

Sharing through Story Telling

Chapters One through Eight invite you to learn to “read” the stories you and your students, faculty, and other associates are telling through the lives they live. You are invited there to refine how you develop working relationships with people, how you watch them and listen to them, and how you think about what you see and hear. Chapter Eight focused particularly on how you interpret the stories you “read” through qualitative inquiry. *This* chapter focuses on sharing stories about what you are learning from all the other activities presented in the figures in Chapter One and in the rest of this book.

Why share? Basically, sharing will accomplish two important objectives. First, as you attempt to disclose what you are learning to others, you refine your interpretations and thoughts and clarify for yourself what you are “reading” in the experiences you are studying. In a sense, sharing is another form of story *reading* that we might call story *telling*. A second important reason to share what you are learning is to help others through participation in a community of learners. Others who are asking similar questions should learn from you and you should learn from them. Sharing what you are doing is a beginning to that learning.

Sharing can range from telling a story to a teacher down the hall about your “reading” of a student’s experience to writing an article or a dissertation about your “reading” of the same thing. As in all story telling, the audience you are addressing, as well as the story you are creating, should help you determine the story you will tell.

For example, the story we told in Chapter One about Steve being expelled from Unified Studies could be told in several different ways, depending on the community of learners with whom we might share it. When we first had this experience, the teachers shared their versions of the story with one another to help them sort out their own feelings about what had happened and what they should do about it, to confirm their values and judgments in light of the choices others were making, to persuade others to consider their ideas in making a decision, and so on. Later, a group of graduate students and the professor from the Steve story used that event as a basis for discussing ethics and the philosophical views of Emmanuel Levinas in a paper presented at a professional meeting. Furthermore, this and other stories about Unified Studies are being included in a book about this program and its teachers, with an emphasis on teaching students responsibility. Finally, here in this book, this story was used to illustrate action research and educators-as-inquirers and to introduce you to the notion of qualitative inquiry. The basic facts of the story did not change in these four stories, but the emphases, the interpretations, and most importantly, the audiences were different in each case. So the version of the story that was told changed.

Who are your audiences for the stories you are creating through the inquiry you are conducting? Are you, like Kyleen in Appendix C, hoping to share what you learn about your students with their parents? If so, you probably will want to tell rich narrative stories about these children, adding your synthesis of some of the key points you find important in those stories. You probably hope to invite the parents to join you more fully in the education of their children and you want to give them the most powerful invitation possible.

Or perhaps you are a building principal seeking funding for a new program in your school and you want to invite funding agencies to look more closely at your needs or at the pilot program you have initiated. In this case, you might want to combine some rich narrative stories illustrating the needs students have which this program would address with some statistics showing the needs from a different perspective. You might also want to pull out themes from both these kinds of stories that highlight the needs that your proposed program is designed to address.

On the other hand, maybe you are a masters or doctoral student trying to study something of real importance to you in your school while meeting the demands of the graduate school and your advisory committee. You would find in this case that you need to include a thorough review of the literature in the story you tell to these audiences, in addition to rich narrative and subsequent analyses and syntheses of themes and implications. You would also be expected to include an audit trail documenting how you conducted the study.

In contrast, if you were writing an article for a journal or a magazine, you would want to study several issues of that publication to ascertain the kinds of stories readers are likely to read and use. You may decide to include all the elements you would include in a thesis or dissertation but in abbreviated form. Or you may decide, like Barone (1992) suggests, that you want to share your stories with ordinary people rather than social scientists and so you must provide narratives that are “inviting, even compelling, so that citizens who are fatigued from struggling to earn their daily bread will desire to read them.” (p. 19) You may want to present your story in an inviting alternate form such as a dialogue, a sketch, a personal essay, a plot outline, a poem, a diagram, a video, a collage, a tale, a drama, a series of letter conversations, a song, a map, a dance or pantomime, a game, or any other medium you deem best for communicating your message to your selected audience.

It is difficult in a chapter like this one to anticipate all the kinds of audiences you might be considering. This task is especially difficult because any experience you have had or have studied could be told to many different audiences in many different ways. To address this challenge, this chapter invites you to review three examples from the stories told already in this book that represent divergent ways of sharing with different kinds of audiences. Each example will be discussed to note the audiences addressed and the elements of the story that seem most appropriate for that audience. Then you will be invited to think about your potential audiences given the story that you are beginning to develop through your “reading” and interpretation of your qualitative inquiry experiences. You may find that your audience matches one of the examples given here; but it is more likely that you will have to extrapolate from these examples to create a story to share that is unique to you and to the audience you select.



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