

The Elevator Story

"The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale."—Walter Benjamin

In *Storytelling in Daily Life*, Kristin Langellier and Eric Peterson reference essayist Walter Benjamin as they examine what they call the reflexive and reversible process that is storytelling. There are dynamic exchanges happening when a storyteller performs tales of experiences lived or heard about, while others experience and pass on the tale, but through their senses and the lived experience of the storytelling performance. Storytelling is non-linear, unfixed, and situational, and there are layers of response that shift and grow in the act of telling. "Storytelling is reversible," they explain, "in that an audience can 'take' her or his consciousness of the storyteller's experience and 'in turn' become a storyteller and make it an experience for another audience" (2004, p. 3).

This sounds a lot like the exponential, meaningful messaging that school librarians hope to spread through advocacy efforts. Our constant refrain is "tell the story," or better yet, get others to tell the story, of student learning and the value of the school library. Advocacy threads can be woven into all forms of communication, programming, collaboration, and improvement plans, as we speak and act with intention, and with understanding of our audience. Targeted messaging via specific, experience-based storytelling is critical if we want people to act. Just telling stories is not enough if we want school leaders to take steps that result in tangible, positive outcomes for our programs.

In the very title of his analysis of the OCLC/ALA report, *From Awareness to Funding*, EveryLibrary political director P.C. Sweeney offered a sharp interpretation of the state of public library advocacy: "The Data Is Clear, It's Time to Move Beyond Storytelling for Library Advocacy" (2018). Sweeney observes that lack of support for public libraries reveals a misplaced emphasis on advertising—"tactics to put messages into the community"—rather than on marketing—"a more holistic approach to getting the word out and measuring real results against goals."

Although the OCLC/ALA study and Sweeney's post are about public libraries, school librarians might heed the data, and the advice, when thinking about how they convey the library's story, and to whom. Are we getting the stories "out there" with an efficient and broad brush? Or, are we engaging stakeholders through vivid, meaningful storytelling, conveyed with care, about students, teachers, and learning? What is the experience that will be so powerful that they'll be able to tell the story to someone else? It might be helpful to review elements of a good elevator speech for sharing library stories. Deb Kachel and Mary Kay Biagini suggest three supporting points: the hook, the proof, and the "bring it home," through which you establish a reason for the person to take interest, give evidence to back up what you're talking about, and present a compelling, personalized talking point (2013).

"Stories aren't stories until they are told," say storytellers Bill Mooney and David Holt (1996, p. 9), and if we want productive advocacy, stories aren't stories until they are told and acted upon. How can your advocacy storytelling engender action? Biagini and Kachel recommend ending an elevator speech with an invitation to attend a specific event or a request to share information with a group such as the school board (2013). This strategy doesn't have to live "in the elevator." To help turn stakeholders into storytellers and partners, welcome them to experience the library for themselves, through moments that will matter to them.

Works Cited

Kachel, Deb and Mary Kay Biagini. "Transforming Decision Makers into Champions for School Library Programs." AASL National Conference, Pre-Conference Workshop. Hartford, CT. November 14, 2013. <https://paschoollibraryproject.org/home/aasl>.

Langellier, Kristin M., and Eric E. Peterson. *Storytelling in Daily Life*. Temple University Press, 2004.

Levitov, Deborah D., ed. *Activism and the School Librarian: Tools for Advocacy and Survival*. Libraries Unlimited, 2012.

Mooney, Bill, and David Holt, eds. *The Storyteller's Guide*. August House, 1996.

OCLC and ALA. *From Awareness to Funding: Voter Perceptions and Support of Public Libraries in 2018*. OCLC, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.25333/C3M92X>.

Sweeney, P.C. "The Data Is Clear, It's Time to Move beyond Storytelling for Library Advocacy." PCSweeney.com. April 18, 2018. <https://pcsweeney.com/2018/04/18/the-data-is-clear-its-time-to-move-beyond-storytelling-for-library-advocacy/>

About the Editor

Rebecca J. Morris, MLIS, PhD, earned her master's degree and doctorate at the University of Pittsburgh and her undergraduate degree in elementary education at Pennsylvania State University. Rebecca teaches graduate courses in school librarianship and youth library services. Rebecca has published articles in journals including *School Library Research*, *Knowledge Quest*, *School Libraries Worldwide*, *Teacher Librarian* and the *Journal of Research on Young Adults in Libraries*. She is the author of *School Libraries and Student Learning: A Guide for School Leaders* (Harvard Education Publishing Group, 2015). Rebecca is a former elementary classroom teacher and middle school librarian.

Email: rmorris@schoollibraryconnection.com

Twitter: [@rebeccajm87](https://twitter.com/rebeccajm87).

COPYRIGHT 2019 ABC-CLIO, LLC

MLA Citation

Morris, Rebecca J. "The Elevator Story." *School Library Connection*, September 2019, schoollibraryconnection.com/Home/Display/2217058.

