

The Instructional Sandwich

When considering best practices, it doesn't take a great leap to understand the power of story in instruction. Sharing an accounting, hearing a narrative, engaging in the sense of place, time, and communal experience of a story provides something which separates us from the critters. Storytelling weaves into our daily interactions personally and socially. Integrating story into lessons is critical mass, not superfluous filler. As Russell J. Branaghan states, "Lectures and rote memorization, motivated by instructor convenience rather than pedagogical effectiveness, are particularly ill suited for training lifelong learners in a knowledge-based economy" (Andrews et.al. 2010). What is effective toward developing young people's interest is the instructional sandwich: ensnare with a story, slide into the active learning, conclude with story. The personal connection of story hooks students through emotion, imagination, shared knowledge, and predicaments.

One of the most productive pieces of knowledge I've gained is to make a sandwich out of anything unpleasant. If I am asking my principal for money to run a program, I start with a positive of how great a current activity is going, then get to the meat of the matter and describe our need, purpose, and request, then top that with an expression of gratitude for something he has done recently to positively impact students or staff. When talking to a student about an ongoing problem, I make a sandwich by explaining a positive growth I have seen in the student thus far this year, then get to the real purpose of our conversation and the difficulty to overcome, and close the sandwich with praise for something recent. A negative, difficulty, or what might be perceived as unpleasant is placed in the middle, between two positives.

During the course of a lesson, the sandwich starts with the base of the bun, the instructional hook, which segues into the BLT (bacon-lettuce-tomato) and the student-perceived disagreeable tasks of actively learning, then top with bun crown, a wrap-up to remind and review what was accomplished and what will happen next time. This is where story is vital to successfully engaging students. That lesson's hook doesn't just lay the foundation, but establishes common experience and knowledge.

Whether I am teaching students, staff, or fellow librarians, this is most effective in the shape of a story. The story can be funny, informative, or dramatic. I have used various forms depending on the grade and the content of the lesson, including a short video clip, a poem, a poignant commercial, an entertaining passage, a song, or a personal anecdote. The selection needs to capture the attention of the majority of (or if I'm lucky all) students in the class so that we can efficiently and effectively continue into the real purpose of the lesson. I used to worry that starting with a tale was a waste of precious instructional minutes, but find instead that we get more done, because it seems to bind the class together and gently place the students into a mode where they are ready to focus and actively listen. After the lesson, just like an athlete needs to cool down, students need the wrap-up of a soft release as they disconnect from the learning in order to transition to the next subject or class. This is also most successfully accomplished through story.

Story can give students in any learning situation a sense of purpose to their engagement in the task at hand. A person reluctant to the task or activity, subtly and subconsciously develops buy-in because the story has emotional meaning and subconsciously connects the brain to relatable prior knowledge and experiences. An effective lesson or professional development can often include a good anecdote to entertain, inform, and engage your audience.

Work Cited

Andrews, Dee H., et al. *Storytelling as an Instructional Method: Research Perspectives*. Sense Publishers, 2010.

About the Editor

Leslie B. Preddy, MS, has been the school librarian at Perry Meridian Middle School in Indianapolis, IN, since 1992 and has served as an adjunct professor for Indiana University, Indiana State University, and IUPUI. She has presented webinars and is a frequent speaker and consultant at local, state, national, and international education conferences and events. She has published many articles in professional journals, co-created online resources for educators, and is the author of *SSR with Intervention: A School Library Action Research Project*, *Social Readers: Promoting Reading in the 21st Century*, and *School Library Makerspaces*. Preddy is a recipient of many awards including AASL's Collaborative School Library Media Award and Perry Township Schools Teacher of the Year. She is Past President of the American Association of School Librarians and the Association of Indiana School Library Educators (AISLE). Preddy is a recent recipient of two grants for her school library makerspace from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services, administered by the Indiana State Library.

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