

Stories We Hear, Stories We Tell, and Stories We Live: Teaching Narrative in the Technical Communication Classroom

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Introduction

In my first semester of college, I took an English class that used Joseph Campbell's model of "the hero's journey" as a framework for all the writing we did in the course. We created short stories, analyzed articles and films, and researched the lives of historical figures. Campbell's idea of the monomyth—that all stories follow a familiar pattern—was brand new to me back then, but applying it as a lens to look at both pop-culture and scholarly work taught me that narrative serves a valid function in academic settings. Because humans are narrative beings, narrative methods increase our potential to form new knowledge and make meaning from the things we perceive and experience. In fact, stories are "the most common, universal way" to make sense of our lives (Marsen, 2014, p. 305). Ever since that first English class opened my eyes to the potential narrative holds for the classroom, I've been hooked on stories.

Perhaps since my introduction to narrative's rhetorical uses occurred early in my academic career, I have had little trouble seeing the value of story. Yet the field of technical and professional communication (TPC) and narrative have a complicated history. In 1988, Barton and Barton's (1988) foundational article drew attention to the persuasive potential of narration by detailing the historical devaluation of narrative in TPC and urging the field to invest more interest in exploring the many benefits of story as a communication tool. Over a decade later in 1999, Perkins and Blyler took up this call and published both a book-length collection titled *Narrative and Professional Communication* and a special issue on narrative in the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* (Small, 2017). Though Perkins and Blyler (1999) predicted that by 2009 narrative would be prevalent in the field, later scholars—such as Moore (2013) and Small (2017)—have noted the lack of meaningful progress made after this initial flurry of scholarly activity.

Yet there have been several more recent additions to the conversation that challenge earlier assumptions of TPC as a field of logic and objectivity that is incompatible with story. One needs only to look at examples such as Cushman's (2015) illustration of storytelling in technical service work, Jones' (2016) and Bacha's (2018) call to reimagine narrative in design, or Van Ittersum's (2014) and

Ledbetter's (2018) work on the use of story in tutorials to see how narrative adds richness to technical communication.

Indeed, narrative has proven useful across the discipline. In business communications, narratives can build trust with customers, increase engagement, market products and services, build corporate culture, promote unity within the company, and drive organizational change (Hirst, 2017; Lemanski, 2014; Moore, 2013; Perkins & Blyler, 1999; Zachry, 1999). In science writing, a narrative approach can make complex knowledge accessible to a general audience and show how science functions in the real world through the demonstration of scientific theory in action (Mott et al., 1999; Sheehan & Rode, 1999). In history research, narrative can help us to construct and organize knowledge of the past and present it in more memorable ways (Mott et al., 1999). Yet despite its many areas of practical application, narrative has remained somewhat divisive in academia—still seen as “too personal, too incomplete, [and] too anecdotal” (Small, 2017, p. 235). While the Social Justice Turn in TPC detailed by Walton et al. (2019) has helped bring acceptance to experience as a way of knowing,¹ I believe the field will not fully embrace narratives until we as scholars, practitioners, and instructors learn to better articulate the complexities of narrative practices and begin to teach narrative in ways that effectively prepare students to communicate in their future careers.

This article is my attempt to blend story and pedagogy in a way that shows how narrative can be interwoven into TPC theory and practice. I have already set the scene by sharing the storied history of narrative in technical communication, along with my own story of how I was first introduced to narrative's potential in academia. In what follows, I discuss the difficulty of defining narrative and the trouble with reducing narrative to a singular pedagogical method. I then illustrate a three-part approach to the teaching of narrative that uses stories in the classroom, teaches students how to apply stories in the workplace, and trains students to view themselves as part of a larger story. I view this three-part framework as a pedagogical tool that helps align instructors of TPC with recent advocacy efforts to embrace more diverse narratives in the field.² Lastly, I argue that embracing narratives in TPC and approaching narrative more holistically in the classroom prepares students to be more culturally aware communicators who are capable of promoting social change.

¹ In the adjacent field of composition studies, Journet (2012) details a similar progression of narrative. She notes how early compositionists thought narrative to lack rigor before the “social turn” in the 1980s began to place value on personal history and ethnography. This, Journet claims, was followed by the “narrative turn” of the 1990s. Here, narrative's power to organize and make sense of the world was recognized and narrative practices began to gain more acceptance in the field. Yet, Journet observes how even in composition studies there is still a tendency to define narrative “in contradiction to the more ‘objective’ or ‘rational’ methods” (p. 15).

² I refer here to Natasha Jones, Kristen Moore, Rebecca Walton, and other recent scholars I have cited throughout this article, yet I also acknowledge my citations do not tell the complete story and there are many others in the field doing important work in promoting narrative.

Narrative: Universally Practiced but Individually Defined

Perhaps one reason narrative is difficult to teach in technical communication is that there is no consensus among teachers, scholars, and practitioners of TPC as to what exactly constitutes a narrative. Do stories follow a specific pattern (e.g., the hero's journey)? Must they observe a specific timeline (i.e., a beginning, middle, and end)? Should they contain certain elements (e.g., a plot, characters, and setting)? Are specific events such as conflict, climax, and resolution required? While narratives are universally recognizable (we all know a story when we hear one), they are not universally defined.

Many scholars use the terms “narrative” and “story” interchangeably (Clark, 2010; Hirst, 2017; Journet, 2012; Perkins & Blyler, 1999; Torres & Pruim, 2019), yet others see these as two distinct things (Dettori & Paiva, 2009; Small, 2017). For instance, Small (2017) draws a distinction between the terms “story” and “narrative,” identifying “narrative” as a compilation of smaller stories. Torres and Pruim's (2019) definition contradicts Small's view, claiming that a story is the coherent narrative whole while anecdotes are the smaller building blocks of stories. Clark (2010), too, uses the two terms synonymously and defines narrative as a sequence of events found meaningful by a particular audience.

Like Clark and others, I prefer to use the terms “narrative” and “story” interchangeably, as I find this broader conceptualization helpful in recognizing the many ways narrative elements can be used in technical communication. While I do not suggest we commit to a singular definition of narrative (as I do not believe it possible to distill such a complex idea down into one universally true explanation), I think it important to recognize how the variety of ways in which we view the idea of narrative contributes confusion to how we discuss narrative in the classroom and the field. That is, narrative is not a simple concept to define for our students; we must acknowledge that the idea of narrative is flexible and its definition largely contextual and culturally situated. Only then can we help students to see the complexities of stories and the different—and oftentimes subtle—ways they can be used in technical and professional communication.

Admittedly, the flexibility of narrative makes it impossible to teach in a single way. One trend in education is to use game-based narrative learning environments to supplement instruction, thus allowing students to learn through interaction with a digital story (Dettori & Paiva, 2009; Mott et al., 1999). A similar method applies narrative as a lens from which to view the course material. Bridgeford (2004) takes this narrative lens approach to her pedagogy by choosing to frame her technical communication courses around literature that provides context for course activities. In one example, Bridgeford uses the novel *Terrarium* as a scenario and basis for a student documentation project. More recently, Lee (2021) speaks of using science fiction as a tool to help TPC students consider

ethics when communicating about new technology. In many ways, these approaches are similar to my own experience with Campbell's hero's journey because they offer students a framework from which to consider their projects. However, using narrative only as a scenario to engage with fails to prepare students to use story in all its various forms.

To be clear, narrative is not merely a device for instructors to use in the classroom; as instructors, it is our job to prepare the next generation of technical communicators to see narrative as a dynamic tool that surrounds every aspect of the work they do. To help our students fully comprehend the role of narrative in technical communication, we as instructors need to move beyond attempts to define narrative and away from viewing it only as a pedagogical tool. Instead, we can teach narrative more holistically by helping students recognize the different ways narrative functions. Essentially, we should train students to listen to the stories of others, weave aspects of stories into their own work, and recognize the role they themselves play in a larger narrative.

This approach is informed by Clark and Rossiter's (2008) theory of the three elements of narrative present in adult learning; Clark and Rossiter claim that "learning through stories is a multifaceted process" (2008, p. 65) that involves stories being heard, told, and recognized. Because the classroom environment helps construct students' knowledge and offers students a safe space to practice the implementation of story in their work, it is an ideal place for instructors to introduce these three elements—hearing, telling, and living out stories—and show how they matter to our field. In the following sections, I will build on Clark and Rossiter's three-part framework and show how it applies to the teaching of TPC. I will then propose that a thorough understanding of these three elements of narrative is essential for preparing technical communicators for ethical social action that promotes equality and justice in workplaces and communities.

A Three-part Approach to Teaching Narrative

The Stories We Hear

Just as my initial exposure to composition was through the hero's journey, my introduction to TPC was also through narrative. The professor of my first graduate-level course began the class by asking us to read Savage and Sullivan's (2001) *Writing a Professional Life* and consider how hearing the stories of real-life technical communicators might help us to define the field. Prior to this point, I had yet to view myself as a technical communicator; however, after hearing the narrative accounts of others, I began to recognize just how many of my past writing experiences already contained elements of TPC. As Clark and Rossiter (2008) remind us, stories "are powerful precisely because they engage learners at a deeply human level... They evoke other experiences we've had, and those experiences become real again" (p. 65). For me, the stories in Savage and Sullivan's (2001) collection gave voice to the field of TPC and both clarified and

complicated my understanding of what it means to be a technical communicator. Therefore, I pose the first method of using narrative in the classroom is to expose students to the stories of others.

Students in our classes, whether they are specializing in TPC or pursuing other professions, can learn much from being on the receiving end of a story. As can be seen in my own story above, narrative makes learning more relatable by providing a bridge between new concepts and prior knowledge, allowing students to construct meaning from experience (Clark & Rossiter, 2008). That is, stories let students use “what is known to understand what is unknown” (Bridgeford, 2004, p. 115). This participatory method encourages students to draw on their own experiences to build connections to new ideas. In this way, the increased engagement students gain through listening to stories helps them to make deeper connections, which in turn leads to increased knowledge retention. Luckily for instructors, there are many ways to include meaningful stories in the TPC classroom. For example, many blogs and podcasts³ offer skill-specific discussions in a narrative format, thus allowing students to hear directly from others working in the industry. For service courses that contain students from multiple disciplines, instructors can create assignments requiring students to seek out stories of on-the-job communication in their chosen field. Students who listen to the stories of those in positions they may one day hold can then begin to see the different ways technical communication happens in all workplaces.

Furthermore, we as instructors can use narratives to promote diversity and foster inclusivity by asking our students to listen to a variety of stories representing the views and voices of people from various backgrounds. In this way, students can learn to hear and respect the stories of people who may be unlike them, regardless of whether these differences are conceptual (stemming from differences in knowledge or values) or physical (born out of differences in bodies or abilities). While listening to stories allows us to “see others’ life experiences through our own eyes” (Wilson, 2008, p. 17), it is also important to teach students to listen in ways that produce meaningful dialogue across cultures and communities rather than reinforce dominant points of view—a process which Ratcliffe (1999) refers to as rhetorical listening. Rhetorical listening requires openness and intent; the listener must pay attention to the similarities and differences between themselves and the speaker and hear not only what is being said but also what is purposely left unspoken (Ratcliffe, 1999). To help students truly understand the stories of others, we need to stress methods of listening that account for cultural context and allow us to question what stories are not being told (Jones et al., 2016). By teaching students to listen rhetorically to the stories of others, we are teaching them to value all knowledge, even knowledge that has been traditionally marginalized by society.

³ Some technical communication podcasts available at the time of writing include “10-Minute Tech Comm,” “The Not-Boring Tech Writer,” “Write the Docs,” “The Manuscript,” “I’d Rather Be Writing,” and “Inside Tech Comm.”

In practical terms, listening to diverse views prepares technical communication students to write for diverse audiences. This is particularly important in creating more equitable, inclusive, and accessible documentation, for as Haas (2012) reminds us, “all our users are not reflections of ourselves” (p. 281). To put the user first, technical communicators first have to understand the user; to understand the user, they need to hear the user’s story. Bacha (2018) claims that collecting stories can be as easy as talking with users in informal settings. To help accomplish this, instructors can create assignments that ask students to seek out a multitude of users’ stories and experiences. The creation of user-personas is a good example of one such assignment.

User personas—in addition to being stories in their own right—are common documents found in UX design that allow technical communicators to better understand different segments of their audience. By asking our students to hear the stories of different user segments, we help them to comprehend the diverse scope of people their documentation reaches. Additionally, listening to the stories of users helps usability experts improve the final product (Bacha, 2018; Ballentine, 2010). Assignments that require usability testing of documents are a way for students to collect stories of how different people perceive documentation and make evidence-based changes to their communication practices. Essentially, integrating assignments that encourage students to practice listening to real users is important when preparing students to communicate effectively in today’s diverse world.

Lastly, hearing stories that reflect real-world situations and contexts can prepare students to become more ethical problem-solvers. As Hirst (2017) reminds us, stories are strategic and can be used to form beliefs and values. Through stories, we allow students to come to their own conclusions, meaning that stories grow students’ convictions “organically” (Hirst, 2017, p. 13). One of the most prevalent ways of sharing these conviction-shaping stories with our students is through case studies,⁴ which present problems in the field and challenge students to think through various solutions. According to Clark and Rossiter (2008), the main benefit of case studies is that they teach students to “think like practitioners, which involves putting theoretical concepts in conversation with prior experience to come up with new insights and interpretations” (p. 68). Examining case studies can help students form a more sophisticated view of issues in the field because they “convey the complexity of human experience and facilitate students in communally exploring that complexity” (Jones & Walton, 2018, p. 249). As Rentz (1999) notes, case studies tend to “complicate our view of the entities we study” (p. 45), which is important for creating well rounded technical communicators

⁴ Some common case studies mentioned by Jones (2018) include the NASA *Challenger* disaster, the Three Mile Island nuclear reactor leak, the *Exxon Valdez* or BP Deepwater Horizon oil spills, and the Ruby Ridge siege. I also think of the memo in Katz’s (1992) “The Ethics of Expediency” as an example of an important ethical case study we should familiarize our students with.

who are capable of thinking through the complexities of real-world problems. By teaching our students to listen to the ethical issues facing the field, we can help prepare our students to act ethically once they enter the workplace.

The Stories We Tell

The second method of implementing story into the classroom is to teach students effective storytelling methods. In contrast to hearing stories, telling stories allows students to become the actor rather than the receiver (Clark & Rossier, 2008). Telling stories forces students beyond a cognitive understanding; the telling of stories forces students to convey coherent experiences that help others construct meaning (Clark, 2010). This is especially relevant in the TPC classroom because technical communicators are, at their core, teachers. That is, technical communicators take specialized knowledge and information and put it into language their audience can easily understand. They teach others how to complete tasks, take action, gain skills, or achieve goals. As instructors of TPC, we are essentially teaching our students how to teach others. If we claim that narrative is the most natural way of making meaning (Hirst, 2017; Marsen, 2014), we must train our students in the art of telling stories.

First, learning effective storytelling techniques helps students to become better user-advocates. Stories help make information easier for the audience to understand. After all, narrative texts are quicker to read, easier to process, and lead to increased retention (Barton & Barton, 1988; Small, 2017). Narrative's flexibility allows students to use simple stories in creative ways to engage, explain, or persuade their audiences. Additionally, teaching students how to ethically apply stories to their work helps them to think more inclusively about the stories they share. Students, as Shelton (2020) reminds us, need to be aware of the kinds of spaces they are creating for marginalized groups. As we teach our students audience awareness and rhetorical listening (Ratcliffe, 1999), we can help them recognize opportunities to use stories—both explicitly and subtly—to create more accessible documentation and more inclusive work environments.

In the technical communication classroom, instructors can create opportunities for students to ethically integrate narrative into course assignments. For example, narratives added to grants or proposals help increase audience engagement and make recommendations more persuasive (Small, 2017). Progress reports tell the story of how far a project has come and the challenges faced along the way (Blake, 2004). Recommendation reports, on the other hand, give practice in problem-solving through the consideration of many potential endings to a story in progress. Narratives can also be used to create instructions that are both usable and motivating (Ledbetter, 2018) by creating “an engaging and accurate embedded story that readers will be eager and able to play out in real life” (Van Ittersum, 2014, p. 238). Additionally, narrative practices can be used to visually structure data, infographics, or digital content in ways that tell a clear story (Lemanski, 2014). Incorporating service learning into TPC courses

also offers a great opportunity for students to gain practical experience in both listening to and telling the story of an organization through various deliverables created for real users (Bourelle, 2014). As Blake (2004) suggests, culturally responsive service learning helps students learn to address and question their role in ethically engaging in societal issues. By adding narrative requirements to their assignment rubrics, instructors can give students practice using stories responsibly and in a variety of formats.

However, as instructors, we must be careful to pair any discussion of narrative with a discussion of genre expectations. As noted earlier, there is a distinct lack of consensus among scholars on the definition of narrative, and I believe this is partially because narrative looks different in different contexts. There is no formula that we can teach students for how to use narrative in their technical communication, and the very nature of many technical documents requires the addition of narrative elements to be quite subtle. Indeed, Jones and Walton (2018) stress the importance of considering context when teaching narrative, as “context sets the scene for a story to be told.” Narratives, they say, “make sense only as far as they are positioned in an ‘appropriate’ context” (Jones & Walton, 2018, p. 254). For example, a strong focus on storytelling in formal reports may not benefit engineering students because narrative’s tendency to focus on the writer can lead to confusing and poorly structured IMRAD reports (Wolfe, 2009).

To be clear, the effective use of narrative in TPC does not require that every deliverable contains a story. Yet even when narrative is not a desired component of the final documentation, we can still teach our students how to recognize opportunities to incorporate narrative into the development phase by telling the stories of their users’ needs. As Ballentine (2010) posits, creating a narrative about how a product should function for its users is an essential step in the design process. These user experience narratives can help organizations solve problems by narrating how systems should work. By teaching our students that the appropriateness of narrative depends largely on genre, we can encourage them to implement stories in the ways most appropriate to their future careers.

Ultimately, we must teach our students to remain flexible in their storytelling and think ethically about the stories they tell and the contexts in which they tell them. While many factors go into ethical storytelling, I suggest we begin by teaching students to think critically about how to tell stories truthfully and respectfully. This requires students to recognize and respect the diversity of their audience by acknowledging the audience may not share the students’ knowledge, beliefs, and values (Ballentine, 2010; Forman, 1999; Haas, 2012). We must also warn our students against the marginalization of others’ voices and instill in them the importance of speaking with a community, not for them (Wilson, 2008). As Bacha (2018) reminds us, people want to be heard, but they also want to “have their stories told in their own voice” (p. 203). Therefore, evidence of listening needs to be present in our telling of stories. In the TPC classroom, instructors can embrace this iterative process by creating assignments that require co-creation

or “checking in” with users. As Forman (1999) reminds us, we need to remain “receptive and thoughtful about other positions” by making adjustments to our stories “when the data or analysis warrant them” (p. 126). Encouraging students to involve users in the design process (and adjust their designs according to users’ feedback) helps ensure the stories that get told reflect the users’ needs. Jones and Walton (2018) note that this approach helps build rapport with the audience and makes the writing more persuasive. In the end, ethical storytelling isn’t just about the finished product—it’s about the process that gets us there.

The Stories We Live

The final approach to narrative—the recognition of everyday life as story—is perhaps the most abstract and difficult to teach, yet it is essential to developing as socially just communicators. Clark and Rossiter (2008) posit that students should be taught to recognize how they are “narratively constituted and narratively positioned” in their worlds (p. 65). That is, by teaching students to think of themselves as global actors in the universal story of life, instructors can help students to recognize how views get shaped by societal forces, structures of power, and cultural norms. Clark (2010) claims that this method of inquiry forces students to examine and critique their place in the narrative of life by identifying their “underlying assumptions and what interests are served by those assumptions” (p. 6). Focusing on positionality challenges students to see how narrative forms their identities, and “how they can choose to think differently” about the role they play in society (Clark, 2010, p. 6). Teaching students to see themselves as actors helps them recognize their role in real-world narratives.

It is through this last component of narrative that we can see the first two components of narrative—the hearing and the telling—come together holistically. Indeed, this third way of viewing narrative forces us to acknowledge the telling of stories is never neutral because “all stories reflect the storyteller and where they are in their lives” (Wilson, 2008, p. 22). Yet helping students recognize how experiences, values, and assumptions shape them as technical communicators, in turn, helps students to listen more carefully and tell stories more discerningly.

As students learn to better understand the world around them and their position in it, they will modify, elaborate on, or even abandon their point of view (Forman, 1999). That is, a student’s point of view should never be static, as their role in the story is always evolving and taking on new meaning. By recognizing their life as a story, students can gain “critical insights through reflexivity” (Jones & Walton, 2018, p. 245). These insights, according to Jones and Walton (2018), “can shape students’ understandings of themselves as people and as professionals, as well as their ability to perceive relations of power that structure and operate in social contexts” (p. 246). As students view their lives through a critical lens, they will often recognize the inequity inherent in these power structures (Blyler, 1995).

Essentially, students learn to construct new meaning from the stories of their lives, and this new meaning changes how they see the world.⁵

By incorporating reflection into the classroom through reflective writing assignments and in-class discussions, instructors can encourage students to consider their identities—and how these identities affect the choices they make. According to Van Ittersum (2014), our sense of self is intrinsically linked to experiences and the stories we tell about them, which makes reflection an act of both considering and narrating the self. In addition, reflection is a metacognitive process that can serve an evaluative purpose, as narrative's ability to make cognitive processes visible is especially important to instructors who are seeking a method for assessing students' understanding.

In the technical communication classroom, teaching students how to tell the story of their learning benefits both student and teacher. For example, requiring students to tell the story of their rhetorical choices in a short memo submitted with each deliverable can further contextualize students' learning while giving their instructor a glance into their meaning-making processes and sense of self. The idea of using reflection in assessment is not a new one; Yancey (1998) described the power of reflection, noting how it requires students to "narrate, analyze, and evaluate their own learning and their own texts" (p. 146). When students are required to reflect on their learning experiences, they are given the chance to consider their positionality and narrate their decision-making rationale, thus providing instructors a method for assessing students' growing understanding of course concepts and a window into how their students see themselves situated in the world.

Narrative: A Tool to Drive Social Change

This article has built upon the three-part approach to teaching narrative first outlined by Clark and Rossiter (2008) and has shown how this framework can be used by TPC instructors to better contextualize the work they do in the classroom. By understanding narrative as more than a lens—that is, by viewing narrative holistically as something that is heard, told, and lived—instructors can help their students become more ethical storytellers, capable of taking up Rude's (2009) call to become agents of social change. Indeed, narrative is essential for socially responsive change (Perkins & Blyler, 1999; Jones & Walton, 2018), for it "reveals power and injustice in potentially elaborate ways that allow for analysis,

⁵ I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge those who played a role in my own story. My understanding of narrative has been influenced by my instructors and mentors—Sarah Z. Johnson, who introduced me to narrative in academia and taught me to recognize the monomyth in the mundane; Rachel Spilka, who used story to show me what it means to be a technical communicator; Rachel Bloom-Pojar, who encouraged my reflexivity through narrative-driven reflections; Maria Novotny, who taught me the importance of positionality and why users' stories matter to socially just documentation; and Emi Stuemke, who supported my inquiry into the use of narrative in TPC pedagogy.

encourage dialog, and offer the potential for transformative learning” (Small, 2017, p. 237). Yet if we as instructors want our students to become culturally competent communicators, we must not oversimplify the role stories play in the world; we must teach students to appreciate the complexity of narrative so they understand its full ethical implications and are prepared to take action in their future careers. Whether our students are TPC majors or taking our courses to learn about professional communication as it relates to their own fields, I believe this three-part approach to narrative can help students see how stories play a dynamic, multifaceted role across communication contexts.

Stories are something we receive from others, give to others, and live out amongst others. To be clear, the power of this three-part approach to narrative is in its ability to both delineate and integrate the various ways narrative must be accounted for in TPC. While it can be helpful to start by thinking about the parts individually, they do not function separately. Rather, they need to interact with one another to help students think comprehensively about the various ways narratives affect—and can be affected by—the work we do in the field. For example, to effectively hear and tell stories, it is imperative to first understand life as a story. That is, once students understand how they are positioned in the world, their minds are primed to listen more rhetorically and value storytelling practices that account for the differences among users. Then, to ensure students are able to “write in less objectivist ways” (Perkins & Blyler, 1999, p. 21), they must be exposed to multiple narratives representative of a broad range of voices that speak to the diversity of human experience (Jones & Walton, 2018). Only when these three parts of narrative come together can students view themselves as actors who strive to ethically listen to and tell the stories that matter—the ones that often go overlooked but have the potential to promote social change.

Learning how to understand and apply narrative can equip students with tools that allow them to subvert the status quo and take action against injustice. As instructors of TPC, we can prepare students to use narrative as a tactic to redistribute power in more just and equitable ways (Bacha, 2018). Jones (2017) explains that:

As a field, we understand that narratives can support dominant ideals or be used as subversive strategy. Narratives frame how we understand ourselves (and others) and what we do as well as what is meaningful to us. They help to shape our lived experiences. Narratives also have the power to disrupt and resist because they can create an individual's reality while informing how that individual makes meaning of that constructed reality. (p. 328)

By teaching our students that stories are heard, told, and lived, they may be better able to reflexively consider their position in structures of power while striving to listen rhetorically and tell stories ethically. The goal of this approach is to help students recognize the countless ways narrative can be used to promote

change in their own fields. The TPC classroom thus provides space for students to practice and reflect on this transformative work before entering the workplace.

Narrative is constructive; as instructors, we can use it to build new stories—and new storytellers—that promote equity and inclusion. Ultimately, the flexibility of narrative means there is no formula for the work we as instructors must do to bring about a functional understanding of narrative among our students. That is, there is no single story to tell, case to study, or assignment to create that can fully convey the multitude of ways narrative functions in real-world communication practices. Rather, there are many possibilities for the effective teaching of narrative in TPC and these possibilities are constrained only by the instructor's understanding of narrative and ability to translate this understanding into material that works in the context of their own unique classroom. This is why I suggest instructors embrace this three-part approach to teaching narrative that accounts for how stories are heard, told, and lived, as this approach provides an adaptable framework capable of expanding students' conception of story in ways that position them to become more socially just communicators in a variety of classroom and professional contexts.

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