



# The Stories We Teach By: The Use of Storytelling to Support Anti-racist Pedagogy

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*“The engaged voice must never be fixed and absolute but always changing,  
always evolving in dialogue with a world beyond itself;”* (Hooks, 1994, p. 8).

Research on teacher identity suggests that the stories we live by influence *who* we are and *how* we are in the classroom (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Beijaard et al., 2004; Clandinin & Connelly, 1999; Day et al., 2005).

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Complimentary research suggests the autobiographical nature of teachers' work (Cole & Knowles, 2000). To that point, "making sense of prior and current life experiences in the context of the person as it influences the 'professional' is the essence of professional development" (p. 15). Thus, we situate storytelling as a powerful pedagogical practice for both teacher educators and classroom educators to deepen their efforts of enactment of anti-racist pedagogy. In this chapter, we nuance the dimensions of storytelling pedagogy and share the ways in which three transdisciplinary faculty used such dimensions to maintain criticality in our classrooms as our university pivoted to remote instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Later in the chapter, we describe the nature of our collaboration; however, there is a need to contextualize our efforts because of the widespread social unrest that came into sharp focus. As we embarked on our transdisciplinary collaboration into a pedagogy of storytelling, two major world events heavily shaped our trajectory. First, we were navigating teaching in the midst of a global pandemic; and second, racial movements, sparked by the murder of George Floyd, unfolded around us. As we pivoted to remote instruction because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we felt morally and ethically compelled to address the social and racial injustices that were for so long silenced and even normalized.

Given this, we asked ourselves how stories could simultaneously humanize our pedagogy with our students while also centering and deconstructing racism. We turned to the sharing of our personal experiences, the crafting of letters to students, the reading of children's literature, and the use of memoirs as ways to address both of these issues. We found that a pedagogy grounded in story modeled vulnerability, attended to students' wellness, and opened up conversations around difficult topics such as racial inequities.

Here, we deepen our commitment to the use of storytelling as a powerful pedagogical practice that models leaning into courageous conversations and delves into the urgent issues facing educators and students; that is, how we engage our students in humanizing and meaningful conversations around race-related topics. To that end, we use our year-long work as critical friends to nuance and advance storytelling as a pedagogy of teacher education by identifying three functions of storytelling: (1) modeling vulnerability; (2) attending to students' wellness; and (3) opening up conversations on difficult topics. Given our shared commitment to social justice and anti-racist teaching, we focus on the following question to both guide and deepen our polyvocal pedagogical understandings: *How*

*can storytelling support more humanizing and anti-racist practices in teacher education?*

Our own storytelling, therefore, brought us to a generative space where storytelling emerged as a critical teacher pedagogy to deepen our own learning about how we teach to enact anti-racist and humanizing practices. Forms of storytelling we pedagogically drew on can be categorized in one of two ways: stories we told about ourselves and stories we told about others. Specific examples of ways we shared stories about ourselves were the sharing of personal experiences and in letters written to students. Stories we told about others' experiences were shared through specific children's literature and memoir. These forms of story appeared in our classes with preservice teachers and school counselors and also in our meetings as critical friends and in professional development sessions, we offered to colleagues. Before delving more deeply into these forms of story, we contextualize our efforts by providing some context of our journey together as Teaching Fellows and the ways we came to know each other and ourselves more deeply through storytelling.

### CONTEXT OF OUR JOURNEY

In the spring of 2020, the Governor of New Jersey ordered all public and private schools to close due to a global pandemic that would come to be known as COVID-19. As a public university, this state-ordered shutdown halted the pattern and continuity of what students, faculty, and the community expected from a system of higher education. In our case, this affected over 23,000 students across three campuses. With no end in sight, fear, confusion, disbelief, and uncertainty plagued students and faculty alike.

Rowan University, nestled in Glassboro, New Jersey, about 20 miles from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, began in 1923 as a college to prepare students to become first-rate teachers. The College of Education proudly boasts its ability to transform schools, develop leaders, and lead the way in social justice initiatives. Within this backdrop, three transdisciplinary faculty members with diverse interests, training, and teaching modalities were selected, based on nominations from Department Chairs, and The College of Education Dean, with the support of the Provost, to be named College of Education Teaching Fellows. The criteria for selection, also echoed by those who made the nominations, consisted of, "teaching experience, currency, mindset, unwavering student-centeredness, and consistent innovativeness in teaching practices."

### *Teaching Fellows*

We were selected as Teaching Fellows in December of 2020 to commence our work in the following academic year (fall 2021–spring 2022); our charge was to develop targeted professional development opportunities for other faculty members based on our own teaching expertise. The time spent collaboratively planning gave us opportunities to discuss and share our practices, which ultimately led us to weave storytelling in order to focus on the current social unrest or awareness of social justice issues surrounding race, police brutality, and inequities in health care, as well as our own educational system. A global pandemic required that we shift our practice from face-to-face instruction to virtually serving the needs of students and faculty who depended on an institution to create an environment that perpetuated learning and growth while still preparing students to be knowledgeable and confident in their respective practices.

Hence, two teacher educators, and one counselor educator, were selected to create innovative teaching practices as the university underwent a transformation from a dynamic, physical space occupied by students to a virtual teaching platform that required and demanded new ways of teaching, learning, and engaging students. As Teaching Fellows, we formed a teaching community that engaged us in the discussion of our teaching practices around race, teaching, technology, and assessments in our unique subject areas.

As Teaching Fellows, the university gave each of us a course release and a stipend to carry out our charge. We were given the independence to create, develop, and present professional development to our peers, collaborate with the College of Education Fall Forum, and meet with faculty members on a one-on-one basis to help them understand the ambiguity that our students faced and how using storytelling could create space for empathy, understanding, and compassion, which would connect us even closer to our students and the goals and objectives of the College of Education. The systemic creation and support of the College of Education Teaching Fellows increased our capacity to address academic *and* social issues as well as create an environment and culture which engaged students on a humanistic platform in each of our classrooms.

It is important to remember the context surrounding us at the genesis of our work: sheltering in place, social movements around us, and the pivot to remote instruction. Storytelling, unbeknownst to us, came into our lives as a way to make sense of these troubling times and everything

unfolding around us. We used storytelling as a way to connect with our students despite the remote nature of our interactions with them and used storytelling to help us make sense of the social injustices unfolding around us. When we came together in our journey as Teaching Fellows, we all discussed how we used storytelling to adjust our remote practices in relational ways.

We met multiple times during the planning phase of our work to discuss innovative ways to maintain criticality and a social justice stance in our remote teaching. As a way to get to know each other better, we not only shared stories about our current experience of teaching remotely during a pandemic but also distant stories embedded in our personal histories of centering social justice in the university classroom. In our discussions, we all shared how the power of story was one way that brought us and others into spaces where we could facilitate conversations around race, language, disability, power, and privilege. Therefore, we set out to examine the forms and functions of storytelling as a way to model humanizing and anti-racist practices during crisis and pain.

### THEORETICAL FRAMES

All stories construe reality and are performative in nature as we seek to show more positive aspects of ourselves. Through our collaborative work as critical friends, we found new courage to share our vulnerabilities with students and colleagues through stories. We draw on theoretical grounding for the development of storytelling as a way to take up anti-racist practice through two frameworks: sensemaking and relational teacher education.

Sensemaking (Rom & Eyal, 2019) offers theoretical grounding for our work as it acknowledges the ways educators use elements of their contexts to render meaning from their experiences. Sensemaking, therefore, can be broadly understood as the narrative or mental map(s) that people create in order to draw meaning from their experiences and to use untenable situations as prompts to action (Powell & Colyas, 2008; Weick, 1995). In this way, sensemaking refers to how individuals “notice, select, and interpret ideas in their environment, but also how they enact them so as to be rendered meaningful” (Rom & Eyal, 2019, p. 63). We turn to sensemaking as a theoretical frame because it acknowledges how individuals and teachers, in particular, “rely on sensemaking to navigate organization dynamics and to address professional issues” (Rom & Eyal, 2019, p. 63).

One of the most profound ways we, as teacher and counselor educators, make sense of our professional work is through the framework of relational teacher education (Kitchen, 2002, 2005a, 2005b). Relational teacher education, as the name suggests, is a perspective that maintains we both live our lives and know ourselves in relation to others. Relational teacher education comprises seven dimensions: understanding one's own personal practical knowledge; improving one's practice; understanding the landscape of one's profession; respecting and empathizing with preservice teachers; conveying such respect and empathy; helping preservice teachers face problems; and receptivity to growing in relationship (2005a, 2005b). We extend these concepts to the work of counselor education, given the inherent relational nature of the field. It is through relationships with others, such as our students, that we make sense of our work and deepen our own understanding of ourselves-in-practice (Fletcher, 2020).

At the heart of building relationships with students is storytelling. Storytelling, through narrative, is the vehicle through which we open ourselves up to others, share our experiences, and admit our vulnerabilities. Indeed, storytelling is the connective tissue of relational knowing with others and with ourselves. Through stories, we show our students what we do when we do not have the answers and when we sojourn *with* students into difficult topics.

### HOW WE COME TO KNOW OURSELVES

While we did know each other prior to our collaboration as Teaching Fellows, we felt it was important to share with each other our stories of what matters to us as educators and why. Below, we share the personal narratives that we also shared with each other during one of our first planning meetings as one example of possible forms and functions of storytelling. We share our narratives in first person, in keeping with the importance of storytelling.

#### *Stephanie's Story*

*I began my career in education as an educational interpreter for two Deaf second graders. Soon, I finished my initial teaching degree, and I taught ESL, first, and fifth grades in Georgia. Many of my students were second and third-generation immigrants, mostly from families who had moved from Mexico to Georgia to work in the poultry industry. Another group of my students were*

*African American, whose families had been living in the area for the past couple of hundred years. As I began graduate school, I realized that the pedagogy I had learned in my undergraduate teaching training was lacking. It was devoid of any relevance or connection to my students' lives.*

*After reading about critical and culturally relevant pedagogies, I began to embrace the idea that my students' lives and languages should be reflected in the books that we read, in the stories that we told, and in the content that we learned. Those beliefs have stayed with me, and they are evident in the classes I currently teach to both preservice and in-service teachers. For this chapter, the examples I draw from come from one course, Literacy Pedagogy I, which is a required course for undergraduate, preservice educators seeking their initial certification in elementary education at Rowan University.*

### *Brie's Story*

*I began my career as a kindergarten teacher in a school with a high-immigrant population. As I started teaching, I began to feel a disjuncture between how I was prepared to teach and how I needed to teach in order to meet the needs of my diverse student population. In fact, as I look back on my teacher preparation program, I realize I was not prepared at all for working effectively with emergent bilingual students and their families. And, while I knew I had a lot to learn in terms of pedagogical strategies, I knew I wanted my students to feel a sense of belonging in my classroom; therefore, I set out to build positive relationships with my students and their families. Over time, I saw how building relationships is actually the most effective and authentic strategy to support students' learning. Building relationships with students has been a significant aspect of my practice as an educator, both when I was a classroom teacher and now as a teacher educator, because of the emotional support relationships offer students. In turn, the relationships I build with students enhance my teaching practice by prompting more equitable and socially just learning environments.*

*I maintain that at the heart of good teaching is the ability to give students a sense of belonging in the learning environment. My philosophy of teaching is grounded in rich literature on care and belonging. I maintain that if students do not feel a sense of belonging in a particular learning space, they will not take the necessary intellectual risks or devote the intellectual effort necessary to grow and learn in meaningful ways. In my experience, which is simply my own and based on a limited set of experiential data, the key to creating a sense of belonging for students is to acknowledge their humanity, to listen to them—really listen to them—and to accommodate their needs.*

### *Zalphia's Story*

*I entered college before there was an official title for “First Generation.” These are students who are the first in their families to attend school beyond high school. Although I did not have the cultural capital to understand financial aid resources for navigating college culture, choosing teaching as a career was easy for me because the happiest days of my life were spent in a school building.*

*Coming from a home without any paper, pencils, books, or magazines, it was in a racially segregated, musty brick school building that I learned to hold crayons, color, sing, read, learn poetry, and dissect a frog. But within those walls were adults who knew my name and saw beyond my current skills to my potential. I wanted to do that for students who looked like me—students who needed someone to know their name and see their potential.*

*Not until I was studying toward my doctorate did I realize that the deficits I faced in school and in college were now my greatest assets and strengths. I had the lens to nurture, motivate, and develop future Professional School Counselors who would make school days for students the happiest of their lives by nurturing and facilitating a more cooperative and participatory environment (Bartunek et al., 2000; Brunner, 1998; Kezar 2000).*

*The students that I taught, counseled, and mentored during my 36 years were from middle to high socio-economic status. In these schools, I was given “wings” to create a classroom environment of safety and support for students. Later, earning a degree in Counseling Education further gave me engagement with students and the opportunity to nurture and help teachers, parents, and administrators grasp their role in shaping and molding students’ development.*

*Now, as a Counselor Educator at a university, I base my theoretical framework on Nel Noddings’s Ethic of Care, a model of ethical caring in education that challenges the present-day hierarchy of schools, content of curriculum, courses taught, and size of classes (Nodding, 1998). Based on my ethic of care approach, it is imperative that I “guide students in a well-informed exploration of meaning” (p. 221) on a daily basis regardless of their academic challenges, which were exacerbated by the global pandemic. In addition to Noddings, I draw on the work of Maria Montessori, who consistently reminded parents and educators that learning is in the doing. Hence the culture of my graduate education program is experiential where students actively participate in the planning, execution, and assessment of their own growth and development.*



*I see myself as a feminist leader, theorist, and teacher. The self-reflective nature of recognizing values, beliefs, ideas, and experiences is a cornerstone of who I am in the classroom (Court, 2007; Thurber & Zimmerman, 2002). I am able to build strong relationships with my students so that when issues arise, collaboration and discussion help me to bring new meaning to the situation (Huffman et al., 2003). This mirrors directly with storytelling as a powerful tool.*

*I am now aware that the ability to communicate, collaborate, and develop consensus are my strongest attributes (Pawar & Eastman, 1997). Feminine attributes of nurture, care, support, empathy, shared values, diversity, and equality indeed define my teaching (Court, 2007), which was incorporated in my work as a College of Education Teaching Fellow.*

### *Common Threads*

After we shared our stories with each other, a common thread became apparent: the experience of teaching marginalized students and, in Zalphia's case, of *being* a marginalized student. Indeed, as we reflected on our individual stories, we came to appreciate the power of humanizing pedagogies. What would it have taken to learn more about the experiences of our marginalized students? How could we have developed pedagogies to serve all our students better? Of course, one of the answers to this question lies first in the need to know more deeply about students' lives, which could be achieved through storytelling. Next, we map out how we brought the power of story into learning spaces for our students.

## THE STORIES WE TELL

We drew on our own stories and the common thread around the need for more humanizing pedagogies as we were tasked with providing Professional Development opportunities to our colleagues by virtue of our roles as College of Education Teaching Fellows. Knowing that one, screentime saturation was a real issue during the ongoing pandemic; and two, we wanted to find ways to help colleagues take up humanizing, anti-racist pedagogies, we decided that we would break away from the traditional model of professional development and instead offer what we called bite-sized professional development sessions focused around storytelling. We wanted to keep our sessions on the shorter side to make them more accessible, and we couldn't recall any of our colleagues wishing they could see

another PowerPoint presentation to help their teaching practice. Further, that transactional approach did not appeal to us as educators or as humans enduring the trying times of the global and racial pandemics.

### *How We Tell Our Stories*

Based on our collective understandings, we developed a series of bite-sized Professional Development sessions that were offered monthly and virtually. The overarching purpose of the sessions was to offer our colleagues an accessible way to take up more humanizing and anti-racist practices in their work. Therefore, during these sessions, we shared stories focused on how we handled race-related experiences in our personal and professional lives.

#### *Personal Experience Stories*

One particularly powerful session was when we told stories about our own encounters with race and racism in our classrooms. Below is a shortened excerpt from a story Stephanie commonly shared in the college classroom and also shared during a bite-sized PD session:

When I was teaching fifth grade, my students were mostly Mexican Americans, children of first generation immigrants, African American children and Asian American. One day, during recess, Rashaad, one of my African American students, came to me with big tears in his eyes. I asked what was wrong, and he told me in big gulps that Quinn, another African American student, had called him the N-word.

Taken aback, I wondered what to do. This is a memorable point of encounter for me. I was in graduate school at the time, and I was just beginning to learn about critical and culturally responsive pedagogies, and I knew that I shouldn't run to the teachers of color to resolve this "problem" for me. So, I remained calm, and I assured Rashaad that I would deal with it when we got back to the classroom. With time to think, I decided that I would call both Rashaad's and Quinn's parents to let them know what happened. Then, I would talk with Quinn about what had motivated him to use this word. After that, I would move forward with solutions.

When I called the children's parents, they were overwhelmingly understanding, as if they expected this to happen at some point in their children's lives. I felt both surprised and relieved. Surprised because I thought their parents would be angry with me, but they weren't. Relieved because they

seemed to understand the problem of the N-word far better than I did. When I sat down with Quinn and Rashaad and asked why he had called Rashaad this word, he nonchalantly threw up his hands and shoulders with a response, “What? It means he’s my friend.” Rashaad looked over at him and replied that it does not mean that. “It’s a very bad word,” he had said.

I decided that I would not “write up” Quinn for this. Instead, I asked the children, their parents, and the principal to meet to talk about what happened. The end result was that Quinn did not know the history of this word, and he really thought he was calling Rashaad his friend, and Rashaad did know the history of the word, and he did not think it meant friend.

In our Professional Development session, Stephanie explained that she uses this story often to facilitate the discussion about the N-word with mostly White preservice teachers, in turn showing a nuanced, but not necessarily perfect, response. Her response considered the context of the word being used in the Black community and how teachers might respond when they hear the word used at school.

In this same Professional Development session, Zalphia shared stories of discussing race with her daughter. She explains that she had lived in a neighborhood that was 98% White. As an African-American family, Zalphia’s family had always felt embraced and comfortable. Her children had school friends and were invited to birthday parties and overnight sleepovers. So, when her five-year-old daughter, sitting at the dinner table, swinging her legs, asked her, “Do we know anyone who is white?” her throat started to close. Was someone teasing her? Did someone make fun of her hair? Her skin color? Zalphia was thinking and feeling all of these questions. But on the outside, she calmly asked her a simple question: “Why?” Her daughter’s response was very matter of fact: “Katie, my best friend, said that she was white” and, through the eyes of a five-year-old, she responded back to her redheaded, freckled-face best friend, “You’re not white, you’re a peach!”

Zalphia shares that from that moment on, she understood how children see—and should see—differences and similarities between people and their relationship to them. So, peach versus White was not about treating someone differently, it was about understanding differences. Zalphia explained that she transferred this non-judgmental, accepting inquiry method within her classroom in order to welcome, hear, empathize, and ultimately, create a learning environment that leans into students’ stories.

*Letters to Students*

During the spring of 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic, Stephanie's normally face-to-face class, Literacy Pedagogy I, was moved online. She expected to continue her classroom discussions via Zoom with lively input from her preservice teachers. However, this isn't what happened. Staring at a black screen, where students had chosen to mute themselves and turn off their cameras, she was looking for a way to re-engage them. At the same time, she was taking a course in writing creative non-fiction and reading *Tiny Beautiful Things: Advice on Life and Love from Dear Sugar*, written by Cheryl Strayed. The book is a compilation of an advice column hosted by Strayed, or Dear Sugar, composed in a series of letters seeking advice from Strayed, followed by her response.

Inspired by this, and after the week's readings on racism in the classroom, she asked her students in Literacy Pedagogy I to pose a question on the discussion board to her or to the classroom that they still had about race, racism, or anything related to it in the classroom. While the questions varied, repeatedly the students asked how to talk about race with students, especially young ones, in an appropriate way. As an example, one student posed this question:

What is the right way to do it (teach about race and racism) especially if you have a student of color in the room, since you do not want them to feel targeted or uncomfortable in any way?

This is what Stephanie wrote back:

Thanks for this great question. First some stories, then some resources. The other day, I was watching Georgia and Ginny on Netflix, binge-watching, I confess. Ginny is an African American high school student. (White mom/Black dad). During her high school English class, her high school teacher, who is a total jackass, reads from a piece of literature, *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf, that had one of many iterations of the n-word in it. He states that it was a different time and context, and we wouldn't use the word now unless in a "rap" song, then he says that he won't read the word aloud because it would be offensive. Followed up with, "Right, Ginny?" Of course, she feels singled out because she is singled out, and she leaves the classroom upset.

In another real event in the US, a pre-service teacher, who was African American, decides to read a text to a group of fourth-graders. It was the supposed letter written by a colonist who was also an enslaver, William

Lynch, which has long been determined to be a *hoax*. You can find the letter and read it if you like. It is obviously racist and very offensive. The children also had to act out being a “slave.” Of course, the children would be upset, and it has resulted in numerous lawsuits.

There are many more of what not to do in the classroom that you can find *here*.

So, what to do? Here’s one reason that I try to expose you to high-quality children’s literature, written by people of color, who have taken up race, other forms of oppression, and racism in multifaceted ways that are appropriate for young children.

In last week’s module, you had a link to the *New Kid*, a graphic novel that discusses current issues of race, school segregation, in a real, even at times humorous way. It is very appropriate for upper elementary and middle school. In the picture book, *Marisol McDonald Doesn’t Match*, you see a complex construction of a Latina, Peruvian heritage, who has freckles and red hair, but speaks Spanish as her first language. It is very appropriate for all elementary ages.

Here you will find links to a variety of books that are meant to prompt discussions about racism and other forms of oppression in the class, but in ways that are appropriate for young children.

In general, you should never have children act out being enslaved, nor should anyone say any iterations of the n-word in class, as it should be hurtful to anyone, not just someone who is Black. Also, please don’t turn to your students of color as the experts on race and racism, listen to their experiences, yes, but just like everyone else, race and racism have not been discussed enough in anyone’s homes or lives, for one person to be a sole expert or speak on the behalf on entire “race” or “culture” isn’t possible.

While Stephanie had answered the question about how to talk about race in the classroom many times, this was the first time she had written a response in the format of a letter to her students. She found that the delay created through letter writing gave her time to craft a more nuanced answer, add additional resources for her students, and connect to popular culture that hopefully made the topic more relevant to them.

### *How We Tell Others’ Stories*

In our work as Teaching Fellows, we identified other forms of story that we had drawn on in our teaching practice: children’s literature and

memoir. We talked about how powerful it is to share the stories of others to teach difficult topics. Here, we share how we drew on particular stories through children's literature and memoir in our practice.

### *Children's Literature*

Throughout our time as educators, both in K-12 and at the university level, we have used children's literature as a vehicle into discussions on so-called difficult topics, such as racism, classism, ableism, or linguisticism. It is worth mentioning that such topics are only difficult because their marginalization has been normalized; for so many students and their families, racism, classism, ableism, linguisticism, and more are harsh realities that are dealt with on a consistent basis. To be a social justice-oriented educator, we needed to center these realities in what we do and model for our pre-service teachers effective and meaningful ways to do so, too.

Children's literature remains a very effective tool for centering the lives of many children who have been historically left out of books and schooling. In Stephanie's course, Literacy Pedagogy I, children's literature is used in three main ways. One, it is incorporated each week along with the required readings. To reduce cost and increase accessibility to the readings, she provides a link to a read-aloud of the text or to an excerpt on Google Books or Amazon. Also, she partnered with the children's librarian at the university to order multiple copies of the texts used in class to be available in the university's library. Two, the students complete a collaborative genre study, Stephanie was careful that the books the students chose were from authors of color and construed nuanced portrayals of the Black and Brown human experience. Third, the final assignment for this course was a literacy lesson plan focused around a piece of children's literature that was included in their genre study.

Based on these preservice teachers' responses to the discussion questions regarding using diverse children's literature in the classroom, students overwhelmingly claimed that they saw the need for diverse texts and affirmed their commitment to their use in their future classrooms. Notably, while every student used a "diverse" text in their final lessons, explicit steps or questions regarding anti-racism were limited. Finally, since this course did not have a field component, so there was no opportunity to observe the students using the texts with children.

Like Stephanie, Brie draws on children's literature in her Working with Families and Communities course to teach overlooked topics about children's lives. In Brie's course, she uses children's literature for dual

purposes: one, to introduce preservice teachers to literature with more diverse representations of children; and, two, to model for preservice teachers how to use children's literature to actively develop anti-racist practices. An example of this is when Brie uses *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de la Peña to illustrate some experiences of a child living in an urban environment. In the story, a young boy named CJ rides the city bus with his grandmother. On their journey, they encounter a blind man with a seeing-eye dog, a guitar player, and some older boys. CJ asks his grandmother inquisitive questions about these people during the ride. At the last stop on Market Street, CJ and his grandmother disembark and CJ notices the "crumbling sidewalks and broken-down doors, graffiti-tagged windows and boarded-up stores" (de la Peña, 2015, p. 21). CJ remarks that his grandmother can find beauty "where he never even thought to look" (2015, p. 23).

At the end of the story, we find CJ and his grandmother helping at a soup kitchen. CJ sees familiar faces and tells his grandmother he is glad they came. After reading this story to her class, Brie discusses the themes of empathy, gratitude, and finding the beauty around us. This book becomes an example for how to perceive urban environments from an asset-based perspective, which is one of the goals of *Working with Families and Communities*. Since we maintain that diverse representations of children in literature are important in classroom instruction, Brie hopes that the preservice teachers will leave her class session with concrete ideas for using more diverse children's literature in very tangible and effective ways.

### *Reading Memoir*

As a College of Education Teaching Fellow, I used memoirs to enhance the learning opportunities of my students. In doing so, I discovered Dr. Charles Dew, scholar, researcher, and historian, from Williams College in Massachusetts, and I had the perfect opportunity to invite him to Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey. His journey of writing his memoir and sharing his own story about racist practice and racial etiquette engaged my students in a Multicultural Counseling class. Humanizing his family, educational experiences, friendships, and ultimately, his awakening into the realm of social justice, gave witness to my students the inherent value of their own storytelling.

As the Dean of the College of Education supported and gave a platform for the Innovative Teaching Fellows, she also supported and created space for other programs within the College of Education. Specifically, the

Center for Access, Success and Equity (CASE) which gave space for the Innovative Teaching Fellows to invite Dr. Dew to “tell his story” to the entire College of Education community through the Annual Fall Forum Professional Development Seminar. The stipend that the College of Education Dean provided the Fellows was used to purchase several copies of Dr. Dew’s memoir, *The Making of a Racist* (Dew, 2016). These books were distributed to colleagues within the College of Education and gave them the opportunity to read in advance and prepare for open dialogue with Dr. Dew. This laid the foundation for increased participation at the forum and necessitated break-out sessions for further discussion with Dr. Dew. Further validating the power of storytelling.

### *Leveraging Technology in Humanizing Ways*

At the time of writing this chapter, there was a daily deluge of social unrest in our country, and our college-aged students were witnessing students, like themselves, asking questions, just like Zalphia’s daughter. Therefore, regardless of the subject of the class, it became imperative that we leave moments open to have students share their stories and their lived experiences and perspectives. Zalphia shares that such moments helped her listen, empathize, and show care to a young graduate student from Guatemala explaining what it was like to live in a multi-generational household and to be expected to attend class on Zoom without adequate space. The learning gleaned from such moments suggests the importance of informal storytelling as a form of humanizing interaction.

Further, Zalphia noted that the stories that marginalized students shared helped others relate and find meaning in their own stories. Stories helped students lean into the trying times we were all navigating related to the health and race pandemics. Although we were teaching using a remote format, the space between us became so small, so insignificant, as we shared stories on a regular basis through notes, dialogue, Zoom sessions, and even through phone calls.

Zalphia also found that as counselors in training, part of the process is to teach how to listen to others by using the eyes, words, feelings, and observing body language. Through storytelling, these skills became even stronger as her students were more engaged, showed more empathy, and asked intentional questions for understanding. Using a remote format allowed Zalphia to use multiple modalities, which included podcasts such as *The Act of Listening* (Zomorodi, 2015). This is relevant because it



embraced storytelling and helped students create a brave space for the telling of their stories.

Part of the process of continuing the storytelling beyond the classroom involves regular correspondence outside of the classroom. Through this process of storytelling through writing, Zalphia sends each student a note at the beginning of the semester, the middle of the semester, and the end of the semester. She takes parts of their stories and incorporates them into the notes that she sends them. Increasingly, they respond by adding more depth and meaning to their stories over time.

During the pivot to remote instruction, we embraced the use of technology to enhance our storytelling and anti-racist pedagogy. For example, Zalphia's class listened to the Ted Talk, the N-word by Dr. Pryor (2016) from Smith College on the social context of this word, especially in light of the social unrest that was evident in our country. Zalphia and her students used Dr. Pryor's story to explore the etymology of this word from a historical, social, and emotional perspective. This, in turn, allowed Zalphia and her students to share their own stories, incorporating lived experiences in a way that humanized the thoughts, feelings, and emotions that this word conveyed to each of us. Based on how Zalphia leveraged technology, she identifies five essential components of storytelling:

1. Reflection
2. Feeling
3. Creating the words and visuals through language
4. Vulnerability
5. Listening to the voices and perspectives of others

Zalphia weaves these components into her teaching in two profound ways. First, all students are assigned a "story" or memoir that explores a life experience different from their own. Examples of memoirs used include, but are not limited to: *Breaking Night*, *Educated*, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, *The Kite Runner*, and *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. Each of these memoirs gives confidence and meaning to the stories we were telling one another without shame or fear. Indeed, these memoirs prompt students to lean into vulnerability to humanize their practice. Then, with three to four of their peers, the students formed a book club to discuss the memoirs.

Secondly, students designed and created children's books based on an assigned chapter in the multicultural education textbook (Sue et al., 2019)

based on a culture other than their own. The student-created books showed vivid illustrations, video format, music added, or in the case of one student; a rap song. Again, by telling the stories of another culture, Zalphia's students enhanced their own storytelling by creating original literature (Nicholson & Pearson, 2003).

Zalphia's students also provided narrative responses about their experiences reading these stories as they continued on their professional journey as school counselors. Below are excerpts from students' narrative responses, which capture how they lean into humanizing our pedagogies:

What an amazing year it has been. I just wanted to thank you for everything you have taught me this year. When I walk into the classroom ready for our class to begin I am graced with a cheerful smile welcoming me into another day full of intentional knowledge. Out of my 6 years in college it is with ease that I say you have been my dearest, most favored, and respected professor. Your commitment to your students is incredible and shows through how special you make our time during class. The tenderness you showed me...With all the knowledge and tools you have given me I will strive to be a woman of simplicity, someone who will show integrity and aim for unity. (Student Response, 2021)

Another student wrote:

As we usually tell you one thing we learned at the end of class, I would still like to contribute to the exit ticket: There was so much great information shared in class tonight, but one thing I learned is that we are currently living through a historical moment in the story of our country, and we must channel outrage into an actionable agenda to bring about change. (Student Response, 2021)

These student responses are examples of the impact that humanizing pedagogies through storytelling can have on educational professionals. The responses also indicate the use of storytelling as a way to prompt anti-racist pedagogies and perspectives.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we shared our own practices of storytelling to enact anti-racist and humanizing practices in the college classroom as our university pivoted to remote instruction during the midst of the global health and

racial pandemics. Our goal is to nuance the ways in which storytelling can be used by others through illustrating how we developed and shared various forms and functions of story in our teaching. We organized our storytelling examples in two broad categories: the sharing of our own stories and the sharing of others' stories. It is important to remember that the two different categories are both humanizing and anti-racist in practice, but the categories demand our vulnerability in different ways.

For example, in sharing our own stories with our students through anecdotes and letters, we model our own vulnerabilities and sensemaking of difficult events and marginalized topics such as race and racism. This requires vulnerability in the way that it shows our students our blind spots and biases; we situate ourselves as learners alongside them in making sense of difficult topics. We show students that it is okay to not have all the answers when it comes to difficult topics. In sharing the experiences of others through children's literature and memoir, we model concrete ways to open up conversations on difficult topics in the classroom. Since the sharing of others' experiences might require less vulnerability, incorporating memoir and children's literature could serve as important beginning steps in practicing anti-racist practices through diverse representations in literature.

In addition to furthering our anti-racist practices, we found that the storytelling practices we illustrated in this chapter also support students' overall wellness in the ways storytelling allowed for open exchanges about challenges and vulnerabilities. Believing that *who* we are influences *how* we are in the classroom requires us to continuously acknowledge and validate the autobiographical nature of teaching (Cole & Knowles, 2000). By sharing our own stories and the stories of others, we assert that who we are matters in the classroom; what we have experienced, how we feel, and how we struggle and grow shape us not just as teachers but as human beings in our efforts to teach other human beings. Indeed, storytelling functions as a way for us to be seen and heard, and it creates ways for our marginalized students to be seen and heard. Storytelling, then, creates a sense of belongingness and sensemaking in a classroom space, both of which are critical to the advancement of humanizing and anti-racist pedagogies.

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