to the listeners. Smith (1998) states that "mnemonics are ways of making sense of something to be learned so that we can relate it to something we know already" (p. 38). Vanessa also uses questioning to prompt student memory. By using questioning techniques, such as those she used when she reminded her students of a

previously told story ("Do you remember what happened to him? Do you want that to happen to you?, What steps did he take that helped him avoid problems?, etc.), Vanessa is able to draw the audience into the storytelling event and make them a part of the actual delivery. Their answers to her questions become a part of the oral dialogue which makes the story complete. Vanessa makes use of editorializing in many of her stories. Editorializing is a means of adding information that may not have been used in the story during a previous telling (Heath, 1983; Sawyer, 1942). Sometimes, if the story is not a personal story originating with the teller, the teller may interject their own personal ideas or information into the story helping to make it more like their own. Personal stories lend themselves to such a strategy because it is easy for the teller to present extra pieces of information along with the primary story text. Vanessa shares stories and personal insights about what she heard from family and friends and how she felt with regard to the Civil Rights movement as she lived through some of the historical events during the 1960s and 1970s. Some extra information which is not essential to the comprehension of the story helps to make the story fresh to the teller and which can help to invigorate the proverbial twice-told-tale.

Vanessa uses storytelling as a subtle classroom management tool in conjunction with other methods. She employs a variety of traditional methods to maintain order in her classroom; broad, over-arching rules for regarding acceptable behavior, respect for others, and classroom procedure are established and posted in the classroom. Procedures are established for routine classroom activities, such as bathroom breaks, pencil-sharpening, turning in work, etc., and there rules of respect for others (listening while others are speaking, not touching or bothering property of others, etc.) that are followed

so that classroom activities function smoothly. Storytelling is used as a tool for transitioning from one subject area conversation to another, as a way to re-focus student attention to the lesson, and, sometimes, as a way to make students think about inappropriate behavior that may be taking place. When the noise and movement associated with a transition from one subject to another was slow to abate, Vanessa would sometimes announce, "Let me tell you about . . ." or use some other introductory statement to begin a story that would gather their collective attention and permit her to move forward with the lesson. Vanessa's use of storytelling in these instances is usually presented seamlessly and is well blended into her instructional delivery.

The use of storytelling has often been associated with teaching and dissemination of moral codes (Bruner, 2002; Coles, 1989; Sawyer, 1942). In Vanessa's classroom, it is part of her belief that teachers are, to a degree, responsible for dispensing information that affects students' decision making processes and, ultimately, the choices they make. Vanessa sees herself as a teacher who must sometimes broach difficult topics in order to make her students think critically about their actions and decisions. By not criticizing or addressing inappropriate action, both inside and outside the classroom, we allow people whom we value to make the same mistakes over and over again (Ross, 1996). Vanessa shares autobiographical stories about some of the rewards and consequences surrounding decisions she has made. Her story about stealing the modeling clay was presented as an effort to correct misguided behavior among students in her grade level about which she had become aware. She also shares biographical stories, as is commonly done in education, so that students may learn from the experiences of others. Drawing from the experiences of others, whether they be famous persons being studied in class or family

members with interesting stories, Vanessa connects stories to the material being taught. Her personal anecdotes and examples are sometimes provided as templates for student behavior and as a model for acceptable action and reaction in the school setting as well as in the personal lives of the students.

Vanessa searches for cognitive and affective meaning together. It is her belief that both go hand in hand and that a classroom without the affective approach is a classroom "without heart." The institutional idealistic philosophies of the nineteenth century help to shape education into an assembly-line approach at the expense of the value of creating an affective environment in schools (Dewey, 1916; Egan, 1986). Vanessa believes that she should create a balance in her classroom.

Storytelling Serves Affective Purpose

Vanessa shapes her classroom environment into a safe and pleasant place for learning. Affective skills are greatly influenced by one's personal experiences, culture, school and family. Affective skills include, risk-taking, expressing feelings and emotions, being curious and sharing the idea of discovery learning, building self-confidence, and responding to emotions (Puccio & Murdock, 2001). Four distinct affective purposes are evident in Vanessa's use of storytelling: 1) story as natural and engaging/lived experience; 2) to develop a sense of other through empathy; 3) to create a safe and comfortable environment for learning; 4) to aid in building teacher/student and student/student relationships.

Vanessa creates lively stories that capture the attention of even some of the most inattentive kids in her classroom. As McDonald (1993) puts it, "her job is to put the listeners at ease, pick them up with the first words of the story, and carry them

confidently through the tale" (p. 24). Her southern dialect adds to her stories by providing an element of realism to her stories that some people could not replicate. When she speaks of the Civil Rights movement, for example, her natural dialect allows her to present information with the added flair of realism that might make one think that he or she is listening to an audio documentary on the topic. Vanessa supplies intricate details of her experiences so that her students can easily create their own visual images. When she feels as though she needs more than just an imagined image she will use items available to her. Vanessa's use of props (the broom in the sweeping "example") is indicative of her prior knowledge of storytelling performance. Props, short for "properties," a term commonly used in performing arts settings, refers to objects used on stage or during a performance by an actor, storyteller, or other type of performer. By using the effects that props sometimes provide to the story, the teller can better control the audience's attention to the story. Other performance techniques, vocal pitch, pacing, maintaining eye contact, and character posturing were also evident during storytelling events I observed in Vanessa's classroom. Her ability to segue into a story when the appropriate moment arises coupled with the aforementioned performance qualities makes Vanessa a capable story performer; a quality which becomes an important ingredient of her teaching practice.

Vanessa has developed another quality which makes her stories easy to listen to. She creates stories that are natural and do not seem rehearsed. Story language does not need to be memorized. The story should be personalized as much as possible. Vanessa uses many personal experiences as a framework for her stories and in doing so she has the ability to draw from memory the events that took place at some time in her past. By

drawing upon her own memory, she is able to hear the voices of the characters speaking, see their movements, and identify with how the characters in her story are feeling and thinking. Even though her story may not depict the exact happenings as they took place, her story is alive with many memorable experiences and is communicated as such. Story does not need to be treated as a recitation (Barton, 2000; Livo & Rietz, 1986). She transitions into the story realm as she needs to, sometimes without announcement to the students of such a move. With her storied experiences well entrenched inside her memory, Vanessa weaves the threads of her story into the fabric of the lesson that she is teaching. Vanessa's ability to thread these qualities into her presentation style makes her a true storyteller. She is well aware of her surroundings and makes certain that her audience of students is prepared to listen. She paces herself well as the weaves her story so that her listeners are able to mentally process the story. Her use of detail enhances the students' ability to co-create the story being told by transferring the oral information being given to them into mental images. Vanessa also uses appropriate performance or delivery techniques that make classroom storytelling interesting and entertaining. Her facial and vocal expressions accentuate the content of the story being told and she has a keen sense of when it becomes necessary to make use of props and other items which might enhance her story.

Vanessa's storytelling develops a sense of other through empathy, a second purpose that serves students' affect. Vanessa integrates story as a way to develop empathy with her students. It is important to her that she has a sense of where her students come from and what cultural or familial mores and beliefs they bring to the classroom. The story events in her classroom often lead to discussions about similar

experiences in her students' lives. Through those shared moments, Vanessa is able to glean bits of information that help her better understand classroom behaviors, academic abilities, and other facets of her students' personalities. Vanessa also places great importance upon the need for her students to know something about her as well. Vanessa's personal stories about her life as a child and her disappointments and triumphs in school serve to demonstrate to her students how she approached some of the decisions she was required to make in her life. Once more, Vanessa's story about the trouble she experienced by taking the modeling clay was a way to help students examine the decision-making process and consequences of bad decisions. Through listening to her story, she hopes that her students would be able to learn from her experiences and the experiences of others.

A third purpose that serves students' affect is Vanessa's efforts to create an environment conducive to learning. Vanessa is aware that the art and science of teaching does not always culminate in a practice that is perfect, but imperfection is part of the process of construction, reorganization, and professional learning. She is willing to risk using innovative teaching strategies along with traditional practices in order to give her students multiple and varied exposure to the materials which are being studied. Vanessa works lead her students out of the mood of passive reception and to instill a love of learning, confidence in learning, and the development of pro-social, cooperative attitudes among her students (Greene, 1995; Slavin, 1991).Vanessa's storytelling events are noticeably enjoyable. Humor is one of the facets of her storytelling events that helps humanize instruction. Her students are actively engaged in the moment, they participate in discussions about stories that are told, and they express their pleasure and comfort

through facial expression, laughter, and interaction with others in the classroom. While Vanessa's students are engaged in story-listening, they seem to be willing to invite instruction, participate in retellings and discussions, demonstrate a recognition of importance of the story content, and take time to examine situations from the perspectives of others (Krathwohl, 1964).

Story in Vanessa's classroom usually surrounds topics that are pertinent to the lesson and to the lives of her students, the fourth purpose that serves students' affect. While there is place for the fictional story in the classroom, there is also a need for story as a means to make life-to-life connections that are critical in appreciating and understanding others. It is through story that we "issue an invitation not to be as the story is but to see the world as embodied in the story" (Bruner, 2002, p. 25). Vanessa found the stories of World War II told by her teacher to be interesting and insightful. That insight into the world of others provides human beings with inter-experiential sense of knowing about the lives of others. Ultimately, it gives us the ability to apply that knowledge to our own circumstance.

Vanessa works with story to develop relationships. Student engagement is a "function of many variables, two of which are one's interest in the topic and one's perception of personal competence (Brooks & Brooks, 1993, p. 58). By establishing relationships with her students through story, Vanessa is creating interest and enhancing the students' self-confidence. Her stories, many times, demonstrate to her students that she shares many of the same values and attributes that they and their families possess. Through her stories of her childhood, she exposes her students to the hardships and the accomplishments she has experienced and allows them to participate in a celebration of

her rising above her difficulties. In doing so, she is telling them "this is what I have done and I know you can do even better than I." Vanessa's storytelling allows students to begin to make meaningful connections and build relationships with other students. As her stories surface, the stories of students also emerge and are shared. Students, both tellers and listeners, are afforded the opportunity to make life-to-life connections with their peers and thereby establishing relationships.

Summary

Vanessa's use of story in the classroom is pervasive. Even though storytelling is not the primary goal of her practice, it is an integral part of her teaching technique. Vanessa has come to the realization that the art of teaching is not a static event and she is quick to reference a familiar story when the opportunities arise. Much of what she does is based on what she has experienced. Her technique is informed by the formal influences of teachers and professors, but it is also shaped by the informal experiences as a recipient of childhood stories and illustrations from family and friends. Vanessa cannot operate in the classroom without exhibiting at least some of the qualities of those informal experiences. We all bring with us a style or technique, uniquely shaped by our own years of experience and carefully threaded into our emerging methodology.

By drawing upon the multiple influences of storytellers in her life, she is also providing a valuable resource for her students as they watch and listen to her model the storytelling craft. Through that modeling, they will begin to collect their own experiences in communicating through storytelling. Although they may not all become educators, they will be able to draw from this experiential data some of the structure they may use in future years to be successful communicators.

Vanessa's techniques are simple ones. They do not require hours of tedious preparation. They are not the culmination of decades of scholarly work. Vanessa is not a professional actor or storyteller, but she has developed a repertoire of story that seems to work. Hers are the techniques of survival; she actively seeks methods that will connect the students to the work. They are the techniques of convenience; her life stories are rich and full of information she can easily adapt to the lessons she teaches. Vanessa has chosen to make use of internal, as well as external, resources which serve to make her classroom practice a powerful and vibrant one which offers her students an opportunity to make connections to the lesson through story.

"Inspiration could be called inhaling the memory of an act never experienced."
Ned Rorem

"Goody, goody! We're going to do some fun things today": Renee's Story

The third grade children file into the room with mouths tightly closed and hands neatly clasped behind them. The students' *real* teachers, their regular home-room teachers, bring their students to these classes and then return to their areas for planning time, team meetings, and other activities. The students have been coming into this classroom only a few days now. They spend most of the day in another classroom and the class they have in this room is only offered to them during one of the four nine-week sessions of the school year. They have come here to participate in one of their specials classes. Specials at this school consist of subject areas like Art, Physical Education, Health, Music, and Literary Arts.

This particular class they are coming to is a Literary Arts class. The school underwent a major change of focus just two years before. Along with other elementary schools in the system, this school became a magnet school of sorts. This school was deemed the Arts school. Another in the system became the Science school and other schools took on their own specific curricula. Students from throughout the system were allowed the opportunity to choose which school they would like to attend. The students and parents at this school chose the Fine Arts. Now, these third graders are taking their seats in a specials class devoted to teaching them about language and literacy and, at the same time, integrating and incorporating arts-based strategies.

The third graders coming into the room right now are followed, during the next class period, by another group of third graders. Two first grade groups and a second grade group have already visited the classroom prior to this period.

As they enter the room, Renee Whittington stands at the front of the immaculate room quietly watching and smiling at the group. She is of medium height, in her early fifties, and always dresses as if she were going to pose for a fashion magazine. Today, Renee is wearing a khaki pant suit and just enough jewelry to let one know that she is probably well-to-do. Her flair for fashionable dress was learned early. Speaking with a true southern accent, "My mother owned a dress shop in town for a long time," she explained to me during an early interview. "That's where I spent about twenty years of my life." Renee had worked in the shop as she grew up and even into her adult years. Working with her mother in one of the town's principle dress shops provided Renee with a sense of fashion and style that most girls her age could only get by perusing copies of fashion magazines. Her classroom reflects the same air of stylishness and, when she is not busy conducting class, she is always tidying up and straightening things in preparation for her next group of students. The knick-knacks on her desk and on other furniture in the room are evidence of her good taste. There are touches of brass and hardwood and a decorative flower vase. There is none of the inexpensive, plastic apple decor and such that sometimes adorns the desks of elementary school teachers.

She knows the necessity of letting the homeroom teacher deliver the students to her classroom under conditions that facilitate a quiet move through the hallways. Not only do the students have to traverse the campus, moving through the main building where their home classroom is located, but they have to make their way out of the main

building and across the breeze-way into the modular building where many of the specials classes are held. The rules are strict; single-file line, mouths closed, and hands clasped in front of them or behind the back so there is no unnecessary touching of walls or of other kids.

For Renee, it is sometimes difficult not being the students' regular home-room teacher. The home-room teacher works to establish rules with the group then they are herded into another teacher's classroom where another set of rules might be in place. My first teaching job was similar to Renee's as I was a connections teacher in the middle grades. Connections teachers, like this school's specials teachers, offer a variety of non-academic classes ranging from Health to Foreign Language. The kids came to me much like Renee's kids, one nine-week period per year and during the time when their academic teachers were having their planning periods. Specials and connections teachers can sometimes feel like the live-in babysitter because it was often hinted by other teachers that if one were not teaching Math, Science, Social Studies, or Language Arts, one wasn't teaching a real class. For specials teachers like Renee, another difficulty is learning so many names and having to identify so many learning styles during the course of the year. Instead of working with a core group of 18 to 26, the specials teachers move most of the entire population of the school through their classrooms. Nevertheless, Renee works hard to prepare for her students and they enter the room with great expectation in their eyes.

There were a number of tables, pushed together end to end, forming a "U" shape around the room. The inside of the "U" shape, toward which the students were facing, served as a performance space for teacher and students. The eighteen kids in this group –

White, African American, Asian, and Hispanic – quietly took their places at the tables, made themselves comfortable, and sat almost motionless awaiting her first words.

Renee is an artist with words. Her use of words and expression fascinates me. She has a way of making even the darkest of moments lighter by crafting words and phrases that just lift you up. Renee is very conservative in the way she conducts herself. She moves with a quiet grace that makes her seem confident and secure. Much of the time, her hands with their well-manicured nails are rested neatly in front of her, fingers interlaced or one hand resting in the other. While she might not outwardly appear to be exceedingly energetic, her spark is evident as she speaks. It is as though her happiness and contentment on the inside is given a voice through her words.

"Goody, goody!" Renee remarks as she displays a big grin to the smiling students awaiting her instruction. "We're going to do some really fun things today! First, let's read a poem! Do you like poems?" She clasps her hands together in front of her as she asks the question. She appears as though she expects everyone to be just as enthusiastic about the topic as she is. There are nods to her inquiry about poetry from around the room, mostly from the girls. Of eighteen kids, there are eleven boys in this group. Some of the boys simply shrug their shoulders in response to her question, but she continues anyway. She had written a poem entitled "The Poet Tree" on the whiteboard at the front of the room prior to the beginning of class. She reads the poem slowly, but expressively as the children silently follow along with her. After finishing the poem, Renee invites them to take part.

"Let's all read together," she tells them, "I love to hear my students read good poetry in my classes! Follow me with your eyeballs please and let's read a little Shel

Silverstein." From the white board Renee reads the poem's title. "The Poet Tree," she announces expressively. The class repeats the title in strong unison voices. Renee then leads them through the poem with the same expressiveness as before. The choral response she hears is equally expressive. "Underneath the poet tree," Renee reads the first line in a clear strong voice. After each line the entire class reads the line in unison.

> "Come and rest a while with me.
> And watch the way the word web weaves
> between the shading story leaves.
> The branches of the poet tree
> reach from the mountains to the sea.
> So come and dream or come and climb.
> Just don't get hit by falling rhymes.

By Shel Silverware," Renee states at the end of the reading without cracking a grin. The classroom erupts in laughter and students offer to correct her obvious error. Renee covers her mouth with her hand as she tries to act as though she is embarrassed by the author's misspoken name, but to the observant eye the laugh lines at the corners of her eyes are signs of her enjoyment of the moment. "Goody, goody!" Renee exclaims, "Isn't that lovely?" she asks in that warm southern drawl. The students, trading glances with one another, respond with smiles and giggles.

"I like to read poetry!" one little girl proclaims. From all over the room there are affirmative responses to her statement, "Me too!" and "I like it too," are heard from enthusiastic sounding voices. Others in the room, even some of the boys, mirror their sentiment by nodding their heads or quietly whispering to a neighbor.

"Well, we are going to be reading some good poems from week to week while you're with me," Renee explained to them. "We're going to be reading and learning about a number of other things too!" Renee walked over to her desk to recover the class

seating chart and spent a few minutes getting to know the class. This group has only been coming to her class for a few days and she has tried hard to memorize everyone's name. Without looking at the chart she tried to recall the names of each student. She made her way, student by student around the room, until everyone had been identified correctly. Sometimes she struggled to remember a name and her attempts were flawed. Her errors created some giggles among the class, but the students were forgiving and they seemed to know that she was trying her hardest. Renee double-checked her seating chart and, once she had made sure everyone was in the right place, she placed it on her desk and immediately got to work on the lesson for the day.

"Oh, boy! Now let's see just how the expression we used in reading that poem might be used in working on something else," she said with excitement! "Have any of you ever read a script or been in a play?" she asks. Hands fly upward all over the room and a number of voices can be heard in quiet mumbling a positive response to a neighbor. Even though they are not a noisy group, they are energetic. Little legs can be seen swinging beneath chairs and there is a constant wriggling and movement in the classroom chairs. They appear as though they are really anxious to actively participate in the class, but they know the rules and they squelch their own attempts to break them.

"Oh, my heavens," Renee said. Of course, with her drawl it was much more elongated and rich with expression. "I guess I'd better tell you why we're going to do this! Did I ever tell you about my sister?" Following the pattern of the previous choral reading, there was an almost united response of "No" from the class. "Oh, my goodness," she said as she brought the palms of her hands to each side of her face. "Well, let me tell you about her." Renee looked down at the floor as she collected her thoughts for a

moment. Her hands slowly meet in front of her in a prayer-like pose and she touched the tips of her fingers to her chin as she began to tell her story. There was not a sound in the room. “My sister is a beautiful woman and she has always been a beautiful girl.” Renee propped her hands on her hips and quipped, “Everybody always told my mama that she had two real pretty girls, but I always thought my sister was really, really pretty. When she was growing up, she decided to enter a beauty pageant at school and my mother and I were excited for her and wanted to help her in any way we could.” Renee walked slowly across the open end of the table arrangement. She looked at each area of the classroom as she spoke, making sure that she let each student know that she was addressing them. “Beauty pageants are important around here! I mean, they are really big things for girls to take part in! We helped her pick out the most beautiful dress to wear and since our mother had a dress shop, you’d better believe she got the best she could get! Well, we were excited when it came time for the pageant!” I could hear the excitement in her voice. At times she would speak in hushed tones, but those tones would change and her voice would modulate in pitch and volume to emphasize select points to be made to the listeners. “Mother and I helped my sister get back stage at the auditorium and we went around the side of the building, walked in the front entrance, and found us a couple of good seats front and center! It was a wonderful pageant! When it came time for the judges to pick the final five girls, my sister was one of the five!” A couple of the girls sitting beside one another on the side of the room opposite my position in the class applauded quietly but vigorously. “You know how they always ask the last group of girls a question and they have to walk up to the microphone and answer it?” she asked the group. Everyone responded affirmatively. “Well, when it came time for that. The host

asked my sister her question and she walked up to the microphone. His question was, 'As an American teenager, what would you like to tell a teenager from Russia about life in the United States?' She stood there and she stood there and she stood there. It seemed like fifteen minutes went by and she was still standing there. The whole auditorium was quiet as a mouse. After a while, my sister just stepped back in line with the other girls. She hadn't even said a word! Not a single, solitary word! Oh, I felt so sorry for her," Renee told her listeners in a doleful tone. "I just knew she was scared to death!" She, once again, brought her hands to her cheeks and gave a look of desperation as she told of the traumatic event in her sister's life. "My, oh my! My sister just wasn't doing very well at all." Renee continued her movement along the front of the room. She did not pace, she moved just enough so that she was able to face each line of tables where the children were seated. All the while, she also used her hands expressively to accent the story. "My mother and I were horrified for her. We knew she had just gone blank when she heard the question and we felt so sorry for her. In a few minutes the host got the envelope from the judges with a list of the runners-up and the winner. He announced the fourth runner-up. Once again, it wasn't my sister! He announced the third runner-up . . .it wasn't my sister! Oh, my goodness, we weren't sure what was going to happen! He announced the next one and it still wasn't my sister! But, guess what!" The classroom came alive with voices as the students clambered to answer her prompt. "My sister got FIRST RUNNER-UP!" Renee exclaimed to the group. Once again, there was a fluttering of applause from some of the students. "After the pageant we all talked about how she might have won the grand prize if she had just said *something* when she was asked her question! Well, that's

something we are going to work on in this class. We are going to do some things that will help ya'll when it comes time to get up in front of people and speak."

Her story and the explanation that followed it set the stage for the activity she had prepared for today's class. Renee believes that she can help her students begin to feel confident about giving presentations and speeches by incorporating elements of storytelling and drama into her classroom activities. The story provided students with some reasons why they might want to become comfortable as a speaker. Even though they may not participate in a beauty pageant, most of them will be expected to "get up in front of people and speak" as Renee put it. Her classroom provided a safe environment for them to practice for such events. Renee also provided the students with some subtle confidence building of her own during the story time. By making eye contact with each student, making an effort to call students by name, and by moving toward and positioning herself in close proximity to them, she fostered the students' sense of acceptance. Being accepted by the teacher and their peers is an important part of enabling children to learn (Good, 1982; Hunter, 1969, 1976, 1982).

Renee reached to the table at the front of the room and retrieved several pieces of paper. "Let's see, now," she said as she looked, first at the papers and then around the room, "I need some volunteers. I need a TV repairman, a husband, and a wife." Once again all hands reached toward the ceiling. "Kamika, Darrin," her eyes wandered across the room as she searched for another willing participant, "and Jorge, you three can come up front." The three students made their way to the front and center part of the room which is used for just such a performance. They each received their single-page script. Kamika and Jorge begin reading or scanning their scripts right away while Darrin looked

around the room at his classmates and playfully held his script by a finger and thumb and swayed it back and forth in front of him. “OK,” Renee said, “let’s see what kind of actors you are.” Darrin quickly got both hands on his paper and seemed to suddenly get serious about his role. Renee gathered the three close to her as she quietly explained the scenario to them. “Kamika is playing the part of the wife, Darrin is going to be the husband, and Jorge is the television repairman,” she announced. Renee gave them time to look over the script and ask questions of her then she directed them to begin.

As the scene began, Darrin and Kamika enter into dialogue, “There’s something wrong with the television set, can you fix it?” the wife asks the husband. “I don’t know,” the husband says as he begins tinkering with the imaginary set. After a variety of improvisational lines and actions, the husband determines he cannot make it work and the wife calls for a repairman. “Hello, Ace TV Repair?” she says into the imaginary telephone. “My TV is on the blink. Can you send someone over?” “Certainly,” Jorge replies via his own imaginary telephone hand-set. “Ding-dong!” Renee sings out in a high-pitched tone as she provides the doorbell sound effect. Jorge is standing at the make-believe doorway and Kamika lets him in. “There’s something wrong with my TV set. Can you fix it?” Kamika asks the repairman. Jorge pretends to work on the TV set. “Well, it’s not this! And it’s not this!” he tells them as he pretends to pull things from the set and throw them over his shoulder. “I think I have found the problem! The set is not plugged in!” Jorge gets busy, fixes the problem, and presents his bill for a rather large sum of money to the couple. “That’ll be fifty dollars!” he tells them as he extends his hand toward them to collect their money. “Fifty dollars!” Kamika exclaimed. “I’ll show you fifty dollars!” she says as she grabs Jorge by the shirt and escorts him to the door.

The husband and wife improvise reactions and the skit ends amid much laughter and applause from the audience.

Once the production had ended and everyone had settled down, Renee began to poll the audience about the performance they had just seen. “What were some of the things you liked about our actors? What were some of the things they did to make the story interesting and entertaining?” she asked. Once again, hands flew toward the ceiling signaling an anxiousness to answer her query.

“I liked the way Kamika was the wife. She was really bossy and she told her husband what to do!” one of Kamika’s friends offered between giggles. “Yeah, she was going to beat up the repairman when he told her how much money he wanted!” said another classmate. Everybody laughed. Jorge and Darrin received complements on their acting abilities too. “I liked the way Jorge handed her the bill, it was like he was glad he didn’t have to work hard to make a lot of money!” one of the boys told Renee.

“What about the way they said things?” Renee asked, “Did you notice anything special about that?” She was attempting to steer them toward a discussion on vocal intonation and expression.

“Yeah, Kamika almost exploded when Jorge told her how much it cost!” some one said, “She almost started yelling at him!”

“Yes, I think you could tell she wasn’t happy with the bill.” Renee said as she proceeded to lead the discussion about the presentation they had just seen. Following the discussion, the three students did a repeat performance and applied some of the suggestions they had received from classmates and teacher. Following their encore

performance, other teams were chosen to perform the same script and more discussions took place.

Story can be such things as the plot of a novel, narrative poem, drama, television and motion picture production (Barell, 2001; McArthur, 1992). Renee's purpose for the use of storytelling through drama was three-fold. "First, I want them to get used to being up in front of the class," she explained to me after the class had left her room, "they need that experience from an early age. It just helps them get over the stage fright that happens when they have to make a speech or do a presentation in middle or high school. It also gives them the opportunity to learn how to be expressive and how to use their voices as a tool to make people listen."

"Secondly, kids today need to learn how to think things through. Storytelling and role-play help them learn about making choices." Drama and storytelling can be integral elements of classroom instruction and provide a variety of experiences for the students as well as information concerning student ability and comprehension to the teacher. Lambert (2002) proposes that:

> Taking the audience to the moment of an important scene, one that either initiates or concludes your tale, and putting then in your shoes, is why we listen to the story. We want to know how characters react. We want to imagine ourselves there as participants or witnesses. We want to know what someone else takes away from the experience and uses to lead their lives forward (p. 38).

Storytelling through creative drama provides a superb environment for promoting social growth and development, encouraging student use of critical thinking skills, and enhancing individual creativity. By placing themselves in a dramatic scene, the student is

provided an opportunity to play the role of a character that is interacting with other characters. Both the actor and the viewer/listener are allowed entrance into the character's motivation, difficulties, and conflict resolution. These hypothetical scenarios provide information as to how the character reacts to internal and external forces. Choice, then, becomes a major factor for the actor and, indirectly, for the viewer/listener. Students learn, through simulation, that they must think critically before making decisions. All the while, the student is stretching his or her ability to make their character understood to the audience through a creative strategy. This also gives the viewer/listener the opportunity enhance their abstract thinking, to witness creativity in the making and possibly determine what they might do if given a similar role to portray (Cottrell, 1987). From even the earliest of dramatic assignments, the students have a sense of seeing the "big picture" which includes the characters, the story plot, and the intended outcome or resolution. By having that knowledge of the big picture they feel as though they are accomplishing something through the task (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995). The story and all of its ramifications are providing a map that can be used, with slight alteration, to accomplish other outcomes, even real-life outcomes.

Renee's third reason for the storytelling and dramatic presentation was simply to make instruction enlightening *and* entertaining by infusing the use of such Arts into her classroom. The skits and stories showed students other avenues by which to communicate. Some educators may consider storytelling and drama to be a fun diversion from the work of school, but storytelling is a rehearsal for other types of composing (Gillard, 1996). Tapping into the student's imaginations and encouraging their creativity is an important part of helping students to make connections between school activities

and real-life situations (Egan, 2005; Greene, 1995). Renee leads her students through stages of learning storytelling. Early class sessions demonstrate story structure and the basic elements of communicating. Other class meetings allow students to involve themselves in methods of communication such as storytelling and role-play using scripted roles given to them by the teacher. Subsequent class meetings would then be used to move students into writing short scripts and allowing them to perform some of them before the class.

Renee realizes the value of storytelling in dramatic form because of her own childhood memories of going to theatrical productions and developing an appreciation for theatre which grew even into her adult years. Growing up in a town the size of Lakeland offered residents some opportunities that people from surrounding counties and towns did not have. With two colleges and a good number of residents interested in the Arts, there was always something happening in Renee's community that was of interest to her. Theatre, including reader's theatre, puppetry, and storytelling performance, art, pottery, and other areas of interest to local art lovers were routinely being taught or presented in and around the small town. I witnessed more attention being paid to drama as a method of telling stories in Renee's classroom than I had in Celeste's or Vanessa's. One reason could be the focus on the Arts that Renee's school has adopted. Another reason could be that her own background experience allowed her more opportunities than the other teachers to participate in that particular realm of sharing stories.

A second grade group sat at their tables anxiously waiting to hear what the day's task would be. "I want to tell you a story," Renee said the rather noisy group. They were fidgety and talkative that day. They quieted somewhat, still settling into their metal

folding chairs. “Have any of you ever helped your moms or dads do things around the house?” Renee asked. Many of the students raised their hands high in the air in response to her question. “Well, let me tell you about somebody who asked some of her friends for some help.” She stood in front of the class and started her story. “Once upon a time, there was a little red hen,” she said with a gleam in her eyes. She held no book in her hands yet the expressive words flowed without any hesitation. “She lived on a farm with a few of her friends; a little doggie, a little kitty cat, and a little piggy.” Renee paused and pointed to one of the students, “I am the little doggie,” she said. The student repeated the line. Renee continued reciting lines as she selected two more students who repeated their introductory lines. “I am the little kitty cat,” said one student, “I am the little piggy,” said the other amid a flurry of laughs from throughout the room. “Well, the little red hen worked around the farm and soon she got very hungry for some cornbread. She looked in the refrigerator, but there was none. No cornbread! What was she to do! The little red hen picked up her pocketbook and went to the store.” By this time, the room was totally still and quiet. There was not much movement and there was absolutely no talking. Renee continued her story. Her voice changed to provide characterization for each animal and she even performed some vocal effects, a meow for the cat and a few snorts for the piggy. “When she got to the store, she bought a package of corn seed. ‘I will plant the seed and soon I will have cornbread’ the little red hen said. The little red hen went home hoping that her friends would help her get the soil ready. ‘Will you help me?’ she asked each one. ‘No, not I,’ said the dog. ‘No, not I,’ said the cat. ‘No, not I,’ said the piggy.” With each line, Renee pointed to the students previously chosen to repeat the key lines. With each repetition, she meowed, barked, or snorted her sound effects to the pleasure of the

audience. “The little red hen shook her head, went and got her hoe, and started getting the soil ready,” Renee continued. The story wound through several exchanges between the little red hen and the other animals. Each exchange was made like the others, with the students repeating the key lines while trying to mimic the vocal intonation and expression Renee was giving each character voice. As the story neared the end the room was still silent. Except for the periods of laughter that followed some of the animal sounds or some of the students’ mistakes when trying to repeat lines, the audience was extremely quiet and still. “And that was the story of the little red hen,” Renee announced. Everyone applauded and there was a sudden change in the noise level in the room as the students resumed their fidgeting and began whispering to each other about the story. “Now, some of you said you’ve help you moms or dads do things. Have any of you ever been like the little red hen’s friends?” Amid many negative responses vocalized there were a couple of hands raised in the affirmative. “I told my brother I’d help him clean up the back yard one time, but I went to ride my bike instead,” one boy said. Renee acknowledged his remark with a raised eyebrow as if to say that she disapproved of his action. “We need to be helpful to one another,” she explained. “What do you think this story teaches us?” she asked. Several students expressed their thoughts at the same time. “To help each other,” said one. “Not to be lazy,” quipped another. “Exactly,” Renee responded, “it’s a good story to remind us of how we need to help each other. I saw Max helping his mother buy groceries last week didn’t I?” she asked one little blond-haired boy. Max was sitting at one of the tables near the door. He quietly nodded and pushed his glasses up on the bridge of his nose. “I don’t like to go to the grocery store” she admitted. “Somebody else at my house always does the grocery shopping, can you guess who?” “Your dad” said

Ryan. “No, but that’s a good guess. That’s a really good guess Ryan.” “Your daughter,” said Kelly. “That’s a good guess too, Kelly, but there’s somebody else.” “Your husband, “Derrick called out. “That’s right, it’s Mister David,” Renee said in a sing-song sounding voice. “I usually don’t buy the groceries, Mister David does because he likes to go and talk to people, but I went to the store to help somebody. I was at the grocery store with my mama too,” she told the group, “I have to help my mom do things like buy groceries because she has a really bad illness and she can’t remember things very well.” Her story of the little red hen and the personal reference to helping her elderly mom do her grocery shopping turned into a discussion about helping others and the many ways the students might be able to help family and friends.

Sawyer (1942) posits that the use of such traditional fairy tales, folk tales, and children’s stories remains critical to their intellectual growth. Renee’s students are immersed in a highly technological world of television, movies, video games and devices, and other elements of our modern word that could draw them away from such simple literacy tools. Even in the early nineteen-forties Sawyer (1942) was shared that “much space fiction among our middle-aged children is taking the place of the ‘once-upon-a-time’ folk, fairy, and hero tales” (p. 173). She went on to explain that such traditional works contain universal truths and wisdom that “children cannot afford to miss” (p. 173). Such traditional stories contain value-laden lessons that help children to understand the concepts of justice, rewards and consequences. Stories help to teach the values of patience and kindness as well as tenacity and determination.

Since there are no textbooks for this class, Renee relies upon a variety of sources to design the curriculum. Much of her resource library includes materials she has

collected over the years as a part of her personal collection. Books of poetry, story books, picture books, and other materials are planning materials she depends upon. “I have a close relationship with the media specialist,” she said to me during one visit. Due to the nature of Renee’s teaching schedule, uses teaching techniques and materials that are age appropriate.

“I’m going to try teaching!”: Growing up Renee

Renee grew up in a rural, yet suburban setting. Medium sized towns in the South tend to have a tendency to be more rural than one might expect. With a population of around 40 thousand, Lakeland, Georgia is a mix of old-time tradition and the new wave of fast food and specialty shops that cater to baby-boomers as well as the x-generation. The town has changed a lot since Renee’s years as a young girl. The small shopping center where her mother’s dress shop was located is now a low-traffic strip mall mainly surrounded by doctors’ offices and other service agencies. Newer, bigger malls have cropped up not too far away and the multi-screen cinemas, steak houses, and seafood establishments have taken much of the business and entertainment seekers elsewhere.

Schools in the area have certainly changed too. Renee’s school system has grown in number of students over the years to the point of the addition of several neighborhood schools and a host of personnel. “I remember when I could walk around the square in town and I’d know most of the people I’d meet,” she told me. “Now, I hardly know anyone!”

“I went to first through third grade at Candler Street School and we lived on James Street, which was close by, so I walked to school then. Later we moved on over close to Andrews Elementary and I walked to school then too. Anyway, I graduated from

Lakeland High School, then I attended Brandt College. Brandt was a small college – girls only – and it was close to home so I could stay at home with my folks and drive over to attend classes." Renee leaned forward with elbows on the table and her hands neatly posed under her chin as she talked. She seemed to enjoy talking about some of the institutions and locations around town. Her small town had seen a fair amount of growth and significant changes in demographics during the last ten years. Those who consider themselves natives speak with pride as they recall the way things used to be. "After a while, I began to feel like I was missing out on life," she continued, "so I transferred to the university. Once I transferred to University, I found that there was so much going on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and I had a hard time saying no, and I had a hard time finding time to study, so I transferred back to Brandt College where I eventually graduated."

"When I graduated, I actually graduated with a degree in Early Childhood Education," she said, as if she herself couldn't believe it. "It was the norm though. When someone graduated from Brandt College, they usually graduated with one of two degrees; Early Childhood Education or Interior Design. I never went to a job interview. I never interviewed to become a teacher. I just fell into the family business – my mother's dress shop. So for twenty years that's what I did. I now realize that business was not my passion it was my mother's passion and it was her store. So finally one day I woke up, and I said to my husband, "David, I'm miserable!" Renee placed emphasis on her words by holding her hands up in a non-verbal gesture that said to me "enough is enough!" She took a deep breath and continued, "I'm tired of waking up and dreading going to work. I'm going to try teaching. I'm going to go for it! He listened to me and then he said 'go

for it!' And so, I got my masters degree, and I was hired here, thank goodness!" The twinkle in her eyes and her bright smile accentuated the statement. I could tell that teaching was just what Renee enjoyed doing.

Lakeland Elementary School was built in the 1970s as an additional school to serve the growing population of a town that was beginning to burst at the seams. The building sits on a knoll overlooking a hilly wooded park situated alongside a large lake. The lake has attracted newcomers to the area for over fifty years. New homes continue to be built along its shores and even more are being built in other areas of the surrounding countryside. No longer able to serve the needs of the city's children with only two elementary schools as it did when Renee was growing up here, the school system now boasts five elementary schools which feed into one middle school and one high school. The facility at Lakeland Elementary is beginning to feel the pinch of overcrowding. A few years ago, a large, multi-classroom modular structure was erected just behind the main building. It is a far cry from the mobile units found on the campuses of most other schools. In fact, one has to look pretty closely in order to tell that it is not a part of the main building.

Just as the population has increased, so have the demographics changed. Due to a variety of business and industry in the immediate area, there has been a significant influx of workers from Mexico and Central America who have moved into the city and the surrounding communities. Lakeland Elementary School's statistics reflect the dramatic changes. More than 30% of its students are Hispanic, 14% are African American, and the rest are White.

"Thank goodness for second grade!": Renee's School Experience

I asked Renee to tell me a little about her teachers and some of the things she enjoyed . . .and disliked . . .about attending school in her small town during the 1960s. She adjusted her necklace as she thought about my question. I could tell she was reaching back to some memories she might not have resurrected in some time.

"O-h-h-h, let me tell you," she said. Her eyes got big and she clenched her teeth together as if she dreaded making her next statement. "My first grade teacher…Booger Bear…I mean we could just call her Mrs. Booger Bear. She was the meanest thing and I was scared to death of her and I was miserable all that year! Thank goodness for second grade!" she said with a huge sigh, "because then I had Mrs. Allen, the sweetest, loveliest teacher in the world, and I was happy again." With a great big smile, Renee crossed her arms, tilted her head slightly, and thought about her second grade teacher. "Mrs. Allen wasn't a great storyteller, she just lived the story. She was just like a story book character. She was just so kind it just knocked me off my feet. I just loved her so much. I remember that she read stories to us quite a bit, but I don't think she spent a lot of time telling us stories. Then, in third grade, my teacher was Mrs. Carter, who was without question meaner than Mrs. Booger Bear in the first grade! She was, without question, the meanest teacher in the universe, and I don't even think she liked children, and I don't think she should have been teaching! Needless to say, it was a miserable year!" She shook her head and frowned. "I do not remember any stories from my first grade teacher or my third grade teacher. I just know I wasn't a happy little girl those two years." Renee took a deep breath and continued telling me about her elementary school experience. In my fourth grade year I had Mrs. Bullard, the sweetest, most wonderful teacher…my

favorite teacher of my entire life. She was so kind, and…and I just remember that she was so patient and so encouraging. It's funny you go through school and you may not remember exactly what the teacher's taught you, but you sure do have strong feelings about how they treated you."

Renee leaned on the table, tilted her head and look up as she tried to recall more about her teachers personalities and their teaching strategies. "I don't have a lot of memories of teachers telling stories" she said after a long pause. "I have memories of teachers reading books, and reading stories. But, I can't say that there were a lot of storytellers in my school experiences. I had some wonderful elementary teachers, but storytelling wasn't a big part of the way they taught back then.

When I got to high school, Coach Blackburn was probably the teacher who told the most stories. He was my favorite high school teacher. He taught Geography and, to this day I still have a passion for Geography!" Renee thought for a moment before she continued. "I liked his class so much because I was scared to open my mouth," she said with a gasp. "I was really bad to whisper and pass notes to my friends in school," she told me, "I would not have wanted to have me as a student! But in Coach Blackburn's class, you better believe I paid strict attention to him. I didn't take my eyes off of him. I respected him, and I admired him, and I learned more in his class than in any class I ever took at Lakeland High School. I really gave him a chance 'cause I was scared not to!" she chuckled. "He had superb classroom management skills, and I just loved him…I just adored him, and I wanted to please him. I really cared about pleasing him."

I was somewhat intrigued that Renee had not had more experience with storytelling in school. As smoothly as she integrated the craft of storytelling into her

teaching practice, I would have been sure that there had been some story influence in her grade school experiences. Like Renee, Vanessa hadn't mentioned much about such an influence in her educational career either. Only Celeste had revealed a significant storytelling practice in school. Renee had mentioned that her teachers read to their classes. Read-aloud is an enjoyable experience and provides the listener with some visual cues which may assist in comprehension of the story. It is somewhat less restrictive than the performance-based practice of storytelling because the reader (teacher) can easily pause to ask and answer question, draw attention to illustrations in the book, and then, pick up the story without losing the sense of continuity among the students (Hahn, 2002; Sawyer, 1942). Not all storytelling events lend themselves to such a stop-and-start rhythm.

"Why do you think you are more prone to using story than your teachers were?" I asked her. I wanted to give her more time to think about someone or something that may have influenced her use of storytelling.

"I will say that for me, had I begun teaching right out of college, I would not have been the teacher that I am now" she explained to me. "It was good for me to have another 20 year career before I began teaching. That was important for me. I don't think I would have been a good teacher right out of college. I think that I am so much more in love with the children now, after having had three of my own." Renee's life experience plays a significant role in her classroom practice. She has stories that might compliment any topic she chooses to address with her students. As a mother, she also feels that she knows more about what her students need and want.

"Growing up and having more life experiences prior to getting into the profession, I think, has made me a better teacher," Renee explained. "But, there are teachers at Lakeland Elementary now, who are fresh out of college and they are magnificent teachers! I'm not saying you have to be in your fifties before you can be a great teacher. There are young women and young men teaching at Lakeland right now who absolutely have it! They have everything they need to be great teachers. They love the children and they're ready. The time was right for them to teach. But, I think for some people, you have to wait for the right time to be the best that you can be as a teacher. For me, middle age time was the best time for me," she said with a quick nod of her head.

I could relate to what Renee was saying. I started my teaching career late in life too and I certainly could see how much of my use of story came from experience I had had outside of teaching. Having a multifaceted bank of life experiences was certainly a help when it came to relating subject-area material to real life.

Renee did have some formal training in storytelling. When she did return to graduate school prior to becoming a teacher, she enrolled in a Storytelling class being offered as part of her degree program. "I don't know why I signed up for the class," she confided in me, "I guess I just thought it would be interesting! I remember the first story I had to tell in front of the class. I had everything prepared and was ready to share my story. As I walked up to the front of the room, I passed by my professor who promptly snatched the notes I was carrying right out of my hand!" She grimaced at the thought of what had happened to her that evening in class. Like many people, Renee was somewhat uncomfortable having to perform in front of her classmates. "I begged him to please let me have my notes, but he refused. I went on to tell my story in class, but I'm still not

comfortable presenting in front of people. I do have to present from time to time, and I still get nervous." Renee's experience probably set the stage for her own student expectations in her present day classroom. She realizes the need for students to be prepared to participate in public speaking events, therefore, she works with her students to prepare them through a variety of classroom activities.

"The greatest influence as far as storytelling was my addiction to television": Storytelling Influences in Renee's Life

"I actually came to the conclusion that probably the greatest influence as far as story telling was my addiction to television. My family got our first television when I was in the third grade," Renee told me during one of my interviews with her. "After some of our initial conversations about my interest in storytelling, I went home and I thought goll-lee, what was the most important TV show?" When Renee iterated that big goll-lee in her Southern accent, I immediately thought she was going to make reference to the Gomer Pyle character who used to make use of that expression countless times on a couple of popular television shows during the 1960s. I was mistaken though. The expression was simply another one of Renee's examples of the way she communicates her thoughts and feelings every day. There is no pretence, no acting, just a touch of what many residents are accustomed to in this region of the country.

Renee continued her exploration into why she was so influenced by story. "I asked myself, what was the most influential TV show as far as storytelling? And I thought, oh my goodness, how could I forget my favorite TV show of all time! It was *The Twilight Zone*! The stories were always pretty weird, but the stories were interesting and each episode's story involved different topics. I learned more about plot and how a story evolved through television than by any other means. I don't even know how old I was

when that show was on television, but to this day, I want to watch the re-runs!" She leaned forward, her forearms resting on the table behind which she was sitting. "You know how they sometimes show re-runs for a whole day of a particular show?" she asked me. "That's the one I look forward to!"

I remember the show well. The short stories presented were sometimes written and presented with emphasis on some of the stranger views of life. I could understand her fascination with the program and the varied story plots that had been explored during the show's run on television. I could also understand how Renee's imagination could have been sparked by such a medium. It was one of many activities through which children growing up with the technological advances made since the 1940s could experience a vast array of storied events on a frequent basis. Celeste had discovered some of the same inspiration from her experiences of reading and being read to. Much of Vanessa's motivation had come from stories she heard being told by adult family members and friends.

Even though Renee had not experienced a great deal of storytelling in school, nor among family members, she had been treated to hours of story through the electronic medium of television. Renee's comments about television prompted me to recall and examine some of the deciding factors that led me toward the use of storytelling in the classroom. I could look back on some of the same elements of influence in my life; reading, listening to stories, and television and movies. Research over the past several decades demonstrates that children do learn from television (Gardner, 1982; Singer & Singer, 2001). Today, children's exposure to television amounts to a great deal of time

and the medium becomes an effective teacher about people and events that are outside the experience realm of the child (Egan, 1986; Wartella & Knell, 2004).

Renee sat back in her chair tapping her right index finger softly against her bottom lip as she tried to recall other television shows she had enjoyed. "*The Andy Griffith Show*. There's never been a better television show in the history of television than Andy Griffith. Oh, and *Leave it to Beaver*…I love it more now than I did then. Fabulous!…oh boy!" Renee's excitement over television was understandable to me. I had also been enamored with television as I was growing up and I could see how it could be a powerful influence. She mentioned a few other shows and named a few movies that she could directly attach to her storytelling expertise, at least with respect to how her imagination was stimulated by that electronic form of storytelling. She also alluded to other influences that the television shows has upon her performance techniques. "I remember the voices of some of the television and movie actors. Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi come to mind." Karloff and Lugosi were famous for their portrayals of the Frankenstein monster and Dracula as well as other scary characters in movies that aired on television. "When you add to the story plot all of the sound effects and music, I can understand how television shows had such an impact on me" Renee explained. Her storytelling techniques mirror some of the elements of television. During a story, Renee develops character voices that are distinct for each character. Her vocal expression and intonation provide an unsophisticated form of special effects as she performs the chosen tale for her audience. Her "little red hen" character voice is significantly higher in pitch than that of the dog and pig characters. Even as she guides the students through stories or plays, saying the lines and having the young actors repeat them after her, Renee's

vocalization skills are quite apparent. The responding recitation of the children mimics the rhythm and tone of their teacher's voice. Just as Renee as witnessed on television and in the movies, vocalization can help one to establish a variety of moods and attitudes that aid the listener in understanding and contextualizing the information being presented in the story (Gillard, 1996; Sawyer, 1942).

Television influenced Renee by providing her with language data and examples of situations for language use while allowing her the opportunity to assess those data and apply what she had observed to her own storytelling techniques, both as a child and as an adult. Heath (1986) documented how television influenced many aspects of daily life for Roadville residents including their use of time, the children's selection of toys and activities, and as a preparatory element to assist in readying children for school through children's programming. Gardner (1982) writes:

> My own observations, as wells as those by other researchers, document that television can fuel the child's imagination. In years past children's imaginations were stimulated by the events and characters they encountered in fireside tales, or, in somewhat more recent times, by the pictures and stories they encountered in book form. Now, however, these sources have largely been supplanted by those characters and events that youngsters encounter on television (p. 254).

Gardner admits that "we lack sufficient information about children before 1950 to allow a judicious comparison of imagination before and after the advent of television" and he suggests that each medium; storytelling, television, radio, reading, etc. can fuel the imagination "but is likely to do so in characteristically different ways" (p. 255).

Another influence upon Renee's interest and use of story came from another community institution, the church. "Goll-lee!" she exclaimed as she tried to recall persons in her life who might have been influential in turning her on to storytelling, "I

don't know anyone in my family who particularly influenced my love for stories! Although, my mother used to always read to me. That certainly had an effect. It's just something that I've always been attracted to. I just love stories…I love theater… and I have come to truly realize how important stories are in teaching lessons."

She paused briefly, still trying to think of other influences. "Another place I remember story from is church. I just truly believe that you can hear a story at church from the preacher, and that's what you're going to remember weeks and weeks and weeks later. You're going to take that story with you!" The church still plays a role in shaping her use of story in the classroom. Her current minister is, according to Renee, a masterful storyteller and uses the craft from the pulpit on a regular basis.

Her statement made me think of my own church experiences. How right she was in her assessment of storytelling in that venue! I still remember stories shared by preachers and teachers from the time I was a youngster.

Unlike Vanessa and Celeste, Renee was not quick to mention any members of her family who may have contributed to her love of story. Even though she mentioned her mother reading to her, I wondered if there had been others. "I can't think of anyone in my family who was really influential in my use of storytelling," she told me in answering my query. "The only person whom I could attach any storytelling to would be my grand-mama. I go to her house and just beg her to tell me stories even now. She probably is the only one in the family whom I remember telling any stories as I grew up. At present, my husband is probably someone who is an influence. He is a master communicator and tells stories all the time."

"I was a tremendous liar": Renee's Growth Into Storytelling

The use of story in Renee's classroom evolved over time and stemmed from a variety of influential sources, but she discovered storytelling early in her life and incorporated various elements of those influential sources to shape her own story method.

"I was a storyteller as a little child. I was notorious for telling stories to the neighborhood children and telling them that it was true when in fact they were all lies…if you want to call them lies." She paused and thought about it for a moment, "Let's call them fictional stories," she said with a mischievous grin. "But, oh…golly, yes to this day people remind me that I was a tremendous liar …I mean, storyteller! I would really create elaborate stories and tell them it was really the truth, but I don't know where it came from. I guess I'd have to attribute much of it to my TV watching!" Renee laughed as she thought about those storytelling experiences as a child. As I observed her use of storytelling with her classes, I came to believe her laughter might also come from the fact that she is enjoying storytelling as much now, as an adult, as she did when she was a child. As Sawyer (1942) states, "left unhampered, a child begins very young to put into everyday life a series of masterpieces of creative thinking and doing" (p. 116). As adults it seems as though we lose some of our inherent ability to be creative simply because we allow external forces to negatively influence our need to create. It is difficult to accept such a simple theory of development when we are confronted by the ever-present complexity of our world and its people (Egan, 2005; Sawyer, 1942).

As an adult, Renee now creates rich opportunities for her students to share genuine dialogue through storytelling. She invites her students to read, receive, perform, and write narratives from oral and written traditions. Much of what she models for her

students comes from personal experiences and familial occurrences. Through those personal experiences, she encourages her students to think and ask questions about their own lives and surroundings. Renee is sharing who she is and how events have shaped her life.

In a conversation with her a week or so earlier I asked her to tell me something about herself that might help me define her persona . . . who she really is. “Let me just say this one thing,” Renee said to me in a soft, sweet voice, “If there is anything I enjoy doing, it’s going to the beauty shop. I would rather spend my money at the beauty parlor than anything I can think of! If I could go to the beauty parlor at least one day a week, I wouldn’t want a maid and I wouldn’t want a yard man. I just love to get my hair fixed!” We laughed about her addiction to go to the beauty parlor. I was reminded of just how central the beauty shop has been to women who live in the rural South. “I don’t know,” Renee continued, “I think about my Aunt Betty and Aunt Evelyn, my father’s twin sisters. I look at those two, short, sweet, Southern belles! They’re just such sweet ladies. And I think, that’s me . . .that’s me!” Renee laughed again as she thought about her comparison of herself with her Aunts.

“Do you consider yourself to be a Southern belle?” I asked her.

“Well, let me just say this. My students have actually asked me what country I was from” she said with elegantly dry wit. “Then another student spoke up and told them that I wasn’t from *out* of the country, that I was *from* the country!” she howled with laughter. She is very much aware of her accent and realizes that it sometimes affords her the opportunity to collect some stories to share with others.

"We have quite a few Hispanic students here at our school" she said as she emerged from the hearty laughter she had just experienced. "When I am teaching classroom drama and I will have a very young group in there. Sometimes they have a hard time reading their lines from a script. Well, when I heard a little Hispanic boy repeat back to me the word, 'fĭy-yăt' for the word f-a-t! I thought, Lord, I'm gonna get fired!"

We both laughed together. The brief story Renee had shared with me was a nice example of how personal story is created by layers of observable or memorable events that can be compiled into a mental journal or a "story store" (Rosen, 1988, p. 8). That mental journal becomes a sort of library from which one extracts stories to tell. Renee has volumes of personal stories in the stacks of her journal library, some of them having to do with personal characteristics such as her Southern drawl. Her accent is quite thick and I can see how it could create some interesting episodes in her daily life that would enrich her storytelling repertoire!

Historically, the ancients told stories about phenomena that were not fully understood. Many stories tried to explain such things as the mysterious wind or the power of the moon. Stories were, many times, aimed at attempting to solve the riddle of human destiny (Feldman, 1965; Gillard, 1996; Ross, 1996; Sawyer, 1942). The stories human beings tell and retell about important happenings in our lives serve the same purpose today. Gillard (1996) writes: "We tell stories to return to an experience that marked us in some way, to search for a moment's meaning, or to repeat its meaning to ourselves or others" (p. 88). At times, those experiences are simple exchanges with our students or with peers. They are experiences that may not have a significant meaning at the time they occur, but they may offer us some insight into new layers of meaning as we evolve and

gain more knowledge about the world around us. Renee is able to reflect upon her characteristics and enjoy the uniqueness of her communicative qualities as well as the events and people who have helped to shape her personality and conduct.

"Children are hungry for story": Storytelling in Renee's Classroom

Renee uses a variety of literacy strategies in her classroom along with storytelling. Her occasional reading of Silverstein and other poets exposes her students to enjoyable poetry experiences. She sometimes shares picture books in read-aloud sessions with her students. Storytelling, however, is the approach that she uses most frequently in her teaching routine. "I think children are hungry for a story, and I *will* say that reading a story is also very important and the children certainly respond to that," she explained to me one afternoon after we came back from lunch in the cafeteria. "But maybe it's because if I'm reading a story, I'm looking at the words and I'm not looking at the children. But when I'm telling a story, I'm making eye contact with each and every child in that room and that just creates a wonderful bond between me and my students. Therefore, I think there is an even greater connection between the listener and the teller of the story when you're telling a story as opposed to reading a story."

Much of Renee's use of story early in her teaching practice evolved as a result of her personal thoughts on how people learn. For her, story is a mnemonic for learning content. "I started using story in my teaching from the very start of my career," Renee said. "I started off only teaching Health, and I found that, as I was teaching about safety, for example, I needed to do something to help the kids really understand the importance of what I was telling them." She straightened her blouse and dabbed the corner of her mouth with her pinkie finger as she continued. "You know, you can put a list up on the

board and you can go over that list and the children will get up and leave your class and they won't remember one thing that was on that list, but you tell them a story about a little boy who went to school one day and saw a little round object sitting on the table, and he picked it up and because…," she stopped in mid-sentence to explain how the story came about, "I was telling them a story about my boy Kyle who is a baseball player, and he's always eating sunflower seeds. He holds them in his hands like this," she said as she demonstrated his technique, "and he'll pop them in his mouth, and shake them up and pop them in his mouth." Renee continued the story, "Well he was at school one day at Farrell Elementary and he picked up this little silver battery. You know, one of those little round batteries. He had it in his hand like this," again demonstrating to me, "and with just knee jerk reaction popped it in his mouth, and down it went!" Her back straightened and her head tilted to the side as if to say "Can you believe that!" Renee folded her arms on the table and continued telling the story. "And so he wasn't going to tell his mom and dad, so when my husband, David, picked Kyle up at the end of the day, Kyle's best friend Mike came over to David's car and in front of my husband said to Kyle, 'Kyle, are you going to tell your dad what you did today?' So Kyle got in the car. They were quiet for a minute. Then David said, 'OK son let's hear it.' So Kyle confessed. 'Dad I swallowed a battery…it was a mistake…I didn't mean to…it was an accident.' Well David took Kyle straight to the doctor. The doctor sent him straight to have X-rays at the hospital. Well the little battery was stuck right here," pointing to the upper part of her stomach. Renee continued her story, pulling from her memory every detail of the event she could remember. The hospital had us take Kyle to Children's Memorial, I think that was the name of it, and they X-rayed Kyle's tummy again." Once again Renee halted

her story long enough to interject background information. “They sent us to Atlanta because the doctor here said we don’t have the right paraphernalia that it takes to go down and pull a battery out of a child’s tummy.” With that understood, she continued. “There the little battery was, still in the same spot. Then the doctor said, ‘I tell you what. We’re going to give Kyle about twelve more hours. Let’s see if that battery doesn’t just work its way on out.’ So, we brought Kyle back home, and it was late at night and…oh well, there was a happy ending the next morning!” Renee said with a big smile. I didn’t ask any questions. “Kyle didn’t have to go back and have it surgically removed or whatever…because it went right through him! Anyway, now I tell that story because you can help kids understand that there are certain things they should not do. I say, ‘now children if you ever swallow a foreign object, be sure to tell your parents!’ If you tell them a story and you explain that if a battery sits in your stomach too long that battery acid could leak, and eat a hole through your stomach lining and that is a serious …serious health problem…or health risk. I just find myself telling a story to teach a lesson about safety! I use stories as examples, and I use stories because they conjure up emotion and drama and the children respond to that.” Renee orchestrates her use of story, dramatic presentation, and prose in order to make an internal connection with the students’ prior knowledge. She perceives teaching as being outside the head while learning is taking place outside the head. Her objective is, therefore, to craft her lesson presentation and activity in such a way that she is able to help her students listen to, visualize or imagine, and analyze the information she is offering so that they can subsequently make sense of the lesson.

Renee's explanation mirrors Frank Smith's (1998) comparison between what he terms the official theory of learning with the classic view. The official theory is responsible for compelling people to learn by rote memorization or in other way which guaranteeing rapid dismissal from the memory. It is a theory that promotes the idea that learning is "occasional, hard work, limited, based on effort, and assured by testing. It is making learning a trial when it should be a pleasure and making forgetting inevitable when it should be insignificant" (pp. 4-5). In that comparison he posits that the official theory relies upon a rigid system which has become so pervasive in the American educational system that we find it difficult to envision an alternative to it. It has become a part of us "because it permeates the broad educational culture in which we have grown up" (p. 5). The classic view or theory is a belief that learning should be effortless, vicarious, a social activity which is inconspicuous, boundless, and an integral part of individual growth. Renee uses the classic view to inform her teaching. Through her life stories, she is able to impress upon the minds of her students conceptual learning that attaches to the students' life experience or possible experience to produce a form of understanding and learning. Smith (1998) states,

> We all recognize implicitly the influence that other people have on ourselves and on our children, and the fact that it is almost impossible to forget what is learned in this way. We act on this belief throughout our lives, especially as far as our children are concerned. We know the likelihood of their becoming like the people with whom they associate and identify most (p. 3).

Renee's use of personal story in the classroom allows her students, especially in Health class, an opportunity to hear real-life stories that teach real-world lessons they can benefit from throughout their lives. Even though they may never meet Renee's son, they are apt to remember his dilemma and their awareness of his experience may serve as a

caution for them in a similar situation. The story provides an indirect association to a person or an event.

"It was a natural thing for me to use storytelling when teaching my different units in Health," Renee told me as she reflected on her teaching methods, "all because I had the freedom—thank the Lord! I just had the freedom to sort of create my own unit in Health and teach it the way I wanted to. So I was able to bring my personality and my style of teaching in to that arena and I just had the freedom to use stories and, to me, that was more fun! I felt that the children held on to these stories, forever and ever." Renee feels that her use of stories, especially personal stories, has a lasting impact on her students and helps them to remember the core values of the lesson in which the stories are used. Former students mention specific stories to her when she crosses paths with them in later years. Storytelling provides the human connection that is described as sharing mind, heart and spirit (Sawyer, 1942).

It is Renee's belief that this classic view of learning through the use of storytelling is a powerful way to teach students. Its affective charm and muscle creates connections with students' experiences that are less likely to be broken and forgotten over time. Paivio (1971) proposes that, in learning vocabulary for example, the ability to create images of the words one hears affects the ease with which they words can be learned and remembered. His dual-code theory postulates two separate but interconnected memory systems, one verbal and the other visual. Both systems work together to process information and aid in retaining the information. Celeste, Vanessa, and Renee use storytelling in trying to achieve retention. Through story, they help their student visualize events – perhaps even concepts and vocabulary – which become a part of the students'

background knowledge through imagery and their imaginations (Egan, 2005; Greene, 1995).

Renee values and employs storytelling as a means to focus attention on the lesson and to ease the difficulty of transitioning from one topic to another. “How many of you have ever been worried about something or been afraid of something?” she asked a group of second graders one day. They had entered the room and were busy chatting with each other to the point that the noise level was somewhat higher than it normally was in Renee’s classroom. Her question caught the attention of most of the students. “When I was walking to my room this morning, I saw something that scared me silly!” Suddenly, everyone was paying attention. There were no conversations taking place and very little rustling of feet and movement of chairs. “Guess what I saw!” Renee challenged the group. There were a few guesses, but none of them guessed correctly. In a whisper, Renee revealed the sight that frightened her that morning. “Just outside this building, stretched out over the walkway just before you come in the door, there was this great big spider!” Some of the kids gasped, others thought it was funny that she was afraid of a spider. A few hands went up, expressing a desire to share their own stories of such fears or of seeing such sights. “Well, I usually don’t get scared by things like that, but I was walking along and all of a sudden there was this huge spider web,” she spread her arms wide to demonstrate how big the web seemed to her at that moment, “and I thought I was going to run right into it!” Renee continued the discussion by asking the students questions about spiders. “How do spiders weave those beautiful webs we see?” she asked. There was a flurry of answers and discussion. “What do you think spiders eat?” she queried. They talked briefly about the event and then she segued into the story of a

witch-like character that lived in the forest that Renee had chosen as the story to be used in today's lesson on performance techniques and classroom presentation. The transition from real-life story to fictional story was practically seamless. Her brief story about her trip into the building served as an impromptu focal tool to bring the noise level and movement level down in the classroom. Renee did not have to address the behavior in a negative manner; she simply redirected the children's behavior and activity by means of a short, personal story or observation that became the focus of the students' attention.

"Well I'll say one thing," Renee told me when I asked her about any difficulties that might arise in teaching the specials classes, "During my day, I will see probably 150 children each and every day. So there is a lot of transition within my classroom. By the end of the day, seven classes have come into and have left my room. It's easy to lose students' attention during such transitions. If I tell the children I have a story I'd like to share with you, I immediately have them in the palm of my hand!" she said as she tapped a finger on her outstretched palm. "I think it's just the greatest tool that I have to maintain order, and to have their undivided attention. There's just nothing like a story that you tell. It's even a better strategy, I believe, than even reading a story. If you're telling a story, that is the time I have complete and total . . . one hundred percent focus on the subject at hand." During my visits in the classrooms of my three study participants, I always noted that story generated a sense of excitement and anticipation, yet it also commanded a quiet respect. Students knew they were in for a treat when a story was going to be told and they knew they didn't want to miss anything, so they quieted themselves in preparation to listen.

Good and Brophy (2003) tell how teachers manage the difficult transitional periods in their classrooms by exhibiting a certain "withitness" (p. 112). They are aware of the happenings in the classroom and react to those happenings in order to avoid inappropriate behavior. Renee successfully uses story as a settling agent or focusing activity when her students are beginning to lose focus. Story not only focuses students' attention and keeps them on task, but it also assists the teacher in building a positive affective environment in the classroom. Maintaining a positive affective tone in the classroom is conducive to learning (Mandler, 1978; Santostefano, 1986).

"Making learning enjoyable": Renee as Storyteller

Renee's use of story in the classroom functions as a strategy to achieve a variety of teaching objectives. From a cognitive perspective, she, like Celeste and Vanessa, has found storytelling to be a helpful tool for teaching such things as subject area content, moral issues, health and safety lessons, to prepare students to communicate effectively, to stimulate creativity, to demonstrate the value of reflective practice, and as a classroom management tool. She also acknowledges the affective value of storytelling as a means of, as she puts it, "making learning enjoyable" through the interactive sharing of animated stories which lead to the development of personal relationships and emotional connections between teacher and student as well as between students. Stories have a profound affective impact as the listener connects to the teller to experience joy, pain, frustration, and other emotions. Through this process, the listener is able to formulate ideas as to the characters' motivations, linking the listener to the character in a powerful way (Haroutunian-Gordon, 1995).

Storytelling is a valuable cognitive tool for teaching content material and processing strategies whether it is used in a Literary Arts or Health class. Renee has found that the use of story provides a method for strategy instruction. Some of Renee's story morals or motivations are designed to encourage students to prepare themselves as communicators. Her story about her sister's stage fright served as a prompt to students that they will probably be called upon to speak in public or to present information to a group at some point in their lives. Students in Renee's classes are able to hone their skills at public speaking and basic communication through listening to and retelling stories and participating in dramatic role-plays. Students are encouraged, through listening to teacher stories, to use their skills at creating pieces of writing and orations for sharing with fellow classmates.

Renee finds value in story as an organizer of content and procedural information. Organizing and delivering information in the form of a story provides students with a structure for recall of information. Discussion which followed the scripted story of the housewife's attempt to get the television repaired indicated that students remembered character intent and motivation, character mood, and methods the characters used to express their emotions and feelings. Those playing the roles of the characters in the story also benefit from the scaffolding method Renee uses to strengthen their abilities as the storytellers or actors in the skit. Renee models her lesson stories for the students, allows character actors to repeat the character's lines and mimic her vocal expression, and then the students perform the stories from memory. Not only do they strive to remember the content or plot of the story, they also must remember how to perform the story; vocal register, tone, and mood of the character must be evident and correlate to the story

content for the story to be enjoyable and believable for the listener. Stories are sequential by nature and sequencing is one way for students to organize abstract concepts and ideas into a logical form which can be more easily stored in memory and recalled when needed.

In Health class, Renee tells stories that are, as Bruner (2002) states, "narrative models of reality" that help to shape her students' views on their everyday experiences specifically related to personal safety and health issues (p. 7). Through the process of comparing and contrasting the scenarios presented in biographical and autobiographical stories, students are given examples of how the decisions and actions of others have impacted lives. By sharing stories like the one about her son swallowing the battery, her students are introduced to ideas about choices and decision making, as well as practical health and safety instruction.

Renee is acutely aware of the need to re-focus student attention during instruction. Transitions, interruptions, and other distractions hinder student participation during a lesson and require the use of some strategy that will allow the teacher to re-gain control. Storytelling is one method that these three teachers use to provide a focal point for their students as a means to overcome the negative affects of interruptions to instructional time.

Renee uses storytelling in modeling her own self-reflection process while allowing the students to interact with that process by sharing their own experiences. Human beings make decisions based, in some cases, upon the decisions made by others. Jackson (2001) states that two of the greatest motivational factors in learning are self-confidence in one's abilities and one's sense of self-worth. These motivators give meaning to the student's identity and boosts motivation. She goes on to say that "self-

discovery is a process of reflection that is built into instruction as a learning ritual, connecting to students on both an affective level and a cognitive one" (p. 225). Students who see the sharing of personal stories as a way for one to reflect upon happenings in life are provided a method to conduct their own self-reflection.

Storytelling blends the cognitive with the affective to produce a functional atmosphere for learning in Renee's classroom. Stories provide students an opportunity to make personal connections to the ideas or concepts being taught. Personal experiences through the stories that are shared by Renee in the classroom act as catalysts for student reflection. These internal dramas are made external through the act of storytelling, therefore aiding the listener to identify with the human plights of the tellers (Bruner, 1986). By reflecting on their personal experiences, the students compare and contrast their experiences with those of others, use critical thinking skills to evaluate actions and outcomes, and prepare themselves to become better problem-solvers.

Classroom climate, both the external elements of student comfort and security and the internal elements of personal attitude and perception, has a direct effect upon learning (Marzano, 1992). Students need to feel safe and secure in the learning environment, but they also need to have a sense of acceptance, comfort, and order. Renee is acutely aware of the need for learning to be significant and enjoyable. Mills, Dunham, and Alpert (1988) propose that the affective state of the student significantly affects the behavior and cognition of the student. Renee's awareness of this element of teaching and learning leads her to look for ways to make the learning experience pleasurable and enlightening.

Another affective element of Renee's classroom teaching is her use of humor. She strives to foster a positive atmosphere by incorporating levity into the classroom routine.

Teachers using humor as part of instructional practice are taking advantage of a basic principle of human behavior that enhances student learning (Mills, 1987; Marzano, 1992). Her jovial expression and use of vocabulary help to lessen levels of stress in the classroom and make coming to class something that is looked forward to by the children. Cottrell (1987) suggests that "if the story is to come alive for the listeners, it must first come alive for the storyteller" (p. 50). Renee's use of gestures, a versatile voice, and an expressive face help to make her stories entertaining as well as educational and enlightening.

By building upon students' prior knowledge and making connections with that knowledge through personal stories, Renee offers her students an opportunity to experience events in her life or in the lives of people she has known. Making those connections plays a role in transferring storied concepts into one's long-term memory. Salzberger-Wittenberg *et al* (1983) outline several expectations held about teachers, among them the teacher is seen as a provider and comforter as well as an object of admiration and envy. By approaching the students from a personal perspective with interesting and enlightening stories about personal experiences, Renee, Celeste, and Vanessa are helping to fulfill those expectations and make the students' school experience more enjoyable. Their challenge is to maintain that enjoyable affective environment while balancing it with the ability to extend and refine students' learning by challenging their beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge (Tennant, 1997).

Tensions do arise when one considers the use of storytelling in the classroom. Renee believes that you *can* use story to excess. She considers storytelling to be essential in creating an enjoyable learning environment. Employing storytelling in moderation is

key to its success. Renee is careful to stress that it is only one of many strategies she uses during the course of a day. Too much story, according to Renee, could "diminish the effectiveness of the approach" and make the students' response less positive.

Summary

Renee's use of storytelling in the classroom is a versatile mix of methods and techniques that are called upon according to the particular needs of the lesson. She has developed her methods over time and by drawing upon her memories and experiences rooted in such things as television, theatre, her school experiences, family experiences, and an experiential knowledge of how learning occurs. Her teaching style is indicative of her perception of having "freedom to teach" in a way that is pleasing to her, but she also adheres to the prescribed requirements of the school system's curriculum.

Storytelling with young children can be much different than storied events used with older children and Renee is apparently aware of such differences. Younger children will, many times, want to play the part of the characters in the story (McDonald, 1993). Renee has found this to be the case in her use of story and has incorporated methods allowing her students to participate in the storytelling events.

Renee's classroom is a place where language is rich and expressive. Her classroom is a place where imagination and creativity is encouraged. She provides guidance and support to her students while allowing them to experience and experiment with their own involvement in story. Students are given the opportunity to discuss the stories they hear and tell and to perform, at their own level of ability and understanding, some analysis and interpretation of the story content which is apt to lead to a deeper understanding of the lesson topics.

CHAPTER 5

CROSS-ANALYSIS OF TEACHERS' STORYTELLING

Through the use of storytelling in their classrooms, the three teachers in this study work to expand the literacy skills of the students in an entertaining and enlightening manner. The teachers' roles involve helping students discover prior knowledge through storytelling as a meaning-making process. Their methods include aspects of their instructional beliefs and methods such as the motivation to engage students as well as their personal sociocultural values and beliefs which, according to Ruddell & Unrau (1994), are crucial components of a socio-cognitive interactive approach to reading and understanding text. To better understand the methods and processes these three teachers employ, the research questions that guided this study will be examined in order to summarize, draw conclusions, and make recommendations for the use of storytelling as a literacy strategy.

What constitutes storytelling in these classrooms?

Celeste, Vanessa, and Renee use storytelling as an informal, non-performance based approach to sharing information. The term "storytelling" is many times defined by the performance techniques used by the teller. These teachers do tell stories that are traditionally structured (i.e. their stories have some element of exposition, a plot or storyline, and a conclusion), but their stories are usually presented as an informal event rather than a formal performance. These teachers do not rely upon storytelling as a theatrical event using a stage or performance setting. They generate stories in the

classroom and as they attend to everyday teaching tasks. Vanessa and Celeste thought of stories to tell as they walked through their classrooms during the course of discussing a lesson. Their use of impromptu stories is an example of their creative use of events and experiences in story form that might help to extend and refine student knowledge of the lesson. Examination of these teachers' lesson plans would not always produce evidence of their intent to use story as part of a lesson because storytelling does not have to be a planned event. These teachers do not view the students as an audience in the formal sense, but as interactive participants in the story. They expect the listening group of students to generate questions and offer to tell of their own experiences when given time.

There are a number of story types that constitute storytelling in the classrooms of these teachers. Each of the teachers in this study believes that it is necessary for her to assist her students in relating new information and knowledge to prior knowledge, and use a variety of story types including personal experience or autobiographical, biographical, moral and ethical, and fictional stories. The following table provides an overview and explanation of some story types used by the teacher in this study.

Table 2

Examples of teachers' story types and topics

Story Type	Story Topics
Autobiographical	Personal experiences from childhood; personal experiences as adult; family experiences; school experiences; workplace stories
Biographical	Stories about: family members; schoolmates; husbands; children; neighbors; famous persons; local personalities; teachers (from their own educational careers); teachers (current peers);
Moral/Ethical	Honesty; work ethic; sharing; friendship; family values; academic achievement; patriotism; determination; stealing; racism; hurt feelings
Fictional	Work ethic; entertainment; humor; friendship; morals and values;

Personal experience stories or autobiographical stories offer these teacher-storytellers the opportunity to place themselves within the context of the lesson. Through their personal experiences, these respondents learn how certain problems are solved and how learning took place for them. For example, Vanessa exposed personal thoughts and feelings when she was caught by her mother stealing clay, and used that embarrassing incident to address the stealing occurring in her school. In her story about her son's accident, Renee helps her students make informed decisions about their own personal safety. Through such personal experiences, students are better able to understand multiple levels within the teller's circumstance, the mental/emotional state of the teller during the event being told, extenuating circumstances from external forces around the teller at that time, and something about the expectations and norms of the societal structure in which the teller inhabited. Renee's story of her sister's stage fright contextualizes and personalizes fears of public speaking. She hopes that such information may help to eliminate or lesson her students' fears as they begin to participate in presentations and speaking events in their school careers. Teacher-storytellers use of autobiographical stories offer the students an opportunity to learn by proxy (Sawyer, 1942). The listener benefits from the information gleaned in the process or experience without having to go through the experience. Bruner (2002) argues that there is not an obvious and essential self that is within one, just sitting there to be displayed in words. We are, instead, continually constructing ourselves while we move through our lives, running into obstacles, and meeting the needs of situations we encounter. All the while, we are drawing from our memories of our past and contemplating our hopes and fears for the future. We alone have the ability to breathe the breath of life into our own stories because

we are able to re-create the stories feeling by feeling, picture by picture, not word by word (Sawyer, 1942). These teacher-storytellers are not only constructing themselves as Bruner (2002) suggests, they are examining their own lives and re-playing those lived experiences for the benefit of their students.

Biographical stories differ slightly from autobiographical in that the storied events being told are also being interpreted by the teller. Celeste's stories of Alexander the Great and Hannibal demonstrate her extensive knowledge of these figures, but told in story, rather than expository, form. Vanessa reinterprets concepts, such as racism, underpinning the Civil Rights movement as they impacted her friends and family members' lives. Historically-located biographical stories offer students a different, more personal, insight into world-changing events. Bruner (2002) states that humans construct their own life stories in reference to the lives and actions of others. Even the best autobiographies are filled with the biographical details of other people.

In the classrooms of these teacher-storytellers, moral and ethical stories give rise to discussion and contemplation concerning decision-making. Celeste's reinterpretation of the tragic air crash into the Andes Mountains illustrates for her students the range of thoughts of and decisions made by humans in survival situations, and their intense commitment to live. Vanessa's decision to steal forced a moral dilemma--to tell or not to tell. Stories that have moral implications enable students to better understand how their decisions are followed by ramifications. Kohlberg (1969) proposes that there are stages along the continuum of life regarding one's moral reasoning. Building on Piaget's (1964) developmental theory, Kohlberg stages are maps that can inform the need for storytelling as a way to instill social values and norms in a variety of ways according to the

developmental level of the individual or group. The respondents in this study choose stories that are appropriate for their audiences and for the desired learning experience they are seeking to provide them.

Renee's use of fictional stories like Little Red Hen, introduces moral and ethical ideas to her students. Egan (2005) argues that the value of the story to teaching, regardless of story type, is engagement with the emotions and the imaginations of the students. Renee uses fictional stories more than do the other participants. She explained to me that, because she teaches younger children, she feels the need to use materials that were somewhat familiar to her students. Nursery rhymes, picture book stories, and other fictional genres enable Renee's students to interact with Renee as narrator and become characters in a story. Fictional stories offer latitude to the teacher-storyteller and can be manipulated to fit the needs of the students, lesson, and teller's performance ability. For example, storytelling often extends into story-writing. Students these teacher-storytellers write stories and become storytellers as they share them.

Each story type possesses elements that may be shared with other story types in both the cognitive and affective realm. The teachers in this study used the variety of story types as comfortable (affective) ways to provide a risk-free (affective) environment in which to learn knowledge and skills (cognitive) necessary for students to be academically and socially successful. Some of the story types possess elements that are not so readily shared with the other types as employed by the teachers in this study. The following table provides an overview of some of the story types used by these teachers and some examples of their instructional uses of story to promote meaning-making in their classrooms.

Theoretical Connections

From the socio-cognitive interactive model perspective, the use of a variety of story types allows both the reader component and the teacher component entrée into the meaning-negotiation process through a number of avenues. Cognitive strategies surrounding the acquisition of declarative and procedural knowledge, use of language skills and text processing strategies, and metacognitive strategies combine with affective conditions, such as motivation to learn and sociocultural values and beliefs, to make meaning. Outcomes of meaning-making for the students include interpretation of the story text and discussion, motivational changes, changes in attitude and beliefs, along with productive elements such as written and oral response (Ruddell & Unrau, 1994).

Storytelling for the teachers in this study is a complex mixture of strategies and techniques aimed at generating connections to prior knowledge and expanding that knowledge to include, interpret, and assimilate new knowledge. The storytelling events in the classrooms of these teachers reach beyond the traditional paradigm of storyteller/performer and settle into the comfortable, affective niches of everyday conversation and information sharing. All three teacher-storytellers in this study use storytelling as a way to share information through a variety of story types.

How Is Storytelling Used By These Three Teachers?

Storytelling for all three teachers is used both as a cognitive and affective tool to develop cognitive strategies and as a scaffold for learning. Each teacher-storyteller uses story as a way to introduce, extend, and refine content concepts and ideas. Some of the teachers in this study refer to this introductory device as a “hook” for engaging the students and commanding their attention right from the beginning of the lesson. By

producing a sense of curiosity, wonder, and interest in why things are the way they are or in how things work, these teacher-storytellers provide story hooks which offer a source of attraction for the students and stimulate their interest in the lesson topic (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

Table 3

Examples of teachers' cognitive and affective purposes

RESPONDENTS' USE OF COGNITIVE INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES			
	Celeste	Vanessa	Renee
Lesson hook	●	●	●
Mnemonics		●	●
Conceptual example	●	●	
Declarative information	●	●	●
Procedural information	●	●	●
Historical information	●	●	
Personal success or failure	●	●	
Mediate actions or reactions		●	●
Critical thinking	●	●	●
Teaching story structure		●	●
Genre study of story types			●
RESPONDENTS' USE OF AFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES			
	Celeste	Vanessa	Renee
Inspiration		●	
Share humanity of teacher	●	●	
Build life to life experience base	●	●	●
Share family experience		●	●
Share school experience	●	●	
Share work experience		●	
Personal success or failure	●	●	●
Promote engagement	●	●	●
Entertain			●

Story serves as a mnemonic device to aid in student retention of information. Mnemonics help us form structures to aid our long-term memory of information and processes. Smith (1998) states that "much of what we learn in our lives has probably been through mnemonics or through associations with things we already know or that we can make into a picture that we can remember" (p.38). In reading, the surface structure of a text "provides potential processing instructions for constructing the intended connections among concepts" (Goldman & Rakestraw, 2000, p. 313). Stories shared by these teachers could affect the critical thinking and decision making processes of their listeners. Their stories are at times meant as a guide or example (as Vanessa calls them) of the teachers' own circumstances demonstrating the decision-making process.

These three teachers used storytelling as a tool for extending and refining student knowledge and understanding. Stories sometimes occurred at mid-lesson in order to clarify, explain, and attach some mental representation to the concept or ideas being taught. Students were able to draw from prior knowledge and experience as the teachers' stories provided a springboard for making connections and creating active discussions.

Using storytelling, these teachers created a great deal of visual imagery. Visual imagery in reading and in storytelling involves the use of guided imagery that helps students get into the text (Harp, 1988). Students draw upon their own background knowledge and experiences as they participate in guided imagery and by using such a strategy in preparation for reading, the students are more likely to interact directly with the text.

The respondents also use this literacy tool as a management device. Storytelling helps them to redirect student inattentiveness and to regain focus on the lesson. Teachers

experience periods of transition, interruptions, and other events that disengage student attention from the lesson. Storytelling is not the only management method these teachers use and it does not always render the desired results, but it is one strategy with which they experience some success.

These teachers use storytelling as a means of strategy instruction. Students are more able to understand a process if they are presented with information to help them create textual representation—a mental picture—of the process. Story provides sequencing and structure. Smith (1998) argues that all learners need structure, especially structure in their own minds. One cannot learn something unless it makes sense to them. "Nonsense is the opposite of structure, the equivalent of chaos, because it is by definition unpredictable" (p. 78). The story tucked away into the memory becomes a model the student may be able to follow in their own problem-solving situations. Explicit teaching of content is a primary objective in these story-teachers' use of story.

Storytelling served as a strategy for modeling communicative skills. The participants in this study recognized the need for students to prepare themselves as communicators and offered opportunities for students to present or perform in the classroom. Celeste's and Vanessa's students were assigned tasks that required them to create written or oral products to be shared with others. Renee encouraged her students to perform stories through drama. The teachers also modeled good communication and presentation skills for their students using storytelling.

Theoretical connections

According to Ruddell and Unrau (1994), teachers' knowledge use and control from the socio-cognitive interactive perspective "includes the instructional decision-

making process" (p. 1000). Teachers in this study based their instructional decisions upon such things as their prior beliefs and knowledge in both the cognitive and affective realm. They concerned themselves with the importance of sharing declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge. They were also concerned with student motivation and engagement. The instructional decisions they made to achieve their objectives were based upon their own knowledge of content, teaching strategies, metacognitive strategies and personal and world knowledge. Storytelling was one way these teachers chose to create elements of instructional representation for use in the meaning-negotiation process.

The teachers in this study use storytelling as an affective tool in their teaching practices. Learning is enhanced for students when the learning environment is made comfortable and inviting and when students are engaged through the use of a real-life approach to learning (Marzano, 2001). Affectively, storytelling motivates children to learn, to read, to explore texts, and to appreciate the sociocultural values and beliefs of others when they are exposed to information in an environment conducive to learning. Egan (1986) writes; "clearly, stories are concerned with affective responses. A good storyteller plays our emotions as a good violinist plays a violin" (p. 29). Students in the classrooms of the teachers in this study are exposed to storytelling and other arts-based strategies in order to reach the affective conditions that the students bring to the meaning-making arena.

Humor was used by these teachers as a mechanism for reducing stress and discomfort in the classroom and these teachers employed humor as a strategy to engage students in the joy of learning. Renee's scripted story skit about the television repairman is one example of how a funny story was used in her classroom. Her students felt

comfortable participating in the story because they were given a chance to create laughter in the room. Vanessa's story of throwing the spit-wad in class was meant to deliver a serious message, but the humor in the story helped to make it more memorable (Smith, 1998). Anecdotal stories emerging as illustrations or examples were told as a means to help students understand concepts and abstractions and to appeal to the affective part of learning.

These story-teachers used performance techniques that made stories interesting and entertaining. They employed facial expressions, movement, vocal sound effects, animal sounds, and character voices make their stories interesting and entertaining. While each teacher used stories as a way to approach academic content, their material had its own flavor. For each of these participants, times arose during lessons that allowed them to reach back into life experiences and make connections to assist the student in better understand the lesson by building upon their prior knowledge.

These teacher-storytellers developed empathy with their listeners to make an emotional connection through both fictional and non-fictional accounts. Empathy promotes the idea of membership and of being accepted as one of the group. Empathy helps humans make emotional connections to each other and to experience, by proxy at least, the pain, frustration, elation, and joy of another. It is important for students to establish their identities and become an active part of the learning community. Regarding literacy, Smith (1998) refers to "spoken language clubs" as a way to establish one as a member of the learning group. The advantage of such empathic groups or clubs is that, once you are a member, there is no coercion, great expectations, or competitiveness. One is accepted, supported, and able to gain security and confidence (p. 18). Csikszentmihalyi

(1990) argues that motivation to read is connected to experiencing the joy of reading. Students who experience that affective condition, whether it be in reading or simply about learning in general, will be more motivated and self-directed toward experiencing more in those areas.

Ruddell and Unrau (1994) argue that affective conditions directly influence the reader's decision to read, their attitudes concerning their direction of interest in reading, and the intensity of that interest (p. 1002). In order for a lesson to be effective, it has to be affective (Marzano, 1992). According to the socio-cognitive interactive model of reading, students create text representation through a filter of cognitive and affective conditions. Student attitudes toward reading and learning and the sociocultural values and beliefs are as important as their knowledge of classroom and social interaction or declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge. All of these elements emerge as factors in their approach to learning as they enter the meaning-negotiation process with the teacher and classroom community.

What Prior Influences Inform How They Use Story?

Even though I had considered looking at similarities in the backgrounds of these teachers as potential reasons why they used storytelling, my data suggested otherwise. In fact, I found that there were few commonalties within and across case-studies which I relate below. However, I found that their differences in experiences offered insight into and guided their use of storytelling in the class. The unique approach used by each teacher suggests that the deeper, underlying factors regarding familial and pre-professional experiences greatly shape their teaching practices. Even though storytelling can be learned, storytelling teachers must consider the influences in their lives that have

helped to make their approaches unique. The power of storytelling for the teacher is not necessarily in the product of creating a good story, but in the process of recognizing when, where, and how story has been influential in her or his own life and attempting to replicate that same sort of influence in the lives of others.

Celeste and Vanessa attributed family storytelling to their own interest in storytelling. Celeste was read to by her mother and grandmother and heard family and teacher-generated stories that furthered her literacy growth. Her parents and grandparents were educated people who talked about the value of education and created opportunities for Celeste to be intellectually stimulated by such engagements as trips to the library, access to plenty of reading materials, and conversation about the educational process and attending college. Vanessa was not strongly influenced by her family in terms of her own value placed on storytelling, but she was encouraged to read by her mother who took her to the library during the summertime. As a child, she also experienced storytelling by adults as a way to establish meaningful relationships. She sat along the periphery of adult circles and listened to the stories being shared. Those story structures and values became evident in her classroom as she shared stories with her students. Her stories were informal and almost gossip-like at times. They dealt, many times, with value-laden material and were crafted to assist her students in understanding life. She placed great importance upon building relationships with her students and, since Vanessa was from a family of lesser means, she did not have many of the resources or possessions that were available to the other participants. Her close family and extended family created an atmosphere of caring, morals, and values which surfaced in her storytelling.

Renee grew up in relative wealth. She and her sister were involved in activities—theatre and beauty pageants—many times associated with wealthier social groups. Renee articulated that television and movies were her primary influences in her love for storytelling. For Renee, there was some influence from the use of story in the church setting. She recalled how those stories were easily remembered for a time after being heard. Her stories reflected the value of the arts and education and they sometimes dealt with practical matters of health and safety because of the subject areas she teaches at her school.

Celeste's teachers and the guest speakers invited into the classrooms of at least one of those teachers provided a basis for Celeste's storytelling. Vanessa and Renee reported little influence by teachers upon their propensity to use story in their teaching.

Based upon this data, I found that teachers from various backgrounds can initiate storytelling in their classrooms. There are no set background experiences that will make one teacher a better storyteller than another. However, what they do share is their love of story and the learning that comes from it. Everyone has a story (or multiple stories) to tell. The style and technique used in one's storytelling will be unique to one's background knowledge and experience; it is that uniqueness that gives the craft of storytelling its strength and value in the areas of teaching and entertaining. The story-teachers in this study shared some of the same purposes and methods of using story and used similar types of stories. The overarching goal of these teachers to make learning engaging, interesting, entertaining, and enduring was accomplished by using storytelling to present information, bridge gaps, and to create connections for the students.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, AND FOR FUTURE STUDY

This study is a story about teachers telling their own stories. Teachers need to tell their stories. As these teachers shared their stories with me, they began to see themselves as meaningful contributors in education. They were eager to demonstrate their techniques and talk about the experiences that led them to their teaching methods. Our interviews and conversations turned inward as they reflected upon what they were doing and as we talked about how it worked for them. It was a process that helped to inform the teachers' practices by reflecting upon the cultural influences the teachers bring to the profession as they begin to realize the control they bring to the meaning-making negotiation process (Florio-Ruane, 2001). Through reflection, these teachers came to a realization that what they were doing was somewhat unique and that their efforts were worth being the focus of such a study. This chapter serves as a beginning rather than an ending point. In it, I will discuss the meaning that these teachers showed me for story in the classroom, the pedagogical characteristics of storytelling, implications for teaching, and implications for future research.

Why Storytelling?

This look into the use of storytelling in the classroom has offered me an opportunity to examine the uniqueness of the three teacher-storytellers as they crafted their lessons. They are unique because of their awareness and appreciation of how story

promotes engagement and understanding among students. They use stories crafted from the lives of others, historic events, and pieces of their own life experiences to help their students to make connections between their prior knowledge and new knowledge. Those events and life experiences may be no more spectacular than any of our own, but the sharing of those occurrences serves as a bridge to understanding. The commonality that connects those of us who are educators to these teachers is the fact that we all have life experiences upon which we base our assumptions and plan our actions.

Story is at the very core of our being and is a part of humanity from birth. It arises within and around our everyday movement as we interact with others. As in the cases of these three teachers, story comes from the mouths of grandmothers as they wash the breakfast dishes or while sitting in the porch swing on a cool summer evening. Story defines our lives and gives us a common framework with which to understand the lives of others. Bruner (2002) argues that stories provide models of the world and that the telling of a story issues an invitation for the listener to, not be as the story is, but to "see the world as embodied in the story" (p. 25). If one could envision stories as the threads of life that make their way through our shared existence, then storytellers are like weavers as they sit before the loom and pass the shuttle to and fro. They manipulate those storied experiences and shape them into a product that, like woven goods, may be soft and fuzzy or coarse and rough to the touch. Suddenly, the patterns of colors and shapes become comprehensible and one can begin to see what the weaver (or storyteller) sees.

The power of storytelling in the classroom lies in its ability to connect to the lives of students and teachers and to provide organizational structure necessary for content learning. As teachers teach and tell stories, they may connect their students to the subject

matter in a variety of ways. They can tell stories about how the study of mathematics developed and about key theorists and the risks they took in promoting and developing their theoretical contributions to the subject. Each subject area has the structure of a good story with characters, plot, tensions, and some form of resolution. Stories can connect students to historical figures by providing an in-depth look into the lives of kings, presidents, military leaders, and other figures who have helped to shape governments throughout the world. It is important for students to know the roles that historical figures played in shaping our world, but it is just as important that they understand the humanity of these people as well. As an inventor and a scientist, Thomas Edison had to struggle through countless failures before achieving success. The succinct nature of textbooks does not allow for much elaboration on such topics, but teachers can share information Edison's story as a way to open up discussion about the risks and struggles students face as they struggle for success. Abraham Lincoln may be considered a great president, but he suffered greatly in his personal life and he was not always an immediate success. The stories from the personal dimension of Lincoln's life aid students in realizing that the potential of Lincoln is much like, if not identical, to that of their own. Story is a great connector.

Stories assist the learner in organizing information, storing information in memory, and recalling the information at a later time. Teachers can use narrative texts to give factual information a sense of sequence and logic. We have all been expected to commit dates and significant events to memory for the purpose of "learning" history. The history of the war in Viet Nam, for example, can be taught with much more meaning and understanding if students are informed of, not only dates and significant events, but the

political and economic reasons behind the conflict, the personal struggles of the peoples in that region, and the sequence of events that led to the war. Students need to grasp the big picture in order to understand the smaller elements and story is a valuable tool in constructing meaning and understanding.

Pedagogical Dimensions of Storytelling

Story can no longer be understood as a frill or as a sidebar to humor students. Although story is often used to entertain, story can also be used to teach content. The medium through which education is transmitted is the communication device called language. By means of strategies such as storytelling, that linguistic communication is a conduit for sharing experiences until they become common possessions. Teaching and learning are essential threads of human existence and humans are constantly communicating experiences in that existence through story and gaining knowledge by comparing those experiences. This communicative process of shared experience modifies the nature of the participating parties and they make decisions based upon the knowledge they have acquired. Dewey (1916) contends that it is the nature of life to continue to survive and that survival is a process of constant renewal. “What nutrition and reproduction are to physiological life, education is to social life” (p. 9). Story is the life-blood of the communicative process which leads to knowledge acquisition and proceeds by extending and refining new knowledge. There were numerous pedagogical characteristics of storytelling that emerged during my hours of interviews and observations with the teacher-storytellers in this study.

One characteristic which emerged during this investigation into the practices of the three teachers revealed that storytelling is humanistic and based in constructivism.

Constructivist teachers encourage student inquiry by engaging students in thoughtful discussion, asking open-ended questions, and presenting information in a way that allows students to form their own understandings of events and phenomena.

Another characteristic that emerged was the use of story-structure as a connection to human thought process. The brain processes parts and wholes simultaneously. Putting semantic information into story form presents to the students the holistic idea along with supporting details. Students can move information into short-term memory rather easily; to remember a telephone number, just start rehearsing it. Information is located into long-term memory in a different way. One puts something into long-term memory by situating it into a structure that is already in one's mind (Smith, 1998). Story provides that structure or scaffold and story structures are important for learning because of the way humans think. Research in recent decades proposes that, if age-appropriate stories are used in instruction, stories can aid young children with recall of information.

The use of storytelling in teaching helps to create a bridge for empathy and understanding. Human beings have an instinctive desire to be connected to others, to the community, and to the world. The craft of teaching helps to make connections through three important dimensions; the intellectual, the emotional, and the spiritual (Palmer, 1998). Story in the classroom is an excellent method of presenting information, augmenting that information with evidence and supporting facts, and promoting discussions about the topic. We use stories every day to give emotional meaning to our lives and events that could be considered rather mundane. Stories help to shape those mundane events into emotionally meaningful models that help humans understand and relate to one another. Empathetic understanding comes from making a connection to

more than just factual, superficial information. Only when empathy is established can students begin to appreciate the fear of the civil rights protestor or the desperation of the plane crash survivor. One of the best ways to establish empathy is through storytelling. The spiritual or transformational dimension of teaching requires that teachers develop a strong sense of personal identity and integrity (Fink, 2003). The storytelling teachers in this study share personal stories from all three of the aforementioned dimensions of teaching in order to help students understand the “big picture” and retain information in long-term memory.

The use of story in the classrooms in this study played a valuable role in creating cross-cultural connections. As students listened to stories, they were able to envision foreign landscapes and the actions of people as they lived out historical events. Storytelling also created a portal for mentally traveling across time and space into events and experiences that might never be accessible to children living in the rural communities represented in this study. Story also offers opportunities for students and teachers to reveal their own cultural backgrounds, identities, personal perceptions, and feelings as they establish a community of learners in the classroom.

Storytelling is a human tool. The content of story memories depends on whether and how they are told to others, and these reconstituted memories form the basis of the individual's remembered self. These three teacher-storytellers remember their own delight in storytelling of the past and share these memories with their own students. The sharing of such experiences helps educators become more aware of themselves and to value past and present experiences. The sharing of story is more than just the sharing of experiences; it is a form of metacognitive processing that allows one to tell what an

experience was and to explain thoughts and feelings that occurred during the experience. Storytelling is a global form of communication that is practiced in most societies and students in the classrooms of the teachers in this study were familiar and comfortable with its use. As demonstrated in this study, each individual's stories reflected aspects of their own culture and values exposing varied perceptions and thought processes. The communication of stories allowed the teachers to reach out to others through both telling and listening.

The craft of storytelling appeals to humans through multiple senses. The storyteller weaves the tale primarily with the spoken word, but other elements are employed by many tellers. Students in the classrooms of these three teacher-storytellers were treated to a multi-sensory approach to learning. Story-teachers painted audible pictures and created visual references to the characters and events in story through rich description and detail. They enhanced storytelling by employing movement, sound effects, and gesturing which aided the students in making sense of the stories. The storytellers sometimes invited the audience to participate in the story by joining in with movement or repetition of sound. Story evokes mental images by enticing the listener with descriptive words. The use of props during a story can provide a tangible element acting as a physical connection to the story.

Storytelling is a cross-curricular strategy just as useful in the mathematics classroom as it is in the study of literature. Stories are available to us in every subject area ranging from the events surrounding the mathematical accomplishments of Pythagoras to stories about the secret development of nuclear weapons during World War II. Every content area, language arts, social studies, literary arts, health, and other subjects, is rich

with plot, information about characters, events that shaped the subject matter over time, and relationships to present-day life. The use of story in any subject area provides an imaginative approach to teaching and learning. Egan (2005) suggests that imaginative classrooms should be filled with mysteries embedded across the curriculum, pulling students into knowing and understanding beyond their current range of knowledge. Bruner (1986) tells us that many scientific and mathematical hypotheses start out as stories or metaphors and mature into verifiable reality. If so, those same stories and metaphors could be used as a springboard for moving students through the unraveling of complex concepts and into problem-solving. Most problem-solving skills are taught and learned implicitly (Sternberg, 2001). There may be no mention by the teacher that problem-solving strategies are being taught so these strategies are embedded in the content. The disadvantage to this method occurs when students are not able to recognize the strategy and transfer it to use in future situations. Story can be used to provide examples of how and when problem-solving skills can and should be employed.

Story is a way of understanding. Most teachers today are pressured to teach information that will be asked for on some form of standardized test. Such information is usually rehearsed through some process of drill and practice until students are able to "perform" well on the test. But is that understanding? Storytelling teachers believe that in order for students to truly understand information they must internalize it. When teachers tell stories, they produce a timeline of complex information to be shared with the listener. The timeline is full of details regarding the key characters in the story, extenuating circumstances, reasons the event happened, and details aimed at connecting the information in the story to the listener. The listeners make a connection to the story and

process the information by attaching meaning to the unfolding story plot and elements while constructing that meaning with the help of prior knowledge or experience. Some students may be able to make connections without much assistance. To them, the teacher is merely a guide (and sometimes even an obstacle) to learning. For other students, there is a sincere need for assistance in understanding content and finding a way to apply it to their lives. Story is not an option for storytelling teachers; it is required.

Implications for Practice

One significant finding in this study is that the teacher-participants did not see themselves as traditional storytellers nor did they realize that much of what they were doing in their practice could be considered storytelling. The definition or labeling of storytelling has been influenced by presentational forms of storytelling and these teachers found themselves re-defining what story is to them and how it might be delivered effectively and efficiently in their classrooms.

Even though the teachers did not describe themselves as storytellers, they began to realize that they were practicing the art more often and with more ease than they previously thought. Through the telling of their stories as teaching professionals during the course of hours of interviews and casual conversations conducted during this study, these three teachers discovered effective elements of teaching methodology that were embedded within their standard practices. Each teacher began to see how storytelling was playing a vital role in helping their students see and understand a broader view of concepts being addressed during their lessons. They learned to accept their storytelling method as a credible way to engage learners in the discovery of new knowledge and to,

even more deliberately and strategically, incorporate the use of storytelling in developing unit learning lessons.

All teachers use some form of storytelling in their practice. Story emerges as the impromptu example a teacher gives her students when she is trying to explain such mysteries as “why we need laws” or “how the Hawaiian islands were formed.” Sometimes story just happens. As the teachers in this study found, many unplanned storied explanations and examples occur during lessons. The teacher suddenly finds herself telling about a sequence of events that began due to a certain impetus, progressed through a series of events, and culminated as some resulting idea or product. Most of us have experienced it in our educational careers and we will probably continue to be influenced by it throughout our lives. Why should teachers use story in the classroom? There are a number of reasons that have emerged in the course of this study. Story engages learners, enlivens the subject matter, and invites us to look at subject areas from other perspectives. Storytelling promotes literacy by teaching good listening skills and promoting writing and student storytelling.

Story engages learners. The simple act of telling a story helps to exclude distractions from our consciousness. Children in the classrooms of storyteller teachers are observed to be focused on the teller and engaged in the story. Time becomes irrelevant because they are receiving information—even intellectual information—in a pleasant and enjoyable manner. We all experience this on occasion as we listen to an interesting speaker and we are even more aware of the lack of engagement when we find ourselves listening to a boring lecture.

Story enlivens the subject matter. A story that is worth listening to is not really a story unless it is out of the ordinary. Humans are always looking for the quirks in life. We relish the humorous and the odd things that happen to people. We are touched by the pain and sadness of others. Storytelling teachers like those in this study look for interesting bits of information to share with their students. They look for images, metaphors and drama in the topic to be studied and make a way for students to feel the drama. Almost any topic includes some opportunity to find out interesting details of the lives of people being studied and offer students a time to "gossip" about those lives that will enrich and enliven their study.

Story invites teacher-storytellers to look at subject areas from a different perspective. Everyone in the classroom, teacher or student, comes to school with his or her own point of view. Teacher storytellers each come to the classroom with her or his own background knowledge and experiences. Story allows people from varied backgrounds and experience bases to come together on common ground and explore collectively. Story can instigate powerful student discussions that bring to the conversation a variety of perspectives and different possibilities for solutions in an effort to solve common problems.

Storytelling promotes literacy. Students pass by hundreds and even thousands of interesting stories each day they attend school and all they have to do is walk by the media center. The problem is that those stories are hiding just behind book jackets. Storytelling teachers like those in this study bring stories to life, even some of the same stories that are sitting on the bookshelf. The lone storyteller among the teaching staff in most schools is, many times, the media specialist. He or she is desperately trying to

interest students in the reading material that is available by providing samples of their wares through storytelling. Many uninterested readers have probably been convinced to read books by just such efforts. Classroom teachers have the much influence on the literacy habits of their students. Telling stories teaches children how to understand oral and written texts. Storytelling also demonstrates to them how stories are structured and how their stories—oral or written—should also have structure.

Story teaches listening skills. Technology has moved the world into an age of exposure to overwhelming amounts of information coming to us in audible form. Students will need good listening skills in order to filter that information and to make sense of it. Listening is a requirement for most students in the school setting, but not all children come to school equipped to be successful in the traditional school environment. Teachers like those in this study who tell stories about successful academic skills, such as listening and note-taking, enhance the possibility of student success in the classroom. Storytelling teachers invite their students to become storytellers so they can understand the importance of being listened to.

Story promotes writing and student storytelling. The stories told by teachers act a scaffolds or templates for student work. Mental models are created by the student as they are challenged to re-tell a story or to create a story which is similar to another story. These storied mental models are cerebral pictures of patterns in stories that assist in memory, recall, and reconstruction of the story for future use.

Story is important to classroom practice because not all students are adept in every subject area. Some students, especially those in secondary school and higher education situate themselves in self-selected courses. They tend to do so, many times,

because the topic is one of interest to them; they *want* to learn about it. Those students can be successful despite the teacher's ability. It is the student who struggles with content or with strategies for learning who is in need of the guiding force of story to explain in human terms how they too can succeed. As such, story benefits students of all language and learning abilities. All students benefit from having information presented to them in a variety of ways (Nuthall, 1999). One can connect self to the text through the relationship built with story.

Storytelling must be considered, as well as other arts-based strategies, as important to learners' education. There is a need to recognize the power of story in teaching and to prepare teachers in building imaginative classrooms through the use of planned and practiced storytelling. Education, according to Dewey (1916), is a social event and as society becomes more complex there is a need to formalize the communication process. As we formalize the process there is significant danger that we will move away from personal and familiar sharing to the "remote and dead—abstract and bookish" (p. 8). The teachers in this study are attempting to maintain a personal approach to teaching in an era of "abstract and bookish" educational practices. Bruner (1986) posits that there are two only two modes of thought; narrative and paradigmatic or logico-scientific and that these two modes of thought should "come to live side by side" (p. 43). He suggests that stories create a reality of their own in art and in life and, for that reason, we should "move toward a better understanding of what is involved in telling and understanding great stories" (p. 43). Unfortunately, when funding cuts happen, they are most often felt first in the arts and those cuts reduce or remove powerful strategies of discovery.

Teacher education should incorporate storytelling methods into teacher preparation programs, especially in literacy programs that must attend to multimodality as part of its curriculum. Educators of the twenty-first century are quickly finding themselves competing with a variety of media for the attention of students. Students, young and old alike, are receiving information through a variety of electronic means: television, movies, internet, computers, computer games, and hand-held devices as examples. Oral storytelling, dramatic storytelling, electronic or digital storytelling, and other forms of the art should be explored as viable teaching methods. Teacher educators should build into these methods courses opportunities for preservice teachers and inservice teachers alike to explore the role of storytelling and oral language arts play in the teaching and learning of literacy and content. The university and college classroom must become a place where preservice and inservice teachers are engaged through multiple methods in order to make the learning environment and process inviting to forthcoming generations. The teachers in this study discovered themselves using forms of storytelling, began reflecting upon that use during conversations with me, and sometimes questioned why the idea of storytelling had not been introduced to them during their pre-service teaching education. Nevertheless, their discovery of the value of story has given them a renewed interest in the strategy and each of them plans to intentionally incorporate storytelling in their future practices.

Implications for Future Research

Portraiture as a way of writing up this collective case study allowed me an opportunity to concentrate on the cases and to pull them apart and try to put them together again in a more meaningful way (Stake, 1995). This method also encouraged me

to listen *for* story instead of listening *to* a story (Welty, 1983). As a researcher, I was challenged and empowered to seek out the story and to participate in helping to shape the story's coherence (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Shank, 2002). The nature of portraiture calls for a closeness between the researcher and the participant, a relationship that a mere observer may not achieve. It became my job as the recorder and reporter of this story to act in behalf of the readers and to pull the reader into the work and let them see, hear, and feel as much as I had seen, heard, and felt while in the field.

By listening *for* story during my interviews, observations, and conversations with the teachers in this study, I was able to understand their experiences as lived and told stories. Ideas and perceptions emerged during the course of this study that could not be quantified and manipulated as numerical data. Teachers' stories presented themselves as powerful ways to examine teaching and learning practices. Heath (1986) argues that researchers can become advocates for those who are the objects of study. She claims to have shifted from a *learning* ethnographer to becoming a *doing* ethnographer. She maintains that teachers and children from across cultural groups could "learn to articulate relations between cultural patterns of talking and knowing, and, understanding such relations, to make choices" if they are "provided adequate information in suitable forms" (p. 13). It is my hope that readers of this work will recognize the potential for storytelling and allow the words of these portraits to inform their decision-making process with regard to practices in teaching and learning.

Just as story helps to develop a sense of empathy between the teller and listener, I was able to listen to the stories of these teachers and feel some of the joy—and pain—of their work in the classroom. Their stories, told in interviews, enabled me to develop a

human relationship with them. I, the researcher, was not just researching the researched. I came away from this study with a greater insight into what makes the use of story important to these teacher storytellers because I learned about their families, their experiences in grade school and college, and their varied backgrounds. The process enabled me to see myself in parts of their stories and to make my own connection with them.

Prior to entering the field, I constructed my own autobiographical account into my interest in storytelling and its influence on my life. It is included in Chapter One of this dissertation. This piece was written in an attempt to gain insights into my own biases and to bring as many of them to mind as possible before I attempted to construct the portraits of these teachers.

Portraiture resists the traditional effort to document failure and invites one to look for and share those things that are good about the inquiry (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). As a researcher who uses storytelling technique, the stories of these teachers helped me to re-evaluate my feelings about some of the fundamental reasons that story should be used in education. Although I studied only three teacher storytellers, my intent was not to generalize across populations of teachers, but to explore in depth, the nature of story, why story is used, and its importance to education and research. As Eisner suggests, extrapolation of important information is up to the reader, rather than the burden of the researcher. Within these portraits, readers may find important and interesting elements, and integrate them into their own research and teaching.

Further research is needed on the use of story as a response to story. Students in these classrooms were eager to respond to the stories that were told and within those

responses could be valuable information as to how they process story as a meaning-making strategy. Attempts have been made to measure student ability to recall information (see Bower & Clark, 1969; Graesser, Hauft-Smith, Cohen, & Pyles, 1980; Nuthall, 1999), but those studies did not attempt to collect perceptual data from the subjects in order to determine the processes used to internalize the story. There is no better way to see how students think than to un-wrap and analyze their stories (Kirby & Kuykendall, 1991). Studies might also be done to compare student participation and response in the storytelling classroom with classrooms where the strategy is not used so readily. As reported in this study, story promotes both the cognitive and the affective in teaching. Student engagement is critical to conducting classes that are well-managed and that offer an environment that is academically risk-free.

The Moral of the Story

What if there were no textbooks? What if there was no internet or other gargantuan body of information at our fingertips? What would the education process look like for us today? From where would our information come and how would it be delivered? If we turn back time and imagine the process of teaching and learning as it occurred in the ancient past we would find story playing a pivotal role in the process. Story circles are the precursors to book clubs and it was in those circles that questions were asked, discussions were conducted, and stories were shared. Even in the not-so-distant past we can find the influences of story to be integral in perpetuating cultural identity. Storytelling has been a way to tell how and when to plant and harvest the crops, how to build a house or barn, and how to care for a sick child. Stories have been at the

heart of education throughout time. Story lets us know that we are not alone. Our stories connect us to everyone else across time and across cultures.

One Final Story

There was once an elementary school student who was not really sure what school was all about. He was a good boy who entered first grade rather unwillingly and as the year progressed he became even more disappointed about having to attend. His first grade teacher never smiled—except when the parents of her students came to visit. Almost every morning, as the boy waited for the school bus, he would try to think of possible excuses for not going to school. He progressed fairly well through the elementary years and found enjoyment in reading, drawing, and music.

He was especially good at drawing, but his teachers didn't seem to appreciate him drawing and doodling on his papers during class time. He did pretty well in science and was quite interested in history and social studies. Math was a different story. It was as though he had been transported into a foreign country where the language being spoken was completely incomprehensible. He hated math and that caused him to begin to really hate school.

The middle grades were a mix of enjoyment and difficulty for him. There was just enough of a flavor of elementary level nurturing mixed with higher expectations and rigor. There were a couple of teachers he really liked. One was his fifth grade teacher who would lead her entire class in the chorus of "You Are My Sunshine" in her best vocal style. The other was his seventh grade teacher who spoke in a quiet voice as he welcomed everyone into the classroom and grinned when students would ask thoughtful questions because it gave him an opportunity to lead them deeper into the topic. Those

two teachers told stories related to the lessons and brought artifacts into the classroom to show the class. They encouraged the students to bring things and share stories. They would read books and sometimes they would quote poems they had learned when they were in school. They were even able to make math sensible to him by telling stories about how math applied to real-life situations. They would talk to him about his future and encourage him to draw and write and perform in plays. They made going to school fun for him and he loved them. Those teachers would talk to him about the future and tell stories about how people from that very community had experienced success.

Some of his teachers scowled when he gave a wrong answer and they made him read aloud even though he wasn't sure how to pronounce some of the new vocabulary. He dreaded parent night because that was the time they had to talk to his mother about his "lack of progress" and he felt as though they were always saying bad things about him.

High school became more bearable because there were a few subjects for which it was worth going to school. History was still pretty interesting, but science was beginning to get rather complex. Art class was wonderful because he could be creative and use his talents and apply what he was learning to his own interests. Foreign language class gave him an opportunity to understand the mechanics of language and learn more about other people and their cultural habits and beliefs. Most of his teachers were bearable, but many of them acted as though they didn't really want to be there. There were still scowling faces when he didn't understand something. He wished all his teachers could be like the ones he had in fifth and seventh grade.

As he got closer to high school graduation, he often thought about his fifth and seventh grade teachers. He remembered their words of encouragement and wondered

why he had such mixed emotions about learning. His current teachers weren't telling him stories about success as he struggled to get through high school. There was little encouragement. He graduated and went to work.

His fifth and seventh grade teachers kept in touch and every time he saw them, they would tell stories about how smart he was in their classes and they would continue to tell him how much potential they saw in him and how proud they were of him. Even as he grew into adulthood, they were there to encourage him. Finally, after marriage and family had kept him busy for a number of years, the echoing words of the two teachers began to resonate in his mind. He enrolled in a small community college and began a ten-year trek toward a two-year degree. With momentum building, he applied to and was accepted to a four-year college. The two teachers were among the first to extend their congratulations when he graduated, and even as this dissertation is being written, the two teachers who are continuing to send him words of encouragement.

That little boy was me. My successes are relatively insignificant, but one of the highlights of my teaching career has been to hear former students remark about the meaningfulness of the stories I shared with them. The successes I did achieve were largely due to teachers and other people taking time to show me and give me examples through the use of storytelling of how to be successful. It was through their stories and the sharing of experiences that I was able to make a connection and begin to follow their guidance toward some degree of success and fulfillment.

It was only after I looked back upon the words and works of the three teachers in this study that I was able to construct this story. Now I realize what was happening in my school years and I better understand how story actually made a difference in my own life.

Storytelling teachers were the ones who greatly impacted my life the lives of others because they were the ones who had the courage to share pieces of their souls. Story does make a difference.

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