

Unlocking Creativity: 6-Part Story Method as an Imaginative Pedagogical Tool

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Abstract

This article emerges from an approach to transformative learning where students are challenged to explore taken-for-granted assumptions about their experiences in the world. We outline the 6-Part Story Method (6PSM), which uses abstract images to provide a structured storytelling process that enables reflexive learning. This is documented through conversations between a university teacher and three Masters students about the method used in their course on practical ethics in process consulting. Using individual stories that emerged from a common set of cards, we illustrate how the method enabled us to critically explore our practices as teacher and student consultants.

Background

This article emerges from the assumption that, as a transformative learner, the practitioner can “work through experiences that challenge his or her tacit, taken-for-granted assumptions, beliefs, values and expectations” (Graham Cagney, 2014, p. 789). In our work, we have used the 6-Part Story Method (6PSM) to aid in this process. We document this through a dialogue between a teacher and three Masters students about the method used in a course on practical ethics in process consulting. A collective autoethnographic case study illustrates that the practitioners found that the method enabled us to “become more open, transparent, flexible, authentic and capable of change” (p. 789).

Specifically, the 6PSM is used as a pedagogical tool to enable reflection amongst students on their own approaches to ethical practice. It draws on three student consultants’, and the professor’s, reflection after using this tool. Using a collective set of cards, we include here the four stories that responded to the prompt, “reflect on the use of the cards as a pedagogical tool.” In the process of telling these stories, “each card has its particular place and purpose so building the story enables participants to layer experiences and engage in reflection as the story is created” (Linds & Vettraiño, 2008, para 31). Transformational learning emerges through our lived experiences with these cards and structure.

The 6-Part Story Method (6PSM)

The 6PSM originated from collaborative work between two dramatherapists, Mooli Lahad and Ofra Ayalon (1992, 2013), who worked with children traumatized by conflict in the Middle East. The purpose of the 6PSM was to act as a diagnostic tool for therapeutic assessment of trauma-coping methods, and

the model has its roots in the work of Alida Gersie (1997), Lahad's dramatherapy instructor, who developed the Story Evocation Technique (SET).

The 6 PSM framework is similar to Gersie's original model, which contains a particular structure:

1. A character.
2. A task the character has to accomplish.
3. A helpful force that will help the character undertake the task.
4. A hindering force that is an obstacle or stops the character from accomplishing the task.
5. Action where the character goes about coping with the challenge or problem and/or doing the task.
6. The ending to the story. This is not necessarily a conclusion but a way of understanding what happened to the character once their problem or task has been dealt with.

In Lahad's implementation of the original SET model, he would ask participants to draw an image for each of the six elements of the story. In later versions (see Dent-Brown, 1999; Vettrano, 2017), picture cards were used instead of drawings, and this process was retained and adapted for the exploration of pedagogy in this article. The reason for this relates to working with adult participants, rather than children. Adults feel significantly less free from judgment when it comes to artistic expression, and particularly drawing (see Kowalchuk & Stone, 2000; Miraglia, 2008; McKean, 2000). Elinor had commissioned the cards from a local artist. The only parameters set were that the images had to be abstract rather than of specific people, places, or things.

Warren's Story of Learning About the Method

I had known Elinor from meeting her at various Theatre of the Oppressed conferences in the United States. During a sabbatical in 2012-2013, I was having an online conversation with her about her research. She was in the middle of doing her D.Ed. Psychology research into the 6PSM where, through Image Theatre (Boal, 1992), she was exploring with educational professionals their own teaching and professional lives. They engaged in embodied storytelling—creating, telling, listening, and embodying their own, and each other's, fictional stories. The purpose of the research was to examine how an embodied process could aid the experience of "reflexing" (reflexively processing in action). So, she asked me to participate in that research at a distance.

One of my approaches to continuing to develop my own pedagogy is to learn new tools and experience new approaches to teaching. I am an experiential learner in that I have to experience something "from the inside" in order to learn a new approach. The introduction to 6PSM during a year off researching and writing was fortuitous and intriguing. When I returned to teaching, I began to apply the 6PSM to my teaching and research work, experimenting with it, and adapting it to new contexts and circumstances.

The program in which I was a professor, and Tejaswinee, Linthuja, and Antonio were graduate students, integrates theory, values, and skills in organization development and a systems approach to intervention. The program is designed to develop the expertise of students as process consultants (Schein, 1999) for future organizational leaders and consultants who are interested in facilitating change processes within human systems. An understanding of this approach to consultation evolves through developing a learning

community where students engage with theory in order to reflect on their experience and interaction with others.

The professors who developed this cohort program, based on Schein's approach, write that the purpose of intervention "at a process level is to enable the client system to catalyze its own learning and renewal, to change normative patterns to be more proactively adaptive; that is, to become a learning system" (Taylor et al., 2002, p. 361).

In the course I taught, the design is rooted in the concept of "ethical know-how" (Varela, 1999), which means that the development of an understanding of our values requires us to become attuned to, and act appropriately in, our environment. Through repeated engagement, our ethical know-how is identified and, through feedback, modified. What we experience is determined by what we do, and what we know how to do is determined by what we are open to doing. We further understand this when we approach this process through enactive and embodied knowing. Enactive knowing means that ethics develops not only as principles, but also emerges collectively through engagement with others in joint and shared action, involving embodied knowing. This means our ethical practices depend upon being actively attuned to, and in, the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Varela et al., 1991).

The 6 PSM is used particularly in the final class in this course as a way for students to reflect on their journey "into" ethical practice, and on all the questions that emerge for them.

Reflecting on the Method Through a New Story

About six months after the end of the course, I invited students who had used the 6PSM in their final papers to collaborate with me on a reflective process well after the experience of using the cards. This reflective process led to this article.

One of the first things we did was use the cards as a way into "reflexing" on the cards as a pedagogical and reflective tool. So, using Elinor's cards and picking random cards, then turning over the cards one by one, we found ourselves creating four different stories from the same set of cards:

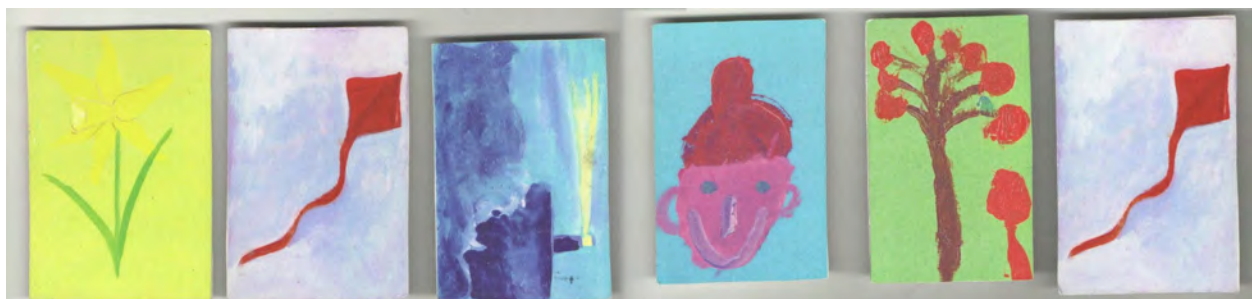


Fig. 1: Cards drawn for our group to make stories from

Warren's Story

I was a small seedling just popping out of the ground. Someone had watered me, but I didn't know who they were, but I sensed I had been nourished carefully, but I did not know who or what had done so.

As slowly my leaves sprouted out of the ground I saw a kite high in the air and I wanted to fly free like the kite but still be tethered to the ground because I had come from the ground and needed it as a connection to my history of being this seed waiting to sprout. But I did not know how I might rise up into the air flowing with the winds.

I looked for something to guide my way. There were many such things around me but how do I choose between them all? I would see something like a light and follow it with my gaze and then wonder if it was the right light to follow.

I feared that people would look at this plant still growing from the ground and wonder why my gaze was looking ever upward. People laughing at me scared me because I knew there were others that might be laughing or discounting my quest.

Then I smelled something, and I looked around and saw high up a forest of fruit bearing trees that smelled so heavenly.

I knew then I was not alone; there were others on the same quest but taking different forms and movements.

These fruits would then drop seeds that would then become new seedlings that would then engage in the quest to fly.

Tejaswinee's Story

One fine day, this little child sprung out of bed like a daffodil rises out of the darkness in the early weeks of spring. She wanted to climb greater heights, where she hadn't been before, to get a different view of her world, a broader view. She wanted to be a full-grown flower! The early sunlight dispelled the darkness, allowing this little flower to see in the darkness—and so she set out on her mission.

She had only taken a few strides, when fear came crawling into her mind, completely uninvited. This fear limited her, just like it did when I first looked at these cards. One limitation with these cards is what our mind does with them, but this limitation can also be a strength if we choose it to be. This little flower wanted to stand taller, to see more, but worried what others may think if she stood out. Would they laugh at her for being too tall, too different? What if she wanted to be something else? What if she wanted to be a fruit tree, and not a daffodil anymore? "That's it, I'm going to be a magical fruit tree!", she said. "I'll stand tall, I'll see the world, and I'll spread my seeds and encourage others to be what they want to be, not what they're told to be." She finally saw what she never could have imagined—views limitless and wide, massive and microscopic, and monotonous and vibrant. Smiling at herself, she realized—how tiny we all really are!

Linthuja's Story

She was grounded ... oh so grounded, to the extent where her roots were interconnected with and wrapped around all those who were sharing her space. The ground, the dirt—that's all she ever knew, and the sky, the earth, that's all she ever felt. Her dream was to dive deep ... deep deep into the ocean where she was forbidden to be—to dive deep and swim besides the red jellyfish, who so stunningly glows amidst the dark and stands up to the test of time. The winds were strong, and the tides were heavy—just strong enough to possibly swift her into the sea with her friends to explore the unknown. It wasn't at all easy, as easy as it seemed to be, for no matter how deeply she was rooted, the power of touch is all it would take to guide her off her path. She reaches her neck out to her neighbors, who were slightly taller and stronger than her. "Help me," she asks. "Help me travel to the sea, that's where I wish to be." The ground, the dirt—that's all she ever knew, and the sky, the earth, that's all she ever felt. Her dream was to dive deep ... deep deep into the ocean where she was forbidden to be...

Antonio's Story

*I am a growing being.
I am for new understanding and new heights.
A light shines a way forward onto me. I feel warm, whole.
But this is fuzzy, I have no control. This is not a game, it's serious.
But what if it was. So I let go and imagine. I play in the unknown
And I see. Me.*

Analysis

We are writing about transformational learning through our lived experience of working with these cards. The story is inspired by the cards we pull, so we don't know the story until we write it.

As we see above, there are different patterns in the storytelling. Some of us wrote in the first person; some in the third person. Each strategy is a reflection of self. Struggles emerge through the storytelling process.

There is also an interplay between the literal and the abstract. Some stories are quite descriptive; others use the cards as jumping off points that spark something, which may not be directly related to the cards. Even the kind of story points to the different ways people think and work. Even if the stories are different and differently told, we see overarching themes of growth and fear.

Warren: *I see my story as a journey into my subconscious mind and bringing its thoughts to the surface through words. There's a playful element to my story that has engaged my inner child that may be helping him to learn and unlearn how to confront fears and challenges.*

The idea of "ending" the story with a climax helped me think beyond just a moment or a feeling in the story. It forced my mind to go a step forward. This was an empowering element that enabled me to be able to create my own story/narrative. When I think of that, I think of how I might enable students I work

with to do the same with regards to “dealing with” ethical dilemmas in their professional and personal lives.

Tejaswinee: *The storytelling was a way of re-inventing myself through a narrative offered to me by my “subconscious” mind. In some ways, it enabled me to uncover the person I knew I was longing to be. Without necessarily knowing it, the story I told is the story I needed to tell, perhaps even a story I knew all along, but may have been afraid to accept directly. Similar to how we often learn through resonating with others’ life experiences and stories, the characters in my story are who I resonated “with,” even though these characters were created by me and were a mirror of myself all along.*

Linthuja: *The story I told enabled me to create my wishful, ideal state. It expresses a longing for community and a breaking away of social and psychological barriers. The cards bring me to a place of deep imagination and the ability to write freely without overthinking on what my mind may be percolating. This method allows my pencil to write before my mind fully builds its thoughts. The capacity to unleash myself from my daylong thoughts, processes, and tasks, allows me to enter a realm of creativity to build a story where I am who I want to be. In deeper reflection, these free-flowing thoughts are not truly free, they are in fact pieces of me that are often submerged deeply in my subconscious. The cards act as my vessel to release me from me.*

Antonio: *The theme that emerged so far for me is reaching out—breaking free, going above and beyond by dispelling myths about myself. It enabled me to go beyond the limitations of the mind and a way to project/externalize ourselves from our own life to take a conceptualized view. By seeing myself through the characters I was able to get in touch with how I was truly feeling about the situation. The pull to “desire” a certain outcome as it was unfolding was something I could become aware of and focus on. I was able to draw on many of the myths and artifacts from stories I heard around me but turn it into “my narrative,” rather than something that exists separate of me. I realized I didn’t want my story to have a clear ending. That it was in the uncertainty that I still had a desire to stay in, and that it was the experience of exploring the question that much of my learning was coming from.*

As we see, the comments of the authors point to themes of looking at ourselves through these fictional worlds.

Reflection

Our graduate program is oriented to enabling student practitioners to reflect on their own learning selves. In particular, we draw on Chris Argyris and Donald Schön’s (1974) use of the terms “single and double loop learning” to distinguish between deepened forms of reflection. This idea in part is based on Gregory Bateson’s (1972) notions of “levels of learning.”

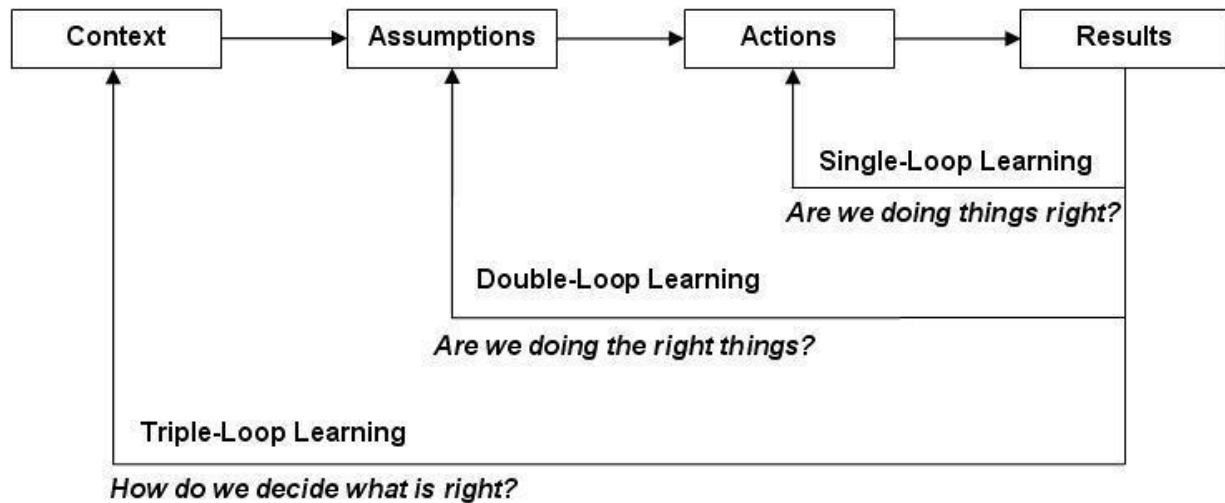


Fig. 2: Sokolov's (n.d.) description of Triple Loop Learning

The first loop occurs “whenever an error is detected and corrected without questioning or altering the underlying values of the system” (Argyris, 1999, p. 68). This involves doing things better without necessarily challenging our underlying beliefs and assumptions. The goal is improvements and fixes that often take the form of procedures or rules.

In the second loop, one not only learns but also simultaneously learns how to learn by questioning what one learned in the single loop. Thus, individuals are able to reflect on whether the “rules” should be changed, not only on whether deviations have occurred and how to correct them. This kind of learning involves more thinking outside the box, creativity, and critical thinking. This often helps participants understand their operating assumptions, so that they become observers of themselves. “To learn to double-loop learn implies learning to carry out the reflection on and inquiry into the governing variables, values and norms underlying organizational action” (Tosey et al., 2012, p. 5)

The third loop (which was inspired by Argyris and Schön’s work [1974]) concerns underlying purposes and principles: “a corrective change in the system of sets of alternatives from which choice is made” (Bateson, 1972, p. 293). The realizations, emotions, and implications that this entails represent an entirely new set of alternatives. This involves “learning how to learn” by reflecting on how we learn in the first place, going beyond insight and patterns to context. The result creates a shift in understanding our context or point of view. We produce new commitments and ways of learning.

Gregory Bateson (1972) proposes that this level of learning is “beyond the reach of language” (p. 302). It is generative learning that is unpredictable, emergent, and, by definition, not controlled. Bateson emphasized the role of the unconscious and aesthetic, saying that learning entails a “double involvement of primary process and conscious thought” (Brockman, 1977, p. 61).

6PSM speaks to this notion of single-, double-, and triple-loop learning. The challenge is to understand how one makes the shift between loops. What might enable these changes? The cards show you possibilities that you wouldn’t be able to see in other ways, like enabling you to see a blind spot we

otherwise wouldn't notice. In driving instruction, one is told to always check one's blind spot when changing lanes. This is done by using a "shoulder check." In some ways, the 6PSM is that shoulder check. It is a bit like an interruption or disruption of the circuitry and facilitates the jump to reconnect the circuitry.

In some senses 6PSM taps into both the second and third loops of learning. In order to investigate this further as a group, we looked at our stories derived from the same set of cards. The first level of reflection we did was for each of us to read each other's stories with the following questions in mind that would help us shift from loop to loop:

1. What are the overarching themes that these stories are telling us? What are they telling us about transformative learning?
2. What questions about transformative learning and change/new ways of knowing emerge for you?
3. What are the consequences or effects of this method of looking at learning?

Warren: *I find the process is a way for the subconscious mind to surface. The cards and the process bring up uncooked thoughts, beliefs, wishes—what could be, what I would like to be, what my vision for the world is. They serve as things that are complementary, or compensatory to what already exists in our lives, for example, what there's maybe too much of, or not enough of. Dilemmas emerge.*

There is also a playful element to these cards that engage our inner child—that may be helping learn and unlearn where we confront fears and take on challenges. It also enables insecurities or unresolved moments from one's past to emerge. I think the process of the ending with a climax helps think beyond just a moment or a feeling. It forces the mind to go a step forward and provides an empowering element where we are able to create, and have a hold on, our own story/narrative.

Tejaswinee: *What I find especially powerful is what happens when you give voice to your subconscious mind to express itself, without consciously imposing a problem statement when embarking on this method. The theme that seems to be emerging so far is a reaching out, a desire to break free and to go above and beyond what binds us at the "event" levels of our life. The process helps me dispel myths and labels about myself, moving past the limits of the mind. Taking this step away from our own life to take a meta or macro view on it allows for and has often helped me review the gap between when I think I was doing, versus how I might have been showing up to others.*

Linthuja: *I find the cards and process create a wishful ideal state where our longing for community takes form as we break away from social and psychological barriers. It allows me to access moments that I've unintentionally or intentionally hidden in my mind, and the process allows me to build a story of an alternate reality. These alternate realities reflect a version of me that exists and does not exist, all at once. What I find to be the most moving about this process is that the story cannot be created twice. Each moment, each time—a different story unfolds, one card at a time. It is almost as though the process mimics reality, in that no two events are truly ever identical, regardless of how much you try to retrace steps. It allows me to reflect on where and who I'd like to be versus who I am today. It allows me to*

reflect on why this story, and why now? It helps me to create meaning around events in my life as the images allow me to externalize the issue or challenge. All the cards—all those parts of me suddenly become much easier to speak about—to write about. That is the power of the 6PSM. I feel that it is magic, allowing you to slowly uncover yourself, so differently each time.

Antonio: *I found that I didn't know the story until I told it. Uncovering each card meant that I wouldn't know the full story until all cards are uncovered, uncovering one's true self and allowing me to become comfortable in my own skin. This enables me to reinvent myself as this fictional character in this fictional world, but coexisting in the Unexpected. It also gave me a sense of control in my actual life. Like if I could dictate the story through these cards, maybe my own life isn't so out of my control, maybe I do have more power over the "narrative" unfolding around me. Much of the value I personally gained through this method came through these more "meta" realizations.*

In our experience, our stories were dependent on the circumstances when we were telling or writing the story. This storytelling method does raise questions:

What provokes the story? Is it just the cards? The environment? The moment? Your day prior to seeing the cards? The people you are surrounded by?

You have the story pretty clear in your head before you open your mouth and release it, and as you release it, it starts to shift and move, creating something new in the telling. How much of the story shape shifts in the telling?

In attempting to explore these questions, we turn to the notion of the "enactive" pedagogical environment. Jerome Proulx (2010) writes that

the concept of fitting is not a static one in which the environment is constant and only the species evolves and continues to adapt. Darwin explained that species and environment co-evolve; Maturana and Varela (1992) add that they co-adapt to each other, meaning that each influences the other in the course of evolution. In other words, the fit is an evolving one, with both parties evolving, leading Capra (1996) to assert that this creates a shift from evolution to co-evolution (p. 56).

This co-evolution is called structural coupling by Maturana and Varela, because both environment and organism interact with each other and experience a mutual history of evolutionary changes and transformations. Both environment and organism undergo changes in their structure in the process of evolution, and this makes them adapted and compatible with each other. From this notion it follows that the environment is a "trigger" for the organism to evolve, much as the organism acts as trigger for the environment to evolve in return.

If we take this idea and connect it to the storytelling, the learner or participant is not necessarily triggered by the cards, but the story co-emerges within the reflection that is in the story itself.

The cards thus become a process of “occasioning” (Davis et al., 2000), which is where possibilities arise when things are allowed to fall together. To occasion something is to bring something about, but not always deliberately, through changing the conditions of interaction.

These notions have significant implications for the use of “tools” or “activities” in pedagogical contexts. As Proulx (2010) points out, participants’ learning and change are not seen as causal events determined by an external stimulus (even though they are triggered by that external stimulus). Rather, learning and change arise from the participants’ own structure as it interacts with its environment. This underlines the importance of the “learners” in the learning situation as they influence how storytelling may unfold.

Conclusion

Throughout the experience, a number of key themes arose from the work, namely safety, difference between want and need, and creative exploration. Reflecting here on these themes, we will consider next steps for the work. We will each explore the themes of safety, the difference between want and need and creative exploration that emerged for us.

Safety

Elinor: *For me, the theme of safety relates to the way in which distance is created through the fictional storied process. Given that the stories being created are “of me but not me” (Boal, 1995), there is an important element of aesthetic distance being created that enables the creator/teller to explore an experience as one step removed from it. The reality with transformational learning experiences is that they are borne out of a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 2008) and this is not necessarily a comfortable event. The use of the story process and the images in particular, creates both a temporal and an aesthetic space in which the learning can take place.*

Warren: *The question has emerged for me after using the cards multiple times: what happens when we tap into the subconscious with visual images as we often don’t know what the impact will be? There should be a certain level of trust in the group so that it is what I call a “safe enough” space for each person. I say safe enough because it was safe enough for each individual at that time. This brings me to the question about scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978) the use of this card process. Elinor used this process over several months in her research; I have used it several times with different purposes in the class environment. Each time I have seen new possibilities.*

Antonio: *Drawing off of Warren’s comments of safe enough, I could see how the 6PSM facilitated my ability to be vulnerable in the face of a situation that felt ethically ambiguous, with no clear path forward. As the cards and story method externalized this process for me, I felt more comfortable bridging the gap with how I was truly feeling about the situation. The tension of pulling a card that forced you to confront a reality you may have been trying to ignore is something that challenges your own integrity on whether it makes sense to step into that space or not.*

Difference between “want” and “need”

Elinor: Often when I worked with this process in the past, the story that individuals would come to the experience to tell was not the one they wound up telling. There was a difference between the story that a teller wanted to share and the one they needed to share.

Antonio: While the awareness I gained from the 6PSM was a gift and it also pushed me to have to let go and trust in the story that emerged. The question always would arise, up that the random nature also meant there may be a limitless number of possible new interpretations of our stories. I continuously struggled with the uneasiness between wanting to hold the belief that the story that needed to emerge will come through in this method. As I look back I realize that this also developed my capacity to trust not only the process but myself. That what I discovered was “right,” reminding me of the concept of equifinality, that the same place can be arrived at from many different places. While the cards facilitate many different branches, the end place is one that gave me the awareness I needed in the moment.

Linthuja: Although the process is random, each time I’ve used the 6PSM, it has allowed me to tell a story I thought I never would explore. These stories often represented pieces of me that needed to emerge, but in a way that was implicit. It helped to not use my voice in the first person, and it helped not to exploit the challenge or the issue I was having. It was easier to tell my story through the cards and reflect on what that meant to me. Why this story and why now? Each story represents a root part of me, and it cannot be explored as separate from me, but as a part of me. As I continue to evolve, my reflection and emotions from the story, from the time I drew the cards, continue to evolve as well. The stories themselves feel like seeds—seeds of me deeply planted in the ground, that continue to be nurtured and watered the more I reflect and retell the stories. In doing so, I become more and more aware of that moment in time and it no longer feels like a story “out there,” but a story that defines me. Suddenly, I become one with my roots, while also holding the awareness of the complexity and layers that exist in all of my stories, since no one story or instance can be defined without the telling of another story.

Creative exploration

Warren: Gregory Bateson (1979) introduces the idea of learning as emerging from dual stochastic processes. By this he means that creative thought relies on some initial randomness, which is then assimilated into a preexisting system of beliefs according to a requirement of coherence or rigor (which is a nonrandom process). In the 6PSM, the cards that are turned over one by one to enable the building of the story are totally random. The teller must then improvise through engaging with the cards as they are turned over, as well as the mindscape environment which the prompt for the stories has provided. (For example, in my class, the prompt might be “think about your experience exploring ethics in this class”). But the story structure is nonrandom and very structured. Without the randomness, nothing new would emerge and creativity wouldn’t be able to wander. Without the linear structure, the process of storytelling would lack reference to the world of the storyteller.

Several times when this process has been used in class, a student would shout out, “how did the cards know my story!?” This interplay between fiction and reality has enabled that student to experience transformative learning. A transformative learning approach helps us to become aware of, and change, our frames of mind and action. In the 6PSM the story enables us to ‘see’ our original frame, and the process of recognizing that gives us the opportunity to reframe.

Antonio: *I draw inspiration from the roots of the word exploration, “explorare,” which mean to investigate, or search out (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). While unexpected and random in nature, there is a quality of searching I found myself experiencing. While I am hesitant about making a comparison with “tarot,” there is a quality that I was discovering in the “future story” of a “past experience.” With the drawing of each card both giving me awareness while also helping me rewrite the story of an experience. I was making meaning in the moment, with the difference being it was not a meaning that emerged from an external source, but rather socially constructed rooted in my own context and interpretation (Gergen, 2001).*

Tejaswinee: *What or how we’re thinking could be based on the intensity of emotions and the circumstances we’re experiencing in those moments. If the cards are being used with a specific thought in mind, an “in the moment” story card use may look very different than if you are in a more reflective space, thinking back to an event that happened a while ago. I think the same applies for when we use the method to just tell a story, tapping more into the subconscious mind and trying to uncover what may be happening there.*

Either way, we have found that the cards provide a space of learning, introspection, and reflection. When used with children and adults alike, I have found it to be an effective way of plunging quickly into a creative space by distancing ourselves from our own stories just for a little while.

When I initially came across this method, I found the structure challenging and limiting. I then asked myself, “Is the structure limiting you or are you limited by the structure?” Through using the cards a couple more times, I realized that in fact the structure the method offered was helping me create and articulate novel stories from my subconscious that I didn’t know I was capable of. Instead of my mind going everywhere and nowhere, the pictures provide a branch for my leaves to spring from, and sometimes make beautiful buds, flowers, and fruit. Then when I look back at my stories, I most often find them to just be a mirror of my internal condition, even though I rarely start with that intention in my mind.

I find this method, like some other imaginal approaches, helps my very divergent mind flex muscles in sensing, articulating, and meaning making, all of which are key in the systems-change work I often find myself engaged in. I have also recently started using it with individuals and teams I work with. I look forward to collectively reflecting with them on how they are experiencing the process.

Linthuja: *Each card, each turn, invites a new story to be told. Despite the structure that is created in the 6PSM, the options are limitless with the turn of every card. The process itself creates a little rigidity in me—not knowing what might come next, what if it’s a trigger that opens up a story that I hadn’t thought*

of for so long? The beauty of this process is exactly that—the ability to sit in a quiet space to tell a story I have never told myself before. The process allows me to make meaning of stories, from the past or future state. It allows me to become aware of my emotions and those of people around me, from when something took place to a space several years later as I reflect using this process. The same event, involving me, is being explored by me in two different spaces and times. It is as though I open a door, and a flood of possibilities enter with the cards. Beyond my imagination that slowly awakens with this process, I feel as though my emotions and awareness awaken too. I am able to relive an experience, but differently, and I am able to feel my emotions, but differently.

Elinor: *Reflecting on Warren’s experience of the impact of images led me to consider that the creation of new knowledge is not always a comfortable process or experience. The emotional connection with the stories told means that there is a vulnerability that occurs for some participants in the process. This in itself is not surprising; a number of theorists have explored the link between trust and vulnerability, and the opening up of personal experiences through storytelling (for example, Corlett, 2012; Gersie & King, 1990; Stuart, 2001). However, the collective and communal nature of the process of engaging in the 6PSM offers a depth of shared experience that enables participants to work almost as a team through the stories told. This requires trust in each other, and in the facilitator of the experience, to recognize the creation of a safe space in which to work.*

This safety can in part be built by the model itself. The structured approach to the creation of a story puts parameters around the work done, although the linearity of the model can often be disrupted in the telling. Participants will move in and out of the structure itself, telling the story more as an ante-narrative (Boje, 2001, 2006), something that grows and changes through the insights and commentary offered by the listeners. Each sharing of a story gives new knowledge to the creator/teller and also to those listening who can bootstrap their experiences onto the world evolving in the story being heard.

Note

The images used from the 6PSM in this article cannot be reproduced without permission from Elinor Vettrano.

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