The lecture is not dead: using storytelling to enhance lectures

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AND FOR TOMORROW, I WANT YOU TO WRITE AN ESSAY ON THE TOPIC OF INDEPENDENT THOUGHT.

AND IN MY VIEW, JEFFERSON'S DEFENSE OF THESE BASIC RIGHTS LACKED CONVINCING PROOF. ANY DISCUSSION OF WHAT I'VE COVERED SO FAR?

OF COURSE NOT, YOU'RE TOO BUSY GETTING IT ALL DOWN.

JEFFERSON WAS THE ANTICHRIST! DEMOCRACY IS FASCISM! BLACK IS WHITE! NIGHT IS DAY!

NO, SCRATCH THAT! THE CONSTITUTION ITSELF SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN RATIFIED! IT'S A DANGEROUS DOCUMENT! ALL POWER SHOULD REST WITH THE EXECUTIVE! WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THAT?

TEACHING IS DEAD.

BAA! BAA! BAA!

EVERYONE OUT THAT?
Pedagogical buzzwords

- Active learning
- Problem-based learning
- Student-directed learning
- Flipped classrooms
It puts kids to sleep — but teachers keep lecturing anyway. Here’s what to do about it.
Complaints about lectures

1. They are outdated, antiquated
2. They promote passive learning
3. A student scribbling down notes is not learning
4. It doesn’t require complex thinking
5. The transmit facts but nothing more
Lecturing is the oldest and still the most commonly used teaching method in higher education — it is practical and efficient, particularly in large class sizes.
Over 3,500 TED Talks with over 3 billion annual views
Reframe the question

Instead of asking,

“How do we replace lecturing in the classroom to enhance learning?”,

let’s ask

“How can we enhance lectures to improve learning?”
Why do you lecture?
Why do I lecture?

1. Introduce a concept
2. Provide background information
3. Highlight the problems
4. Provide historical overview
5. Highlight the journey in scientific developments, not just the discovery
6. Provide a bigger picture overview that helps the importance sink in
7. It “gets to the heart of why a lesson is worth learning”
8. Get them excited about the content
9. Open their eyes to new questions, help them see connections between ideas, and provide new perspectives they may not have considered
The Power of Stories

Throughout history, stories have been an effective way of transmitting not just information but also values and attitudes to an individual or to a community.
What stood out in the TED Talk?
From a biological standpoint, stories move us forward in three major ways:

- Relate to each other
- Whole-brain connection
- Integrate and remember
HOW STORYTELLING AFFECTS THE BRAIN

NEURAL COUPLING
A story activates parts in the brain that allows the listener to turn the story into their own ideas and experience thanks to a process called neural coupling.

DOPAMINE
The brain releases dopamine into the system when it experiences an emotionally-charged event, making it easier to remember and with greater accuracy.

MIRRORING
Listeners will not only experience the similar brain activity to each other, but also to the speaker.

CORTEX ACTIVITY
When processing facts, two areas of the brain are activated (Broca’s and Wernicke’s area). A well-told story can engage many additional areas, including the motor cortex, sensory cortex and frontal cortex.

https://www.onespot.com/blog/infographic-the-science-of-storytelling/
Storytelling improves learning

1. Learning is more than just facts. It is having *mental organization*, a framework of understanding. This is what facilitates retrieval and application of knowledge.
2. One needs to develop their own way of thinking, build on their own prior knowledge, and *construct their own framework* to truly learn and form long lasting memories.
3. Short-term and working memory has limited capacity.
The value of storytelling in the classroom

STORYTELLING
boosts learning in the college classroom

STORYTELLING
• Creates a stronger connection with students
• Relaxes students and lowers barriers
• Engages and holds the learner's attention
• Gives difficult concepts real context
• Makes facts more memorable
• Encourages students to share their own experiences

When we hear FACTS
only our language processing centers activate

When we hear STORIES
multiple areas of the brain are activated

Whether the story is HEARD, READ, OR WATCHED
our brains are activated just the same

Stories exist in every culture
Using stories in the classroom

1. Have a beginning, middle, and end.
2. A good story has a good hook, a strong opening.
3. Have a theme.
4. Keep it simple. Don’t try to include too much information. Reduce it down to a nugget that can be remembered.
5. Try to include emotional hooks.
7. They work at any time during a class period.
   a. At the beginning, it sets up interest and intrigue, helps them see from the very beginning why what they’re about to learn is important
   b. In the middle, it helps students make connections with concepts they just learned
   c. At the end, it summarizes and puts concepts into a greater context
8. As the storyteller, you are performing. Make eye contact, move your body around, pause occasionally for effect — give them a chance to think about what you’ve just said
9. Not everything needs to be a story.
TIPS for using stories in class

- Use real stories that students will find reliable
- Don't be afraid to include emotion
- Test out stories to make sure they are effective
- Make sure there is a clear beginning, middle, and end
- Keep it simple to hold focus and make it memorable
- Have a strong character
- Have a strong opening to grab their attention
- Great stories can come from experiences, news, history, or pop culture
- Include stories that use images and data to improve critical thinking skills

check out sagepub.com for great storytelling materials
Storytelling is *just one tool* in the instructional toolbox that can be a part of a larger sequence of instruction.
THINK OF YOURSELF LESS AS A TEACHER AND MORE AS A DESIGNER OF MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES.

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Thanks

Do you have any questions?
Email me at kfphill@vt.edu