Lectures as Storytelling

Research background

Storytelling\(^1\) can:
- create anticipation
- pique pupil’s curiosity
- develop a sense of wonder
- help students remember and understand major/important concepts better

Purpose of Stories\(^2\)

1. Stories create interest (perhaps by making a problem seem more realistic) – but goal here is to ENGAGE STUDENTS
2. Stories create a structure for remembering course material – often a sub-purpose is to illuminate a change (in behavior, policy, thinking, etc.)
3. Stories are a familiar and accessible form of sharing information
4. Telling a story from experience can create a more personal student-teacher connection – provide a real-world example
5. Stories can be used to tell a cautionary tale – especially in sciences (e.g., dealing with chemicals that can be dangerous) or in professional programs (e.g., highlight problems to be faced by lack of forethought).

Types of Stories\(^3\)

1. Personal experience
2. Historical anecdote
3. Extended example
4. “You” stories (put a few of the students or entire audience at the center of the story)

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\(^2\) Melanie Green: Retrieved on 2/7/11 from http://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/getArticle.cfm?id=1562

Components of effective stories:

1. Poses unanswered questions (at least unanswered as the story is told) or unresolved conflict
2. Story has a beginning, a middle, and a presumed end (though not always divulged before class is engaged in discussion)
3. Bring abstract principles to life by giving them concrete form
4. Has more depth than an example (by this, we mean that it either has character or plot development; some aspects of the story may be intentionally held back at least for a while and the story may be told in such a way that we, the audience, can see more about what is happening than the character(s) in the story)
5. The story actively engages the students’ empathy, tie the facts of the story with emotion and often lead to mental imagery – students can picture what is taking place in the story.
6. There is a clear tie in to the material of the day – in some way, the instructor draws lines of connection between the moral of the story and the concept under discussion, the result of the story and how it applies to one’s professional life, etc. The connection to that which is to be learned is intentionally and obviously drawn.

Videos used in presentation:

Brian Sturm – University of North Carolina - Charlotte.  

Michael Sandel – Justice -  

Dave Carroll – United Breaks Guitars - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YGc4zOqozo