Methodologies for Motivating Student Learning Through Personal Connections

Craig E. Abrahamson, Professor of Psychology, James Madison University

Abstract

This paper focuses on the premise that within the instruction process of higher education, the classroom context needs to create an atmosphere of motivational learning that is founded in part on a relationship between the students and professor that is formatted on the concept of mutual sharing of personal experiences, values, beliefs, and obviously course content. This process needs to begin with the instructor getting to know each student, even in large classes with more than 100 students. Through these personal connections, the content can become personally meaningful for the students. Over the past 35 years I have continued to develop and refine guidelines to facilitate this process of creating a significant connection between myself and students, students within and between themselves for each course that I teach. This paper will illustrate these essential and specific techniques, demonstrate methods in helping students to conceptualize course content within this methodology.

Introduction

I teach in the areas of abnormal, social, clinical, and physiological/neurological psychology, and through the years I have worked with many of my colleagues in application of this approach, from various disciplines including the empirical sciences, business, political science, computer technology, history and languages, and they have indicated through various feedback techniques that there has been consistent increase in student's acquisition of course content while utilizing certain aspects of this model.

In this paper we are going to explore the following topics: methods of creating interpersonal connection in teaching within the university/college context; creating a mutual relationship the first day of class; utilizing storytelling as a method for teaching concepts; the history of storytelling in education; narratology in context; using the learning story; and a special case of using hypnotic trance in storytelling. Examples throughout this discussion will illustrate how storytelling can be an effective mechanism for motivating students not only in learning course content but also to utilize the principles of course content as potential tools for personal application of essential content.

Creating Interpersonal Connections

Interaction between instructor and student is the interconnected spheres of both thought and emotion (Biber, 1971), and within this process the instructor reflects a sense of oneself, students, and the content in an integrated fashion. Within the classroom, sensory activity is continually taking place, and the assimilation of new information fits into one's past experiences by producing a reflective and reflexive response as the assimilation draws from memory and produces emotion (Gold, 2002).

Since this active learning process often causes an emotional response, it is essential for the instructor to encourage the students from the beginning of a course by showing faith in each student's ability to learn the course content. The instructor should recognize and appreciate each student's real effort during classroom tasks, such as class participation, thus facilitating the student's desire to learn (Carlson & Thorpe, 1984) and generating interpersonal connectedness among students and the instructor.

Instructors of college/university courses need to continually utilize positive reinforcement when students participate in the learning process, not all of which comes from verbal communication. Much can be communicated through body language. The instructors also need to be continually aware of what types of messages body language is communicating. Often, students are able to "read" their professors quite readily. Thus, when students appear to be actively engaging in the learning process in the classroom through their own verbal and non-verbal expressions, the instructor needs to be aware also that s/he is expressing his/her appreciation of the class through body posturing or verbal expressions.

For example, during a class discussion in a course that I was teaching regarding the possibility of inherited physiological tendencies in personality types, a student began describing her beliefs. Another student interrupted to comment that he could tell that I didn't agree with her because of my facial expressions. I concurred with his assessment immediately and stated that I would share my thoughts once the student finished talking. If I had not openly admitted my own feelings, I would have lost the class's trust and our rapport would have been compromised.

When interpersonal connectedness is truly a part of the classroom dynamics, it is possible to motivate students to interact with the course content and to apply it to their own lives, which can be a powerful reality. With a foundation of trust and mutual respect, students and instructors can work and share together in an atmosphere that is non-threatening (Johnson & Johnson, 1982), and the story continues to be enhanced.

Creating a Mutual Relationship the First Day of Class

For an atmosphere of motivational learning to exist in the classroom, there must be a relationship between students and the instructor that is founded on mutual sharing of personal experiences, values, beliefs, and course content. A good relationship is the foundation for all learning (McEwan & Egan, 1995), change takes place in the context of a relationship (Johnson & Johnson, 2003), and it must begin with the instructor's getting to know each student, even in large classes with more than 100 students. Through this personal connection, the content can become personally meaningful for the students.

For the past 35 years I have set 2 primary objectives for the first day of class of each semester. One is to obtain some primary educational and personal information from each student. After identifying myself, I tell them that, in order for me to be effective in the learning process on which we are about to embark, I need to information about each student before I share any aspects of the course with them. I ask the class to record on a sheet of paper that will be handed

in the following information: name, e-mail address, phone number, year in school, and major, and nickname, if preferred.

Next, I inform them that their answers to the series of questions I will ask will not affect their grade and will be treated with complete confidentiality. The primary purpose for this writing exercise is to begin the students' storytelling process whereby I can learn about them through their own stories—their names and faces, along with the personal information that they have shared. Their evaluations consistently indicate that students feel empowered when they write about themselves in this non-graded assignment.

I then ask them what specifically they want to learn in each particular course, what they expect from me, and what they expect from themselves. I compare myself to a waiter in a restaurant that wants to know what they would like to eat before they see the menu, an unexpected analogy which always generates laughter, letting me know that the students are engaged. I tell them that I want to be aware of their learning desires as they relate to this class before I might change their perceptions by discussing the course syllabus.

Their next task is to answer in a minimum of 2 sentences the following question: "From a personal perspective, why are you taking this course?" As they respond to my questions, I talk about how I will be spending the late afternoon, sitting comfortably in my office reading their papers and getting to know them; how I am looking forward to this activity, particularly since this group of papers I won't have to grade; and how their responses will give me insight regarding themselves as it relates to course content and application.

When the students have answered these questions, I instruct them to write a minimum of 6 paragraphs describing themselves from a "personal perspective," including experiences with family, friends, and school, and then describe what they think their life will be like in 10 years. I encourage them to share aspects of themselves that will help me get to know them. I set aside 20 minutes for this part of the exercise, giving them more time if needed. While they write, I take a seat in the classroom and I relax while I am looking over the official class roster sheet with their names and photos so that I can begin the process of connecting their writing with their faces.

I normally have no more than 40 students in my classes, so the orientation noted above is workable. A colleague who taught a history course of 300 students attempted a similar process. He found the student writings useful but less effective than what I and other professors have experienced due to the size of the class. If the instructor can assimilate the students' personal stories into his/her memory, s/he can select stories and examples for that class which will relate more directly to individual students. The professor should make a concerted effort to learn each student's first name, thus facilitate the relationship-building process.

In order for educators to utilize fully the powerful impact that the process of student sharing can have on their mastering course content, the educators have to change their thinking. When I first started having students complete this initial exercise, I thought I was wasting class time as there is so much course content to cover within the grading term. Instructors must resist the temptation of seeing teaching as a process of primarily transmitting content, for it gets in the way of student understanding and applying new knowledge (Wood, 1998).

Through the years I have had many conversations with colleagues who teach within various academic disciplines about using the first day of class to begin creating a positive and mutual relationship with students and have received mixed responses from them. It appears that about two-thirds feel that this "important" relationship will develop naturally over the course of the semester without using specific mechanisms to initiate it. The other one-third endorsed the use of "ice-breakers" on the first day of class so that students get to know each other and that, as instructors we need to make certain that the focus primarily is on course content and expectations.

The second objective for the first class of each semester is to explain in detail the syllabus and what are my expectations of each student. In addition to the usual personal data, I give out my home phone number for emergency use. One semester a student called me at home at 6:00 a.m. to tell me that his grandfather had had a stroke and that he had to leave campus immediately to be with his family and therefore would not be in class that day. I normally receive only about 5 to 10 such phone calls at home per semester, though I teach four courses per semester with twenty to sixty students in each. These calls, without exception, have all had a sense of legitimate urgency.

In regard to my expectations of the class, I talk specifically about the course requirement of "class participation" which enhances the course as the instructor and students all feel free to share their own perspectives on the topics of the course. The instructor and students don't need to agree with each other but must show tolerance for another's perspective to enhance "critical thinking." After identifying myself as a storyteller, I explain that I will relate my own personal experiences and those that others have shared with me that are directly relevant to course content. I encourage them to share their own stories at appropriate times during the course. The goal for the first class period is for students to experience a sense of initial ownership to the class as a group and course content that we will be exploring. Thus, an instructor begins the process of building a positive relationship with students.

Storytelling: A Method for Teaching Concepts
Storytelling is an important technique in the process of learning and understanding (Langer 1997), whether it occurs in or out of the classroom. People gain a better understanding of one another using concrete examples rather than abstractions and generalizations that have little relationship to one's experiences, since the sharing of experiences through the device of storytelling enables individuals to build the bridge of understanding between one another (Maguire, 1998). This technique facilitates commonality and the shared resonance of experiences within the content of introductory psychology.

It should be emphasized that not all instructors feel comfortable discussing their own personal stories initially. To become a storyteller, an instructor should perhaps listen to people telling stories on news clips on the internet and television, tape recordings, and of course live presentations. Ballads or other forms of music the lyrics of which are a narrative are also useful.

Initially, an instructor can rely on stories from these sources until s/he is comfortable integrating some personal ones.

The "student evaluation" of the course should include a section where students assess specific aspects of storytelling. Their feedback can assist the professor in refining the different approaches to storytelling. The instructor could also utilize a mid-term assessment on which students indicate how effective specific stories (ones identified in the assessment document) have been as aids to their understanding of course content. Students submit these writings anonymously so as to feel free to write candidly without fear of reprisal.

Through interacting with colleagues on campus and at conferences where I have given a significant number of presentations on the pedagogy of storytelling, I have received a number of different perspectives on various methodologies of storytelling. One approach is to relate in story form different professional and non-professional readings to which one has been exposed. Another helpful idea is to read published stories to students that pertain to specific content in a particular course. There are many opportunities in locating human stories to illumine the course content. For example, an instructor can invite specialists in particular areas of their discipline to give presentations to the class. Another technique employing computer technology utilizes short "clips" of individuals telling their own "stories" which emphasize specific course content. Also, many textbooks now have accompanying discs on which there is information in story format to emphasize important concepts and terms. Instructors can also utilize storytelling in this format in their classes.

The story provides a context for individuals to better understand others by providing a key to their own vast experiences. Thus, the student is able to relate in a meaningful way to the instructor's point of view by working through personal experiences that result in a more profound and lasting understanding than would have been possible through generalizations (Rorty, 1991). The instructor and the students come together on cognitive and emotional levels that allow students to relate to the instructor from their own personal framework and to grasp the instructor's presentation of various concepts at the same time. This engagement represents a remarkable, and yet common, interpersonal experience.

Once I told the following story to a class that I was teaching entitled Abnormal Psychology to help explain the concept of cognitive dissonance. While a social worker for the Salvation Army in Phoenix, Arizona, I was asked to deliver for a sick co-worker the prepared hot lunch to a center approximately 15 miles from the main facility. When I arrived at the center located in a high crime urban neighborhood, I locked the car before taking inside the center 1 of 3 large containers of food from the car. When I returned to the car to get the next container, I realized that I had locked my keys inside the car. Just at that moment a "low-riding" pink Cadillac stopped in front of me. A hulking man exited the car and said, "Got a problem?" Needless to say, I was scared, especially when next he took a long knife out of his pocket. However, he quickly used the potential weapon to unlock the door. When he smiled and said, "Be careful around here," I experienced 2 inconsistent perceptions of that individual; i.e., cognitive dissonance.

About 10 years after I told a class this story, a former student approached me on a very snowy day while sled riding with my children and asked, "Hey, was that story about the pink Cadillac true?" I replied that I would answer his question if he would tell me to what concept did the story relate. Though the man badly mispronounced the concept, he still knew the answer. This encounter affected me in 2 ways: it reinforced my conviction about the power of storytelling and proved that through storytelling an instructor can attach emotional meaning to a contextual concept in such a way that facilitates its transfer into a student's long-term memory.

One important value of storytelling from a cognitive perspective is that it becomes a mutual creation involving interaction and understanding between instructor and student (Peck, 1989). The story can create a mutual bond, as students are able to personally identify with the story and the instructor if the story comes from a life experience to which a student can personally relate.

One of the advantages of knowing specific aspects of a student's background gleaned from the first class period's writing activity is that the stories will have a relational context and an emotional impact as well as meaning. Thus, the student is better able to comprehend the course content while sharing a bond developing with classmates and the instructor. Also, as professors age, they need to receive from students accounts of their own life experiences to bridge the generation gap and maintain rapport with an increasingly age difference between themselves and students. The generation "gap" can be "intercepted" to some degree through this methodology.

History of Storytelling in Education

Prior to the advent of writing, storytelling was the primary tool with which individuals within their communities preserved and shared their heritage. It is found in all learning institutions (Kirkwood & Gold 1983) and have ensured continuity of experiences from one generation to the next. Storytelling is also the foundation of the teaching profession. Great teachers, from Homer and Plato, through Jesus, Li Po, and Gandhi have used stories, myths, parables, and personal history to instruct, to illustrate, and to guide the thinking of students (Zabel, 1991). Stories are natural formalisms for storing and describing memories and experiential knowledge. Learning throughout the ages has relied on narrative (storytelling) for the communication of ideas and culture (Land and Hannafin, 1996). Oral tales are used by many cultures to shape minds, providing each listener with a concept of self, of knowledge, of relationship to community, and of individual motivation (Fried, 1995).

Learning stories is at the heart of human imagination and human needs. The utilization of story lies near the center of the language universe, imbuing communication with powers beyond the symbolic meaning of words (Berger, 1997). Fisher (1985, 1987) emphasizes that humans are essentially storytellers and proposes that all forms of communication are most usefully interpreted from a narrational perspective, since people inherently pursue a "narrative" logic. More (1987) argues that the use of metaphors, images, and symbols have always existed as primary learning tools throughout human history because humans effectively "code with

imagery" to remember and understand words and concepts. Therefore, stories provide mental images for the student to remember and understand concepts.

My American history professor back over forty-five years ago illustrated this concept as he lectured on President Calvin Coolidge while lying on a bed to emphasize that President Coolidge slept more than any other president on a daily average. At the end of the lecture, the professor jumped out of the bed and proceeded to shake every student's hand as we left the lecture hall. Before he made his leap, he stated that "Silent Cal" could shake more hands per minute that any president in U.S. history. Decades later the image I have is still very clear because of his use of the "story" and "imagery."

Narratology in Context

The primary concept of narratology is that human beings love to tell and listen to stories. There appears to be an innate need in humans for chronological and causal connections, and these processes help make us who we are (Scholes, 1981). Narrative can be described as a primary and irreducible form of human comprehension, which is a defining characteristic of human intelligence and of the human species (Mink, 1978). Related to human comprehension is the idea that as humans we have basic stories, or deep structures, for organizing our experiences (Herrnstein-Smith, 1981). These come in many versions of reality that are shaped by the basic stories to which we have been exposed, directly or indirectly. Thus, the interplay of storytelling in the classroom appears to be helpful in the comprehension and application of new knowledge (Mink, 1978).

Researchers have identified an internal cognitive structure for simple stories that has been referred to as story grammar (Stein and Glenn, 1979). Researchers generally agree that story grammars reflect the story structures that are used to understand narratives (Olson & Gee, 1988), and empirical data indicates that the utilization of the story form exerts a powerful influence on memory for simple stories (Yussen, Huang, Mathews and Evans, 1988). It is ethical to acknowledge that storytelling can assist students in learning course content, a statement supported also by my students' comments on course evaluations and mid-term assessments for over twenty-five years.

There are, nevertheless, some potential pitfalls in using storytelling in college and university courses. One fear is that students can develop an assumption that course content is primarily based on storytelling and not on valid empirical "realities". It is necessary to reiterate that storytelling should be used for illustrating examples of specific course content. Another concern is that students, conditioned to hearing stories that provide a break from the covering of content, may begin to regard them merely as entertainment. To curb this tendency, the instructor should ask the students follow-up questions that will result in a discussion about the specific content that the story illustrated. By using this technique and making it personal, the instructor also risks having the students think that they are forming too close of a personal relationship with their professor. To reduce that risk factor, the instructor should narrate stories that are not all personal, as well as sprinkle anecdotes about his/her flaws to indicate that s/he too

often makes mistakes and has weaknesses. Lastly, another major concern is that the use of storytelling may seduce students into becoming overly intrigued with course content and the discipline/field of study. This concern can be tempered by balancing storytelling so that the discipline is showed realistically as "fact specific" (empirical) in nature.

Using the Learning Story

Many cultures use learning stories to stimulate questions, raise issues, initiate debate, and offer listeners a point of view that may challenge their own perspective (Underwood, 1991). Cultures have utilized "traditional stories" passed down through generations that have kept certain cultural traditions intact and been viewed as sacred aspects of society (Kaufmann, 1996). Kirkwood (1983) defines "learning stories" as brief, oral narratives told primarily to instruct, guide, or influence listeners, rather than to entertain. Stories have survived throughout civilization as they give order to human experience (Fisher, 1987).

As humans our experiences (stories) are organized in time, and this organization gives our life a sense of structure. The other day while reading about past polio epidemics, I immediately remembered myself as a first grader standing in line with my mother at my elementary school for my vaccination. As our life stories are organized in content and in time, the learning story also needs similar structure for the student to absorb many different kinds of information. It should consist of a setting, human or human-like characters, and a sequence of elements that creates mounting tension and gives rise to reaction (McAdams, 1997)**.** The learning story can provide a sense of order to the teaching and interaction process within the classroom experience. The instructor should begin each class period with a brief overview of what was covered in the previous class period and then present an outline of the content to be covered during the current class session. After proceeding with factual content for about ten minutes, s/he should tell a learning story, which often creates active student participation, before going to the next topic of discussion. This ongoing sequential pattern of covering content, storytelling, and student participation has its own rhythm during each class period. Students have indicated that they do not find the pattern boring.

As indicated, the traditional learning story comes from traditional contexts and is not entertainment. Student evaluations continue to confirm that my methodology of story telling is personal, relates to content, and definitely has its entertaining characteristics. This combination is essential as learning stories appear to enhance student learning. The following is a story to illustrate abnormal behavior as deviating from a norm**.** While stopped at a traffic light, a young woman driver picks her nose. Asked if they thought her behavior was abnormal, the students laughed but gave no further response immediately. However, when asked if they themselves had every done such a thing, and the instructor admitted to doing the same act, most students agreed that indeed the behavior was normal from their personal perspective.

Each story shared in the classroom must be factual, especially those from the instructor's own experiences. Honesty allows students to know the background of the instructor as a person [an oral response to the students' first day's writings] and also facilitates interpersonal

connections. Authentic stories are essential to reflect the ethical standards of the disciple/ profession that the course originates from. While the instructor may share many aspects of his/her personal and professional life, an essential rule to follow is not to share any experiences that have not been resolved. The instructor should hesitate to share experiences that can be viewed as reflecting above average accomplishments, so as not to be seen in an overly positive way. Personal accolades can create even more imbalance in the student-instructor relationship. However, stories about negative life experiences can heighten mutual understanding as well as promote animated discussion.

For example, in a class where the topic was the current findings of alcohol use among college students and the effects of binge drinking, students showed a reluctance to discuss this topic. Asked if they thought binge drinking was a problem on our campus, no one responded. The instructor then gave a detailed account of one of his own drinking episodes as a college student, an experience in which he took no pride. Initially, the students looked shocked as the professor talked. However, by the time he finished, they were relaxed and eager to share their own feelings about this issue and how it can affect various aspects of behavior. If the professor had not shared a personal story, the opportunity for dialogue with the class on this topic may have been lost.

A Special Case: Utilizing Hypnotic Trance in Storytelling

A hypnotic trance is a state that most people experience everyday, yet many people have feelings of caution regarding how it could negatively affect them. This trance can be defined as a temporary suspension from ordinary consciousness and cognitive processing (Erickson, 1958). For example, while stopped at a red light, a driver daydreams. When the light does turns green, s/he doesn't know to move forward until the driver of the car behind him blows the horn. According to trance theory, when a person is in a trance, s/he is open to suggestiveness, and the unconscious aspect of the mind will automatically store content to which the person is exposed if it has personal meaning (Erickson, 1959).

Erickson (Erickson & Rossi 1976a) defines hypnotic trance as the evocation and utilization of unconscious learning. He believes that a person is most open to learning in this state due to the fact that one's usual frames of reference and beliefs are temporarily altered so one can be receptive to concepts and information that may be somewhat different from what already has been assimilated into one's cognitive and emotional frames of reference.

Often, when individuals are engaged in listening to a story, they experience an altered state of cognitive processing, which is referred to as a hypnotic trance state (Tinterow, 1970). When students are listening to an instructor tell a story, they can become absorbed in the story. If the story directly relates to specific course content, a connection is built between content and the personal experience that the instructor is sharing (Collay, 1998). When the story relates in part to a student's own experiences, this state permits an inner-dialogue within the student's own knowledge (Carter, 1993). It is essential after completing a story for the instructor to remind the

class of the specific content to which the story referred so that the students can properly connect the content and story for the purpose of storing it in their memory.

Erickson used personal accounts of his life experiences as metaphors that directly related to the points that he was making in such a way that it often appeared to create miraculous learning on the part of students (Sarbin and Coe, 1972). The credibility of Erickson's experiences and his innovative use of storytelling have opened limitless possibilities for the applications of learning through storytelling in educational settings. He empirically shows that individuals learn in remarkably different ways when they are subjected to storytelling that captures their attention and absorbs their thought processes (Barber, Spanos and Chaves, 1974).

As the instructor delivers the story, the students create their own understanding and assimilate the content into their mental awareness in their own individual way. In other words, each student interprets and assigns meaning to the story in a way that makes sense. While covering the concept of learned helplessness—the debilitating consequences of experiences with uncontrollable events in human and dogs (Seligman, 1975), a professor discussed the possibility that the learned helplessness could be a product of both the environment and one's individual make up and related the story of Mike (not his real name). When Mike was about ten years old, his father built him a simple tree house. During the summer months Mike loved to play in it and, as he grew older, would camp in it over night. By the time Mike was in his late teens, his father had enclosed the tree house. When Mike was in his early twenties, his dad equipped the tree house with electricity, insulation and running water. This tree house eventually became Mike's permanent home. Mike's parents were content for him to live in their backyard and provided him with all of his financial needs on a regular basis. When Mike reached late middle age, he had never been employed, had had very limited social contact outside of his immediate family, and remained in his parent's backyard both day and night. With visitors, Mike limited their conversations to no more than five minutes. His behavior would be considered anti-social by conventional standards.

Without much variation students appeared to have been pulled into the story cognitively and emotionally. They were in a trance state. Immediately afterward, the class erupted into a heated discussion. Some students thought Mike had a good life and had made the most out of his circumstances. Others thought he was a lazy bum. Still others thought that Mike's parents had victimized him to the extent that Mike was unable to live a "normal" life. And, some believed that Mike was not very motivated due to his genetic make-up and had made the best of his circumstances.

By discussing this story, students learned the meaning of learned helplessness and become personally involved in understanding its manifestations. The story of Mike makes a lasting impression on students, an impression which strengthens their ability to apply this particular concept to their life experiences. To understand how students experience a hypnotic trance while listening to a story, the following five-stage paradigm of conversational trance induction is instructive (Erickson and Rossi, 1976b). Most students experience at least some of the following stages as they listen to a story, such as the story of Mike.

Fixation of Attention

By telling a story interesting to students, the instructor is able to gain their attention. Students are able to relate to Mike as a child who liked to play outdoors because of their own experiences. As the story unfolds and becomes more intriguing in relationship to their own development, they experience a degree of being absorbed by the story, i.e. fixation.

Depotentiating Habitual Frameworks and Belief Systems

Through the absorption process mentioned above, the student is consciously pulled into the story and patterns of sensory-perception alter his/her state of consciousness into a trance state. The student becomes so completely focused on the story that s/he is not aware of external stimulus, such as when the class period is going to end. The student becomes open to a new means of experiencing and learning.

Unconscious Search

The instructor initiates the unconscious process with direct and indirect forms of suggestion (i.e., "is Mike lazy?) which can create in the students an unconscious search and mental processing of ideas and concepts that in the past appeared closed (maybe Mike is a victim). They search their memories to resolve the particular experience or conflict and develop a new frame of reference. The experience allows the students to reorganize information and concepts, as well as to develop new concepts and knowledge.

Unconscious Process

The instructor makes direct and indirect suggestions (Mike is trapped in his tree house by his parents), which initiate in the students an unconscious search and facilitates an openness to mental associations, both of which help students bypass their learned limitations (does Mike have the ability to make up his own mind?). After listening to the story, students have acquired a series of concepts that are perhaps in conflict with the students' previous perceptions, a series of concepts which open their thought processes beyond normal conscious awareness.

The Hypnotic Response

This temporary suspension from ordinary awareness is the outcome of the unconscious search and processes initiated by the instructor when employing the storytelling technique. The response occurs when a story has truly grasped the students' attention. Their perceptions have been temporarily altered by the trance state. This state ends once the story is completed and the instructor initiates a discussion or begins to lecture.

In summary, the utilization of trance within the storytelling process derives primarily from the students' activities (Erickson and Rossi, 1976b). When telling the story, the instructor stimulates, guides, and exercises judgment in the appropriateness of the story as it relates to the understanding of course content. This educational process is the result of the students' life

experiences, understandings, memories, attitudes, the prescribed course content, and the course's goals and objectives.

Conclusion

One of the primary tasks for a college/university professor teaching a specific course is to help students maintain an interest in and gain ownership of course content. Personal connections between the class and the instructor can aid in this process. As discussed throughout this paper, the relationship needs to be maintained throughout the semester. It is essential for this instructor to attempt to join with his/her students, to try to understand their current perspective(s) on life and where they feel they are heading. The instructor needs to feel an intellectual and emotional empathy with the class and strive to relate to what the students are experiencing as they seek similarities in their own life experiences.

Having been college students ourselves, we as instructors need to reflect not only on what those experiences were like and the scope of the content of the course but also on the milieu in which they moved while taking the courses. When I read my students' papers from the first day of class, my primary goal is to feel empathy; I almost disregard the factual content of the writings during my first reading. The bond between instructor and students needs to begin with feelings. The instructor must mentally join their world. Communication between faculty teaching introductory psychology and students is essential within the classroom since it can create a sense of a learning community. Encouraging students to share their stories within classroom discussions can help the instructor reach this goal. Another technique to consider is to create written assignments (such as journal article discussions, student research projects, reaction paper to research articles, and retrospective self reports) that require students to record their own feelings and perspectives about the content being examined. Most of the courses that are taught in colleges and universities utilize the foundation of "empirical focused content" for the focused content. The story—by instructors and students alike—becomes the common thread to creating personal connections and a sense of togetherness between the instructor and students, ingredients essential to this learning process.

References

Barber, T., Spanos, N., & Chaves, J. 1974. *Hypnosis, imagination and human potentialities*. New York: Pergamon Press.

Bellah, R. N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W. M., Swidler, A., & Tipton, S. M. 1985. *Habits of the heart: Individualism and commitment in American life*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

Berger, A. A. 1997. *Narratives in popular culture, media, and everyday life.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Press.

Biber, B. 1967. "A learning-teaching paradigm integrating intellectual and affective processes." In E. M. Bower & W. G. Hollister (Eds.), *Behavioral science frontiers in education* (pp.111-155). New York: Wiley Press.

Carlson, J., & Thorpe, C. 1984. *The growing teacher: How to become the teacher you have always wanted to be.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice- Hall.

Carter, K. 1993. "The place of story in the study of teaching and teacher education." *Educational Researcher*, 22(1), 5-12.

Clandinin, D. J. 1986. *Classroom practice: Teacher images in action*, 14,(3), 245-256.

Collay, M. 1998. "Recherche: Teaching our life histories." *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 14(3), 245-256.

Erickson, M. H. 1958. "Naturalistic techniques in hypnosis." *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis*, 1, 3-8.

Erickson, M. H. 1959. "Further techniques of hypnosis-utilization techniques." *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis*, 2, 3-21.

Erickson, M. H., & Rossi, E. I. 1976a. "Two-level communication and the microdynamics of trance." *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis*, 18, 153-171.

Erickson, M. H., & Rossi, E. I. 1976b. *Hypnotic realities*. New York: Irvington Publishers.

Fairclough, N. 1995. *Critical discourse analysis*. New York: Longman.

Fisher, W. R. 1985. "The narrative paradigm: In the beginning." *Journal of Communication,* 35(4), 121-134.

Fisher, W. R. 1987. *Human communication as a narration: Toward a philosophy of reason, value, and action.* Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina.

Fried, R. L. 1995. *The passionate teacher: A practical guide.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Gold, J. 2002. *The story species: Our life-connection.* Markham, Ontario: Fitzhenry and Whiteside Limited.

Herrnstein-Smith, B. 1978. "Narrative form as a cognitive instrument." In H. Coronary & H. Kozicki (Eds.), *The writing of history: Literary form and historical understanding*, 83-97. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.

Johnson, D. W. & Johnson, F. P. 2003. *Joining together: Group theory and group skills* (8th ed.). New York: Allyn and Bacon.

Johnson, R.W. & Johnson, D. W. 1982. "Cooperation in learning: Ignored but powerful." *Lyceum,* 5, 22-26.

Kaufmann, W. O. 1996. *The anthropology of wisdom literature*. Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey.

Kirkwood, W. G. 1983. "Storytelling and self-confrontation: Parables as communication strategies." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 69, 58-74.

Kirkwood, W. G., & Gold, J. B. 1983. "Using teaching stories to explore philosophical themes in the classroom." *Metaphilosophy,* 14, 341-352.

Langer, E. J. 1997. *The power of mindful learning.* Reading, MA: Perseus Books.

Land, S. M., & Hannafin, M. J. 1996. "A conceptual framework for the development of theories-in-action with open-ended learning environments." *Educational Technology Research & Development,* 44(3), 37-53.

McAdams, D.P. 1997. *The stories we live by: Personal myths and the making of the self.* New York: Guilford Press.

McEwan, H. & Egan, K. 1995. *Narrative in teaching, learning, and research.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Maguire, J. 1998. *The power of personal story telling: Spinning tales to connect with others*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam.

Mink, L.1978. "Narrative form as a cognitive instrument." In H. Canary & H. Kozicki (Eds.), *The writing of history: Literary form and historical understanding.* Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.

More, A. J. 1987. "Native Indian learning styles: A review for researchers and teachers." *Journal of American Indian Education,* 27, 17-29.

Olson, M.W. & Gee, T.C. 1988. "Understanding narratives: A review of story grammar research." *Childhood Education,* 64(5), 302-306.

Peck, J. 1989. "Using storytelling to promote language and literacy development." *The Reading Teacher,* 18, 138-141.

Ricoeur, P. 1984. *Time and narrative*. (K. Blamey & D. Pellauer, Trans). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rorty, R. 1991. *Objectivity, relativism and truth: Philosophical papers.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Sarbin, T. & Coe, W. 2008. *Hypnosis: A social-psychological analysis of influence communication*. New York: Holt Press.

Scholes, R. 1981. "Language, narrative, and anti-narrative." In W. J. T. Mitchell (Ed.), *On Narrative.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Seligman, M.E.P. 1975. *Helplessness: On depression, development, and death.* New York, Scriber Press.

Stein, N.L., & Glenn, C.G. 1979. "An analysis of story comprehension in elementary school children." In R.O. Freedle (Ed.), *Advances in discourse processes: New directions in discourse processing,* 2, 53-120. Norwood, NJ, Ablex Press.

Tinterow, M. M. 1970. *Foundations of hypnosis*. Springfield, IL: Thomas Press.

Underwood, P. 1991. *Three strands in the braid: A guide for enablers of learning*. San Insilco, CA: A Tribe of Two Press.

White, H. 1978. *Topics of discourse: Essays in cultural criticism*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Wills, J.E. 1992. "Lives and other stories: Neglected aspects of the teachers' art." *The History Teacher*, 26, 33-43.

Wood, D. 1998. *How children think and learn.* Oxford, England: Blackwell Press.

Yussen, S, Huang, S, Mathews, S., & Evans, R. 1988. "The robustness and temporal course of the story schema's influence on recall." *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, & Cognition. 14(1), 173-179.*

Zabel, M. K. 1991. "Storytelling, myths, and folk tales: Strategies for multicultural inclusion." *Preventing School Failure,* 32, 28-41.