

The Psychological Power of Storytelling

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ABSTRACT

This review article is an attempt to understand the efficacy of Storytelling in comprehending complex concepts and abstract ideas. It is envisioned as a potential tool in creating a participatory event that helps in maintaining the coherence of the ideas thereby reinforcing the related concept. Scientists are looking forward to embracing this lost art to have authentic connections with their audience and to understand the processing of information in the complex parts of the brain. They identify it as a secure path to communicate the message that not only engages the feelings, emotions, and attitudes but also the cognitive domain of an individual. Storytelling is associated with diversified intent in creating awareness about oneself, value system, vision, and mission of life in personal and professional life. It is a potential tool to develop emotional connections, self-reflection, mutual understanding, and increased empathy. It gives an option to learn from others' experiences thereby shaping the value system of an individual by either strengthening or challenging the core beliefs.

Keywords: *Storytelling, Psychological Impact of Storytelling, Mental health of the Audience, Mental Health of the Storyteller*

The art of storytelling is a unique human skill that has a captivating effect on the mind of the listener. It is an effective medium that creates a focus on the information by having a personal connection through glimpses of real-life experiences and interconnections between different topics and emphasizing the significant concepts (Daphne Lordly MA, 2007). The concepts are better comprehended through story narration which can have a lifelong impact. An effective narrative gives an in-depth understanding and helps one resolve their personal challenges in life through the morals and the key takeaways from the story. It's a potential medium for creating a participatory event and helps in maintaining the coherence of the ideas and reinforcing the related concept. The most-remembered stories generate insight and reinforce the value behind the narrative. It engages the audience in bridging the gap in the knowledge of the listener and the reality. It is an effective tool to convey complex messages and amalgamate abstract concepts. The power of storytelling is immense as it helps one to bring focus on all the senses and fosters imagination. It helps build a connection with the characters which aids in the release of oxytocin, a feel-good hormone that helps in nourishing relationships.

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Storytelling has a therapeutic effect on the well-being of the storyteller and the listener (Trent S.Parker & Wampler, 2007). It is an effective medium that can be integrated into goal planning and goal review processes which can support meaningful goal identifications. Storytelling activates the cortical, parietal, subcortical, and frontal portions of the brain leading to better retention and recall of complex concepts and abstract ideas (Wendy A. Suzuki, 2018). Empathy and social connectedness are the vital benefits of this medium which aids in coexistence and harmony all around the world (Hibbin, 2016) (Patricia S. Yoder-Wise, 2003).



Figure 1: Psychology of Storytelling

Figure 1 details the power of storytelling as immense in entertaining and engaging the listener to have significant learnings. It builds a connection with the storyteller getting an in-depth understanding of the concept.

Storytelling and its Elements

Stories are a part of our daily lives and have a long-lasting impact. Storytelling is an effective tool for creating a vivid mental picture in the mind of the listener for significant learning (Patricia S. Yoder-Wise, 2003). The concept of storytelling entails the four basic elements that include a clearly defined message with conflict as the driving force having a cast of characters and a plot that can be mixed, matched, and applied in a variety of ways depending on the context and the purpose of the narrative (Fog, 2010).

The message is the crux of the story which makes it effective and acceptable to the audience. A plot is a flow of events that revolves around the characters leading towards a climax. Climax adds a dramatic angle to the narrative that directs the emotional need to bring order to chaos and attain harmony. The principles of storytelling are explored to speculate on the implementation of this technique in healthcare education to promote professional identity, healthy behaviors, and group cohesion (Haigh C, 2011).

Augusto Palombini has defined a theoretical framework of storytelling approach in the field of cultural heritage for harmonizing the relation between freedom of narration and historical truth. The narrative arena can be defined as an environment where the depiction of the non-interactive elements shapes the background of the story along with the whole made of all places portraying the effectiveness of storytelling in the digital era. (Augusto, 2016).

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A new term known as ‘Serious Storytelling’ has emerged in the field of digital storytelling which refers to storytelling with a purpose beyond entertainment which can have a positive influence in the world of media with a different way of narrating a story. The meaning attached to storytelling has transformed from casual to serious business (Lugmayr A. S., 2017).

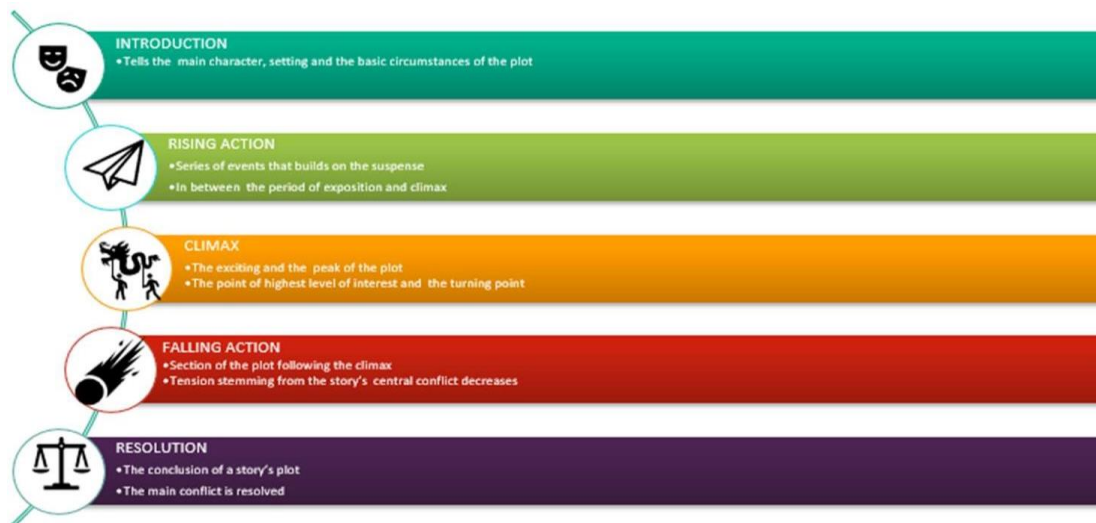


Figure 2: Storytelling and its Elements

Figure 2 details the four core elements of Storytelling that includes the plot of the narration with the introduction of the casting characters followed by the conflict that includes the rising action, climax, and the falling action that holds the attention of the listener concluded with a significant message.

Effectiveness of Storytelling

The effectiveness of storytelling lies in the fact that it can distill incoherent information into a coherent portrait causing the audience to sink in the act to believe and feel the story. The human brain is bombarded with lots of information and storytelling is a potential medium to make sense of the information and process it simultaneously in organizing the information to avoid confusion and achieve orderliness.

Daphne explains the process of engagement involved during the process of storytelling through the creation of a greater focus on personalized information, glimpses of real-life experience, a personal connection with a topic and connections between different topics, and emphasis on the key concept (Daphne Lordly MA, 2007).

The usage of storytelling has been found as a productive medium for adult learning. Storytelling can lead to the implementation of knowledge and wisdom for the people who are willing to evolve and transform into better human beings (Caminotti & Gray, 2012). The narrative has been identified as an effective tool for the development of multiple intelligence development in preschool students based on constructivism theory. (Nuket Gunduz, 2016) It is one of the effective pedagogical strategies that are fruitful in expanding literacy and reading comprehension skills by capturing the attention of the learner. (Sara Miller, 2008). Oral storytelling has benefitted children in their ability to self-express, identify with story characters, empathic understanding of self and others, and bi-directional communication (Hibbin, 2016).

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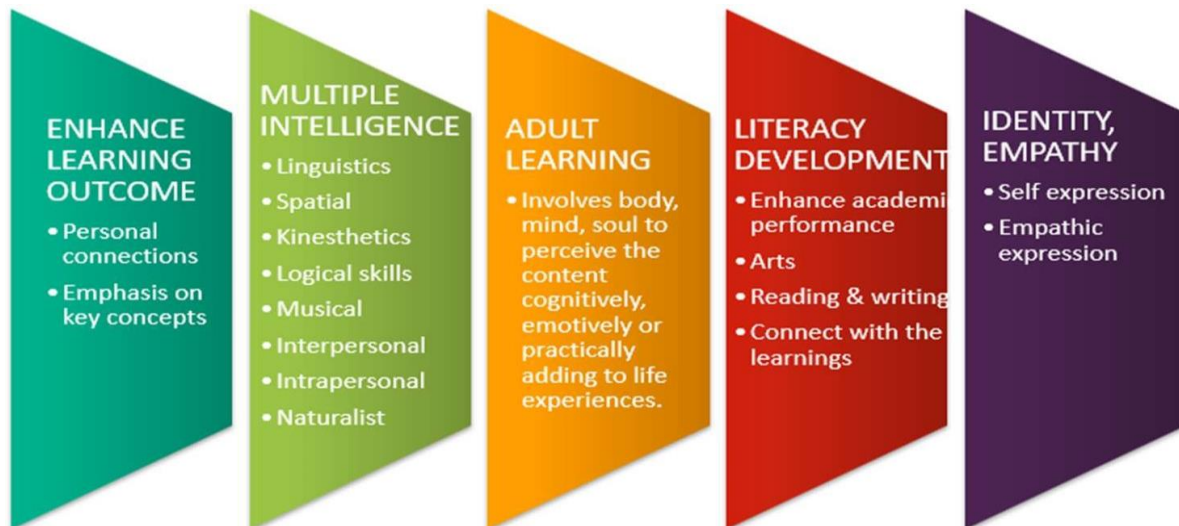


Figure 3: Effectiveness of Storytelling

Figure 3 details the effectiveness of Storytelling to enhance learning outcomes, literacy development, and emotional wellbeing. It aids in the development of multiple intelligence in children and supports adult learning also.

Storytelling and its effect on Cognition

The reason our brain loves storytelling is not only due to its impact on the affective domain but also on the cognitive domain which has led scientists and Neuroscience to understand the impact of storytelling on cognitive function and factors like happiness and overall wellbeing. Studies indicate a positive influence of this medium in enhancing the overall quality of life. Wendy et al in conversation with a group of scientists have tried to explain the science of storytelling and the brain response in reproducible ways. They found that there was a similar pattern of neural activity in cortical and subcortical areas, ranging from early auditory areas to linguistic areas, to high-order areas in the parietal and frontal cortices across listeners (Wendy A. Suzuki, 2018).

Storytelling has been an effective medium for evoking mental images that leads to mental simulation thereby engaging the audience in providing stimulation and pleasure to the brain (Susana Martinez-Conde, 2019). Storytelling elicits emotions that propel the functioning of the brain acting as a defining ingredient that propels, guides, and focuses our cognitive system in our goal-seeking activities (Aldama, 2015).

The use of therapeutic storytelling has been found to influence the change in emotions which can be implemented as an intervention for the individuals or couples undergoing relationship issues (Trent S.Parker & Wampler, 2007).

Guilherme Brockington et al investigated the effect of storytelling on children admitted to Intensive care units by collecting the biomarkers (oxytocin and cortisol) before and after storytelling. Results indicated an increase in oxytocin combined with a decrease in cortisol thus suggesting a simple and inexpensive intervention for increasing empathy, reinforcing human connections, and pain relief in hospitalized children (Brockington, et al., 2021).

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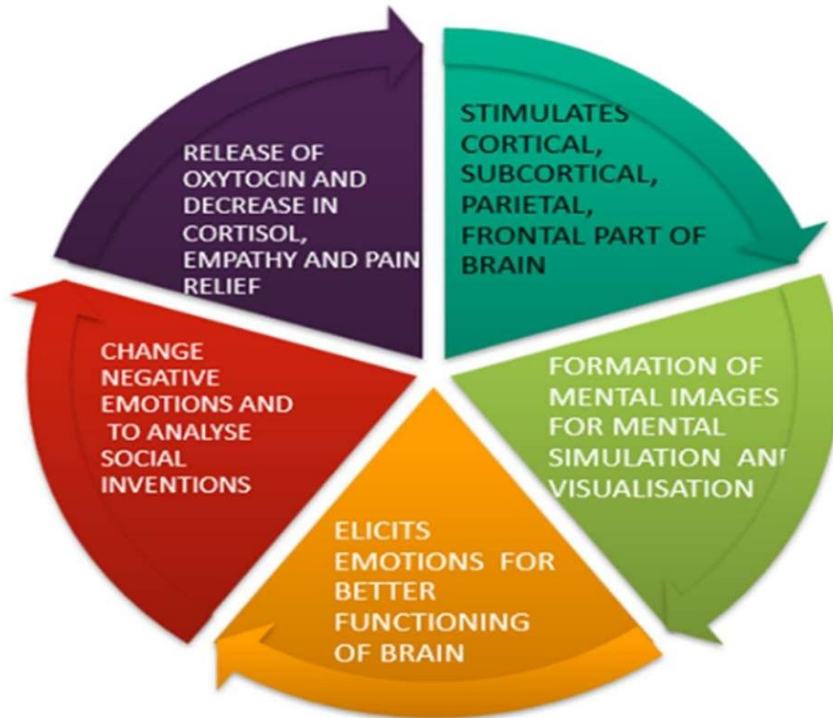


Figure 4: Storytelling and The Effect on Cognition

Figure 4 details the power of storytelling in stimulating the significant parts of the brain for better retention and recall of the concept.

Mental health and Psychological Well-Being of the Storyteller

Storytelling is a bidirectional process between a storyteller and the listener that aids in the release of chemicals like cortisol, oxytocin, and dopamine. These chemicals are responsible for attention, empathy, and pleasure respectively. Thus, the listener gets engaged and the brain waves of the listener tend to synchronize with that of the storyteller resulting in the listener to feel the same emotions.

Patrick Ryan has made an effort to explain the identity of the storyteller and the storytelling experience through cognitive theory and active research. Attributes such as physical, cultural, and social effects the cognition of the storyteller to depict the story. Awareness of one's own thoughts during the process of narration is related to genuineness in storytelling (Ryan, 2008).

Lanham. N proposes to highlight the intangible understandings of the people and their society along with the language and the mindset of the storyteller and the technique used in storytelling (Lanham, 2013). The impact of storytelling on people having acquired brain injury (ABI) is identified as a promising tool in having a therapeutic effect. Kate D'Cruz, Jacinta Douglas, Tanya Serry have done a qualitative analysis of the intersection of experiences between eight storytellers with acquired brain injury and six storytelling facilitators in the advocacy storytelling program. Findings revealed that there has been increased awareness about the use of storytelling for brain injury rehabilitation (Kate D' Cruz, 2019).

Christine Savvidou has explored the usage of the dialogic form of storytelling in the construction of the professional knowledge of teachers. A project including twelve lecturers

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was initiated by sharing their stories of professional development. This was used as a narrative framework to analyze the connections between the sharing and the results indicated the emergence of five processes that included connecting, echoing, developing, questioning, and constructing. This explorative study highlighted the usage of storytelling as an effective medium for the professional development of the teachers through these five processes (Savvidou, 2010).

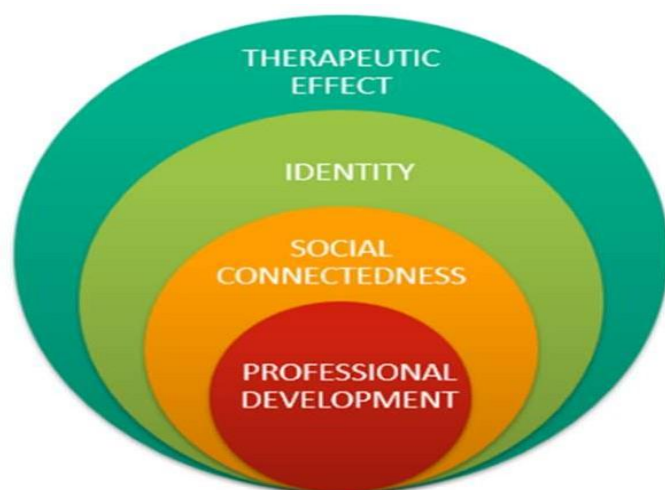


Figure 5: Mental Health and Well-Being of The Storyteller

Figure 5 describes the therapeutic benefits of storytelling for personal and professional development, building connections, and shaping the identity of the storyteller.

Mental Health and Psychological Well-Being of the Listener

Storytelling has an immense influence on the mind of the audience to entertain and engage and help them understand difficult and complex concepts in a subtle way. It has been helpful to connect the visual learners by creating mental images in the mind of the listener, the focal point for auditory learners is the voice and the words used by the teller, whereas the kinesthetic learners make connections with the emotions and feelings in the narrative. The act allows the listener to trust the storyteller and feel the story thereby imbibing the message conveyed through the medium. The usage of digital storytelling in the field of mental health is identified as a potential process to develop a feeling of empathy through personal experiences and promotes mutual understanding. It's known to have a positive influence in the field of mental health (De Vecchi, Kenny, Dickson-Swift, & Kidd, 2016).

Wendy explains the effectiveness of storytelling in understanding complex concepts and abstract ideas in meaningful ways through personal connections. Results indicated a strong correlation between the speaker's brain and the listener's brain signifying a positive effect of storytelling (Suzuki, Feliu- Mojer, Hasson, Yehuda, & Zarate, 2018).

Freema Elbaz Luwisch emphasizes the heart and mind behind the act of storytelling to understand the diversity and co-existence in Israel. The research was based on student writings and the instructor's journal in a teacher education setting highlighting the impact of storytelling on the Arab and Jewish students and teachers. The author has used the collective experiences of diversity and conflicts between Arabs and Jews in Israel. Participants experienced a feeling of empathy and connectedness during the re-sharing of personal

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stories. This indicates that storytelling is an effective tool not only for engagement and entertainment but also acts as a survival tool (Freema Elbaz Luwisch, 2001).

Katie L. Glonek, Paul E. King have made an attempt for experimental examination to study the impact of storytelling in the classroom. Authors have reflected upon the implementation of narrative comprehension in having better retention based on the constructivist theory along with other theories. In a controlled experiment that involved 262 undergraduate students were allowed to listen to the videotaped instruction and to the expository presentation. The narrative presentation included a storyline consisting of introduction, conflict, and resolution which was presented at a normal speed and the expository presentation included a paragraph followed by the main explanation for the introduction. Results indicated a positive correlation between the narrative style and retention rate (King K. L., 2014).

Eduardo Robini da Silva & Fabiano Larentis have tried to analyze the impact of storytelling on the learnings acquired from older people's experiences in an informal way. Authors have proposed a framework known as the (Experience, Reflection, Sense, Meaning, and Learning) ERSML cycle of organizational learning. Results indicate a positive correlation between storytelling and the ERSML cycle which represents the reflective and organizational learning resulting from the interaction between both and the knowledge emerging through the reflections from storytelling in an informal way (Silva & Larentis, 2020).

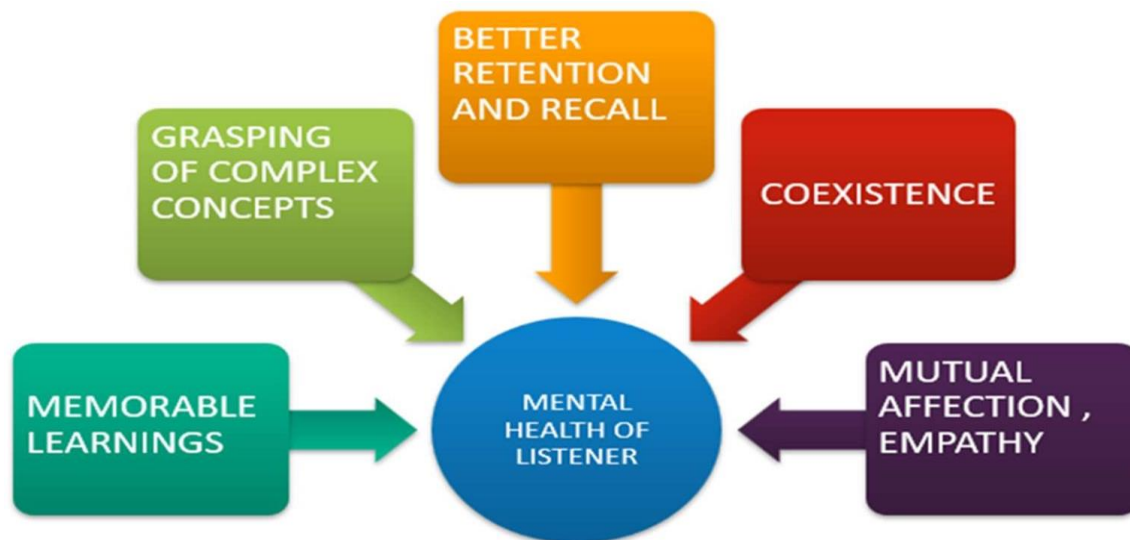


Figure 6: Mental Health and well-being of the Listener

Figure 6 signifies the impact of storytelling on the development of empathy, mutual understanding, and coexistence supported by memorable learnings and a better understanding of complex concepts aiding the psychological wellbeing of the audience.

CONCLUSION

Storytelling is an effective tool to convey complex messages and the amalgamation of abstract concepts. The usage of digital storytelling in the field of mental health is identified as a potential process to develop a feeling of empathy through personal experiences and to promote mutual understanding. The principles of storytelling can be implemented in

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healthcare education to promote professional identity, healthy behaviors, and group cohesion. The introduction of a new idea 'Serious storytelling' can have a positive influence in the world of media with a different way of narrating stories. Storytelling can be implemented in the development of a curriculum for multiple intelligence in preschool students based on constructivism theory. It is an effective technique for developing literacy and reading comprehension skills by capturing the attention of the learner. The study indicates the benefits of oral storytelling to children in their ability for self-expression, identification with story characters, empathic understanding of self and others, and bi-directional communication. The study indicates an increased awareness of the use of storytelling for brain injury rehabilitation. There is an indication of storytelling as an effective medium for the professional development of the teachers. Storytelling can be utilized as an effective medium not only for engagement and entertainment but also acts as a survival tool. There is a positive correlation between the narrative style and retention rate emphasizing the efficiency of storytelling in the teaching-learning process.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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