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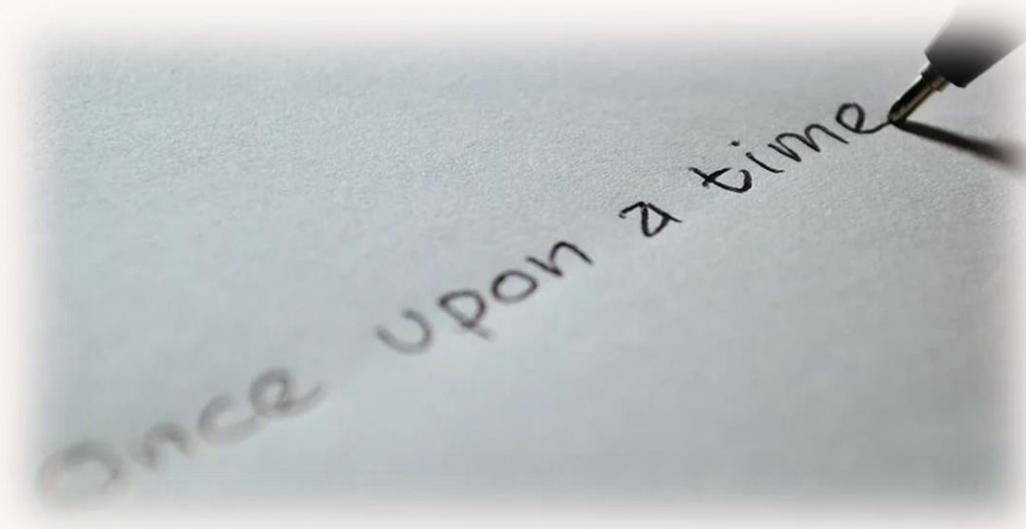
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Playing with words.... connecting through story 2



Dr Tracy Hayes

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Centre (LED)**

Story crafting methods: exploring magic and mundane moments and capturing elusive elements

We may choose to tell a tale, but it takes skill to ‘... craft something with power, something with emotion, something that lives and breathes within the hearts and minds of audiences for years to come’

(Hull, 2011).

Aim of session



To explore how we can craft stories with influence:

1. I will share some of my research with you, showing how I have crafted a story
2. You will have a go at writing your own short story – to share with each other
3. We will consider what happens next to our stories

Some key ideas

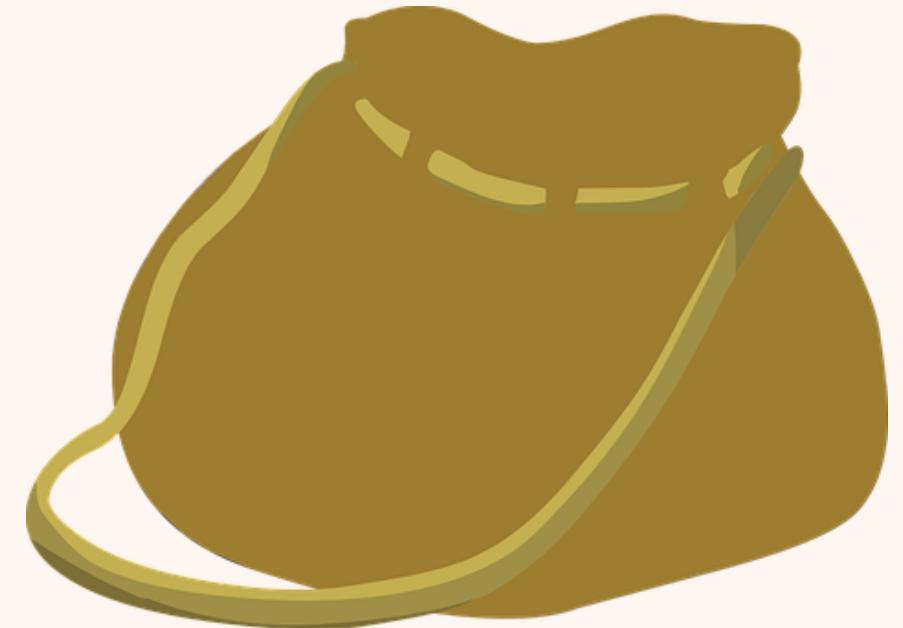
- **Magic moments** – I define these as those moments that make us stop and wonder, to question and extract meaning – aka critical incidents (may be very small)
- **Mundane** methods – everyday, may be seen as very ordinary and therefore not interesting
- **Elusive** elements – these are things that may be difficult to describe, to find, or remember

The ‘humdrum nature’ of everyday life, the banal, the seemingly trivial – this is hard to study

Focusing on society’s bad news gives us a sense of purpose and importance somehow

Recap from last session: The Carrier Bag Theory

Words hold things. They bear meanings.... Holding things in a particular, powerful relation to one another and to us.



Art Bochner: a story is always told by someone to someone at some place...

As human beings, we live our lives as storytelling animals. We are born into a world of stories and storytellers, ready to be shaped and fashioned by the narratives to which we will be exposed.

The stories we hear and the stories we tell are not only about our lives; they are part of them.

Our lives are rooted in narratives and narrative practices.

We depend on stories almost as much as we depend on the air we breathe.

Margaret Ledwith: giving expression to silenced voices...

Voice is an expression of self; it is rooted in the belief that what we have to say is relevant and of value. The simple act of listening, respectfully giving one's full attention, is an act of personal empowerment, but to bring about change for social justice this needs to be located within wider structures...

She argues that:

- reflection and story are a way of locating and analysing personal experience as profoundly political
- Based on the premise that power and empowerment, poverty and privilege, nature and humanity are all inextricably linked

My PhD – Making Sense of Nature: A Creative Exploration of Young People’s Relationship with the Natural Environment

- Qualitative study that considers how young people make sense of facilitated outdoor learning experiences.
- I used stories: to illustrate key points and explore ‘issues’ in more detail. The reader/listener needs to work out the lesson/message intended by the story teller.
- As advocated by Andrew Sparkes (2007) I invite listeners to ‘...think *with* the story and see where it takes them... look after the story, and when it is needed, **share** it with others’.

So, if you’re sitting comfortably...Here’s one of my stories

How did I *craft* this story?

- What do you think was my **intent**?
- What is my **message**? What am I trying to say with this story?
- What is the **purpose** of this story?
- There is **someone** the writer wants to listen, to hear, to **respond** to their story

This story was carefully crafted to explore thematic elements, with the aim of bringing ‘issues’ to light. It was published as a book chapter, available through UoC library (or by emailing me).

Informed by auto/ethnography

- A highly useful methodology, to generate rich and detailed accounts
- The study of **social interactions, behaviours, & perceptions** that take place within groups, organisations, communities.
 - **Social interactions** - an exchange between two or more individuals and is a building block of society; by interacting with one another, we construct rules, institutions and systems within which we live
 - **Behaviours** - the ways in which we act or conduct ourselves, especially towards others; how we / they behave in response to a particular situation or stimulus
 - **Perceptions** - the ways in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted; the ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses

Auto/ethnography Starts with YOU...

Reed-Danahay (1997:4) states that it involves 'a rewriting of the self and the social.'

As a method, it reflects that it is both *product* and *process*

Ellis, Adams & Bochner (2011:1) explain it is '... an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)'

- A selection of past events is remembered and analysed; the moments chosen as a focus tend to be perceived as an epiphany or a turning-point
- Those defining moments that make us stop and wonder – and to question in an attempt to extract meaning (Denzin, 2014).

I call them my *magic moments* ... over to you

Over to you... To have a go

Rules for ‘writing for five minutes’ Start when I say ‘*GO!*’ And keep going until I say ‘*STOP!*’

- You must not stop early, keep writing the whole time
- You must not think about what to write before writing it, just write
- If you run out of things to say, rewrite the last word over and over again until you think of another word
- Do not think about punctuation, grammar, spelling, just keep writing – no-one else is going to read it (unless YOU want to share it)
- Do not allow yourself to get distracted
- NO COMPUTERS ALLOWED – PEN/PENCIL & PAPER ONLY
- The topic is

“My magic moment last week”

- Write the title at the top of the paper
- When I say go – start writing
- When I say stop – stop writing!

What do you need to do next with this short story, before sharing it with someone else?

Would anyone like to share their story today?

Crafting your stories...

- Craft involves technique, there are **rules**, the **process** matters
- Most stories contain similar features and follow similar patterns of development, including
 - People depicted as **characters** in the story.
 - A **setting scene**, place, or context in which the story occurs.
 - A **temporal** ordering of events.
 - An **epiphany** or **crises** of some sort that provides trouble and dramatic tension, around which the plot or action depicted in the story revolve and towards which a resolution and/or explanation is pointed.
 - **Purpose** - a **point** or moral to the story that provides an explanation and gives meaning and value to the experiences depicted.

To Tell a Tale...

- Simple linear progression from one point to another. E.g. this happened, then this happened, then there was an outcome.
- Aims to entertain rather than serve a purpose
- It doesn't argue a position – it tells the tale of what happened and how it happened – this is more important than the sum total of what happened.
- In short, it's a tale that we can tell to others.



To Craft a Story...

- In contrast to a tale, a story is a key message, an argument
- The author has **intent**, the story has a **purpose**.
- It is carefully crafted to explore thematic elements, with the aim of bringing ‘issues’ to light.
- There is something the writer is trying to say – a **message**
- There is **someone** the writer wants to listen, to hear, to **respond** to their story



The craft of knowledge...

Carol Smart (quoted in *Mundane Methods*) explains (from her perspective)

- Craft is not necessarily tied to professionalised forms of expertise
- It has strong feminine and/or working class meanings e.g. sewing, knitting, cooking, midwifery
- Craft often seen as humble, undervalued – in contrast to Arts

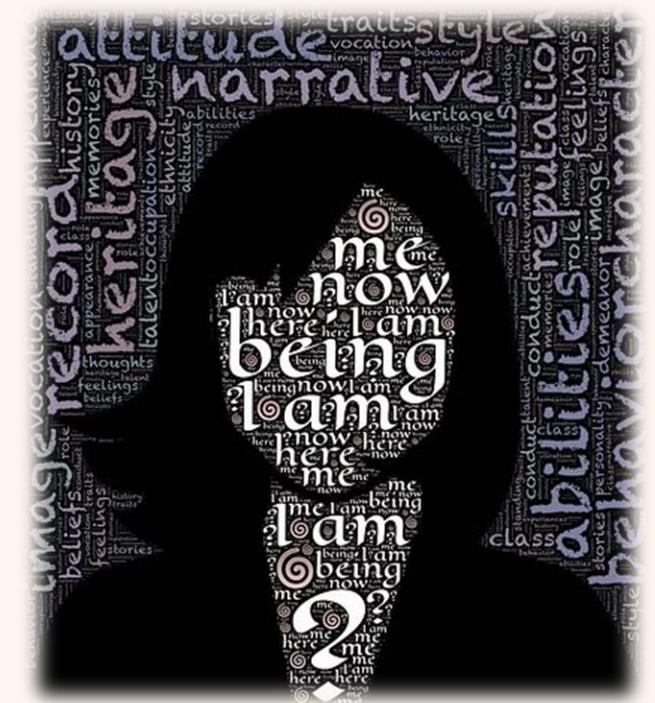
What do you think?

Whose stories are they?

Look at your story – *who* is in it? Is it only YOU?

We may want people to share / publish stories under their own names... BUT

1. They may not feel ready to do that – it may not be *safe*
 2. If they share it with us, give us permission to summarise and share under our name – is that *right*?
 3. Who has access to being heard?
 4. What is our role?



Donna Haraway: Whose story is it?

Excerpts from: *It Matters What Stories Tell Stories; It Matters Whose Stories Tell Stories*

- ... retelling another's personal and family stories foregrounds the question of who owns stories, who has access to whose stories, who is safe enough to tell their stories...
- ... nothing makes itself, nothing tells its own story. Stories nest like Russian dolls inside ever more stories...
- Who owns life stories and who has access to another's story are crucial questions...

To bring this to a close...

By crafting a story - an argument - authors respect the time and attention granted to them by an audience.

BUT - there are ethical and moral questions/dilemmas raised through entering the lives of others, participating alongside them, sharing their stories – and sharing our stories of their experiences and thoughts.

We should be open to this, and honest about it.

We need to respect the trust placed in us by the ‘characters’ in our stories – it is a gift

Next (final) event in this themed series

- Wednesday 21 April 2021: Symposium (half-day):
Telling small stories from the everyday to bring about
change.
- References from this talk are available on request.



Ways to continue this conversation...

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