

STORIED IMAGINATION

My class was titled “Storied Learning” in my proposed syllabus. But a week before the semester, students contacted me with “Storied Imagination” in the subject line. “Some interesting slip of tongue”, I thought. Contacting the registrar’s office, I found out that evidently somebody made a leap of imagination in the registrar’s office and renamed my class.

I was taken aback by this confusion at first, but soon realized that it was prophetic. Stories have the power of stirring up our imagination and teaching in a profound way that no other teaching method actually can accomplish. Imagination and learning are fundamentally united in their teaching potential. This is more so in religious education where we hope learning is emancipatory and affirming.

Seven students signed up for the class and we started thirteen weeks journey of Storied Imagination together. For each week, students were expected to submit a story. We would spend the first hour of the class sharing stories, learning about stories and writing lessons focusing on story telling.

But eventually sharing our stories became the central focus of our class. The instruction was simple: share a story and write a paragraph on why you picked this story to share. I did not require the students to write the story themselves. They were free to do so if they wished or they could share a story they read or heard. I just said, “share a story” and we did. They were confused at first. They kept pushing back on what exactly I wanted them to write? What exactly makes a story a story to share? Whatever they wrote and shared, I affirmed. Whatever they trusted me with, I acknowledged. By the sixth week the stories became more personal. They started exploring the depths of their selves. Some became frightened and resigned to poetry and reading. Some others felt confident in telling a story, but ended up telling a different story than what they intended.

MAIN POINT

In this paper I will be exploring my experience with teaching Storied Imagination. In doing this, I will be reflecting on the centrality of stories in imaginative teaching/learning process.

Story

Stories are the window to the self. A human practice since ancient times, stories capture human imagination. As the Bible is the story of divine and human encounter, stories of faith and faithfulness are taught and learned through storytelling. Though modern societies consider storytelling archaic and subjective, religious education relies heavily on stories.

Our lives are stories in retrospect. Telling our stories reminds us of our fundamental connectedness with each other and with the God. Storytelling is fundamentally human act of connectedness.

Imagination

Based on his research in neuroscience and his expertise in pastoral care, David Hogue in his book *Remembering the Future, Imagining the Past* claims that remembering is rooted

in imagination. Humans never remember the same incident exactly as it was. Actually when we remember, we reimagine the incident in our minds. Every time we remember, we attribute new meanings and weave new insights into it. In this sense, imagining a future is strongly rooted in our reimagining of our past. Memories are imagined and imagined memories are captured in stories.

In her book *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, Sharon Daloz Parks connects faith with imagination. Imagination is a process, an act of naming and a creative life-giving act. This creative naming process is what brings us closer to the experience of the Divine in our lives. In telling our faith stories we are creatively naming our journey of faith. Story telling is about this process of creative naming that Parks calls faith.

Storied Learning:

How do we reflect on the past and how do we explain a memory of the past, sets us into a specific state of imagining the future. The problem with this statement is that it underestimates the present. Dr. Hogue goes into lengths discussing the philosophical understanding of past and future. According to this discourse, the present simply does not exist. We are either in the past or in the future. After all any present is a future if we did not realize it yet and it is past the moment we become aware of it.

Although the present is lucid and hard to capture, teaching and learning are acts of the present. Indeed they deal with the past, they aim for a future, but practically, they deal with the present state when the teaching and learning is happening. In my opinion, our state, emotional and intellectual, in the present plays an important role in how we reimagine the past. Storied learning is a creative method to shift the narrative and the mode of the story from hopelessness to hopefulness. It is a creative process that makes renaming and reimagining the past possible for the sake of hopeful future.

For thirteen weeks we shared stories. We practiced not being critical and to 'be' in the story. We learned about methods of teaching the Bible through stories. We practiced listening to biblical texts as we listened to each other's stories. The last day of the class some of us were in tears. We felt like we needed closure, so we came up with a ritual. We lighted candles as we each shared a story. I lighted my candle from theirs thanking them for trusting me. But we realized, less was more and wished we could give more space for stories to breath in our churches and communities of faith. After all, isn't faith a story?

Bibliography:

Hogue, David A. *Remembering the Future, Imagining the Past: Story, Ritual, and the Human Brain*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2003.

Parks, Sharon Daloz. *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith*. U.S.A.: Jossey-Bass, 2000.

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