

# TRANSCA

## Storytelling

### Why read this text...

In its the widest sense, stories are an account of something. Anthropologists have engaged with stories and storytelling in different forms – as paradigms, grand theory, master narrative, myth, legend, tales and folktales, life and oral history, arts and literature, politics, biology and so much more. Storytelling is fundamental to educational practice just as much as it for anthropology. In these troubling times of environmental crisis teachers need to not only learn and tell new types of stories but also discover, co-create and encourage them.

### Historical Context

Stories are fundamental for who we are as humans (Jackson, 2002). Every community has its stories, legends, tales, narratives and so on and they proliferate through oral, written and enacted means, including performance, film and other art, but also through politics, economy and science. Our own lives are rooted in narratives. Storytelling involves sharing and interpreting accounts of events, things, ideas and so on, it is a worldbuilding practice. Everybody has stories, tells stories and is exposed to stories of different kinds and interprets them. Tim Ingold (2013) writes that anthropology is transformative storytelling, coincidentally, anthropology is also education (2018) and education is storytelling too.

### a) Discussion

*„To be an educator today is to be confronted with an urgent question: how is what and how I am teaching adequate to the times we are living in?“*

The educator Keri Facer begins her article “Storytelling in troubled times: What is the role for educators in the deep crises of the 21 century?” with this fitting sentence. The article starts with naming some of the transformative troubles the world faces today; repeating economic crisis, crisis of democracy at the hands of corporations, the rise of nationalism clashing with the rise of migration, biotechnological advancements that change what it means to be human, climate crisis and so on. But soon after she gives us the picture of possibilities and inventive ideas for living differently on a troubled planet that are already flourishing despite or because of these troubles. Here, she finds radical experiments in knowledge production and pedagogy that might be needed to live these complex times. She poses these specifically to explore the role of educators and the practice of storytelling.

Storytelling is fundamental to the way we live. We are made of stories just as much as we make stories. Stories keep us prisoners just as they set us free. There are “big” stories, stories that aim for universals, and there are “small” stories that are called particular. But small stories often end up being big, or at least part of it (Tsing 2015, Haraway 2015). Storytelling matters because it shows us what is, what was and what will be. But storytelling is not just important to us humans. There are distinct big stories told today, some have been with us for some time, like stories of progress, growth, development, going forward and



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there are stories that have been here before but were not heard, like stories of extinction, degradation and destruction. (see for example: colonialism, ethnocentrism, racism, migration, representation, environment...).

The 2018 Issue on Stories in Etnofoor address how “storytelling can do justice to the lived realities of the people whom the anthropologist tries to understand”, how stories and the practice of story-telling may allow for a vivid and engaged transmission of meaning (Kaulingfreks, Marlous van den Akker 2018: ). Since anthropologists have always been preoccupied not just with the ways of hearing stories and trying to understand them, but also in creating stories, writing and making them for wide audiences teachers can benefit from anthropological perspectives and ask them self’s how can storytelling do justice to the lived realities of their students.

## **b) Practical Example**

Both Mike Hayler (2011) and Michael Dyson (2007) advocate for the use of autoethnographic research in teacher education. By telling stories about themselves, which are never just stories of individual lives, teachers can learn a great deal about their teaching practice, professional knowledge, educational research and more. As a form of inquiry, writing, interpreting and teaching autoethnography is actually a “way of knowing” that includes a great deal of self-reflection and the constant attention to personal and structural entanglement.

Hayler writes that

“autoethnography offers opportunities to examine and analyse the connections between self-narrative and social structures in distinctively grounded ways. The narrative analysis here traces the ways in which the participants draw upon our personal experiences and perceptions to develop and describe our professional selves while simultaneously drawing on our social and professional understandings to enrich our understanding of our selves. These methods have allowed me to consider the connection and character of teacher educators’ biography and pedagogy in new and illuminating way.” (Hayler,2011:103)

## **Thinking further:**

1. Think about your educational practice. Why do you teach? Do you love it? How did you end up being a teacher? What has drawn you to the profession? Do you have a story about it? What are some of the experiences that have most defined your story? Can you imagine ways in which other educators could have the same, similar or very different experiences? How did your story influence your professional identity?
2. Do you encourage storytelling with your students? Can you imagine a way you could incorporate storytelling in to your practice? How would your students be best served in expressing them self’s and finding different connections to subject matter in their own lives?

## **KEY-WORDS/ CROSS-REFERENCES**



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Narratives, Autoethnography, Family stories

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