Uses of Storytelling for Education and Healing

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Abstract

Human beings primary form of communication happens through the complex formulaic expression of storytelling. Currently, there is some debate about what creates compelling and decisive stories. However, numerous studies have concluded that storytelling promotes a vast array of developmental and healing properties in conjunction with their structure. In my analysis of the subject, I will discuss the potential for storytelling to be used as a means of healing and its use currently in the educational system for teaching and development. Similarly, I will also break down the currently accepted structures for storytelling and their relation to healing and learning. My goal for this paper is to provide a reference point toward the growing conversations and arguments being made for the use of storytelling in healing and learning. I have concluded that storytelling is an essential part of all physiologically based subjects and can be used as an effective form of healing and education. Similarly, I have found that many instances of storytelling are highly prominent in the field of education and constitute toward an accelerated learning path for students.

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Uses for the Case of Education

For generations, storytelling has been the focus of many schooling endeavors including lessons and classes. Often school teachers will use storytelling for teaching abstract concepts such as loyalty, friendship, and honor. However, as the educational system has developed so too has our ability to implement storytelling into the classroom to increase learning potential. One needs not to look further than a math class to see the implementation of storytelling to teach concepts to students. Upon further inspection of any classroom, you will find that many arithmetic exercises include problems called “Story Problems”. These story problems introduce a concept or expression in the form of a story. Instead of a simple algebraic principle being described with pure numbers you’ll often find that a make-believe person is forced with a dilemma that can be solved with the subject formula for the lesson. At its heart, these problems form the basis for one of the easiest implementations of storytelling in the classroom that boosts critical thinking. Instead of mindlessly seeing a list of numbers students are granted the opportunity to dissect a story for the important information that would help resolve the issue. Knowing that good stories often produce engaging results with an audience we can concur that by following a structure we can better engage with students in the process of helping teach abstract concepts.

Students can also learn about non-abstract concepts using storytelling through media as opposed to the fewer effective methods being used in classrooms today. However, for the use of storytelling to be effective for the student it must have an effective structure.

Arguably the most effective and well-observed structure for creating a compelling story is one created by a Blake Snyder in 2001 within his popular book “Save the Cat”. Within his book, Snyder presents 15 dramatic beats that can be attributed to creating a compelling story. His methodology is based on his experience creating screenplays for movies and has become known as a screenwriting superstar. Without breaking down each dramatic beat Blake Snyder’s approach focuses on the protagonist’s journey and why they do what they do within the story. In many ways, it can be paralleled with other popular story structures such as the hero’s journey. Although because we wish to look at story structure for teaching we choose to go with Blake Snyder’s approach for referencing what makes a story great. Similarly, we found that using Blake Snyder’s approach correlates with the growing trend in America where concepts like history are being taught through movies. As such I believe that the solution to helping students become more knowledgeable about subjects can be ascertained using media and storytelling. Similarly, by using Blake Snyder’s approach toward storytelling in the classroom we can avoid the common mistake made in Hollywood that Blake Snyder (2005) mentions in his book stating, “… many in Hollywood forget the basics and ignore what works, thinking that just because they have studio offices and big expense accounts, they don’t need to follow the rules anymore.” (p. 14)

By drawing from his story structure, I believe that educators can create a more compelling narrative as to why students should be interested in the topic at hand. I believe that by implementing his story structure into every lesson educator can avoid the mistakes of holly wood mentioned by Snyder by creating interesting lesson plans that revolve around progression rather than mindless memorization of topics and events. In practice this should reduce the amount of information lost after a subject has been taught and increase student engagement in the classroom.

Uses for the Case of Healing

Storytelling can also be used in the case of healing as well. Often it is our ability as human beings to identify with ourselves through the actions of others as a reflection of our own wellbeing. In one such case, a study conducted by Gaudiano, Davis, Miller, & Uebelacker (2019) found that, “… six participants (54.5%) achieved clinically significant change…”(p. 69) after being treated with videos of others telling their stories of depression. Simply put storytelling is a powerful tool that can be leveraged for several phycological treatments. It can be postulated that by using effective targeted storytelling we can reduce the level of physiologically based illness. I can conclude that by using storytelling it may be possible to induce a placebo effect within patients to encourage proper healing in select medical instances.

**Conclusions**

In conclusion, many examples of storytelling can be seen where human improvement is involved. It can be surmised that storytelling is an effective means of positively impacting human beings particularly in the fields of education and healing. I believe that the more we implement storytelling into critical communication instances the higher our capacity will be as humans to solve problems and prevent future issues. I also believe that this paper can be used as a source to further the discussion on the implementation of storytelling in our everyday lives. I would encourage that storytelling, and its structure is considered in all fields of study.

References

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