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“To Thine Own Self Be True”

By

Renee A. O’Brien

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
with a concentration in Curriculum and Instruction
Department of Secondary Education
College of Education
University of South Florida

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Keywords: Self- study, storytelling, S-STEP, Pedagogy, Persistence, beginning teachers

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and friends.

To my grandparents, Jack and Sara Jacobson, and Gretel and Kurt Schwab, for telling me the stories I continue to share in my classroom and for teaching me to “never forget”. To my parents, Evelyn, and Louis Jacobson, thank you for adding to the stories, believing in me, and always reinforcing the importance of education by encouraging me to shoot for the academic stars. Thank you for also showing that family is essential and is not confined to blood relatives.

Thank you to my children for always pushing me to continue and letting me know you are proud of me. To my daughter, Shannon, you have grown into a strong capable woman, and I couldn't be prouder of you. To my son. Joshua, you, and Kathryn have given me my greatest delight in Jayde, Kenzie, and Hayzley, watching all of you grow into a beautiful family gives me limitless joy and I am in awe of the amazing father you have become. To my son, Killian, you have grown into an admirable young man with a limitless future, and I can't wait to see your continuing success. I am so proud to be the mother to all three of you and I am so impressed by the adults you have become.

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**“This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.
Farewell, my blessing season this in thee!”
Polonius, Hamlet, Act-1, Scene-III, Shakespeare**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this self-study was to take an in-depth look at the development of the pedagogy of one teacher, myself, and to describe and explain how this style of teaching developed both from early familial influences and through experiences I have had throughout my career. This study focused specifically on my use of storytelling in the classroom and how my lessons, community building, language development, and maintaining student engagement are based on the culmination of those experiences. This study also looked at the impact these factors had on my persistence as a teacher and how using this type of pedagogy has aided me in staying in the classroom. This inquiry also addressed the impacts of changes in my pedagogy because of the Covid-19 pandemic and the move to simultaneously teaching students in my classroom and online. The research questions were:

- Which family stories do I use repeatedly and what is their function in my pedagogy?
- How have I adjusted my use of stories for varied situations?
- In what ways has sharing family stories contributed to my persistence in my teaching career?

This qualitative study was guided by a Social Constructivist perspective as the theoretical framework. Analysis of the data resulted in specific findings. Stories were used in a wide variety of ways in all my classes. An equal number of planned and unplanned stories were used in my classroom. I used many nonfamilial stories and stories by other authors in more traditional ways. A notable trend in the research was my practice of responding to student inquiries by offering anecdotes to clarify the information I was explaining.

Data analysis in this self-study showed that having a pedagogical style that is adaptable can aid teachers in persisting in their careers. Implications of this study are significant for use in training beginning teachers and in aiding teachers as they develop a pedagogical style.

Additionally, implementing the use of self-study as a form of professional development would serve to focus and personalize teacher professional development and increase the persistence of teachers in their careers.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

“The heart of human experience is often captured in story.”
(Meyer, Licklider & Wiersma, 2009, p. 23)

Introduction

My recollections of my first weeks as a teacher are jumbled together. The years have flown by, and suddenly, here I am in my 26th year. I have witnessed new teachers coming and going, sometimes within days of meeting their students. Simultaneously, I have witnessed teachers who choose not to retire until way past being eligible, who weep at leaving their students and their classrooms. This led me to wonder about what makes a teacher successful and ultimately allows them to find their pedagogical niche and choose a lifetime career as an educator. I pondered over the idea that each educator must find their own “magic” formula. Most of all, I wondered why I have persisted and continued to teach and continued to have a renewed passion for my students each year. Teaching was not the career I planned for as I attended college, nor was it the career I sought after graduating. I was completely against becoming a teacher, teaching was my mother’s profession, and I “knew” it was not for me. I began substitute teaching at the urging of my mother, a thirty-year veteran. As a substitute teacher, I found I enjoyed being in front of a class. Ultimately, I chose to teach because it was convenient with three young children. As the years passed, teaching chose me, and my career became a part of who I am.

I pursued my newfound career with fervor, obtaining my state certification, attending extra professional development, and returning to school to obtain a master’s degree in Curriculum and Instruction. National Board Certification (NBC) was established and as I learned about the elite certification, I knew it was a certification I wanted to pursue. NBC is a

“certification process...(involving) the completion of a rigorous, content-specific, performance-based, and reflective portfolio that goes well beyond the initial teacher licensure” (Petty, Good, & Heafner, 2019, p. 216). I attended informational meetings and joined NBC groups online. The certification requires an intense critical look at five components of your praxis and how you apply them in the classroom. Each candidate completes three portfolio entries which require taking a critical look at your pedagogy and assessing what is working and how you can improve, two sections require videotaping yourself while teaching and critically assessing your actions and reactions to students in the classroom. Completing the process was incredibly eye-opening, dissecting my pedagogy gave me great insight into how I could improve, and gaining the certification was a bonus. My experience is not unique, Petty, Good & Heafner (2019) surveyed 496 teachers who had obtained the certification and found, “Teachers report the NBC process is the most rewarding professional development they have experienced” (p. 226). As I worked through the sections of the certification, I realized that teaching was the career for me and that reflectively assessing my pedagogy would improve all aspects of my teaching.

This is not the case for many new teachers, numerous young people acquire a degree in teaching and obtain state certification, enter a classroom, and realize it is not for them. I have mentored these new teachers preparing for their chosen profession, assisted them in setting up their classrooms, aided them in writing lesson plans and preparing to meet their students, and then learned that they abruptly quit shortly after the year began. I have also sat with new teachers, shared my “tricks” of the trade, helped them set up classrooms, and watched them blossom into innovative educators. I have looked around at my colleagues and sought to determine the essence of what separates a successful veteran teacher from an unsuccessful new

teacher. Embarking on a self-study of my pedagogy has led me to some insights that I can share as I continue to improve my practice.

21ST Century Pedagogy

Richard Bowman (2018) stated, “Influential teachers create environments where students want to pay attention by attaching meaning to instructional events through linguistic devices such as stories, metaphors, and emotions. Stories invite students to sense relationships with the whole; metaphors allow students to connect what they see in life; narratives engage students intellectually and emotionally” (p. 101). Teaching is the weaving together of an individual’s talents with a pre-determined set of knowledge that is necessary in our society, intertwining these pieces is a delicate process that is different for each educator. In my mind teaching has always been an art form rather than a series of specific actions that can be imitated to result in students learning. What works for me in my classroom, may not work for another. I have observed that each veteran educator develops an individual methodology of teaching. It is this individualized methodology that impacts success or failure, and it must be adjusted to each subject, group of students, and the climate of the school community. Each teacher implements all these components differently and the ability to balance things we can control in our classrooms is very delicate. Teachers lean towards similar models and methods in each class they teach and develop an individual style, much as an artist develops their style by finding a medium and subject matter that illuminates their craft. Teachers build on their personal strengths to engage students while also maintaining a recognizable passion for the subject matter. Those who stay in the profession seem to have some favorite types of lessons they are passionate about and which they can adapt to a wide variety of teaching situations. For me, this medium is storytelling, it is adaptable to varied subjects and student groups.

The United States is in the midst of a teacher shortage. According to Antonio Abitabile (2020), the U.S. Department of Education estimated a “need for another 1.6 million teachers across the United States over a 10-year span that began in 2012” (p. 23). The U.S. student population is expected to increase by nearly 3 million in the next 10 years and simultaneously there has been a drop in the enrollment in teacher education programs of 35 percent in the 5 years from 2009 to 2014 (Abitabile, 2020). The combined effect of these statistics illuminates a need for research into why some teachers stay and so many choose to leave. Teacher persistence is the term that has been coined to describe the qualities of teachers who stay in the classroom throughout a lengthy career. Karl F. Wheatley (2002) first described teacher persistence as a quality of educators that “may prompt high expectations of students, the development of teaching skills, teachers’ reflectiveness, responsiveness to diversity, teaching efficacy, effective responses to setbacks, and successful use of reformed teaching methods” (p. 1). More recently, Valerie Hill-Jackson, Nicholas D. Hartlep and Delia Stafford (2019) in *What makes a Star Teacher?* simply defined teacher persistence as a “disposition manifested in the day-to-day actions of a teacher pursuing an outcome directly related to improving student achievement” (p. 5). For this study, teacher persistence was defined as an educator’s persistence to adapt to changing demands while continuing to teach. Understanding how these qualities developed in myself contributes to the existing research on fostering teacher persistence. This study focused on the aspects of pedagogy that are most personal for me and provided insight into supporting teachers as they begin and maintain a long-term career.

The purpose of this study was to take an in-depth look at the development of the pedagogy of one teacher, myself, and to describe and explain how this particular style of teaching developed both from early familial influences and through the vast array of

experiences I have had over the last 26 years of teaching. This study focused specifically on my use of storytelling in the classroom and how my lessons, community building, language development, and maintaining student engagement are based on the culmination of those experiences. This study also looked at the impact these factors had on my persistence as a teacher and how using this type of pedagogy has aided me in staying in the classroom through many adjustments, changes, and teaching situations. Investigating the progress of this pedagogical style and its development lends insight into how a pedagogical style developed and served as a support for a developing teacher, allowing her to continue to grow and succeed in the profession. This inquiry also addressed the impacts of changes in my pedagogy as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the move to simultaneously teaching students in my classroom and online.

This study focused on the function of the consistent use of storytelling in my classroom over time and how this type of pedagogy has developed and supported my persistence in the field of education. Research about the use of storytelling in the classroom is abundant, however, most of the existing research focuses on how storytelling is used to engage students, teach concepts, and increase learning. This study concentrated on the impact of storytelling on myself, the teacher, as a component of regular classroom interactions and as part of the planning of lessons for use in my classroom. Rather than focusing on how students benefit from the use of storytelling in the classroom this study answered questions about how my use of storytelling has developed, and how this practice has supported the development of my pedagogy and influenced my persistence in the field of education.

Inquiry Focus and Questions

This study was designed to evaluate how my pedagogical style has developed to incorporate storytelling as an educational tool. The focus of this research was to comprehend the degree to which storytelling has propelled and supported this teacher as a basis for developing her practice and maintaining persistence. This inquiry also focused on the adjustments made to this pedagogical style through varying situations and the onset of a pandemic. The following research questions guided this study:

- Which family stories do I use repeatedly and what is their function in my pedagogy?
- How have I adjusted my use of stories for varied situations?
- In what ways has sharing family stories contributed to my persistence in my teaching career?

Study Justification

This teacher self-study addressed the reasons I have stayed in education and what extenuating circumstances have impacted both my reasons for continuing in the classroom and how I adapted my practice to meet the needs of my students and myself. Additionally, I addressed the transdisciplinarity of my pedagogy due to the use of storytelling to engage students and build community in my classroom. Personal motivations for teaching, along with the responses observed in my students combined to support my philosophy of education, as well as the foundations of education supported by scholars in the field. Petrisko (2019) echoed my beliefs as an educator, “The goal of education should be not only to provide fragmentary knowledge in different disciplines and to verify academic performance but also to ensure the harmonious development of other aspects of the human personality” (p. 67). In every subject I

have taught, I have utilized all core subjects and strived to reveal the connections between disciplines rather than maintaining boundaries that feel unnatural to me.

As an inexperienced teacher, I found myself utilizing storytelling to pique the interest of my students as we began a lesson or unit. Sharing a familiar experience served to assuage my nervousness and helped create a connection between my students and me. Divulging my interest in a topic, how I had come to learn about it, or how a subject impacted me always seemed to interest students. Richard Bowman (2018) discussed this phenomenon, “In the classroom, the ability to tell the right story at the right time is an essential pedagogical skill” (p. 97). This skill came naturally to me as I built my pedagogical style and learned how to capture my students’ attention, I shared anecdotes about myself and my upbringing, experiences I had as a young adult, and stories of my family’s immigration from Germany during the Holocaust. Some stories were shared to show students that I had experiences with which they could identify and for which they had stories of their own. Some stories were told to exemplify the parallels between my grandparent’s exodus from Europe due to antisemitism, and the impacts of the racism that exists in our current society and which impacts many of them. Students listened, asked questions, and made connections. As they connected my life and experiences to their own, they nodded their heads, offered commentary, asked questions, and some even shared stories of their own. Sarah Telfer and Amanda Turner (2019) recognized this phenomenon and concluded that “...individuals and their stories should be at the heart of education, that learners’ views beliefs and experiences will help us as teachers to better understand, change and manage learning” (p. 45). When I shared a story, I noticed the inquiries students made and the parallels to their own lives and experiences. Their questions helped me

focus on areas that we needed to explore, gave me insight into the prior knowledge they possessed, and helped me plan my lessons for the unit of study.

As educators our goal is to provide information to our students, they then take that information, apply it to their prior knowledge and learning takes place as they construct their individual understanding. These are lessons that will help them as they enter adulthood, become adults, and make their contributions to the world around us. Students come to our classrooms seeking to engage and learn. Our lessons lead to the conversations that create the relationships through which students learn. They must trust us to learn and take our lessons and apply them to their personal prior knowledge. By sharing anecdotes about myself, my family, my life, and my experiences I am offering students insight into myself as a person and giving them information with which they may identify. This simple act serves a multitude of purposes and assists students in comprehending our shared humanity. Richard Bowman (2018) recognized the power of telling “the right story at the right time” (p. 97) as an essential pedagogical skill. In Bowman’s article, he discussed how storytelling “speaks to what makes us human” (p. 98). This sharing of humanity results in students listening and identifying with their teachers and sets the stage for meaningful, lasting learning. As Bowman (2018) explained, “The implication for teachers and students is that successful communication in instructional settings is a *shared* activity resulting in a transfer of information across brains” (p. 98). This “transfer across brains” is the learning that occurs when students can identify with a story and combine its lesson with the knowledge they already possess.

Teacher self-reflection always leads me back to why I began teaching. It was never my desire to teach, but once I accepted my first position, I found that working with students came naturally to me and I have spent a great deal of time reflecting on my practice. With reflection

comes growth and change as I constantly incorporate strategies that support my pedagogy for my current students while improving myself as an educator. My thoughts always return to my first days, weeks, and months as an educator. I am amazed at how much I love the profession I once thought I would never pursue. I accepted my first position because it offered me an opportunity to teach Holocaust studies, a subject near and dear to me. Growing up with grandparents who had barely escaped the horrors of Nazi Germany and Poland I felt myself tasked with teaching younger generations how to avoid a cataclysmic genocide in their own time. My grandparents entrusted me with their stories and experiences. Sharing their stories is part of my duty as their descendent. The more time I spent in front of a class, the more I found myself sharing various bits of experience in the form of stories. As my pedagogy developed, storytelling was at the center of my teaching. Now I tell stories about much more than the Holocaust and each story has a purpose and a place. Former students often tell me it is the stories they remember, and those stories also help them recall the associated lessons.

I remember the fears and the apprehension connected with trying to imagine myself in front of a classroom, captivating the attention of students, and getting them to understand and learn from me. To this day, the first days of school are nerve-wracking and filled with pondering about what the year ahead may hold. When I plan my introductory lesson, I include an anecdote to give my students insight into who I am and to expose some of my humanity. These anecdotes serve multiple purposes. Students tend to relax and listen; they have shared a personal exchange with me, and they relate to whatever I have told them. This often leads to students feeling comfortable in sharing something relatable about themselves and trust develops. The stories I use to start the year are rarely anything special, they are ordinary stories about my life and experience. As we move through the school year my stories become more

focused and relatable to what we are learning about. I encourage students to share stories whenever possible and I encourage them to seek out stories in their own lives and families and to share them with me and their classmates.

Throughout my career, I have been tasked with teaching a wide variety of subjects to varying student groups. As a teacher of Gifted students, I let students decide the topics we would investigate and how we would engage in each subject. The topics varied from psychology to advertising to genocide studies. As an American History teacher, I converted the curriculum into a study of literature and government documents about the early years of the United States. As a high school English teacher incorporating stories is essential and natural to my pedagogy. Storytelling is the thread that runs through each and every teaching experience; storytelling usually begins with me modeling by using my own stories and eventually leads to students telling their stories and finding their voices.

Telling stories about myself and my family reminds me of growing up and listening to my grandparents and great-grandparents sharing tales of their own experiences. Stories about relatives who had “not made it” and those who had. Stories about sacrifices made to get to America and the daunting months before leaving Nazi Germany. Stories of some of the people around the table and what they had done when they were young. Much of it seemed boring when I was growing up, some stories were repeated often, and some were cut off before they were finished because they brought back painful memories. The stories painted a picture of a life that was very different from my own and, as I got older, I found the stories more intriguing. There was comfort in hearing stories and sharing information, they were the thread that brought generations together and made the idea that my grandparents had once been teenagers real. Stories gave me an emotional connection to my older relatives and made the history they

lived through tangible. Stories led me to teach as a profession. Bowman explained, “The very heart of being an educator ‘is a desire to tell a story by making a sensory, emotional connections’ with students in an empathetic, realistic way” (Schultz, 2011, p. 273). As a beginning teacher, I learned that I had many stories to tell, and those stories engaged my students, aided in creating community, and led to learning.

This natural form of communication became the center of my pedagogy. It was a comfortable and effective way for me to communicate and usually resulted in my students engaging and listening. Storytelling required me to offer up a small piece of myself for my students to inspect and embrace or criticize. Katy McDowell (2018) identifies storytelling as “non-textual pedagogy” (p. 15) that “brings the teller and audience into a reciprocal process of listening and telling” (p. 16). The goal is to have them offer a piece of themselves in return.

Storytelling is powerful because it is personal and in listening to stories students recall their own stories or those heard from family members. Collins and Cooper (1997) summed up the importance of stories simply, “Perhaps most important, storytelling creates a relationship” (p. 1). Stories require focus and an understanding of the audience; the wrong story, told to the wrong audience may destroy rather than build the relationship that is so important between teachers and students. “Storytelling is a non-textual tool, involving oral communication and aural reception, with no written text between the teller and the audience” (McDowell, 2018, p. 15). Sharing a moment of discovery with my students is crucial to creating a dialogue between myself and the class as a whole, but also as individuals since each student will resonate with different parts of the stories I share. They will each have their inner dialogue that will respond to the information based on experience and background. “For educators, the ability to tell the right story at the right time is an essential communication skill in instructional settings”

(Bowman, 2018, p. 98). As storytelling became a natural component of my teaching I learned, by trial and error, which stories students found most interesting and where they fit into my lessons. Each year new stories find their way into my classroom, as we focus on different subjects, and the world around us gives us new events to address, I find myself drawing on my memories and sharing stories about everything from my first experience with antisemitism, to tales of holidays at my grandparent's home, and most recently anecdotes about my own children and grandchildren.

Storytelling also requires that I be self-aware and thoughtful about opening up to students about memories that are individual and may be emotional. As Bowman (2018) explains, "Self-knowledge is the blood of all resonant stories" (p. 97). This form of pedagogy is personal and powerful. As students listen to my stories, they recognize my experience, my goal is for them to appreciate the many ways in which we are all the same and simultaneously unique. The recognition of how we are all the same, as well as different, and that we all have stories to tell is integral to the process of learning. "Neurocognitive research suggests that learners are drawn to stories that they think will be emotionally relevant to others in their social group" (Bowman, 2018, p. 98). Students often respond with stories from their own experiences, and they are clearly seeking response and acceptance from their peers in the classroom.

Stories range from cautionary tales to lived history experiences, stories of my family members, or anecdotes about my children, pets, and former students. The goal is always to give life to the knowledge I am sharing with my students. Bowman (2018) cautions, "...well-meaning educators risk making a fundamental mistake when they, for example, start a science or a history class with a bullet-point summary of what has gone before as opposed to beginning

class with anecdotes or stories that are emotionally relevant to students” (p. 98). The emotional connection created by sharing a story or anecdote plays a role in building the community of the classroom and building teacher/student relationships. Stories have an emotional impact which makes them memorable, the subconscious association between the feelings and the lesson aids in learning and recall.

Storytelling is an art form that has its roots in ancient human cultures all over the world. Much of our known history was transmitted through generations of storytellers. The same storytellers can also be credited with sharing knowledge. “The transgenerational transmission of the wisdom of the elders via storytelling is as old as humanity itself. Cognitive neuroscientists have argued that stories grew out of a group’s need for social cohesion” (Bowman, p. 98). As human beings, we have an innate need to connect with other people. From stories shared around a cook fire to stories told to children to explain the mysteries of the world and every interpersonal aspect of human existence, stories have been used to pass on history, share information and encourage group cohesion. “The implication for educators in diverse instructional settings is that while non-stories provide information, resonant stories teach, inspire and motivate students by engaging them emotionally and intellectually” (Bowman, p. 98). As my career has progressed and my pedagogy developed, I have learned to use stories in every subject I have taught, and I have witnessed the emotional and intellectual engagement of my students.

As a white female teacher addressing a predominantly minority student base my stories are especially important for building trust and community. They give me a chance to show students that while I will never completely understand their experiences with racism, I have had experiences that give me an idea of the depth of feeling that is elicited by being

stereotyped. Kendal Haven's extensive research discussed this phenomenon in *The Power of Story*, "Stories engage the entire person and evoke a sense of community and of belonging that brings whole people into an event or space" (p. 87). Each year when I share my personal experiences with antisemitism and how I felt as a result, my students respond with surprise and then share their own experiences of being both dismissed and stereotyped as a result of their skin color.

Storytelling also extends to sharing stories that are not our own, in the form of books, podcasts, movies, and other media. Students are naturally drawn to information that they can identify with, or which they can recognize as a "typical" experience. Introducing a topic by sharing a video clip or reading a short story aloud offers students a chance to identify and understand the individuals and experiences portrayed in the story. A story in any form "nourishes and emphasizes this understanding" (Kuyvenhoven, p. 161). Throughout my career, I have used stories to introduce new topics, explain difficult concepts and illustrate connections between seemingly unrelated things we have studied and shared in class. For me, this has been a natural way to show my students the connections they have to subject matter and to each other.

Johanna Kuyvenhoven (2009) observed "storytelling teacher", Linda Stender, in an ethnographic case study. During her time with Ms. Stender, she found that "stories belong to people and people belong to stories" (p. 18). Kuyvenhoven quoted Ms. Stender, "I think in storytelling you can do a lot of quick lessons. It's a very efficient kind of teaching tool" (p. 22). This echoes my personal experience with the use of stories in the classroom. Haven further supports this concept, explaining that stories "...make learning fun and involve story receivers (for example, students, employees, and co-workers) in the material you want to teach" (p. 87).

The stories I share in the classroom serve a myriad number of purposes, they are often to make a point or to help my students connect to an idea or concept, they also serve the purpose of aiding my students in connecting to me and trusting me. While these stories serve as a method of illustration, they are much more than that.

Storytelling as Incidental Learning

When I share a story about my family, a former student, or even something I have read, I am not only using the story to explain, but I am also using the story to connect to the students. Telfer and Turner (2019) refer to this phenomenon as “incidental learning” and a key finding of their study showed that “...storytelling provides creative opportunities for teachers to develop their practice through incidental learning” (p. 41). Sharing a snippet of my personal life allows students to feel that they know something about my life beyond the classroom, they connect their own experience to my experience and our sense of community grows. The trainee teachers in Telfer and Turner’s study found storytelling was “a creative source or incidental springboard for inspiration...” (p. 47), this finding mimics my own experience which led me to continue to use stories as a teaching tool. Students are impacted by stories because they reflect a personal connection to the teacher. Kuyvenhoven (2009) observed the impact of stories and noted that “storytelling is an activity of identity-making, healing, and counseling” (p. 18). Stories give the teacher the ability to address the required lessons while simultaneously showing students how these lessons are directly related to daily life.

Storytelling as pedagogy requires “...a vision of teaching that stresses helping our students make connections with their experience and knowledge, showing our students how to construct knowledge of themselves” (Deniston-Trochta, 1998, p. 28). This echoes Freire’s concept that education should lead to the development of consciousness about the world and

themselves. The connections students make to stories help to develop critical thinking skills and encourage students to connect to the learning process rather than being passive receivers of knowledge as are described in Freire's description of the "banking method of teaching" (1970, p. 62). The idea of knowledge being individually constructed echoes the teachings of both Vygotsky and Freire. Actively engaging with stories and connecting them to personal experiences allows students to make a wide range of connections through critical thinking.

Storytelling as Metacognition

This study was guided by a Social Constructivist perspective, which focuses on students engaging in a broad range of rich experiences, undergoing varied pedagogical styles, and engaging in metacognition to draw their own conclusions and make connections. Lev Vygotsky developed this framework as part of his rejection of the ideas of Piaget and Perry, "Social constructivism is a variety of cognitive constructivism that emphasizes the collaborative nature of much learning" (Social Constructivism, 2020). Storytelling is a collaborative activity because it lends itself to students sharing their own stories. Storytelling is a rich experience when it aids students in making connections.

In developing a Social Constructivist framework for this study, I was influenced by the work of Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and Paulo Freire. The inquiry was framed by Vygotskian principles of learning and focuses on how each of these guiding principles is supported in the integration of stories into my teaching style. Vygotsky believed, "Knowledge is not simply constructed, it is co-constructed" (Social Constructivism, 2020). The sharing of stories and making connections leads to the co-construction of knowledge through discussion and connecting the stories to personal knowledge which is the foundation of my pedagogy.

Self-study lends itself to this framework as it is an "exploration of one's self" (Samaras, 2002, p. xiv) and leads to examining our "...interpretations, choices, and commitments as an

active agent...” (p. 148). This type of inquiry offered the opportunity to thoroughly examine and determine the roots of my choices as a teacher while creating an opportunity to use the knowledge of these pedagogical choices to guide and assist new teachers as they enter the profession. Understanding my motivations for implementing this type of pedagogy adds to the research on empowering beginning teachers and assisting them in finding their own pedagogy as they develop. As teacher shortages become more pervasive it is essential to find more ways to support new teachers and this study contributes to the growing body of research on training and supporting new teachers, as well as helping them to be persistent and remain in the classroom throughout their career.

The co-construction of knowledge is part of a conceptual framework that situates one’s family and its history within a wider analysis of social power, relationships, and culture. Christine Sleeter (2016) discusses the importance of understanding this context and its impacts of it on shared stories, she asserts that “...ignoring context leads to uncritical appropriation of national mythologies” (p. 12). This is an essential aspect of sharing family stories, however, in this study, my focus was on understanding when I shared family stories and how the stories had become central to my pedagogy. It is important for students to understand the historical context that impacts each story, and often I include some background information to assist students in their perceptions of the time to which I am referring. Discussions about the stories often lead to conversations about daily life during the time periods referenced in the stories and add to their understanding of those earlier periods as well as how some information may have been mythologized.

Research Design

This study was designed to unpack and examine the choices I made as I was finding my niche in the classroom and determining how I would use my pedagogy to reach students. This goes beyond developing lessons and the associated materials, but it is also an integral part of the day-to-day processes of teaching. In my role as an educator as I move through the different stages of my career, I determine what works and what does not, I find the rhythm by which I run my classroom and plan for instruction. Samaras (2002) expounded on the role of self-study in education, “Self-study is more than an exploration of one’s self. The heart of self-study is the application of the knowledge one gains through this process to one’s teaching practices” (p. xiv). Kuyvenhoven (2009) summed up the connection between self-study, storytelling, and pedagogy when she described Linda Stender as, “always...thinking about their thinking” (p. 154), she went on to describe storytelling as a” medium of presence” that “nourishes and emphasizes their understanding” (p. 161). This presence gives all participants a sense of community and builds the culture and trust in the classroom which leads to learning.

“Stories serve multiple functions...(they) implicate us in a way that clarifies connections, that embodies the connection to what we are studying” (Bell, 2009, p. 108-9). They are used throughout education for a broad spectrum of purposes, and they are key to human development. Almost every teacher utilizes stories in some form in their classroom. When any individual tells a story, they are sharing a piece of themselves. Neuroscientist, Emily Falk (2021), explained this component of human nature, “Stories are one tool to help people simulate and understand social experiences they’ve never personally gone through” (p. 4). No two people tell a story the same way and no two students hear a story the same way, each individual responds to a story based on their background and experience and learns from it in

the same way. Since “Our student’s lived experience is the foundation for their learning” (Denison-Trochta, 1998, p. 27), exploring the culmination of storytelling and pedagogy is key to gaining a deeper understanding of teacher development.

Pandemic Pedagogy

Showing students that our lessons are related to everyday life was especially important during the year my research was collected. We were in the middle of a pandemic and everything my students knew and expected of school had changed. That school year my students were required to sit apart, with plexiglass shields between them, they wore masks everywhere they went on campus, and collaborative assignments as we have always known them were absent from the classrooms. Dividing students into groups and asking them to huddle together and work in separate corners of the classroom was not allowed for fear of further spreading Covid-19 or, “the virus”. Additionally, only half of my students were physically sitting in my classroom, and the other half of the class were listening and watching on their laptops at home. I could not see their faces to gauge comprehension and many of them avoided speaking through the computer. I imagined it was uncomfortable for them because they couldn’t see their classmates or my face most of the time. My webcam faced the Smartboard so the online students could take notes and view the information displayed there throughout the class. All of this added a new dynamic to my use of storytelling.

In previous years, storytelling was a natural occurrence in my classroom. I planned for many stories, but there were also many incidences of spontaneous storytelling. A response to a question, a chance to add deeper meaning to a discussion, or just a sense I had that a story about myself and my connection to our topic would both help students understand and embrace the concepts we were addressing. That year, the spontaneity was squelched by the camera in

the room. I was still telling stories, but there was a great deal more to consider when sharing a story. My place in the room had to be intentional. If I told a story and the online students couldn't see me, they missed some of the subtleties of facial expressions and gestures, often the sound was spotty on their end. All these factors impacted how often I told stories and which stories I told.

Previously tried and true lessons were no longer easy to include in my plans. If a story was to be used, consideration had to be given to when in the lesson students would be paying close attention to their screens. It was essential that I consider the information projected on the board and whether my placement in front of the board would impact the online student's ability to complete assignments. Online students dealt with a myriad array of interruptions and distractions that I also had to consider. If I was telling a story verbally and a student missed all or part of it, they needed another way to obtain the lesson. Video and audio recordings became more important to my lessons, and I was constantly seeking additional resources. Stories I previously read aloud were now often presented as videos. All these details did not require consideration before the implementation of simultaneous teaching. Realizing the importance of these small details resulted in alterations to the way I presented every part of my lessons, it impacted how and when I told a story. Deriving the essential essence of previous lessons and redesigning them for simultaneous instruction became the focus of my planning. My pedagogical style was at the heart of these newly created lessons and storytelling was still central. However, the staging and implementation were much more intentional.

Definition of Terms

In this dissertation, specific terms were used to refer to the methods of using storytelling in the classroom, and the qualitative research method of self-study. The following

definitions are intended to clarify the meaning of these terms and maintain the consistent meaning and avoid misinterpretation or misunderstanding.

- *Counternarrative* – A narrative shared in response to a narrative.
- *Narrative* – A spoken or written account of an event.
- *NBC* – National Board Teacher Certification – the multifaceted certification process designed to develop, retain, and recognize accomplished teachers and to generate ongoing improvement in schools nationwide. It is the most respected professional certification available in K-12 education.
- *Pedagogy* – the art or science of teaching; education; instructional methods.
- *S-STEP*– Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices – a research practice that developed in the early 1990s and which focuses on the introspective study of one’s own practices to contribute to professional learning and the understanding of the development of pedagogy.
- *Storytelling* – the act of sharing a story, anecdote, memory, or allusion from memory to a group of listeners.
- *Story* – a narrative account of a real or imagined event or events, often used to illustrate a concept, or elaborate on a point.
- *Teacher Persistence* – an educator striving towards a goal in the face of challenges. It is perseverance with a passion for attaining a long-term goal.

Chapter Summary

This chapter began with an introduction to the research study and the rationale behind engaging in such a study. The chapter continued to examine the purpose of the study, how the study was framed by several research questions, the research design for the study, and a

justification for this study as an essential addition to research in the field of education. This chapter also included an explanation of circumstances related to the Covid-19 pandemic which impacted the study. The next chapter discusses the literature and research that supports this study and how this information contributed to the development of the study parameters.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

“Storytelling is culturally universal—it is likely the oldest form of teaching, allowing generations of humans to share cultural knowledge to be remembered over time.”
(Landrum, Brakke, & McCarthy, 2019, p. 247)

Introduction

I chose the self-study methodology so I could take an in-depth look at the use of storytelling as pedagogy and the multiple ways in which I have used storytelling as a pedagogical foundation for my classroom practices. In this study, I was looking at stories and their use in my classroom on multiple levels. These levels include how my use of stories developed as a pedagogical method, how listening to stories as a child and young adult aided in developing this style of teaching, the cross-curricular nature of stories and how this helps stories transcend various subject areas, and how telling stories impacts my students and shapes their interactions with me in the classroom. Self-study was the most appropriate type of study for this research; I am intimately familiar with the subject of my study and can understand choices and motivations from a deeper perspective than would be possible when studying another teacher’s pedagogy. Anastasia Samaras, author of *Self-Study for Teacher Educators*, explained, “Self-study is an exploration of one’s self. The heart of self-study is the application of the knowledge one gains through this process to one’s own teaching practices” (p. xiv). This study explores my individual practice of using storytelling in the classroom to contribute to the body of research that exists and to contribute additional understandings of the role of storytelling in the classroom, both as a teaching tool and a pedagogy.

Overview

Chapter One of this study established the central focus of this study and how it has developed into a vital addition to the current research on this topic. Chapter Two was a review of literature on storytelling as an important pedagogical tool and its development within the growth of educational theories. Chapter Two focuses on both how an educator develops their style of pedagogy and the outside influences that impact the teacher and the students. Chapter Two addresses the impacts of developing this pedagogy as part of my persistence as an educator. Further attention is given to the conscious changes that I made to my style of pedagogy because of experience and how these changes continue to develop as I teach in varying situations throughout my career and how these changes supported my persistence. This study focused on my individual journey while extrapolating the similarities of my journey with other educators in the current educational landscape. Storytelling is identified as the central and transdisciplinary platform on which my lessons were developed and expanded. Chapter Two identifies previous research on the use of stories in a wide variety of subject areas and academic levels and identifies gaps in this literature that require further research.

Self-Study

Utilizing the guidance and knowledge of previous educators who embarked on a journey of self-study, I reviewed the various points in my education and career that encouraged and developed storytelling as the central pedagogical method used in my classroom; additionally, I explored the impacts of this methodology on my students and myself. Prior experience impacts the perception of oneself, and the patterns recognized during self-study and was an essential part of this study. The self-study methodology is “a body of practices,

procedures, and guidelines used by those who work in a discipline or engage in an inquiry” and includes a choice of multiple self-study methods” (Samaras & Freese, 2006, p. 56). The methodology employed in self-study is specific to the individual who undertakes this type of research and must be tailored to that individual’s situation and surroundings.

Self-study was appropriate to this inquiry because it focused on carefully dissecting the decisions I made as a teacher and how my prior experience, both personal and professional, impacted those choices as well as how they affected my students. As both researcher and subject, I was in a unique position. I possessed the knowledge of the motivations that guided my decisions as an educator, as well as embracing the successes and failures which result from those decisions. Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) stated, “Biographical and autobiographical self-studies in teacher education are about the problems and issues that make someone an educator” (p. 17). As the subject of my study, I was also able to identify how my responses to problems helped me maintain my career. In my dual roles, I was aware of the motivations for my actions while simultaneously being responsible for their outcomes. Embracing this unique perspective within this study allowed me to gain insight into my actions and to gain information that will be used to improve the learning situations for others.

Storytelling Defined

The telling of stories or sharing of experiences “have provided the vehicles for cultural transmission of knowledge throughout human history...” (Landrum, Brakke, & McCarthy, 2019, p. 101). Sharing experiences by telling a story is an ancient method for educating our younger generations. In this study, I looked at this practice through the eyes of both practitioner and recipient. My recollections of being a child listening to stories have shaped how and when I utilize this practice in my classroom and why it has become central to lesson

preparation as well as being the preferred technique when I find students struggling with concepts and ideas. This study also addressed the stories that were told in my classroom. Stories that became a pedagogical tool, aided me in helping my students and helped me to sustain myself in the profession. According to Deniston -Trochta (1998), “It is worth our while as teachers to look at the role of stories in making these necessary connections” (p. 29). My experience and the growth of my pedagogy served as an essential understanding of how this teaching style developed over time.

The Nature of Storytelling

Storytelling takes many forms. In the “Pedagogical Power of Storytelling” (2019) the authors note states, “With regard to teaching, the purpose of stories is to (a) create interest, (b) provide a structure for remembering course material, (c) share information in a familiar and accessible form, and (d) create a more personal student-teacher connection” (as cited in Green, 2004, p. 2). In interacting with students, stories can be used as an introduction to a new idea or subject, as an example to illustrate the application of a new skill, as a method to aid students in recalling information, or for a vast array of other reasons. Students respond to a story as a respite from learning when it is part of the learning, and they interact with the story being told uniquely because it is not in a book or part of a handout. Stories allow our students to experience “perils and pitfalls” (Landrum, Brakke, & McCarthy, 2019, p. 3) without leaving the comfort of the classroom. Stories offer students examples of the concepts they are learning being applied in the life of the storyteller, someone they know and trust. Bowman (2018) recognized this phenomenon, “In the classroom, great stories unite an idea with emotion, arousing students’ attention, arousing student attention and interest by putting a ‘human face’ on anecdotes and stories” (p. 97). The connection students have to the “human face” bolsters

the power of the story's teachers tell in the classroom. "In classroom settings...a story characteristically ignites students' attention" (p. 98). The relationship the teacher has built with the student increases both the student's interest and their connection to the information being shared. Neuroscientist, Dr. Emily Falk (2021) explained this phenomenon "listeners brains synch with one another" as has been shown in "A new study...that shows personal stories are more consistently processed in regions of the brain that help us understand what other people think and feel..." (p. 4). As humans, we are inclined to listen to stories and our responses to them are both voluntary and involuntary.

Landrum, Brakke, and McCarthy (2019) lauded storytelling as "one of the oldest forms of teaching, allowing generations of humans to share cultural knowledge to be remembered over time" (p. 247) and for perspective cited Abrahamson (2006) as referring to the practice of storytelling as "foundational to the teaching profession." In Landrum, Brakke, and McCarthy's 2006 theory review of "The Pedagogical Power of Storytelling" they identified the roots of storytelling in teaching and the essential role stories have played in sharing and communicating information in cultures all over the world. "Beyond knowledge and experience, stories have provided the vehicles of cultural transmission of knowledge throughout human history, allowing each generation to build upon the wisdom of the ancestors" (Landrum, Brakke, & McCarthy, p. 248). As the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors, I was exposed to this oral tradition regularly and it became the underpinnings of both how I learned, and how I taught. This study looked at how these early experiences helped to build a foundation for my career and contributed to my persistence. The following research question guided this portion of the self-study:

- In what ways has sharing family stories contributed to my persistence in my teaching career?

Storytelling as a Pedagogical Method

Storytelling requires the active engagement of two parties, the teller of the story and the listener. Kuyvenhoven (2009) defined stories as "...telling, an act in which a person speaks a story from memory to a listener or group of listeners" (p. 3). In sharing stories, teacher and student are engaging in a shared experience and they are finding common ground and working together to solve a problem. The teacher is presenting their own experience and the student, as the listener, is evaluating and applying their own lived experience. "Freire believed that student and teacher should work together to solve problems..." (Kalogeras, 2013, p. 1). Learning a new skill or obtaining information is viewed as solving a problem for the purposes of this study. The teacher is offering a rationale or method for the student to retain and utilize the lesson by sharing a story that exemplifies the usefulness of the information they are imparting to the student. Storytelling fulfills many varied purposes. Each of these purposes can be viewed as the resolution of a problem, problems of engagement, recall, simplification, and relationship building. These are all problems teachers solve in their classrooms daily. Freire (2000) expounded "...dialogue is a way of knowing...an indispensable component of the process of both learning and knowing" (p. 17). By identifying with the teacher's stories and combining it with their own, teacher and student are working together to solve the problem of how to learn the concept. This interaction aids in building trust and the relationship between teacher and student. At the center of teaching is the relationship between teacher and student and the trust that is necessary for that relationship to be successful. Stories aid in building that trust.

Stories have a naturally transdisciplinary nature. Stories can be used in any class and with any subject matter. Drake and Reid (2020) explain, “Narrative is a way humans interpret the world, hence the concept of story informs the model” (p. 7). The model they are referring to is the “Story Model Framework” (Appendix C) developed by Drake et al. in 1992. Drake and Reid (2020) further explain this model as “a transdisciplinary curriculum model and a collaborative problem-solving model” (p. 7).

This model illustrates the wide range of impacts that a story can have on a listener. When students listen to a story, they can connect to it on any of the levels indicated: universal, global, cultural, or personal, depending on when the story is told and who is telling it. When a story is told by a teacher students incorporate that story into their classroom experience and integrate it with their knowledge and experience and the “old story” becomes part of the “present story”. As they incorporate the “present story” into their learning they can take that knowledge and apply it in any of the ways indicated in the framework. Students can use the story to project using the knowledge they have gained, or they can imagine the ideal story as it applies to them. The Story Model framework illustrates the comprehensive impact of stories on students and how storytelling can be used in the classroom for a wide variety of purposes.

Storytelling is an important part of why I became a teacher. My desire to share my family stories and to ensure that memories of the Holocaust were not lost, propelled me during my first teaching position. Finding that my stories helped my students understand various concepts and aid in building my classroom community bolstered my confidence. As I continued in my career, I adapted my storytelling to a wider variety of stories and, over time, used stories in more and more of my teaching. The development of this style of pedagogy contributed to my persistence by challenging me to be creative through the incorporation of

purposeful stories that engaged, challenged, and served my students. Wheatley (2002) explained, “teachers are persistent when they reflect on something repeatedly to try to figure it out and to plan how to do better the next time” (p. 3). Determining when and how to incorporate stories into my praxis challenged me and aided in my persistence in the profession.

Throughout my career, I have taught a variety of classes and topics, and in each teaching situation, I have employed stories to explain the subject matter covered in the class. A natural extension of using stories for subject introduction has been to use stories when clearing up confusion or showing students the connections between what we are doing in the classroom and the real world. Drake and Reid (2020) also profess that this tool “allows for messiness, multilayered complexity, and a big picture perspective” (p. 6). The use of stories is not unique to me as an educator, many renowned teachers incorporate stories into their practice. However, each teacher uses stories slightly differently, each adapts their own series of tales they use repeatedly in their classrooms and each storytelling teacher adapts their stories to the group of students before them each year. This portion of the study was guided by the research question:

- In what ways has sharing family stories contributed to my persistence in my teaching career?

The methodology employed in using stories as a basis for pedagogy is not new and its success has been documented by multiple experts in the field of education including Anastasia Samaras, Anne Freese, Clive Beck, Tom Russel, and J. Loughran. Freire (1973), in discussing his teaching methods, recognized that “Acquiring literacy does not involve memorizing sentences, words, or syllables...” (p. 48) but that learning was propelled by dialogue, often in the form of storytelling. Vygotsky’s “zone of proximal development” also supports the essential role of stories in teaching new ideas and concepts. Vygotsky believed that

communication was essential to learning and storytelling is one of the most basic forms of communication. Reynoso, Romero, and Romero (2012) refer to Lev Vygotsky's zone of proximal development as presenting a "communication view that perceives intelligence as inter-and intra-personal communication in a social context" (p. 514). The intimate communication that occurs during the telling of a story forms a connection between the teller and the listener.

As the subject of this study, it was essential to recognize the impact of my learning. This study examined the experiences and underpinnings that my upbringing contributed to my pedagogy. The experiences of my family members were often shared in the form of a story told to explain why our family did things in a particular way. This type of interaction between generations is typical of German-Jewish families and storytelling is an integral part of Judaism; much of our history and culture is shared through storytelling, both formal and informal. Each Sabbath, stories from the Torah are shared in the synagogue, all major holidays center around stories of our ancestral beginnings and the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, the adolescent rite of passage to adulthood, requires a Jewish teenager to study a portion of the Torah, become intimately familiar with the story in that portion, present it to the congregation and explain its personal meaning to the adolescent and their Jewish community. Franzenburg, Ilisko, and Verkest (2018) explain this as "remembering as a moral duty" an integral concept from "the Jewish model of remembrance and reconciliation...recalls victims as well as blessings..." (p. 119). The examples I encountered as a child and young adult contributed to the development of my individual pedagogical style. My development as a writer, teller of stories, and educator are all intertwined, teaching is my art form, and stories are the medium I manipulate.

Marshall Ganz (2011), an expert in the field of narrative practice, as well as being a renowned Rabbi and professor, recognized that “Stories teach us the right way to act” (p. 282). He understood that the stories we tell are a way of telling others what we expect of them. This was reiterated by Dr. Falk (2021) in researching the use of stories to change children’s behavior, she learned that “...research in many fields supports the idea that stories can reduce defensiveness, teach complicated concepts, change individuals’ behaviors, and promote social change” (p. 3). All these impacts of stories are key to teaching students in the classroom.

As an educator, it’s my goal to prepare students to apply the knowledge and experience they gain in school to a wide range of situations. Sharing a story to illustrate how or why something in our curriculum applies to my life illustrates why I am asking students to master a skill, while simultaneously increasing the bond between teacher and student. “Storytelling is how we interact with each other about values – how we share experiences with each other, comfort each other, and inspire each other to action” (Ganz, 2011, p. 282). Landrum, Brakke, and McCarthy (2019) noted that “...researchers suggest that our brains actually respond to what is happening in a story as if it were a genuine experience” (p. 249). The ability of our students to “live” the stories we tell and “enter the other world of the story” (Landrum, Brakke, & McCarthy, p. 250) offers insight as to why students can recall stories more easily than facts and figures and how their brains are processing the information encompassed in the story itself. Stories allow students to connect the information to their own lives and recognize the feelings connected to the story. Collins and Cooper stated, “Storytelling is the commonality of all human beings, in all places, in all times. It is used to educate, to inspire, to record historical events, to entertain, to transmit cultural mores” (p. 1). The versatility of stories and their universality made them a natural component of pedagogy.

This review of literature focused on previous research done on the impacts of storytelling, the use of storytelling as a form of pedagogy, the transdisciplinary nature of stories in the classroom, and the array of ways in which storytelling can be implemented in the classroom. This literature review identified consistent areas of knowledge found in research on pedagogy beginning with Lev Vygotsky (1978) in *Mind in Society*, and Paolo Freire, a renowned authority in education, and the influences of pedagogy stated in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). This literature review spanned past and current scholarly articles, studies of developing educators, previous reviews of the literature on storytelling, self-studies published by fellow teachers, empirical studies from experts in a variety of fields, and anecdotal information from journals as well as from international agencies that impact the development of education at all levels. Explaining concepts and ideas through storytelling is a natural way for adults to address unfamiliar concepts for children. Stories are personal and they show students the sameness they share with their teachers. “The paradigm of storytelling emphasizes the importance of the personal in learning that is lasting” (Deniston-Trochta, 1998, p. 29). Stories are not memorized, like facts or formulas, students recall the connection they make with what happens in the story, Deniston-Trochta (1998) refers to this connection as a “personal aesthetic experience” that is a “necessary link for learning...that has lasting value” (p. 29). This section of the study was guided by the question:

- Which family stories do I use repeatedly and what is their function in my pedagogy?

Impacts of the Pandemic

At the beginning of this study, everything about teaching changed due to the arrival of a deadly pandemic. Noor, Isa, and Mazhar (2020) summed up the impacts on schools as,

“Teaching staff...the most vital resource in any schooling system, faced considerable physical, mental and financial challenges due to an overnight shift to an online mode of teaching...” (p. 169). Formerly tried and true assignments and lessons were impacted by the shift from classroom education to emergency online learning because schools across the country closed their physical doors and teachers began teaching from their dining rooms and kitchens via the internet. “The unexpected arrival of COVID-19 and the almost overnight need to move delivery of programs online at every level of schooling has exacerbated an already uneven implementation of digital technology” (McQuirter, 2020, p. 48). This unexpected change had an immense impact on my teaching and how I approached and planned everything about my pedagogy. Roy Schwartzman (2020) summarized the experience “...educational institutions issued the mandate to convert all face-to-face courses to online often within a week or less to engineer this metamorphosis, the very nature of education transformed” (p. 503). The combination of a new method of teaching, concerns about the health and safety of students and peers, and an abrupt disruption of our daily lives impacted every part of how and what I taught.

As the weeks of online education became months, and graduations, proms, finals, and all the “normal” vestiges of the end of a school year were reconfigured into online, contactless events the impact of the pandemic required all teachers to modify and rethink how they teach and how they engage their students. “UNESCO (2020) reported that 165 billion learners worldwide, equivalent to 87% of the world’s student population, suffered some degree due to the impact of COVID-19 school closures” (Noor, Isa, & Mzhar, 2020, p. 170). This continued as summer ended and the pandemic was still ravaging our country. As teachers planned to return to their classrooms, new configurations of how they would meet, teach, and engage with their students were created and teachers, myself included, had to rethink the beginning of the

school year. My school district opted for a combination of online and face-to-face education; parents were asked to choose the option best suited to their family's situation. Simultaneous teaching became the norm, a model in which approximately half of my students attended school face-to-face and the rest attended class online, resulting in teaching two separate groups of students simultaneously.

“Reflection, thought, and academic research responds by trying to make sense of the world we live in, seeking order and meaning in the face of chaos and despair, questioning what we previously took for granted” (Norris, 2020, p. 29). Research on the wide range of impacts that resulted from this alteration of education during the pandemic is limited and still in the process of being cultivated/ and evaluated and “educational research is more relevant than ever” (Norris, 2020, p. 4). The availability of online classrooms and the ability to continue teaching through the pandemic is uncharted territory, as are the responses of teachers all over the world. This study focused on my responses and adjustments as well as the methods employed to continue using storytelling as a foundation of my pedagogy. This section of the study was guided by the question:

- How have I adjusted my use of stories for varied situations?

Chapter Summary

This self-study focused on the development, implementation, and continuing use of storytelling as pedagogy throughout a 25-year career. It was guided by relevant literature on the use of storytelling and the development of a distinct pedagogical style, specifically the impact of various influences on the life of the subject. Additionally, this study addressed the direct impacts on this pedagogical style directly resulting from simultaneous teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Chapter Two established the context and background for the study. First, the background and rationale for the study were clarified and two major components of the study were defined and explained, storytelling and self-study. The historical perspective of storytelling as pedagogy was discussed and the connections of the study subject to storytelling as a personal and cultural association were established. To further illustrate my methodology, the development of self-study as a qualitative form of research was reviewed and data sources were defined. Finally, the rationale for including the adjustments necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic were explained.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS

“Self-study research allows you to openly ask questions about your teaching practice.”
(Samaras, 2010, p. 34)

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to take a self-reflective look at my pedagogical practice, analyze how this practice has developed over the past 26 years, and reflect on how these factors have supported my persistence as an educator. By self-study, I refer to a “...critical examination of one’s actions and the context of those actions in order to achieve a more conscious mode of professional activity...” (Samaras, 2002, p. xii). Analyzing the development of my practice adds to current research used in training and assisting new teachers as they develop their practice and aids me in continuing to hone my pedagogy so I may better serve my students. Additionally, I analyzed how finding a pedagogical style propelled me to remain in the classroom and adjust this style to various subjects and student groups. This inquiry assessed current practices and how they have developed throughout my career and how my personal familial background has impacted my use of stories in the classroom. This research investigated how the use of storytelling has developed over time and how it is used consistently as a method of engaging students, building community, and offering a transdisciplinary view of the topics discussed in class. Exploration of the connections between my background and experience was crucial to understanding the data obtained. Specific attention was paid to how growing up in an environment in which sharing stories was commonplace impacted the development of my pedagogy and I examined how those influences led me to utilize stories on various levels as an educator. Additionally, I engaged in further investigation and inquiry into how these stories served to build community in my classroom, create connections for my students and define a lasting career.

The following questions guided this research:

- In what ways has sharing family stories contributed to my persistence in my teaching career?
- Which family stories do I use repeatedly and what is their function in my pedagogy?
- How have I adjusted my use of stories for varied situations?

Self-Study Educators (S-STEP)

Teacher self-study is a growing body of education research. It is an autobiographical and ethnographic method of reviewing one's actions and reactions as an educator and looking at the motivation and prior knowledge implemented in making decisions about how to present lessons and engage students. Self-study requires a dual role for the researcher as both subject and investigator, this dual role complicates self-study as a method of research. Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) stated "Self-study is a mongrel: the study is always of practice, but at the intersection of self and other and its methods are borrowed" (p. 15). Self-study draws research practices from various areas of qualitative research. Bullough and Pinegar (2001) further explained, "Who a researcher is, is central to what the researcher does" (p. 13). Seeking to understand our actions as teachers provides information to improve our praxis and assist future generations of teachers as they navigate the complicated road to developing their pedagogical style. The *International Handbook of Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices* illuminates the importance of self-study for teachers "... if we are to genuinely be scholars of teaching, we need to be able to demonstrate that we learn through the challenges created by our actions in our practice. In that way, self-study is an important touchstone to personal professional accountability" (Loughran, 2018, p. 66). Each day, as educators, we make dozens

of decisions about what we are teaching and how it will be taught, these decisions are at the core of our praxis, and unpacking the reasons behind our decisions can only help future generations of teachers.

This study was designed according to the accepted guidelines for teacher self-study, a type of qualitative research specifically used in education. Qualitative research encompasses a unique form of research specific to the study of education and teacher practices. Teacher educators began this type of qualitative research during the early 1990s and it has continued to grow as an accepted form of research over the past 25+ years. This research was specifically focused on classroom teachers and “aimed at making explicit and questioning their tacit knowledge of practice through systematic investigation of their practices” (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015, p. 509). This research was focused on improving the preparation of teachers for their work with students in the classroom while also aiding each teacher who undertakes this type of study in critically assessing their actions as an educator. It was a direct assessment of how teachers make their plans and determine methods for imparting knowledge to their students. Self-study research is essential to the improvement of teacher education as it assists in the “construction of an explicit pedagogy and growth in practice” (p. 509). National Board Certification echoes this specific type of research and the results from teachers who have engaged in this process support its undeniable value. “Many teachers say the NBC process is one of the most rewarding professional development experiences they have had...” (Petty, Good, & Heafner, 2019, p. 219). Teaching is an art form and cannot simply be broken down into a series of steps to be taken. The process of dissecting one’s practice results in critical analysis of methods and ultimately improving those practices, as well as the ability to explain the motivation behind them to new and developing teachers.

Zeichner (1999) called self-study the “single most significant development ever in the field” (p. 8), and there is evidence that this type of qualitative research resonates with teachers and offers new insights into the complexities of classroom management, lesson preparation, and presentation, and all other aspects of teaching. A bi-yearly conference is held in England for researchers to come together and collaborate on significant details of carrying out this type of research. Juanjo Mena and Tom Russell (2017) have analyzed more than 60 papers from the 2014 conference, and they have concluded that when engaging in a self-study, researchers must be aware that “particular attention needs to be given to collaboration, use of multiple methods, and trustworthiness as essential characteristics of S-STEP” (p. 106). S-Step offers opportunities for teachers to dissect their practice and share with colleagues and student teachers the factors that influence their decisions and can assist developing teachers in making choices about their classrooms.

Self-study is very specific to the individual conducting the study and “focuses on one’s own role as a teacher/teacher educator, analyzing the consequences of personal decisions and actions as well as the characteristics and nuances” (Mena & Russell, 2017, p. 107) in which an individual teaches. As a result, each self-study is unique to the locale in which the practitioner hones their craft. For example, a teacher in an urban school in New York City may not gain insight by reading the self-study of a midwestern teacher in an affluent urban school. The two teaching assignments each hold their challenges and rewards, but the methodology used by each teacher is going to vary to respond to the students in their rooms and the pedagogy of the teacher. This is not to say that each of the aforementioned teachers could not find valuable information in these self-studies, simply that they may glean different types of insight and guidance. Laboskey (2004) stated, “two types of knowledge can be elicited in a self-study of

practice: embodied knowledge, a context-specific knowledge that resides in the researchers' practice, and public knowledge, the knowledge that is reported to others and contributes to the improvement of teaching practices" (p. 108). This confirmation of the value of S-Step research shows its many applications in preparing teachers for the classroom and the vast array of challenges faced by both new and continuing teachers.

Self-Study and National Board Certification

S-Step research is akin to the research done by individual teachers during the National Board Certification (NBC) process, a process considered both rigorous and informative. The process requires teachers to look at their practice and answer a series of self-reflective questions to identify their strengths and the areas that need refinement. NBC teachers also engage in videotaping lessons in their classroom and reviewing their teaching and their interactions with students. The goal of the process, as stated on the home page of their website, is to "build a stronger profession...provide aspiring, new, and professional teachers with a clear picture of what accomplished teaching looks like and how accomplished teachers continue to improve their practice" (NBPTS.org/ATLAS, 2018). The culmination of engaging in the NBC practice results in teachers obtaining a critical view of their practice and gives them insight into areas for improvement and change. Teachers who complete the process are noted for the impact they have on their students and their commitment to teaching. Studies cited on the NBPTS website reiterate the value of teacher self-study and its impact on students, supporting the value of self-reflection in education and training teachers.

S-Step incorporates both the study of practices and the assessment of "existing written (e.g., lesson plans, journals, meeting reports, comments on discussion boards) and non-written data (e.g. photographs, videotapes of instructional activities) to inform their research interests"

(Vassche & Kelchtermans, p. 515). This combination of artifacts serves to give a multi-faceted view of the praxis of the individual and allows for insight into how multiple aspects of teaching work together. Focusing on the multitude of components that impact teaching gives evidence that it is a transdisciplinary, complex profession that is also distinctly individual. The knowledge and insights gleaned from S-STEP studies will provide data that can be utilized in many ways to assist teachers as they develop their practice. “For self-study inquiries to be exemplars of scholarship and practice, they need to be intentional and reflective of human actions, be socially and contextually situated...and involve the construction of meaning and knowledge” (p. 518).

S-STEP research is essential to the creation of comprehensive knowledge of teaching and training teachers and ultimately “could turn the self-study approach into a research perspective that is more promising and inspiring than the currently dominant perspectives” (p. 523). As S-STEP research continues to grow, the contributions from this research paradigm complement the more traditional research studies by adding an individual perspective that is essential in education. S-STEP research inserts the voice of the teacher into the research on teaching and reflects the qualitative nature of education. The teaching profession is unique in its focus on an individual’s pedagogical style and the choices each teacher makes when preparing a lesson and presenting it to their students, individuality is a key component of being a teacher, our personalities are on display each time we step in front of the classroom. Teachers are in the unique position of utilizing their strengths in the classroom and S-STEP research aids in shedding light on how this is accomplished.

Researcher as Subject

A key aspect of self-study research requires that the researcher also serves as the subject of their research. Self-study is a form of auto-ethnography and has developed from action research, however, the personal goals and research goals differ; in self-study, the goal is for the teacher to analyze specific aspects of their practice so that they can improve and assist developing teachers as they develop their pedagogy. Samaras (2011) stated, “Self-study research is for your personal and professional development” (p. 61). Self-study is a form of autoethnography that also serves as professional development and an individual assessment of one’s pedagogy. Autoethnography focuses on specific events or a series of events in the life of the researcher and seeks to assess their cultural and/or emotional impacts.

Salem Press Encyclopedia (2018), defines auto-ethnography as “...a research and reporting method that utilizes a writer’s personal experiences and history to help analyze, describe, or report on cultural, social, or political phenomena.” Samaras (2011) paraphrased Feldman, et al (2004) to clarify the differentiation, “In action research, the goal of the “action “is for a change in the classroom. In self-study research, the “self” is the focus of the study with the goal of leading to a reframed understanding of one’s role to impact students’ learning” (p. 124). S-STEP is focused on improving education and educators by dissecting one’s habits and behaviors in the classroom and using them to improve, not just your own practice, but also educational practice. The researcher is analyzing their pedagogy while also developing information to be shared with fellow teachers to aid them in improving their pedagogical practice.

Samaras (2011) further explained the impact of teachers participating in S-STEP, “Consequently, teachers gain self-efficacy and confidence in their abilities to promote

students' learning through self-study research" (p. 65). In scrutinizing the wide range of choices and plans implemented in our classrooms we, as educators, can continually improve and revise our understanding. We are our own best research subjects because only we understand why we implement processes and procedures in our classrooms, and we understand how important it is to learn from our teaching. Teaching often requires an understanding that each new lesson requires a certain amount of trial and error, and teachers understand that it is essential to learn from our mistakes in the classroom. Embarking on a self-study requires viewing your praxis with a critical eye and using what you see to implement change for improvement. Tom Russell (2018) summed up his experience with self-study "Self-study has been central to my growing understanding of how I have learned from my teaching experiences" (p. 13). Learning from our experience makes us better educators because it allows us to see what we do from the perspectives of both teacher and learner. Self-study offers the opportunity to experience some of the frustrations that our students may encounter while also allowing us to celebrate our successes.

Research Technique

Teacher self-study was an appropriate method for this study as it offered the opportunity to assess choices made as a teacher over a long and varied career. Self-study is widely accepted in the field of education and has been defined as "teacher educators researching their practice with the purpose of improving it, making explicit and validating their professional expertise and, at the same time, contributing to the knowledge base of teacher education" (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015, p. 508). This method of study is one in which I have been involved since early in my career when I endeavored to and subsequently obtained National Board Teacher Certification. The process of procuring this elite certification made the

value of self-reflection as a teacher very apparent to me as a young educator. In *Self-Study for Teacher Educators* Samaras (2002) echoed my sentiments, “Self-knowledge enabled me to better understand how my model for teaching grew” (p. xiii). This also led to both engaging in further self-reflection to improve my practice and guiding fellow teachers through this process through mentoring and leading lesson studies.

By engaging in this study, I identified the patterns that I have developed specifically for my use of storytelling in the classroom. Specifically, I focused on my use of family stories, stories that I heard growing up, and stories about events and circumstances I have encountered with my own children, and immediate and extended family including former students. In understanding the motivations and goals behind employing a storytelling pedagogy, I was better able to identify how and why this type of pedagogy has been successful for me and the influences that guided me in fostering this style of pedagogy. The results of this study were useful to me in multiple ways. They allow me to understand the cultural underpinning of how pedagogy is developed, and they assisted me in mentoring and training teachers new to the profession. Viewing my own pedagogy with a critical eye aided in my understanding of how my methods have supported my persistence as a teacher and how those I mentor can persist. Identifying the factors that have propelled me to use stories in my classroom also allowed me to expand this area of my pedagogy and make it more effective and focused.

Study Design

Data collection for this study was assembled from documentation generated during the planning and teaching of my classes. These sources included, but are not limited to, current lesson plans, teacher-created syllabi, a reflective journal kept by the teacher throughout the study, and a log of teacher-student interactions. These data sources offered insight into the

daily flow of the classroom and the planning and implementation of lessons. Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) also recommend some data be gleaned from "...email, letters, recorded conversations" (p. 13). These personal data sources allowed for an understanding of the intersection of the personal and the professional that is foundational to teaching. "When biography and history are joined, when the issue confronted by the self is shown to have a relationship to and bearing on the context and ethos of time, then self-study moves to research" (p.15). The information revealed by analyzing the progression from lesson plan to presentation is used to determine the factors that aid in the decision to include a storying event and how the story is presented and discussed. The "storytelling log" supplied a day-to-day record of the stories that were told, when, why, and how as well as the type of story that was shared. AERA (1999) also supports the use of personal data sources for self-study, "keeping of journals in written or video formats, the writing of autobiographies, and the presentation of research in other narrative forms are now more and more commonplace" (p. 13). The reflective journal and the log gave a detailed look into the daily interactions between myself and my students, the log allowed me to jot down observations and unplanned storying events which occurred during the school day; the reflective journal was used for more insightful thoughts and concepts as well analysis and introspection and was amended at least weekly. The log gave me insight into the timing of my use of stories as well as which stories I told, who they were about, what they were and why they were told.

Examining the patterns of my storytelling revealed patterns of behavior that disclosed their role in my praxis and how they support student learning and community building in my classroom. The nature of self-study is to review the actions taken by the teacher and the impact on the students for analysis towards the improvement of these actions. I was looking for

patterns of when and why I used a story and what the student response was to the stories I told. Attention was given to whether stories resulted in students sharing stories of their own, or if we connected it to a lesson or assignment that the students completed. The stories were chosen and how they were told was reviewed for connections to my familial tradition of storytelling. LaBoskey (2004) further explains the purpose of self-study, “We are not simply presenting a ‘model’ of practice for our students to imitate; we are engaged in the process to improve ourselves, as much as we are to improve them” (p. 841). Careful review and analysis of my use of stories revealed the patterns of my pedagogy, what aspects were successful, and which required reassessment.

At the time of the study, I taught three sections each of AVID III and Advanced Placement English Language and Composition in an urban high school located in Gulfport, Florida. We served 1674 students from all over Pinellas County, most of our students lived in the immediate area, 55%, and about 45% were bussed in from other parts of the county. We had students in a wide range of living conditions and economic situations including homeless students and some living in foster homes or group homes. Our student body was diverse, consisting of 66% minority students who include 47% African American students, 4% Asian and multiracial students in addition to our 34% Caucasian students. Our student body was also 58% female and 42% male. In contrast, our faculty consisted of 75% Caucasian adults, 16% African American adults, and less than 1% members of other ethnic groups. Our teachers were 50% male and 50% female. At the time Boca Ciega High School was a Title I school, 86% of our students were identified as economically disadvantaged and we provided multiple support services including providing meals, a fully staffed clinic, mental health support, and a teen parent’s program.

Boca Ciega High School also maintained two magnet programs, a medical program for students interested in pursuing a career in the medical field and a fundamental program “where strong parental involvement occurs” (www.bocaciega.org) and in which students were expected to follow school policies and maintain high academic standards. Boca Ciega High School also maintained a large AVID program which had achieved the title of “National Demonstration School”, a coveted achievement within the AVID educational community. A strong school culture was cultivated by the staff and multiple levels of academic support were available for all students which resulted in a 98% graduation rate. Boca Ciega High School also maintained an ROTC program and a wide variety of extracurricular options including clubs and sports. The faculty strives to maintain high academic standards while taking into consideration the challenges each student is encountering. The school culture included a strong sense of positivity and support for our students. The administration is supportive of the teachers and the faculty is very cohesive as a result.

Data collection focused on interactions with students in both my AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) III classes and my AP English Language and Composition classes. AVID is a course designed to prepare students for college, specifically students from homes in which the parents or guardians have not had the opportunity to attend college, this course is designed to address deficits of information about the college application process, as well as academic skills that are essential to successfully obtaining an advanced degree. “AVID’s mission is to close the opportunity gap by preparing all students for college readiness and success in a global society” (www.avid.org). For half of each class period students engaged in tutorials, during which time they brought a “point of confusion” from any of their classes, explained to their peers where they got confused and then the tutorial group helped

them eliminate their confusion by offering their understanding, asking probing questions and sharing notes or other resources to assist each student. The other half of the class period was spent improving core academic skills such as complex reading and college-level writing to aid students in being successful in college. Due to the cross-curricular nature of the curriculum for this class, the lessons lend themselves to the use of stories and the integration of information about my academic journey. AP English focuses on non-fiction literature and the analysis of various texts. This course also gave me multiple opportunities to share stories with students about my interactions with various texts while elaborating on the historical backgrounds of readings. It is a college-level course taken to earn college credits while in high school. As I choose texts for this class, I observed that I chose texts to which I have a personal connection, and which address issues that are important to my students as they are preparing to enter the adult world. As I prepared materials, I also considered my own stories and how I would share them as we read and discuss each piece of writing. Frequently student inquiries also led me to tell additional unplanned stories to make a point or a connection. I had been teaching each of these classes for more than four years and during that time I refined both content and methods of delivery to best address each group of students.

Data was reviewed, and patterns and frequency of storytelling events were noted. These patterns provide insight into when stories are shared and their purpose as well as the planning that facilitated the story and its role in the lesson. Any other behaviors and trends were also noted for further investigation and discussion. Knowledge of previous lessons and previous teaching experiences added insight into which stories I used frequently and when and how the telling of these familiar stories took place. As an extension of autoethnography, the goals of self-study are to "...offer accounts of personal experience to complement or fill gaps in

existing research” (Adams, Ellis, & Jones, 2017, p. 3). Lesson plans and my recollections of previous years added to the data and revealed patterns of stories told.

The data review was not limited to storytelling, any other significant patterns were noted and reviewed to present the multifaceted nature of teaching and contribute to current knowledge and research, and aid in improving my praxis. Bullock (2009) refers to these aspects of individual praxis as “default features...those features of pedagogy that happen almost unconsciously as a reflection of prior assumptions of teaching and learning” (p. 272). Becoming aware of my own “default features” specifically the ones that lead me to tell a story aid in improving all aspects of my teaching by making me aware of these tendencies while working to improve upon them to better serve my students. I was looking at how stories were told during simultaneous teaching as compared to previous years, counter-narratives that become part of the classroom discussions, and any other effects of sharing stories were noted. The purpose of the stories is, as an illustration, an alternative perspective, or a reinforcing or conflicting perspective for students to consider supplied knowledge of the deeper meaning of my choice to use that story at that point in the lesson. The goals of self-study are multifaceted. S-STEP “places teaching and learning about teaching at the center of the research endeavor” (Loughran, 2014, p. 278) in reviewing the data I was looking for information that aided in answering the aforementioned research questions, as well as information about the relationship between teaching and learning in my classroom. Shawn Bullock (2009) explains this aspect of S-STEP, “self-study is a methodology that provides a basis-for-knowing rather than a knowledge base for teacher education” (p. 280). The information that is sought in a self-study differs from that of other research methods, it is “shaped by the nature of the question under investigation” (p. 269) and “constructed through reflection in action” (p. 279). This unique

research method offered me the opportunity to learn from experience as I was conducting my study.

As both researcher and subject, assessment of the data needed to include, "...critical examination of one's actions and the context of those actions in order to achieve a more conscious mode of professional activity, in contrast to action based on habit, tradition and impulse" (Samaras, 2002, p. xiii). Addressing the data with a critical eye was vital in determining the impacts of storytelling on individual students as well as the classroom community. Critical assessment of these events served multiple purposes, Vanasschee and Kelchtermans (2015) characterized this role as "...teacher educators researching their own practice with the purpose of improving it, making explicit and validating their professional expertise and, at the same time contributing to the knowledge base of teacher education" (p. 508). Previous experience with assessing my own pedagogy from a critical perspective, as an NBC candidate, prepared me to both critique and assess my choices in the use of storytelling and my student-teacher interactions. Undertaking this self-study was a natural progression from my previous professional development experiences and offers me the opportunity to continue to hone my pedagogical skills and improve classroom and lesson planning practices while contributing to the available body of knowledge on teacher use of storytelling to foster classroom community and improve student learning.

Storytelling Log

In addition to the details reported in the reflective journal, I maintained a "storytelling log" (Appendix B, figures 1.1-1.5) to maintain a record of when stories were used throughout my lessons. The log was updated as stories were told and aided me in completing my reflective journal (Appendix E) by supplying specific details. The log encompasses detailed information

about the storytelling that occurred throughout the day and provided data to assess patterns and frequency of storytelling events. It also provided a record of whether stories were planned or spontaneous and the subject for the lesson during which the story was told. The log was located beside my computer in the classroom so that it was constantly accessible for notes and details as each class period unfolded. The comprehensive information collected on the log was useful as data was assessed. A copy of the log's format can be found in Appendix A (Figure 1).

Data gleaned from the reflective journal, the logs, and teacher-created materials such as syllabi and lesson plans were assessed for patterns and the frequency with which these events occurred. Samaras and Freese (2006) describe a formal self-study approach as “a systematic research approach to explore one’s practice” (p. 61). Both the logs and the reflective journal provided a systematic method of collecting data. I reviewed my notes in all sources to assess the motivation for sharing stories and their role as an essential part of my pedagogy. These sources supplied evidence of how stories function within my pedagogy. This information was essential in determining the impact of the stories and their role in my classroom. These details were also used to reflect on how this information could inform changes or adjustments needed in my practice.

Summary

In Chapter Three, the research design for this study was explained in full detail. Additional attention was given to the role of S-STEP research in the progression and growth of educational research to clarify how this study contributes to the current and existing studies. The purpose and background for this methodology were defined. An overview of the attributes of S-STEP research were examined and their usefulness in education research were defined. The connection between S-STEP research and the researchers' prior experience with National

Board Certification was identified. The role of the researcher as the subject was addressed and preparation for these roles was reviewed. Research techniques were discussed as part of the S-STEP form of qualitative research. The study design was outlined, and the methodology was discussed. Chapter Four addresses data analysis of classroom interactions, teacher logs, and analysis of teacher practice. Chapter Five comprises a detailed discussion of the study findings. This study contributes to the current body of knowledge on the development of pedagogy, teacher education, teacher persistence, and the use of storytelling in the classroom.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF DATA

“If self-study research is to be self-initiated, self-focused,
and action-oriented, then it is imperative that we put ourselves as well as our research
under scrutiny.”

(Feldman, 2016, p. 29)

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to take an in-depth look at the development of the pedagogy of one teacher, myself, and to describe and explain how this style of teaching developed both from early familial influences and through the vast array of experiences I have had over the last 26 years of teaching. This self-study investigated the development and maintenance of my career as a teacher and assessed the role of storytelling, specifically family stories, in contributing to my persistence in the profession. The goal was to determine which stories I used frequently and what their role was in my pedagogy, as well as how these stories have been used in varied teaching situations and various subject areas. Storytelling is known to be an integral part of education, especially in the English classroom. This study contributes to the body of current research by focusing on the teacher rather than the students. A great deal of the current research focuses on assigning stories to students and their use as a classroom tool for teaching students to write, or how teachers use specific stories to teach writing skills. This study focused on the teacher and how telling stories can be an essential part of pedagogy that contributes to staying in the profession throughout a long and varied career. This study investigated which stories have been used repeatedly and how those stories have become foundational in my pedagogy.

This research was completed as a self-study, a research method mainly used in education. Self-study requires extensive reflection and evaluation of one’s actions as a teacher. The data discussed in this section was mined to gain an understanding of how I developed my

style of pedagogy. This data was further inspected to gain insight into how my pedagogy aided me in persisting in my career. The trends gleaned from this data contribute to the development of the profession and add understanding as to why some teachers maintain a long-term career and many others leave the profession after just a few years. It is well known that the teaching profession is currently struggling to attract students to education programs across the country. Insight into how persistence develops and is maintained adds to the body of knowledge used in supporting, training, and maintaining teachers throughout their careers. This study concentrated on my individual use of stories and the development of this type of pedagogy as I have progressed in my career, earned a master's degree, became a Nationally Board-Certified Teacher, embarked on a variety of teaching positions in middle and high school, and took on a wide variety of roles in the faculty from department chairperson to new teacher mentor to student club sponsor.

Overview of the Chapter

In this chapter, I present the results of the data analysis described in Chapter Three. I collected and reviewed various types of data using open coding to establish patterns recognized as components of my pedagogy. I also carefully reviewed examples of lesson plans from my first ten years in the classroom and multiple points in my career, portfolios created for the Tampa Bay Area Writing Project, and National Board Certification for evidence of the use of stories from my early career. These items established the use of storytelling pedagogy as I developed as a teacher. In addition, my memories and recollections supplemented the artifacts from my early career.

I reviewed the log described in Chapter Three for recent uses of stories and evidence of the continuing development of my pedagogical style. Another layer of data was collected in a

reflective journal which I began early in my research and continued throughout data collection. In evaluating the data, journal entries were compared to lesson plans and log entries for the days noted in the log and these provided several layers of information about these individual storytelling events. Data was culled for patterns of storytelling, to identify commonalities in storytelling events, and to differentiate between variations in storytelling events. Recent storytelling logs were compared to information gleaned from previous lesson plans, portfolios, and other teaching artifacts to determine whether the same stories were used repeatedly and in what teaching situation they were used. All the information gleaned from these varied sources was coded (e.g., for planned/unplanned, familial vs nonfamilial, etc.) and assessed to find repeated behaviors and use of the same stories at different points in my teaching career.

Anecdotes to Clarify

In reviewing all the data sources, several trends became evident immediately. I used stories in a wide variety of ways in all the classes that I taught. An equal number of planned and unplanned stories were used in my classroom. Additionally, I used many nonfamilial stories and stories by other authors in more traditional ways, such as introducing a lesson or illustrating a point in a lesson. As an English teacher, stories from literature are an essential part of my curriculum, but my pedagogy evolved to integrate many personal stories to enhance the literature that is central to my curriculum. A notable trend in the research was my practice of responding to student inquiries by offering anecdotes to clarify the information I was explaining. During data collection, I noticed multiple instances in which a student required more information and I supplied it using a story. In reviewing the data, I recognized that when I was clarifying information for my students I frequently did it by using an anecdote, this is a

method used throughout my career, students find it easier to remember a story rather than a rule.

In my Advanced Placement English class, we read a variety of editorials. One was about teenage suicide and ways to keep our children safe, the author used the evolution of the seat belt as an example of how protections change over time. My students were a bit confused because in their lifetime they have always been legally required to wear seatbelts and were unfamiliar with how seatbelt laws have evolved. I shared with them a story my mother has told me many times.

When I was a newborn, car seats were not yet required and not readily available. The newest apparatus for transporting a baby in a car was a sort of hammock that hung between the front and rear seats, which I described to my students. Most cars didn't even have rear seatbelts at that time, and I shared that I could remember riding in cars without seatbelts as a child. They were amazed, and they were able to make sense of the author's references and come up with some examples of their own.

Instances like this one were evident throughout my teaching. In reviewing lesson plans from the past ten years ago, I was able to identify lessons in which I incorporated anecdotes, and I recalled that some of the anecdotes had become part of the lessons because they were told in response to a student inquiry. There are many instances of this practice throughout my pedagogy. In my National Board Certification portfolio from 1999, I found a reference to a story I told about a young man with severe epilepsy who had a corpus callosotomy, I told my students this story to aid them in understanding how the hemispheres of the brain are dependent upon each other while we were completing a unit on psychology.

Stories to Create Connection

Kendall Haven (2007), author of *Story Proof* wrote “Stories create interest, context, and relevance for subsequent information and material” (p. 86). In reviewing multiple data sources, I identified repeated instances in which I used a story to create a context for my students. My use of stories served to connect my students to the information I was giving them. Haven concluded that “...the use of a story structure to organize and present material is more effective simply because it matches the way that humans naturally think and perceive” (p.103). There were instances in which I shared a story about a friend or family member who struggled in school to aid a student who was struggling. I told stories about my grandmother coming to the United States at 15 years old to illustrate that students should not underestimate their abilities because of their youth. As well as telling the story of my grandparents’ wedding on Christmas day to avoid and hide from the Nazis while defying the ban on parties for Jews, when students asked for more information about the conditions during the Holocaust. This pedagogical tool became a foundational aspect of my teaching. As I sifted through the data, I realized that this practice has become much more than a tool in my “teacher toolbox”. It became the primary method I used to “...engage the entire person and evoke a sense of community and belonging...engaging multiple receivers and allowing them to relate to each other on multiple levels” (Haven, 2007 p. 87). In each artifact, I identified evidence of my use of anecdotes to teach and showed my students that their experiences were relatable. My own experiences became a part of the curriculum and aided students in connecting to the lessons.

The evidence I used to answer my research questions exists in multiple places throughout each type of data. To clearly show how the evidence answers each question I organized my results by correlating them with each research question. There is some

redundancy in referring to each data source in different sections of the data assessment, however, this type of data shows multiple aspects of my pedagogy and is, therefore, necessary to create a complete picture of how stories were used and why they were the foundation of my praxis. Focusing on each question also allowed me to reflect on how my pedagogy developed over my career.

Which family stories do I use repeatedly and what is their function in my pedagogy?

Several stories appeared repeatedly in my data; I began telling them as a new teacher and they reappeared in my lessons year after year. They were stories near and dear to me, and they were stories that I believed were important for students to hear. Correlating my data and reading through the varied artifacts I have saved from my career aided in establishing that there are definitive patterns to my use of stories. Some stories were used yearly. No matter what I was teaching, I found a place to share certain stories. Often, as I was sharing information with students, a question would cause me to recall a relevant story or experience and it would occur to me that a particular story illustrated a salient point. These stories were at the heart of my pedagogy because they were adaptable to varied teaching situations and because I had a personal connection to the stories, students listened and asked questions when the stories were told.

For example, when students asked about my experiences with prejudice, I shared a story from when I was in college and traveled to Fort Lauderdale for Spring Break:

While I was there with some of my closest friends, I experienced antisemitism for the first time. We were waiting in line at a local Subway restaurant when another young woman stepped ahead of me and told me she had the right to go ahead because I was wearing a “Jew star”. She gestured towards the necklace I always wore which had a Star of David or Jewish

star on it. I was shocked and confused because no one had ever referenced my jewelry in this way, nor had I experienced any antisemitism.

This story resulted in questions about whether I got into a fight, and how I handled the situation. During my research, this story was shared in my AVID III class during a discussion about George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement. I explained that while I had not confronted the other women, I could still recall how intensely angry the interaction had made me and that the memory has stayed with me because of the intense feelings I experienced. During the study, this story led to a discussion about violence. During other years, when I have told this story the discussion centered on the many types of oppression and racism that exist in our society, or how people confront someone who confronts, insults, or offends them. What students took away from my stories varied and was based on what inspired the telling of the story and their connection to the story.

The stories I told ranged from a set of stories that I have told year after year to some that came from interactions I have had with family in the typical course of life. As time continued, I find more and more experiences that were relatable to texts we read in class and to questions students asked in response to the texts. When planning lessons, I considered how I would add to the conversation by sharing a personal anecdote or story. In recent years, I was less likely to include a note in my lesson plan, the connection between the lesson and the story was already in my mind, so I didn't need to add a reference in my plans. In reading through my log, there were several lessons during which a student inquiry led to me sharing a story, the reaction of my students resulted in me using the same story in subsequent classes as I taught the same lesson. One of those stories was about my great uncle (log entry 5/25/21, Figure 1.4) who came to the United States as a teenager and who spoke perfect German. He enlisted in the

army and assisted in infiltrating groups of Nazis who were attempting to avoid the Allied forces. Initially, I told the story in response to questions about a video we watched of a survivor who came to the United States as a young child. One of my 1st-period students wondered aloud what it might have been like to arrive in the U.S. as a teenager and I shared my great uncle's story in response. When my class reacted with multiple questions, I chose to include the same story in subsequent class periods, and it received a similar reaction in every class. This type of interaction with students, in which they showed me they were thinking deeply about a story I told them, propelled my love of teaching, and has kept me in the classroom.

In my AP English Language and Composition class, I changed some of the texts we read each year. The nature of the class was that material on the exam will require students to have some knowledge of history and current events. As part of lesson preparation for the class, I constantly scanned newspaper and magazine articles for material that was relevant and would assist in teaching students the necessary lessons about analyzing rhetoric and creating strong arguments. Each semester I incorporated speeches, articles, and even advertisements for my students to analyze. I chose them based on their relevance to the current news cycle and pop culture. There were also texts that I used each year because they encompassed writing strategies to which I wanted to expose my students. Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, Weisel's *Dangers of Indifference*, and King's *Birmingham Jail* appeared each year in my classroom. When I shared each of these texts, I introduced them by telling my students what I remembered about the first time I read them. Inevitably they had questions about my own high school experiences, and this often led to additional stories and comparisons between the world today and the world then.

There were many family stories I have used repeatedly each year, no matter what I was teaching I found a way to share my maternal grandmother's story.

She was born in Germany and grew up in a small town which is now the subject of several books. Her father was well connected and foresaw the coming political undertones of World War II, so he contacted a family he knew in the U.S. and sent his oldest daughter, at the age of 15 or 16, to go and live with them. He did not know them very well, but he did know that she would be safer in the U.S. than she was in Germany. She came from a very comfortable life in Germany and the family that took her in treated her as a maid rather than a guest, something she did not expect. Even though her English was limited and everything about New York was unfamiliar, and I imagine, terrifying, she rose to the occasion and learned how to adapt. Eventually, she also took care of her younger sister and, as the rest of the family made their way to the U.S., she helped them get situated. She learned English, how to navigate the hustle and bustle of New York, and ultimately had a family, owned her own business and she flourished.

I often used this story to illustrate that just because my students were young and had just begun understanding how the world works, they had it in them to adapt and make their way. I told it when students were complaining about how much harder life was for them, as compared to past generations. During that school year, I shared this story in response to a student telling me that I was expecting too much from a 16-year-old. The conversation began in my AVID III class during a lesson on using a planner to schedule upcoming school projects. One of the students began complaining bitterly about the number of projects and assignments that were being given in various classes and stated that it would be much easier to just get a job and skip the hassle of school, the student was insistent that life for her generation was much

more difficult than it had been for any previous generation. During this exchange, I used the story to show my students that there are difficulties they could never imagine and that they can accomplish whatever they set their minds to doing.

I also used this story during units on the Holocaust and Genocide, as an introduction to reading *Night* by Elie Wiesel, and during lessons on immigration when I was teaching American History. It was a versatile story because it reflected the determination of a young immigrant to the United States, and it encompassed many important aspects of history. Additionally, I told the story because I was proud of my grandmother and proud to be a descendent of someone who overcame such difficult times and found the strength to survive and thrive. Unsurprisingly, students had questions, and they asked for details. They asked about other relatives who escaped, and they asked whether anyone to whom I am related died during the Holocaust. Each time I told this story, I honored my grandmother and the other relatives who escaped the Nazis and came to the United States. Knowing that the stories of my grandparents have been shared and that they have impacted another generation rejuvenated my commitment to teaching. My parents and grandparents taught me that it was important to talk about their experiences so that future generations would not let another generation experience anything as terrible as the Holocaust.

Another story that I have found I told repeatedly was about my paternal grandparents and the perilous journey they made to the United States.

My grandfather left his small town in Poland and moved to Germany, where my grandmother was living with her family. My grandfather ended up working for her family and they fell in love. Ultimately, they decided to marry, and because of the Nazi occupation, they had to hide their wedding festivities by having their wedding on Christmas Eve. Jews were not

allowed to have parties or festive gatherings, but they knew that they would not be noticed when Christmas parties were going on all over. Immediately after their wedding my grandmother, her sisters, a young brother, and her stepmother planned to escape aboard a ship. My grandfather was to follow sometime later once he had finished packing their belongings. After they had left and my grandfather was packing, he received a warning from a friend who had been forced into service for the Nazis that they were coming for him, and he had to flee and find any way possible to get to the United States. He escaped with the assistance of other friends and eventually made it to the U.S. where he was reunited with my grandmother and the rest of the family.

During the 2020-2021 school year I shared this story when a student suddenly realized that the Holocaust was less than 100 years ago. She had the epiphany that some survivors were still alive, and I explained that I had grown up around many family members who had managed to escape. This story was also told during Holocaust units and when there have been references to the Holocaust or perilous journeys in pieces of literature we have read in my classes.

Telling these stories rejuvenated my commitment to teaching. In all the years I have told these stories in the classroom, students never responded negatively. Invariably, the response was a barrage of questions, and I saw my students processing the information, thinking critically, and preparing their thoughts. As a teacher, this was exactly what I wanted to see my students doing, and as I watched this process unfold, my pedagogy continued to develop and my commitment to teaching was cemented.

How have I adjusted my use of stories for varied situations?

As evidenced by much of the information in the previous section, many of the stories I shared served different purposes in different teaching situations. Throughout my career, I

taught a variety of subjects, and in each situation, I had to be creative, use my strengths and my developing pedagogy to determine the best way to engage my students and teach the material that was required for the course. In addition to adjusting to varied subject areas, I also adjusted to working simultaneously with students both in my classroom and online at the same time during the pandemic. Each unique set of parameters required adjustments to the materials I used and the activities and lessons I planned and implemented. There was a consistent return to using stories in every teaching situation. With each new school year came a new set of students and often new materials, standards, or curriculum I was required to execute. As I planned, I found appropriate places to insert stories that would enhance the lesson and assist students in recalling the information they were learning.

As a beginning teacher, I integrated my family stories into a wide variety of units including units I created about the Holocaust/Genocide, Psychology, Advertising, and What it means to be Gifted. I had personal connections to each of these topics and while teaching I integrated my intimate knowledge of these subjects by sharing stories of my own experiences and encouraging students to share their stories as well. The success of using stories led me to continue incorporating various stories at crucial points in my lessons. Simultaneously, I recognized that my students were responding positively to my stories. Kendall Haven elucidates the power of stories in the classroom, “Stories create interest, context, and relevance for subsequent information and material. Stories increase learning, interest, and enthusiasm” (Story Proof, 2007, p. 86). As a beginning teacher, I comprehended this essential concept of teaching without consciously understanding it. As my career continued, I continued to adapt the practices that I recognized as being successful and I applied that knowledge in all my lesson planning. After quite a few years as a teacher, former students began to contact me to let

me know about their successes. Often when we discussed their time as a student in my class, they would refer to stories that I had shared and to the learning they associated with those stories.

In what ways has sharing family stories contributed to my persistence in my teaching career?

As part of my research, I reviewed lesson plans written throughout my career to determine when stories became an integral part of my pedagogical style. In reviewing many of my early lesson plans, I identified directions in which I included notes which referred to the telling of a particular story or anecdote. For example, “Teacher shares anecdote about eating (cow) tongue at holiday meals” (Lesson Plan 09/13/10) was noted in my lesson plans when my students read “Fish Cheeks” by Amy Tan. “Share story of family departure from Germany” (Lesson Plan 4/26/09) was listed in my directions when my class began reading *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry. Reading through my past lesson plans allowed me to recall stories that I told repeatedly, the lessons in which I used the stories, and that many of those stories were still part of my lesson planning and presentation today.

Recalling the memories of revealing those personal anecdotes also helped me to recall the sense of comfort I felt when relating a personal experience or story. When I shared a story, it was a more personal interaction with my students, to them I was exposing something about myself and my family history. For me, telling a family story allowed me to make connections between the curriculum, my own experiences, and my students. Students also recognized the connection that was created. In a response to an end-of-year survey (2020-21 school year), one student remarked, “I will remember all the times we’ve laughed together as a class. I feel like we had the opportunity to bond well with each other. It was like our own little family.” This

was how I wanted my students to feel when they were in my classroom; that they were in a safe place, and we were having a conversation; using stories helped me maintain this type of classroom culture.

Stories as an Extension of Self

Early in my career, I recall realizing that it was much easier to explain a concept by using a story to illustrate how and why the lesson is important. For me, it was a natural extension of myself as an educator. In reviewing my data, I became cognizant of the fact that this is not simply part of my pedagogy, it is part of who I am. Claudia Mitchell (2006) discusses this phenomenon in “In My Own Handwriting: Textual Evidence and Self-Study” she discusses rereading journals from her early teaching career and finding “...there can be future in the past” (p. 129). As she read through journals from her teaching career, she recognized the beginnings of her pedagogy. My experience while reading old lesson plans was very similar. They took me back to my early career and aided me in reconstructing how I became a story-telling teacher. It is how I have always explained my actions, ideas, and plans to those close to me. In almost every aspect of my life, I have used stories when I am trying to help someone else understand my motives and actions. Telling stories is a natural extension of my personality and finding a way to use this in my pedagogy has aided me in maintaining a long career. The success of this method of communication has helped shape my pedagogical style. Incorporating my natural proclivity for storytelling into my praxis made teaching a natural extension of myself.

Stories as a Key to Persistence

Karl F. Wheatley (2002) discusses the importance of teacher persistence and defines teacher persistence as “...a disposition manifested in the day-to-day actions of teaching

“(Teacher Persistence, p. 3). He then expands this definition to include “...a tendency to persist steadfastly, until successful...” (Teacher Persistence, p. 3). In reviewing years of past lesson plans, notes, student letters, and projects I was able to identify my persistence. As I looked through years of evidence and recognized the many ways in which my lesson planning had developed and matured, I could see the development of my pedagogy. I identified patterns in my behavior that, through trial and error, I realized worked in my classroom. That knowledge aided me in planning and implementing lessons that utilized the strengths I identified in myself, and I eliminated components of lessons that were unsuccessful. This phenomenon has been observed in other successful teachers, “...for highly effective teachers, it (learning to teach) is something that they continue to do, day after day, throughout their entire careers” (Wheatley, 2002, p. 4). This continual search for better ways to teach students was an integral part of my persistence. When preparing to teach each year, I always looked for new ways to engage my students and reach them. When I read articles, talked to family and friends, or even watched movies, I often thought of ways those interactions related to my students and my classroom. Many of the unplanned story events I recorded were the result of a student making an inquiry that sparked a memory which I then shared. Students are always interested in teachers’ lives outside of school, and anecdotes give them a peek.

While revisiting lesson plans from ten to fifteen years ago, I identified notes such as “share story of personal failure” (Lesson Plan 09/06/11) or “personal anecdote about writing with friends” (Lesson Plan 10/01/12). Seeing these notes in my lesson plans gave me the opportunity to reflect on how my use of stories developed and supported my persistence in teaching. On a personal level, telling these stories helped me fulfill my goal of becoming a teacher. When I took my first position, I was thrilled that teaching middle school Gifted

included a Holocaust unit and I knew I would get the chance to tell the stories of my family's emigration to the United States, and I would get to tell the stories of the grandparents who instilled in me the importance of stories. As I recalled my interest in teaching family Holocaust stories, I connected that goal to my persistence in the profession. Having the opportunity to share my family stories and connect them to the experiences of my students aided me in achieving one of my goals as a teacher, that all students be aware of the events leading to the Holocaust and know that they could make sure it did not happen again.

Stories to Honor my Family

Telling stories gave me the sense that I was fulfilling my grandparent's wishes. "Never forget" was a phrase that I heard my entire life. My parents and grandparents made sure I knew the obstacles that they had encountered and that I needed to tell those stories, so another Holocaust does not occur. Students always had questions and wanted to know more about the stories I shared. Stories also helped build my classroom community and they aided my students in remembering the lessons I was teaching. As I developed my pedagogical style, I found other places in the curriculum to share the same stories, and I used them in a variety of situations and subjects. Early in my career, telling a story gave me a way to share the information which felt comfortable and to which students responded positively. My confidence grew because I knew I was making connections with my students, and I realized that they were learning. Students' inquiries about the information I shared opened opportunities to connect my stories to the bigger picture of the curriculum I was teaching. Hearing the stories also helped students recall the information and its connections to the curriculum.

In addition to using my personal stories, I also used a wide assortment of other types of stories to teach a wide variety of concepts. For the first ten years of my career, I taught Gifted

and Advanced English. The subject matter for Gifted varied from year to year because I had the students choose the topics. Each year, I created project-based units which incorporated all disciplines and guided my students through researching and discovering information about each of their chosen topics. With each unit, I created opportunities to share my own experience with the areas of study and entwined opportunities for my students to write their own stories and develop their connections to the information they were discovering. About 15 years into my career, I was asked to teach American History. Initially, I was overwhelmed by the task as every other class I had taught had been writing and English based, and I was not sure how I would adapt my pedagogical style to a fact and date-focused topic like American History. As I began reviewing the curriculum, I realized that there were texts that I associated with each of the units I was being asked to teach. I reworked the curriculum so that we read historical texts, both fiction and non-fiction along with the textbook. I implemented the texts to aid students in connecting to the stories, facts, and dates they needed to learn, and the results were incredibly positive. Students were exposed to a variety of historical texts, and I shared my own familiarity with some of the texts as I had read them as a student. The combination of historical information and personal information resulted in excellent discussions and retention of information by my students.

Adaptations for the Pandemic

During the timeframe of my data collection, my teaching situation was the most unique one I have experienced in my career. Due to the Covid pandemic, more than half of my students were at home viewing the class via computers. This exceptional situation required a great deal of creativity and flexibility on the part of every teacher asked to conduct their classes in this manner. This was a new concept for all of us and we had little guidance in altering our

pedagogy. For me, not being able to see my student's faces as I shared a story or read aloud was very disconcerting at first. As time went on, we adapted and online students became more comfortable with turning on their microphones and speaking during class, but it was never the same as the classroom experience, which I considered “normal”.

While the practice of sharing personal stories continued to play a prominent role in my pedagogy, I also incorporated a few more stories from published authors. This alteration was necessary so that online students had the option of reading stories that were pertinent to the lessons, as they were not able to experience the same nuances as the face-to-face students. The sound quality was unreliable, so the students online were not as likely to recognize changes in my voice, and often they were unable to see my facial expressions because of the location of my webcam. In reviewing the data from the log, I recognized that I included multiple counternarratives in response to student inquiries to assist in clarifying answers to questions. Online students did not have the advantage of being seated beside a peer who could repeat something that was missed or explain it in their own words. My natural inclination when I recognized confusion was to explain it by sharing an anecdote or story.

Between March 24, 2021, and June 3, 2021 (Appendix B, Figures 1 - 1.5), there were twelve instances during which I used a story to assist students in understanding. They included everything from sharing a conversation with a friend about her niece who had nearly found herself involved in child trafficking, to stories of my first experiences with getting a job, to stories about my grandparents after they arrived in the United States. In reviewing the log, I recognized the unplanned stories as moments in which students needed further clarification to understand a lesson. My default response was to share a personal connection to eliminate their confusion or to add clarification. In several instances, students responded with their own

stories, and this led to a class discussion. One student shared a similar experience her cousin had with a child trafficking scam, and another spoke about the information they had heard in a documentary. The tone of these interactions is conversational and contributed to building our classroom community. Students were eager to contribute to the conversation and they are not only responding to me, but they are also responding to each other and building our classroom community.

Teaching simultaneously made building a classroom community very challenging. The culmination of having many students attend online, making them somewhat anonymous, paired with the same students choosing to type questions and comments into our online chat, and everyone being masked, resulted in less student interaction and fewer connections between myself and my students. Sharing a personal story about myself aided in making students feel more comfortable and built the relationships that are foundational to teaching. When I shared more personal stories, the online students were more likely to respond by speaking or sharing a response in the online chat, or at times they would send a text to a student in the room so they could share it for them. Being able to interact with their peers in these ways helped them to feel a greater sense of belonging and aided in building a relationship with the class.

Each year, there were new challenges that I encountered in the classroom, and with each challenge came adjustment. Changing curriculum, subject areas, and methodological requirements are all aspects of teaching that have changed from one year to the next. The constant in any classroom is the educator and the relationships they have built with students. In my classroom, I used various types of stories to engage students and build the relationships that were essential to creating a community. This style of pedagogy developed over time and experience and was comfortable for me and aided me in being a successful teacher. This

pedagogical tool was not unique to me. Sharing stories is a tool that every educator can use.

Every teacher, both new and veteran, has stories to tell about the information they are relaying to their students. Stories could be about memories they have of learning the same subjects in school, a book they read related to the subject, or even a movie or television shows that relates to the topic at hand. Stories show our students who we are and where we have been, they reveal our humanity and are essential to relationship building. Building relationships is the foundation of good teaching and a great place to start building a pedagogical toolbox. Based on this research, it is essential for an educator to find a pedagogical tool that is suited to them, and which results in success for their students. My success with using stories as a vehicle for instruction and promoting discussion supported me in maintaining a long career and continuing in the profession.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND REFLECTION

“For self-study inquiries to be exemplars of scholarship and practice, they need to be intentional and reflective human actions, be socially and contextually situated, engaging the writer/researcher in interrogating aspects of teaching and learning by storing the experience, implicate the author’s sense of self, and involve the construction of meaning and knowledge.”
(Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015)

The purpose of this study was to take an in-depth look at the development of the pedagogy of one teacher, myself, and to describe and explain how this style of teaching developed. From early familial influences and through the vast array of experiences I have had over the last 26 years of teaching I have used storytelling in the classroom. I was specifically focusing on family stories that I have shared repeatedly throughout my career and how my family tradition of sharing stories helped shape this practice. I also sought to determine how I adjusted my storytelling to varied teaching situations and how having this “go-to” teaching tool has aided me in maintaining a long career as an educator. During my twenty-six years in the classroom, I have observed and mentored many new teachers and there is no one attribute that I recognize in those that remain in the profession. However, many of the teachers whom I have seen leave the profession lacked a successful way to build community with their students while maintaining their classroom. I undertook this study to gain insight into the aspects of my praxis that had kept me in the classroom and helped me to be successful with a variety of students and subjects.

In reviewing lesson plans, journals, portfolios, and other artifacts collected throughout my career I recognized several patterns in my use of stories. I also observed that there are several stories I utilize in a variety of teaching situations, and which serve multiple purposes in my pedagogy. This tendency gave me insight into my comfort with these stories and reflects

my familial ties to the practice of storytelling. The following research question guided this portion of the study:

- Which family stories do I use repeatedly and what is their function in my pedagogy?

Introspection is central to self-study research. Determining the role of stories in my classroom required taking an honest critical look at how I conduct my classroom and why self-study is the perfect methodological practice for this study. In the *International Handbook of Self-Study*, Vicki LaBoskey (2004) quoted Mishler (1990) when defining Self-study of Teacher Education Practice (S-STEP) as having the following characteristics, "...it is self-initiated and focused; it is improvement-aimed; it is interactive; it includes multiple, mainly qualitative, methods, and it defines validity as a validation process based in trustworthiness" (p. 818).

Gathering and assessing the data is a personal process that requires looking beyond the frequency of my pedagogical choices and considering why the choices were made and all the variables that influenced each choice. This process is further complicated because these are frequently split-second choices made while conducting a class and working with students. Determining the experiences and events that impact these choices adds another level of complexity, creating a type of research that encompasses deeply personal cognition about why I teach the way I do. "Self-study methodology is, therefore, initiated by and focused on us as teachers and teacher educators in relation to the others who are our students" (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 11). S-STEP is also a process that improves teaching and aids teachers in improving their pedagogy by giving an insider's view of the workings of a teacher's mind.

Self-study is a multi-layered form of research; the subject of the research has intimate knowledge of every decision made in the development of the pedagogy being observed. No

one else would be qualified to explain my motivation for using stories. Gleaning information from a self-study requires understanding not just what the data shows, but also what happened before the lessons and why choices were made during and after each lesson. Ragoonaden (2014) aptly explains the dual nature of self-study, "... the focus of self-study is not on the self but more so the space between the self and the practice engaged in" (p. 83). This chapter will review this study's purpose, research questions, literature review, and methodology to further illustrate the nature of self-study. Discussion of the data will focus on conclusions drawn from the patterns recognized throughout my career and specifically the time captured in the log and journal, implications on persistence in my career, and the significance of my findings in the fields of education and teacher retention. I will further propose additional research that could add to this body of knowledge and aid in improving teacher retention while also aiding new teachers in finding their form of pedagogy. In closing this chapter, I will discuss the impact of this research on myself, and the researcher, and share my personal reflections on the nature of this type of research as I bring this dissertation to a close.

Stories Create Connection

One of the first prominent trends I recognized in my data, focused on the realization that many of the ways I use stories are to make my students feel comfortable by sharing a little bit of myself and encouraging them to share a bit of themselves. Rives Collins and Pamela J. Cooper (1997), authors of two books about the power of teaching through storytelling stated, "Perhaps most important, storytelling creates a relationship" (p. 1). This trend in my data was supported by various practices which have become a natural part of my pedagogy. I introduce myself to my students each year by telling the story of how I came to be a teacher and often I include my own apprehension about the new school year and meeting new students. Johanna

Kuyvenhoven (2009) reiterated the importance of stories when she defined storytelling as "...an inescapably human activity" (p. 21). She also connected the practice of telling stories in the classroom to Freire's comments about dialogue (1987, p. 98) in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, "Dialogue is a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it" (p. 154). While reading Freire I connected my use of stories with his focus on the importance of dialogue as explained in Chapter Two of this dissertation. People connect by telling stories about themselves and the commonalities they share, this is how a community is built in the classroom and the world. This finding affirms the power of stories in the classroom to connect students to each other and the teacher.

For example, when I tell stories about my family leaving Germany, students often respond with stories about moving with their own families from one state to another or one home to another. I have had students who were born outside the U.S. share some of their own experiences with learning a new language and culture. The stories I share are also a way to connect my students to the subject matter on a more personal level. Storyteller, researcher, and author, Kendall Haven (2007), observed this same phenomenon, "Stories engage multiple aspects of each receiver and allow them to relate to each other on multiple levels" (p. 87). By illustrating my own personal connections to the curriculum, I am encouraging them to see their connections to the subject matter. The responses from my students show me that they are making connections when they ask questions, share their own stories, and refer to the stories during future lessons. Above I have shown that stories are interwoven throughout my pedagogy and my use of stories is well documented as a powerful classroom tool.

Stories Clarify Concepts

Another phenomenon I observed was that while often I plan for the stories I share during class, there are an equal number of stories I share that are not planned. These stories are usually added for clarification, to illustrate a point, or to make a connection to something I know my students are familiar with from other classes or their own lives. In my AP English classes, we read many texts that predate my students and frequently they require a more modern reference to fully understand the author's argument. Sharing my own experience with something they don't recognize usually helps them to make a connection to the text. The following research question guided this portion of the study:

- How have I adjusted my use of stories for varied situations?

My use of stories as a teaching tool began early in my career, this was evidenced by references to several stories in my lesson plans from ten to fifteen years ago. Recognizing this trend led me to consider the influences that steered me to use stories in my classroom. My parents are the children of Holocaust survivors, three of my four grandparents were living in Germany when the Nazis took over. Each of them escaped and made their way to the United States where they began new lives. I heard their stories as I was growing up and their importance was stressed by my parents and grandparents. "Never forget" was something which I was reminded of often, both by my family and the Jewish community in which I grew up. I was taught to be proud of everything my family overcame to have a life in the United States. The stories my family told me became the stories I told my students.

Stories Connect Students to History

When I began teaching here in Florida, it became apparent that few of my students had any living connection to the events of the Holocaust. Having grown up among many children

of first-generation Americans in New York, this was surprising to me. One of the motivators for me to begin teaching was that part of the Gifted curriculum was a unit on Holocaust studies. As my pedagogy developed and I began teaching a variety of subjects I found myself incorporating more and more of my family stories. The recent artifacts from my research clearly show that this practice has continued and that integrating my family stories has become central to my pedagogical style. Now I tell stories about my grandparents and stories about my children and grandchildren. Many of the stories I have told year after year, finding a way to connect something we are learning in class to an experience that myself or a family member has had. Sharing stories helps me to connect with my students and them with me. Possessing this teaching “tool” allows me to have a way to assist my students in almost any subject. My stories have helped sustain me in the profession by being part of my success with students and by giving me a foundation in my planning. The following research guided this portion of the study:

- In what ways has sharing family stories contributed to my persistence in my teaching career?

Trends, Findings, and Observations

Several trends became evident in reviewing my data. The first being my focus on stories that I heard when I was growing up. Each of the stories outlined in the previous chapter was repeated often and in various forms throughout my childhood and young adulthood. I heard different versions from several relatives and the versions I share have been pieced together from the multiple retellings I have witnessed. In sharing these stories, I focus on different parts depending on the purpose of telling that story at that moment in my classroom. This adjustment of the stories has become part of my persona as a teacher and is a natural

extension of my personality. When I began my career, I began using the stories because they were familiar and helped to stave the nervousness I felt in front of a class. They were relevant to our subject matter and the students' responses made me realize that they were interested in what I was saying. I have told these same stories – about my grandparent's wedding, my grandmother's journey, and my uncle's role in finding Nazis as a teenager – in different classes, teaching different subjects, and each time these stories serve the purpose of illustrating a point for my students while also allowing me to pass on my legacy of family Holocaust history. Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett (2008) explained why family stories connect teachers and students, stories "...provide unique insights into the connections between individual life trajectories and collective forces and institutions beyond the individual" (p. 3). Personal stories, as discussed previously, give students a glance into the lives of their teachers and show the connections between our lives and theirs. The connections this creates helps to build community in the classroom.

Another trend observed was that when my students are confused by something we have read or an unfamiliar reference in a text, my response is to tell a story about my experience with whatever they do not understand. Rather than defining or referring to something similar, it is my habit to share an anecdote as I did when explaining the changes in seatbelt laws or during a discussion about child trafficking. Even when I have not planned to incorporate a story into a lesson, when my students don't understand I explain by telling a story, often about someone in my family. Prior studies also reflected that storytelling is recognized as one of the earliest forms of teaching and human communication. Having grown up in an environment in which telling stories was a consistent component of our familial communication, I have continued this tradition of storytelling by making it a pedagogical tool in my classroom.

Listening to my family stories from the time I was very young taught me that this was how adults communicated and how people shared information. The closeness and familiarity I felt as a child hearing those stories made them a natural extension of my pedagogy as I developed as an educator. This was reinforced by the positive reactions of my students when I shared stories in class, their reactions also increased my confidence as a new teacher. As I developed my praxis and added more stories it became part of my process to identify relatable stories when I was planning lessons. In my role as a veteran teacher, the data reflects that I continue to use stories in my teaching and that this practice is so ingrained in my pedagogy that stories are my immediate response when students ask for clarification.

In reviewing the log and journal entries, clear patterns of my use of telling stories emerged, between March 24, 2021, and June 4, 2021, I recorded thirty events during which I used a story in my teaching. Of those events, twelve were unplanned and reflected that I used a story to illustrate a point or explain something unfamiliar to my students. Of those stories, only one was not about a family member. This data reflects a pattern of behavior that illustrates when and how I use stories in my lessons. This also shows that telling stories about my family has become central to my pedagogy. Both the log and my journal entries show that stories are used frequently in my classroom in each subject that I teach. Lesson plans from years prior also reflect the use of family stories and how this praxis has developed as my career has continued.

My use of stories has contributed to my persistence as a teacher because my stories allow me to adapt to varied teaching situations and subjects. Telling stories about my family not only made me more comfortable in front of a class but also allowed me to pass on the legacy given to me by my grandparents, an important motivation for me to become a teacher.

Saatcioglu (2020) conducted a study of a large urban district where findings indicated “...customizing interpersonal and instructional styles to meet student needs (leads to) ...a teacher who is more effective and more likely to persist” (p. 3). Previous studies of teacher persistence have indicated that the ability to adjust pedagogy to various student groups contributes to longevity in the profession.

When sharing stories my goals are not just about teaching the curriculum. My stories are also about building community and aiding my students in feeling comfortable in my classroom. When I share personal information their comfort level increases, and they are more willing to take risks by asking questions or attempting to complete unfamiliar tasks. Students respond to my stories with stories about their own families and friends. As more stories are told the students become more comfortable with each other and with me. The rapport that is created by sharing stories builds the classroom community and contributes to student success. Researchers interested in teacher persistence might wish to study this connection between teacher-student relationship creation and teacher job satisfaction which is an important aspect of teacher persistence.

Samaras, Hicks, and Garvey (2004) in the *International Handbook of Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices* surmised “...personal history self-study researchers are providing support for the notion that who we are as people, affects who we are as teachers and consequently our students’ learning” (p. 906). As I reviewed my data I was reminded of my use of stories outside the classroom when explaining concepts to my children, family, and friends. My use of stories in my praxis is an extension of who I am. My comfort with stories is evident to my students and assists in creating a comfortable classroom that is also a safe place to share their own stories.

As part of my data collection, I included events during which students shared stories of their own. When one student shared a story other students followed suit. Their high level of engagement is obvious because they raise their hands high, wave their hands to try to get picked, and when they share their stories, their animation reflects their connection to the story and the lesson. When students are willing to tell a personal story it shows that they feel safe and comfortable in my classroom, this is always my goal as I work to build our classroom community.

Human beings have shared knowledge using stories since the beginning of time. Stories help us comprehend and make meaning out of unfamiliar information by giving it a framework that we can connect to prior knowledge. “Placing key concepts and information within the structure of stories motivates to absorb and learn material by creating context and relevance...” (Haven, 2007, p. 109). In reviewing my data, it became clear that my use of stories in the classroom became a habit because my students responded positively, and it was a comfortable extension of myself in my teaching. The combination of these positive attributes when telling stories propelled me to add more stories to my repertoire and make storytelling central to my teaching. Over time this became a habit and an essential component of my lessons and my responses to student inquiries.

Teacher persistence is a growing area of research. Karl Wheatley (2002) defined teacher persistence as “...a tendency to persist steadfastly, until successful, in the many specific courses of action that constitute teaching” (p. 3). In Wheatley’s article, he discusses the importance of persistence as a characteristic of teachers which develops when they “...reflect on something repeatedly to figure it out and plan how to do it better the next time” (p. 3). This definition reflects the process by which storytelling became an integral component

of my pedagogy. Early in my career, I discovered, through trial and error, that my students responded to my stories and that sharing the stories bolstered my confidence in the classroom. The combination of these factors propelled me to continue in my career, pursue additional degrees in education and continue to find success in the classroom.

Geert Kelchtermans' (2009) research on teacher development found that "...career teachers develop a *personal interpretative framework*: a set of cognitions, of mental representations that operates as a lens through which teachers look at their job, give meaning to it, and act in it" (p. 260). In accumulating the research for this study, it became apparent that storytelling became the framework of my teaching because of my familiarity with stories and their role in conveying information. When I began teaching, I wanted to pass on the legacy of my family's Holocaust history, so I shared stories that I knew well. As I continued to teach, I applied my innate understanding of the value of stories to everything I taught and used my success with stories to propel my career and success with students. Telling my stories gave my teaching meaning for both me and my students and helped me develop a love of teaching. I learned that the same story could become a resource for a variety of different pedagogical situations. I became adept at incorporating stories into my classes and used them with increased frequency as my pedagogy developed. The positive responses I receive from students and my personal satisfaction have helped me to sustain a long and successful career. This indicates that finding a pedagogical style is an essential element in sustaining a long career as a teacher.

Implications for Teacher Education

Formal self-study research is a process that accomplished educators engage in repeatedly, after each lesson we consider what went well and what needs to be changed when

we teach the lesson again. The knowledge gained throughout this research added insight to the factors which contribute to persistence in a career as a teacher. Expanding the use of self-study would support teacher persistence by showing beginning teachers where they are being successful and assisting them in honing the areas which they identify that need revision. Currently, we are experiencing a shortage of teachers across the country, in part, this attrition is due to the pandemic and the changes schools and teaching experienced when many schools became virtual. Teachers who engage in self-study can focus on the strengths of their pedagogy while turning weaknesses they identify into strengths. As previously mentioned, the act of reflecting on something with the goal of improvement contributes to persistence. Engaging in self-study, as I have done throughout my career has helped me to build a personal style of pedagogy and stay in the profession. This practice is empowering because it is based on our own dissection of our work in the classroom, we are not being directed by an outside agency or administrator, we are directing our development as educators.

A study by Overschelde, Saunders, and Ash (2017) found that “the preparation of teachers must provide numerous opportunities for students to practice and critically reflect on pedagogical approaches...” (p. 28). Self-study opens the opportunity for practice and critical reflection at all stages of a teacher’s career. Incorporating opportunities for new teachers to reflect on their practice and engage in productive conversations about what went well and what can be improved would allow them to build their confidence and their pedagogy at the same time. Novice teachers who feel supported are more likely to remain in the profession and develop their praxis. Participating in an honest assessment of lessons taught will increase confidence and individualize teacher preparation. Strengthening these aspects of novice teacher's training provides them with a strong foundation upon which to build their career.

Wheatley (2002) states that “Persistence is critical for teaching excellence” (p. 3). Persistence goes beyond maintaining a lengthy career, persistence “...means a tendency to persist steadfastly, until successful...” (p. 3). This disposition is essential to the teacher fine-tuning their craft, and it is a critical skill for a teacher who must believe in their student’s ability to learn the subject matter. Reviewing lessons with the critical eye of self-study also requires persistence. As new teachers are trained, requiring them to engage in self-study would both help them build their skillset and teach them the value of revisiting past lessons for improvement. This practice will encourage persistence as it allows new teachers to improve as they expand their knowledge of both the subject matter and their own pedagogical style. Taking a lead role in determining ways to improve will boost the confidence of beginning teachers by empowering them as they develop their style of pedagogy. Confidence is key to persisting in the profession, beginning to build confidence as early as possible will increase teacher persistence.

Ann Freese (2006) conducted a study in which she monitored a group of preservice teachers as they engaged in self-study and reflective writing. She found the self-studies to be “...invaluable sources of information about learning to teach because these preservice teachers articulated and made public the personal knowledge, background and philosophies that influenced their beliefs about teaching and practice” (p. 77). The insights provided by the self-studies allowed her to be more responsive to the individual needs of each preservice teacher resulting in more personalized education for each of them. This type of individualization helps to address areas specific to each individual and gives them the opportunity “...take personal risks to make themselves vulnerable as they systematically reconstructed their knowledge...” (p. 77). Addressing these areas of concern gave each student a chance to tackle areas of

consternation before entering the classroom, thus better preparing them for the challenges ahead.

Implications for Education

Beyond the implications of using self-study for beginning teachers, lie possibilities for using self-study to aid teachers in improving their praxis in an infinite number of ways. Professional development would be more individualized and useful if self-study were an accepted component of teacher development. In retrospect, had I realized that I was building my pedagogy based on storytelling, I would have focused on improving this aspect of praxis from early on in my career. I do not mean to suggest that the bulk of teacher training requires intensive self-study. This level of introspection requires knowledge about why you are making choices as a teacher and would be appropriate for teachers preparing to enter classrooms, recently appointed teachers and teachers who are experiencing difficulty. Self-study would also assist teachers in changing teaching assignments or schools and give them the opportunity to assess what is working and what needs adjustment as they work to assimilate to a new teaching situation.

Using self-study as an educational tool would serve to empower teachers when they encounter difficult situations. Learning early in their careers to honestly self-evaluate would give them a method for addressing areas of concern. The process of becoming a Nationally Board-Certified teacher taught me to engage in self-study by teaching me how to look at myself through a critical lens. As I continued in my career, I often revisit the process I used in the NBC journey when I have a lesson that is not as successful as I expected, or when my students do not seem to learn the lessons which I am teaching. When I take a step back,

reevaluate my lessons, and critically assess my teaching, I can determine where I need to adjust. This is an invaluable tool for any educator.

Implications of this Study on the Researcher

Completing this study has reignited my passion for stories and teaching. As I assessed my data, I had many ideas for additional ways to incorporate more stories into my classes. I will be incorporating additional opportunities for students to share their own stories through writing. I observed that when students share their own stories it is verbally, not all students are comfortable speaking in class, incorporating time to write will allow those students to also share their stories with me. I also want to give students more time to process the stories and to ask questions. In my data, I recognized a tendency to move quickly from a story into an academic lesson. To give students an opportunity to ask additional questions, I will be adding a parking lot for students to aid in processing and making sense of the stories.

Going through the process of self-study also made clear the value of reviewing and revising lessons so that they are improved in the future. This process is valuable for the teacher who taught the lesson and for their colleagues teaching similar subjects. Implementing time for lesson study within my department will establish a pattern of critical review and self-study to assist all my teachers while giving everyone in the department additional lesson ideas to utilize.

Reflection

When I embarked on my self-study Ph.D. journey, I was not sure what I was looking for or what I would find. Throughout this study, I have looked at my use of stories as a teaching tool, a basis for my pedagogy, and a personal method of honoring my family history. I knew that stories had become an integral part of my pedagogy and that developing a “go-to” for lesson planning had helped me to gain confidence, build community with my students, and

continue a family tradition. I was aware of the usefulness and flexibility of stories in the classroom, and I knew that self-study was a research method that was familiar and appropriate for this study.

Before beginning my work, I struggled to find a dissertation topic that felt right. As I learned more about S-STEP and read articles by Anastacia Samaras, Anne Freese, Vicky LaBoskey, and many others who have led the implementation of self-study research as a crucial component of teacher education, I understood the importance of S-Step research and how it aligned perfectly with the type of study I wanted to complete. As I planned the study and began looking through years and years of lesson plans, I began to process how I became the teacher I am today. Samaras (2002) experienced a similar epiphany, “Self-knowledge enabled me to better understand how my model for teaching grew” (p. xiii). My research goal was to look at what I do each day and critically dissect the choices that I make and specifically determine why I used stories

Embarking on a self-study requires looking at the roots of your praxis which exist in your personal history. It is necessary to consider the background and experiences you have had throughout your life when determining the influences that have impacted your individual style of pedagogy. Samaras, Hicks, and Garvey (2004) explained the transformative nature of self-study, Vygotsky’s principles, and personal history as an essential component of educational research, “...educators also study their teaching while exploring the sociocultural (Vygotsky, 1978) milieu that has impacted their practice” (p. 906). Who we are as teachers is impacted by who we were before we became teachers? As we gain experience teaching, we incorporate what we have learned throughout our lives to hone our praxis.

Engaging in a self-study of my pedagogy was a natural extension of practices I have engaged in since I began in the profession. Beginning with earning my National Board Certification, I learned that looking back at the lessons I taught and how I taught them gave me insight into ways I could improve. Reviewing what worked well and what didn't work at all has enabled me to build a successful, long-term career. Revisiting the lessons which I have taught aids in improving them and making them more engaging and altering the lessons to better serve my students. This process is not unique, every successful educator realizes that adaptation is necessary as we teach. There are an endless number of variables that impact how we present a lesson and what we do and say during the lesson. As we gain experience, we find our comfort zone and the types of lessons that are successful for us. Building this knowledge supports an extended career because when you feel comfortable at the front of the classroom you gain confidence which also leads to greater success with your students and how they had sustained me in the field.

As I researched S-STEP, I found that there were very few dissertations that used self-study as a research method. Most of the S-STEP studies I found were done by groups of teachers or researchers focusing on a specific aspect of their praxis, or as a reflective method to assist beginning teachers. The uniqueness of doing my research as a self-study appealed to me instantly. I saw a gap in the current research for the type of study in which I wanted to engage. Having participated in other self-studies through NBC and Lesson Study professional development, I knew that there was great value in reviewing and assessing your praxis and analyzing one's teaching through a critical lens. The insights I have gained are invaluable and have assisted in further developing my storytelling style of pedagogy.

My research questions guided me on a journey during which I discovered how I have developed my storytelling into the foundation of my pedagogy. I began teaching because I wanted to share stories, as I shared my stories, I adapted them to varied teaching situations and they became central to my praxis. In turn, storytelling contributed to my persistence by contributing to my confidence as a teacher and enhancing my experiences in the classroom. Storytelling also contributed to my persistence by challenging my creativity and giving me a way to connect with my students, build community, and gain confidence in my abilities as an educator.

My contribution to existing research exemplifies how self-study was used to improve my pedagogy. Engaging in a self-study offers novice teachers a pedagogical option that could be used by any teacher, in any subject. Additionally, I want to make the powerful results of self-study known in the hope that teachers will read my study and realize the value of looking at their own work through a critical lens. Once I began collecting data, everything began to fall into place, and I began to notice trends before I formally addressed the data I had collected. I could see patterns in my behavior as I planned, executed lessons, and logged my stories. It became clear as I assessed my data that the stories which I tell are more than a tool, they are an extension of who I am and how I navigate the world around me. They are what sustain me in my career and allow me continued success.

Stories are a tool that every teacher can use. Everyone has stories from their daily life that can assist students in making meaning out of a lesson, explaining an unfamiliar reference, interpreting a text, or determining the motives of a character in a complex story. The stories a teacher uses do not have to be wildly exciting or unique. The more mundane stories reveal our humanity to our students and help to build the relationships that are crucial to successful

teaching. For novice teachers, learning to use their own stories is a natural way to build relationships and community with students in any teaching situation.

Bringing all the information together and writing about it led me right back to my stories. As I explained the how and why of my study, I told the stories I had told in the classroom, and I told my own story. It became clear to me that throughout my career stories became a place of comfort for me and helped me in multiple ways as I developed my pedagogy. This dissertation is my biggest story, and it encompasses so many of my stories because they are the foundation upon which I have built my pedagogical style. Stories have given me a way to reach my students when they are confused. Stories have aided me in connecting with my students. Stories have helped me build community and make my students feel comfortable in my classroom. Stories have allowed me to honor my grandparents while fulfilling my goal of becoming a teacher. Stories have given me the reason to keep teaching, learning, and growing while fulfilling my life's goals. Stories will always be a part of me.

APPENDICES

Appendix A
Storytelling Logs

Storytelling Log



Date	Time	Class	Type of story	Subject	Planned ? Purpose ?	Summary
			Familial Non-Familial Cross-curricular Counternarrative	W W W W H		
			Familial Non-Familial Cross curricular Counternarrative	W W W W H		
			Familial Non-Familial Cross curricular Counternarrative	W W W W H		
			Familial Non-Familial Cross curricular Counternarrative	W W W W H		

Figure 1 – Blank Story Log

Appendix B

Storytelling Log

Date	Time	Class	Type of story	Subject	Planned? Purpose?	Summary
3/24	7:45	AP	Familial - Friend Non-Familial Transdisciplinary Counternarrative	w Friends niece w Trn th. cks w mt lesson w FL H	Not planned illustrate pts made in mt video	Shared experience of friends niece w/ traffic injury - students had many q's shared stories they have discussed what should not be on ex. med
3/21	10:45	AP	Familial Non-Familial Transdisciplinary Counternarrative	w my kids w using my car was teens w nicer car H trying to convince	planned - to illustrate line of reasoning	ex of how teens convince parents to use their car - students shared their own efforts to convince parents
3/25	All Periods	AVID	Familial Non-Familial Transdisciplinary Counternarrative	w Career (Teaching) w Deciding to teach w 1997 w career choice H tried subbing	Example of alt. way to become a teacher Not planned	PCSB recruiter spoke to chs about Ed opportunities of I shared my path to being a teacher by subbing, etc
3/26	1st Period	AP	Familial Non-Familial Transdisciplinary Counternarrative	w my son (K) w HS & senior w conversation w Hand H	planned	shared story of son (K) realizing the import of reading - that all text, email journaling and determining reading is more imp. <small>note</small>
4/7	4th Per	AVID	Familial Non-Familial Transdisciplinary Counternarrative	w son w SS # error w use w paper work H transposed #	unplanned elaborate & explain	Shared story of error in SS # on my son's w/ FFASS & the issues it caused - used to illustrate why they should keep copies/records

Figure 1.1 – Completed story log 03/24-04/07/21

Storytelling Log

Date	Time	Class	Type of story	Subject	Planned? Purpose?	Summary
4/8	7:40	AP	Familial Non-Familial Transdisciplinary Counternarrative	W Othello story W myself W to help w/ prompt W before writing H Verbal reading students follow	planned	I read "1 thousand #1's" to help students think about Chanté's when writing arg. essay (200)
4/8	9/5	AP	Familial Non-Familial Transdisciplinary Counternarrative	↓	↓	Read orig version of story - recorded
4/8	10:30	AP	Familial Non-Familial Transdisciplinary Counternarrative	↓	↓	Read orig - recorded
4/9	11:15	AP	Familial Non-Familial Transdisciplinary Counternarrative	W me W worked w/ mom W at W NY H	Unplanned to illustrate the abilities of disabled	Shared my experience working w/ mom with children w/ multiple disabilities to show how little we understand about them
4/12	Per 1:35	AP	Familial Non-Familial Transdisciplinary Counternarrative	W me W below home from W Rochester NY Mass W illustrate seatbelt law H	Unplanned	after reading editorial which referred to the evolution of seatbelt laws, kids were confused - I shared my mom's story about the car hemmlock I came home in

Figure 1.2 – Completed story log 04/08 -04/12/21

Storytelling Log

Date	Time	Class	Type of story	Subject	Planned? Purpose?	Summary
4/14	All day	AD	Familial Non-Familial Transdisciplinary Counternarrative	W Students W Doing brainstorm W shared about W Pandemic activities H after Biden 3/11 speech	Planned	In analyzing Biden speech of looking for evidence of gains students shared stories of family game nights, movies cooking together, family projects
4/19	6th Per	AUD	Familial Non-Familial Transdisciplinary Counternarrative	W His Self W exodus story W leaving grandparents W orma H student asked	Unplanned to illustrate recency of Holo	Shared story of my family leaving Germany after a student marvelled that "the Holo was less than 75 yrs ago"
4/20	1,3,5	AD	Familial Non-Familial Transdisciplinary Counternarrative	W Fictional Alan W murder W wife as suspect W H	Planned	Students are practicing line of reasoning by looking at evidence & trying to determine murder or accident
4/22	1,3,5	AD	Familial Non-Familial Transdisciplinary Counternarrative	W Continue W devising W story W Alton H made	Planned	Students are continue to use suspect interviews to create LOE-story
5/4	3rd Per	A	Familial Non-Familial Transdisciplinary Counternarrative	W Birth of sister W W W H	Unplanned	In response to a bellwork prompt a student shared a beautiful story about the birth of her sister, in response others talked about their siblings births

Figure 1.3 - Completed Storytelling Log 04/14- 05/04/21

Storytelling Log

Date	Time	Class	Type of story	Subject	Planned? Purpose?	Summary
5/6	5m	AP	Familial Non-Familial Transdisciplinary Counternarrative	W Adopting pets W me W varied W varied H	not planned	After reading a column about a dog for adoption - students asked if I had pets & how/why I had so many - I shared the adoption stories - then students shared their own
5/17	2nd	AP	Familial Non-Familial Transdisciplinary Counternarrative	W My friend W Surprise in my family W Learning to deal W w/ unexpected homework	Not planned	A student asked: why doesn't HS prepare for all that can happen - I shared a story of a friend's daughter who found herself & no pregnant to illustrate
5/19	2 nd	AP	Familial Non-Familial Transdisciplinary Counternarrative	W Terrible W Things W by Eve Smith H - Youtube	Planned Also told making story Gina's planned	as part of our Holo mini unit I shared TT as an intro - student listened & I read TT - responded & tried to assign characters to stories characters were safe as citizens
5/19	4/6	AP	Familial Non-Familial Transdisciplinary Counternarrative	W Bad terrible W things W - recorded	Planned Shared story of family in-betw - thinking they were safe as citizens	
5/20	1/3	AP	Familial Non-Familial Transdisciplinary Counternarrative	W Gentleman story W W W H	Planned - read aloud	In prep for AP Lit we read allegory of British colonization of Africa and analyzed the meaning, characters & concepts

Figure 1.4 – Completed Story Log 05/06 – 05/20/21

Storytelling Log

Date	Time	Class	Type of story	Subject	Planned? Purpose?	Summary
5/21	2-4-6	LAND	Familial Non-Familial Transdisciplinary Counternarrative	W Great Grandfather W Nazi Germ W Sending Great to US W Nazis H - to friends	Planned - to illustrate what Germans did when Nazi decrees were instituted	- Student asked what people did when Hitler took over
5/21	2-6	AVID	Familial Non-Familial Transdisciplinary Counternarrative	W slaves W death W during transport on slave ships W forced	Not planned	After defining genocide, a student told a short story about people dying while coming to be slaves - she had heard it in history - she was trying to ask the class if that was genocide
5/21	2-6	AVID	Familial Non-Familial Transdisciplinary Counternarrative	W me looking at old books W found ancestry charts W as a young girl	Not planned	In response to students asking how Jews were identified I told them about finding an ancestry chart in my grandparents
5/25	2-6	AVID	Familial Non-Familial Transdisciplinary Counternarrative	W telling us pres about holocaust W 193- H	Not planned	After a video "one survivor" students asked how the US responded - shared Sydney's story
6/3	2-6	AVID	Familial Non-Familial Transdisciplinary Counternarrative	W various exodus of Jews W retelling of Helen Kristal's story	Not planned	As we reviewed the Holocaust scavenger hunt, students asked various questions re: how non-Jews responded, how people escaped and how people felt after

Figure 1.5 – Completed storytelling log 05/21-06/03/21

Appendix C

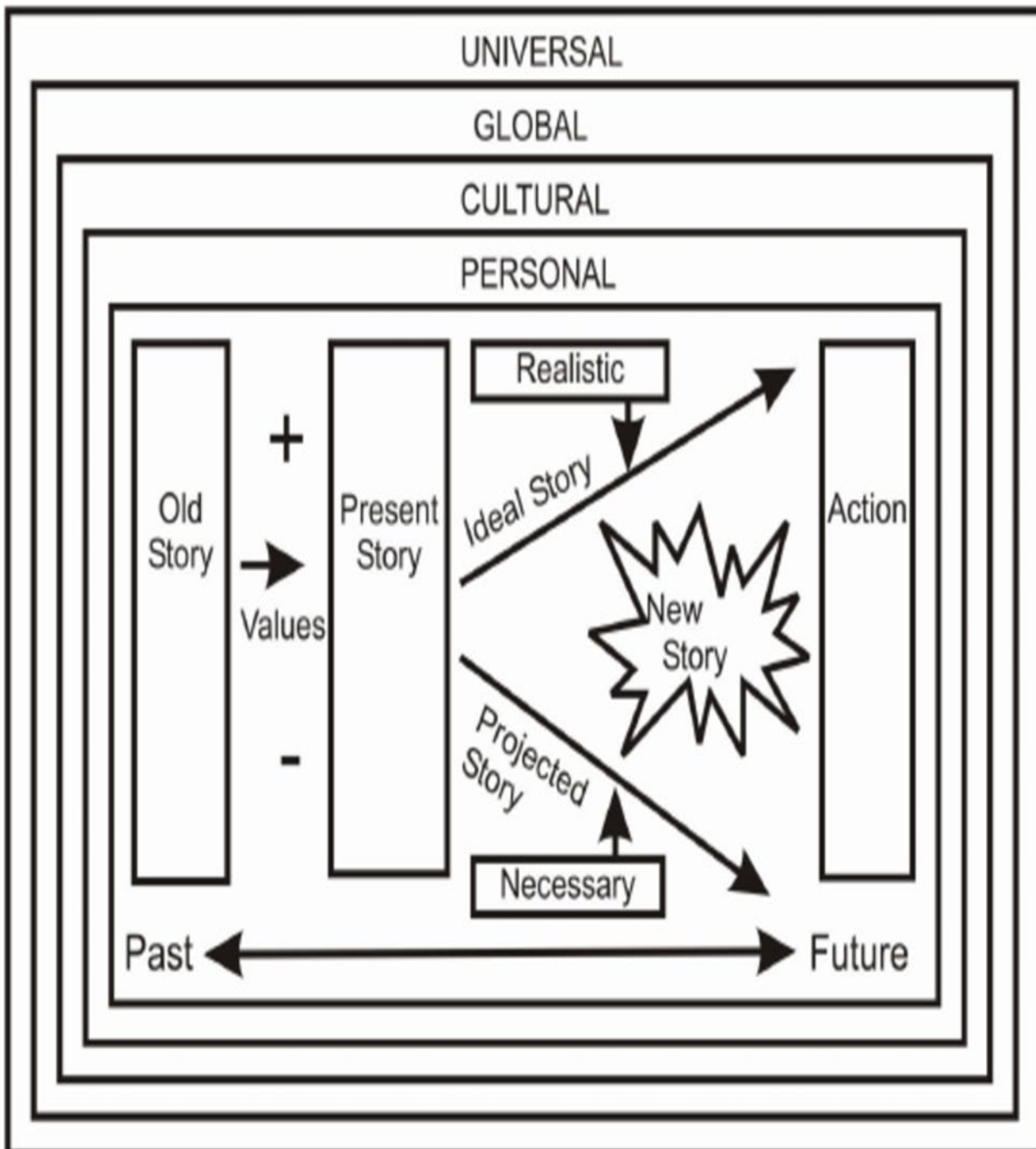


Figure 2 - Story Model framework – (Drake, et all, 1992)

Appendix D

Research-Based Lesson Planning and Delivery Guide

Teacher: Obrien **Course:** Language arts **Grade Level:** 7 **Date:** 09/13/10-09/24/10

Lesson Planning
<p>Benchmark(s)/Standard(s): <i>What is the next benchmark(s) on my course curriculum guide or FCIM calendar?</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><i>Benchmark LA.A.1.3.3: The student demonstrates consistent and effective use of interpersonal and academic vocabularies in reading, writing, listening, and speaking.</i><i>analyzes information from one textual source to create a report.</i><i>Benchmark LA.A.2.3.5: The student locates, organizes, and interprets written information for a variety of purposes, including classroom research, collaborative decision making, and performing a school or real-world task.</i>
<p>Lesson Objective s): <i>What specific part(s) of the benchmark will I teach in this lesson?</i></p> <p><i>Extends the vocabulary-building expectations of the sixth grade using seventh grade or higher level vocabulary. organizes and interprets information from a variety of sources for a school or real-world task. gathers information from a variety of sources, including primary sources (for example, magazines and newspapers).</i></p> <p><i>Differentiation between subject and predicate in simple sentences</i></p>
<p>Essential Question(s): <i>How will I reword the lesson objective(s) into a question(s) using student friendly terms?</i></p> <p><i>How can I improve my vocabulary? How can I use a thesaurus and/or a dictionary to make better word choices?</i></p> <p><i>How can I write perfect sentences?</i></p> <p><i>How can I use my new vocabulary words in my writing?</i></p>
<p>Materials/Resources: <i>What do I have or need to teach this lesson objective(s)?</i></p> <p><i>Dictionaries, paper, pencils, crayons, markers, glue, magazines</i></p>
<p>Lesson Agenda: <i>How will I deliver this lesson to help my students answer the essential question(s)?</i></p> <p>9/13 – The most embarrassing thing that EVER happened...”</p> <p>9/14 – If I could change the world in one way, I would...”</p> <p>9/15 –When I was little...</p> <p>9/16 – I wish someone would invent...</p> <p>9/17 – If children ruled the world</p> <p>(Students write response, teacher shares her response, the students share their response)</p>

Figure 3 - Lesson Plans 09/13/10-09/24/10

<p>Lessons/Class work:</p> <p>9/13 – Read “Fishcheeks” by Amy Tan pg 134-136</p> <p>Teacher shares anecdote about tongue at holiday meals</p> <p>Students share anecdotes about food</p> <p>Answer questions 1-4, 7, 8 on page 141</p> <p>Read “Immigrants” Discuss how it is related to “Fishcheeks”</p> <p>9/14 – Complete Spelling Worksheet</p> <p>Vocab Words : Bulging, shabby, mound, slimy, fungus</p> <p>Find definitions and write 2 sentences for each vocab word.</p> <p>9/15 – Work on ABC books</p> <p>9/16 –QW: Do you know how your parents chose your name?</p> <p>Anecdote – how parents picked my name</p> <p>Read “Names, Nombres” page 152</p> <p>Define words to know- 2 sentences for each word</p> <p>Discuss –protagonist/antagonist role in literature, define in each story</p> <p>9/17 – Finish “Names, Nombres”</p> <p>Finish ABC books!</p> <p>9/20 – “Names Nombres” 5 Vocab words</p> <p>My Name essay</p> <p>9/21 – Venn Diagram comparing N/N and Fishcheeks</p> <p>Finish essay</p> <p>9/22 – Subject Verb Agreement pgs 51-52</p> <p>9/23 Pro/con Chart of being from a foreign country</p> <p>9/24 Finish all unfinished assignments</p>

Figure 3.1 – Lesson plans 09/13-09/24/10

BPMS Lesson Plan Guide

Teacher: Obrien Course: LA 7 & Adv Hon Eng I
 Grade Level: 7th & 8th Date 08/18/14

Lesson Planning
<p>Benchmark(s)/Standard(s): <i>What is the next benchmark(s) on my course curriculum guide or FCIM calendar?</i> LAFS 7/9 R.L.1.1, 1.2, 2.4, 4.1, 5.1, 7.1, 9.1 LAFS.7/9.W.1.2, 1.4.2.4, 2.5, 4.10</p>
<p>Lesson Objective(s): <i>What specific part(s) of the benchmark will I teach in this lesson?</i> Students will be using written language to introduce themselves to teacher and classmates while simultaneously learning classroom rules and procedures.</p>
<p>Essential Question(s): <i>How will I reword the lesson objective(s) into a question(s) using student friendly terms?</i> What do I need to know and remember to be successful in Mrs. O's class?</p>
<p>Materials/Resources: <i>What do I have or need to teach this lesson objective(s)?</i> Textbooks, smart board, post it notes, index cards, chart paper, scissors, glue</p>
<p>Lesson Agenda: <i>How will I deliver this lesson to help my students answer the essential question(s)?</i></p> <p><i>All Classes:</i></p> <p><i>Teacher will introduce herself using vocab from student words sheet and explain why she chose the words she used – give background and point out some commonalities</i></p> <p><i>Using a word sheet students will use unfamiliar vocab to describe themselves</i></p> <p><i>They will also interview each other and introduce each other to the class – trying to point out something unique about their partner</i></p> <p><i>We will be looking at the new textbook and discussing possible text to read, adv H will begin R & J, history of Shakespeare and sonnets</i></p> <p><i>7th graders will read Rogue Wave and Flight of Icarus and compare and contrast the stories.</i></p> <p><i>Focus will be on tone, vocab and rising action</i></p> <p><i>Teacher will share story about daughter's accident</i></p> <p><i>Students will write a story about a personal experience in which they came close to injury</i></p>
Lesson Delivery

Figure 3.2 – Lesson Plan 08/18/14

11-REA of 11th Grade AVID Standards

1. Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama or poem, evaluating how each version interprets the source text
4. Effectively summarize sections of an argument, text or film
5. Focus on a three-part source integration, including source, paraphrase/direct quote, and comment about its relevance to the argument
6. Deliberately select rereading strategies that will assist in understanding of the text

Lesson Plan 11/06/2019

1. Bell work
2. Homework Review – Students re-read article “3 types of Failure” marked texted, answered text questions and wrote a summary explaining their opinion of the author’s argument
3. Teacher will share personal story of failure – Beginning teacher, new parent, and first job
4. Students will be review text again using AVID 3-2-1 sheet
5. After completing worksheet students will choose the point they think is most important to remember, these points will be shared in table groups using “stand, share, sit”
6. One person from each table will share out to whole class
7. Discussion – experiences with failure, ways to avoid failure, importance of failure
8. Transition to tutorials

Figure 3.3 – Lesson Plan 11/06/2019

APPENDIX E

Journal Entries

06/01/21

On Thursday I am going to read the story about my grandparents, and I hope that they will respond with stories of their own, just verbally. I don't intend to have them doing any more writing unless they volunteer, I think they would just get the assignment done and they wouldn't think about it the way I want them to, if I insist, they will just do whatever they have to do, so I will see what happens.

I keep thinking that I haven't had enough time to research and that maybe I should have just waited until fall, but I'm not sure. I am very curious to see what I find when I start going through my notes.

05/25/2021

I did not realize it had been a couple of weeks since I wrote in this journal. I have been busy pulling together a Holocaust mini unit that my AVID kids requested. I love teaching kids about it and I've been able to share a lot of stories, on video, verbally, and a read-aloud. The kids loved the read-aloud. I really wish there was time to do more.

I hope to get the opportunity to tell more family stories at the end of this week and the beginning of next week.

I think the kids are really appreciating that I am not asking them to "work", they are asking lots of questions and making connections to things they heard in history and previous classes. A few students have gone home and done additional research on their own- which is awesome.

I am going to create a new scavenger hunt of USHMM for them to do next week and then share some stories about my family. I am hoping this inspires them to tell some stories of their own!

05/05/2021

The more I read the more I want to write about, there is so much literature that connects to my research. I could probably keep reading for years and never find everything. Plus, new articles are being published all the time.

Creating my outline has helped to refine what I am collecting, and how I will code and assess what it means. So much to do and never enough time or energy.

This has not been a great week for sharing stories. AP exams have started, and attendance is spotty. The lessons I plan do not always get taught. There are so many tests for students to take that the idea of adding anything to their already overworked brains seems unfair.

My AVID students expressed an interest in learning more about the Holocaust, so I think I am going to incorporate some more Holocaust lit or maybe a video into the next few weeks so that they are learning something they are interested in and which is relevant to their other studies.

04/22/2021

As I am collecting data, I am noticing that my log sheet needs revision.

I didn't include a way to really show when students share a story and as much as I am working around it- I think I need to rethink how I am collecting data.

This week was focused on prewritten stories - things students read and short videos.

We talked about some of the things in the news- especially the Chauvin trial.

Several kids shared a little about how their families had reacted, but they were pretty reserved. One girl shared a list of films for her peers to watch on Netflix. She explained that her mother had been having her watch them, so she has a deeper understanding of the situations they get so sensationalized in the news.

I have also suddenly realized that simultaneous teaching has finally taken on a rhythm. It took all year and I still hate it, but it is not as awkward as it was at the beginning. I will not miss it next year.

04/19/2021

Today a student asked me a question about the Holocaust- I don't remember how it came up. he said, "Can you believe that there are still people alive who lived through the Holocaust?" I responded by explaining that my family had come to the US because of the Holocaust and that if not for the horrible events I probably would never have been born, that led to me sharing stories of my grandparent's (paternal) exodus and the role my great uncle had played as a young German refugee who joined the American army and used his fluent German to find out what the Nazi's were planning. This led to more questions and a discussion of genocide and the fact that genocides are occurring right now.

My students found it all intriguing, they asked lots of questions and before I realized it, half the class period was over, and we had not even looked at the assignment for the day. The level of engagement and attention they exhibited was beyond what I usually see in this class, and it made me hopeful that some of the low energy and disengagement I have seen is starting to lift as things start to feel more "normal".

I have to question whether it was the topic or my level of excitement in sharing these stories that created interest and propelled the conversations. I am going to share more stories and show

a Holocaust movie they haven't seen. This year has been hard and as we are starting to get towards the end of the year, I am really seeing the toll the pandemic has taken on everyone. They want to learn more about the Holocaust, and I love sharing the stories I know so it will be a win-win.

04/06/2021

As I am logging the stories I tell, I am noticing that I plan more stories during the 1st half of the year and that I tell more unplanned stories/anecdotes during the 2nd half. There are many more moments when students come to me with a question or dilemma that I respond to with a story while they are trying to finish the year and prepare for Senior year.

As we look at the things that go into choosing a college, they have so many questions about how you make choices and many of the questions have multiple answers. I find it easier to share an experience I had or one someone I know (usually a former student or one of my children) had instead of giving them direct advice. This is the age at which they should be starting to weigh odds and make choices. I share experiences, successes, and failures so that they can take that knowledge and use it to guide or dissuade themselves as they look at the future ahead of them.

Usually, I would have former students come in to talk to my students and give them some insight from the perspective of a "young" person. That's not allowed this year because of Covid restrictions on visitors, so instead I had our SRO and a teacher recruiter come in and share their stories. Both of them left the kids with new ideas about the jobs that are out there and the many options that they have, both of them told my students that when they left college, they did not see themselves in their current professions. When I have former students come in there are lots of questions about parties and dorms and college life. Since my speakers were adults, the questions were about their professions and the experiences that led them to choose the professions as well as experiences each of them had encountered in their lines of work.

03/10/2021

In AP we are working on writing synthesis essays and one of the practice assignments that I have used for several years is known as the High School Drama prompt. I read the story of Mark and Carly, a teenage couple who is arguing over a bonfire that he attended without her. Students then read through magazine articles on teen romance, text messages, notes, and Instagram posts from the characters and their friends, they gather information to write a letter of advice to Mark, helping him decide whether he should continue seeing Carly or break up with her. Each year when I read the background story I am bombarded with questions about the main characters. Students always want to know more about their personal details - what they look like, what type of students they are, where they live, etc.

I always find it interesting how quickly my students take a personal interest in these fictional characters and latch on to identifying with them.

As I read it today, I realized that this is one more story that I use in the classroom to interest and connect to students. It's not my story but it is a story with characters and a plot line and students listen to it and form ideas and opinions very quickly. They talk about it for weeks afterward as well. As each class walked out of the room, I could hear them weighing on Mark and Carly's relationship and what they would do in the same situation.

It's a typical teenage romance story full of miscommunications and misguided assumptions.

This year the story was told in a PowerPoint of slides which students reviewed in breakout rooms without much input or guidance from me. In previous years we have started with a full class discussion and then broken into small groups to discuss the "evidence" and decide on appropriate advice for Mark. Doing this in a virtual environment meant I didn't get to hear a lot of the conversations and I missed it. I always find the assumptions and ideas they impose on this story amusing and today I had to manage the tech and help students with less tech-savvy navigate the slides the input and the breakout rooms. It was a very different experience.

I missed hearing them argue amongst themselves and compare the fictional couple to actual couples at school.

03/08/2021

Today was mostly a regular day, my lesson plans did not include any plans for stories and because there was ACT testing going on students were mostly working independently on a "Dream College" one-pager.

One student came in very excited and shared that she was learning about the stock market from her aunt, she gave me a quick rundown of her understanding of the markets and shares and how you could invest and earn money.

In response, I shared my step-grandfather's story. As a young man working for a NY newspaper, he had purchased some Texaco stock, over the years he continued to let the shares build and never sold any, he only gained additional shares through stock options and splits. No one knew that he had this stock or how long he had been letting it grow. It's unclear how much his original investment was, but my mom always said she doubted it was more than \$1000, as that was a small fortune when he was a young man. Upon his passing, we were shocked to find that he had amassed nearly half a million dollars.

The student thought this was amazing and explained that that is exactly what she wants to do and she hoped to start a small account with her earnings as a cashier at Publix. She is really interested in how long it had taken and how it has grown gradually.

She promised to let me know when she had earned her first 10K.

02/17/2021

Yesterday we did a lesson on logical fallacies which began with 2 literary marriage proposals (Dickens and Austen) - students analyzed each proposal for logical fallacies and as students thought through the fallacies and requested clarification, I used anecdotes to clarify - one about the misunderstandings that texts can cause because the information can be misconstrued due to lack of punctuation and background information. I asked them to recall text messages that they had misinterpreted because the punctuation/capitalization seemed angry or rude and what it was like to find they had simply misunderstood the writer's intent

Today we were discussing the push for reparations for African Americans, I used my grandmother's experience with reparations to aid students in understanding the concept and how, in her case, recipients were determined and how the money helped her. Sharing what I knew about her experience led to a great conversation about what my students or their parents might be able to do if they received reparations and how it could change their financial future for the better. Once I shared my story, they became much more interested and had a lot more questions.

I have finally developed some sort of rhythm and order of events each day for my simultaneous students. I am running my class very much as I normally do, except for monitoring the computer constantly and allowing online students to speak at will

It is working, I still feel stretched way too far and we are all exhausted. The mental load and the constant use of screens are exhausting. We have students out on quarantine most days and we must mark attendance differently for them.

Every lesson must be reworked to be doable online and to remove collaborative assignments that require students to get close together. Group work is a whole new thing and online groups require a lot of monitoring.

I've come a long way in the past few months, but I will be so glad when all my students are back in front of me, and I can just teach.

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