A LIVING LIBRARY: A VENUE FOR THE FUTURE OF TESTIMONIES, STORYTELLING, AND TRANSMITTED FAITH THROUGH DIALOGUE

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Bio:
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Abstract:
We live in a world shaped by stories and filled with lived libraries of plots. When stewarded well, stories aid us in interpreting lived experience. This completed research explores the application of narrative learning theory, living library strategies, and digital storytelling in local youth ministries, examining the use of narrative through digital storytelling and living library learning strategies as well as the implications and risks.

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Imagine with me a room full of students engaging in conversation with quality adults, where students are asking questions and leaning in, with wide eyes and excited interest. These adults are not just average congregants, but leaders and community members trained to engage students at the very points of their wondering and assumptions. Imagine with me a park full of students and adults engaged in deep conversation, paired off in twos or threes listening, answering, engaging, learning, and growing. The topics being discussed ones that are often shied away from in other venues. There the stuff of debates and division are the prompter's of dialogue. Imagine a library where the books all breathe, and blink, and respond., a library where readers can ask questions of their books and receive responses in live time.

In a season of our history where there are so many voices clamoring for attention with a cacophony of opinions, surprisingly the values of listening to and sharing stories are finding center stage. Non-profit organizations focused on storytelling have even been met with recent attention of the general public. The Human Library organization established in 2000 partnered with Heineken to create a social experiment entitled, "Worlds Apart: An Experiment" a short video they posted on April 20, 2017 had 13,044,812 views on YouTube in just over one month (May 26,2017). The video demonstrates the known truth that the sharing of personal stories is a communal experience full of vulnerability which has the power to change us (Sarbin, 1986, 59). Sarbin illustrates how we reside in a "story shaped world" filled with "narratives of all kinds, myths and folklore popular television shows and movies, social scripts and mores, religious histories and parables, all of which embody our cultural values" (1986, 63). These

foster what Sarbin calls "libraries of plots" which aid us in interpreting "our own and other people's experience" (1986, 59).

This research will explore more closely the impact of narratives, narrative learning theory, living library strategies, and digital storytelling and how they can be applied through the lens of youth ministry. We will briefly examine: 1) In what ways can narrative learning through oral and digital storytelling practices bring power and depth to the spiritual development and identity formation of students?; 2) In what ways could digital storytelling and living library learning strategies be beneficial in youth ministry for evangelism and discipleship?; and 3) What educational implications and risk factors must youth educators be aware of in utilizing digital storytelling and living library methods?

Living Library

Two newer mediums for narrative learning and storytelling are now being utilized in different venues each stewarded by a non-profit organization: living libraries and digital storytelling. The first Living Library began as the brainchild of five teenagers in Denmark who had witnessed the brutal murder of a friend (Little, Nemutlu, Magic, and Moln.ar, 2011, 12). They first created a peer led youth initiative called "Stop the Violence" to help peers prevent youth violence. The Living Library idea was hosted first at a Danish festival Roskilde to challenge the roots of violence: stereotype, stigma, prejudice and discrimination through constructive dialogue (Little, Nemutlu, Magic, and Molnar, 2011, 13).

The next year they hosted a living library at one of the largest music festivals in Europe, Sziget (Little, Nemutlu, Magic, and Molnar, 2011, 12). In 2010, the name of the organization changed from Living Libraries to Human Libraries because activity in the US and UK used this name, the aims and values remain the same (Little, Nemutlu, Magic, and Molnar, 2011, 7). It is officially trademarked as the Human Library Project. According to the *Living Library Organizers Guide 2011* published by the Council of Europe Youth Department, the methodology is "to create constructive personal dialogues between people who would normally not have the opportunity to speak to each other and thus challenge common prejudices and stereotypes" (Little, Nemutlu, Magic, and Molnar, 2011, 5).

The Human Library have been utilized with junior high and high school students, college students in general, members of the community. They've been housed in festivals, conferences, parks, community centers, public libraries, and academic university libraries throughout the world. They are mainly as one-time events sprinkled throughout the calendar, but now has been adapted into a mobile Living Library bus, an online chat version, and now even in the spring of 2017 a Danish TV show (Little, Nemutlu, Magic, and Molnar, 2011, 13; humanlibrary.org).

The Human Library works is much like a standard library in the way that there is a card-catalog and books to be checked out by readers. However, in this case the books breathe, blink, and answer questions in live time, because the books are people.

The "books" are carefully selected by the organizer of the event with the aim of highlighting different types of stereotype and prejudices, which include anyone they deem to be different from the mainstream culture. The theory base is rooted in intergroup contact, contact-based prejudice reduction, and stereotype-mitigation through the familiar framework of the library and storytelling (Little, Nemutlu, Magic, and Molnar, 2011, 16). Some of the "book genres" have included, a person with autism, someone who eats only raw food, an ex gang member, a single parent, a refugee or immigrant, a veteran, and a wide variety of sexual identities. In one case, even a nudist was used (Shoaff, 2016).

The event is fashioned after a standard library so that readers acquire a human library card and peruse the titles of the available " books", with the aim of finding a book that meets up with one of their preconceived notions or prejudices. "Just read don't judge" is the encouraged motto to get past the "cover" of prejudice (Little, Nemutlu, Magic, and Molnar, 2011, 27). Once selected the book and the reader, then have the opportunity to have a conversation together for varying lengths of time depending on the organizers. Visits have been as short as 12 minutes and as long as an hour, depending on the context that the human library is situated within. In Tasmania sessions are only 12 min. each with rotating high school students through the books (afairerworld.org). At Dongguk University in Seoul, Korea, they have called their project the "Mentoring Living Library" and is an established program using retirees as books and established mentors, with checkout times of 60 minutes (Kim Ji-yeon, Na

Soo-hyun, 2013). In the US, the organizers are encouraged to place the checkout time to 30 minutes (humanlibrary.org).

One of the attributes of the popularity of the program is the fact "readers can predict the 'risk' they are taking by meeting the 'other'"(Little, Nemutlu, Magic, and Molnar, 2011, 5). During the time of hearing the book's story, often of someone with a completely different viewpoint on the subject the reader has the opportunity to ask questions in a safe environment that is dialogue instead of a debate or discussion (Isaacs 1999, 41; Bohm 1996, 8, 21). Issacs defines a dialogue as a "conversation with a center, not sides"(Isaacs 1999, 19). In the case of the Human Library is the book's story being shared at the center of the conversation. This creates space for the questions and fresh connections with others who could have been seen as enemies entering into the conversation.

This concept is being used in public forums at an increasing rate across the world. The Human Library organization now hosts venues and events in over 70 countries.. According to the newsfeed of the Human Library website, in one weekend alone, as I write this article, there are human library events in Lisbon, Portugal; Copenhagen, Denmark; Plock, Poland; Mumbai, India; Drummondville, Québec, Canada; and in St. Petersburg, Russia.

Digital Storytelling

A second narrative learning and storytelling medium, which would pair well with Living Libraries as the archive of guest books is: digital storytelling. The non-profit, the Center for Digital Storytelling focuses on hosting public workshops and coaching in helping

others "listen deeply and tell stories" in a digital format. Rossiter and Garcia describe digital storytelling as, “a dynamic and beautiful marriage of narrative and technology that is proving to be a potent force in educational practice” (2010, 37). The challenge for the storyteller is the desire to include every detail like making a full-length screenplay or epic novel. Yet, Lambert the founder of the Center for Digital Story telling claims this is "exactly that kind of scale that disables our memory" (2012,41).

Lambert has delineated seven steps to follow and process through in his *Digital Storytelling Cookbook* including: owning your own insights, owning your emotions, finding the moment, seeing and hearing your story, assembling your story, and sharing your story. The first three steps speak "to self-awareness and reflection that attend any life story"(41). The remaining four address the specific multimedia elements.

Lambert challenges the teller to reflect and take the story “picture by picture" (Lambert, 2010, 8, 41) using still and moving implicit and explicit imagery. In the time it takes to write and record the story in their voice, and then to coordinate images and music to accompany it, there is natural space for reflection. From his perspective this practice slows down the process allowing for emotional connections and contextual associations to occur for the teller and the audience (Lambert, 2010, 8, 41). Lambert recommends text to be used sparingly to avoid competing with the spoken word, as well as avoiding the timing issues of various audience reader speeds. (Lambert, 2010, 41) Essentially, it is the creation of short multimedia presentations, which combine the recorded physical voice of the author narrating a

personal life-story in 2-5 minutes. The narration is accompanied by background music, and the visuals of still photography and short video clips intentionally selected by the author to compliment, but not overshadow the words being spoken. The sounds and visuals are central to this medium to convey the "mood, character, and rhythm" facial expressions would do in person or video (Rossiter and Garcia, 2010, 41). Rossiter and Garcia in their article on digital storytelling emphasized the power of discovering one's voice through the use of their own recorded physical voice in the digital story project (2010, 43).

A Narrative Voice

Telling a story is essentially a conversation, whether it be with one's self or another (Dirkx, 2006). Oral informal communication connects with the author differently than giving a formal speech or writing a memoir or testimony. As Calvin Chong writes in his chapter in *Beyond Literate Western Practices*, "where as oral and written communication forms may share some overlapping features, they also have profound differences in their properties, function and impact" (2014, 129). Chong recommended in oral storytelling also called dialogical storytelling: "fragmented versus complete sentences, intonation and stress versus spelling, punctuation, and layout, and informal and repetitive versus formal, condensed, and clear, and transitory versus permanent nature" (2014, 129). In Chong's opinion storytelling is intended to flow like a conversation between the teller and the audience in a more verbal style (2014, 129).

In the midst of narrating a personal story the voice is a primary and powerful ingredient. This portion of the experience often surprises the teller. Especially in mediums

where the story is recorded, many are unfamiliar with how their voice sounds. In the kneading together the pieces of the story, one is also developing their "narrative voice" (Lambert, 2012, 8). The uniqueness of each person's expressions and tones "can jump off the page or resonate" with the hearer (Lambert, 2012, 8).

Many individuals are not used to hearing themselves let alone their story being articulated. Many often express their discomfort by suggesting the use a soundtrack instead. The strain of this is more intense in verbal over written communication because of the unique and intensely personal nature of the physical voice. No one else sounds just like you, and this is especially true when recorded and played back. "Our voice like our breath has been with us, inside us, since the dawn of our consciousness. We hear it from the inside. To hear it coming from the outside can be a jarring experience, from both a sensory and a phenomenological perspective" (Rossiter and Garcia, 2010, 43-44).

The transformational learning abounds in this space. Rossiter and Garcia apply narrative psychology to the answer in that, "When we hear our voices coming from outside ourselves, we have a moment of seeing ourselves as someone other than our self. In that moment, we can experience the kind of empathy and compassion for ourselves that we would feel for another person who might be telling their story. We are taken outside of our own heads so that we can see and hear ourselves as one who is worthy of compassion and understanding" (2010, 44).

For many, this is very unlike other negative moments they have collected in their memories over the years that have dimmed and even in some cases silenced their true voice. Especially in experiences of discrimination, abuse, or stereotyping, the restorying of those experiences can be extremely redemptive. "Truly, our voice is a great gift. Those of us fortunate enough to be able to talk out loud should love our voices, because they tell everyone so much about who we are, how strong we can be, and how fragile" (Lambert 2012, 16). Lambert goes on to say, "It is true our voices do reveal much about who we are. Perhaps that is why hearings one's own voice is often an unsettling experience" (Lambert, 16). Rossiter and Garcia confirm this by stating, "Sharing of autobiographical stories 'out loud' can be an unexpectedly emotional experience for the teller. We know intuitively that emotionality has to do with the externalization of one's story" (2010, 43).

Restorying, Learning, and Identity

When done well while preparing and sharing a personal story whether in written, digital, or verbal format, the hearer and the crafter of it on a journey. It is a journey to connect with the teller's feelings, the places, and the faces of their story. In the time it takes to craft and in some cases record their voice, and coordinate images and music to accompany it, there is natural space for reflection. Reflection is a powerful component of learning thus allowing the learner to contextualize and connect new learning with previous experiences and knowledge. Through this process, restorying is occurring. Randall captures the heart of restorying by stating, "We reputedly rework and reinterpret the events of our lives to bring

coherence and meaning to the whole of our life narrative. Transformative autobiographical learning can be understood as a process of 'restorying' our lives" (Kenyon and Randall, 1997, 1).

According to Charlotte Linde author of *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence,* "A life story is an oral unit that is told over many occasions. Conventionally, it includes certain kinds of landmark events, such as choice of profession, marriage, divorce, and religious or ideological conversion if any" (11). She also suggests that life stories follow two criteria when told by an individual during the course of their lifetime. Life stories must be: "about the speaker, not a general point about the way the world is", and stories must have "extended reportability; they are tellable and are told and retold over the course of a long period of time" (Linde, 21).

Elizabeth J. Tisdell has linked experiential learning with spiritual experience stating, "Any spiritual experience takes place at a particular moment in time, but making sense of it or learning from the experience happens over time"(2008, 32). In the reclaiming or "spiraling back" on these experiences, "the past can be infused and remapped with new meaning" (Tisdell, 2008, 32). Tisdell also found that for her study participants, "when spiral learning experiences were infused with the stuff of symbol, mythic story, metaphor, or music, they were often discussed as spiritual experiences and were seen as transformative as well as spiritual" (2008, 32). This is what youth often experience on youth ministry missions trips and retreats: spiritually transformative experiences that spiraled from symbols and stories.

There is a “developmental change as experienced through the ongoing construction and reconstruction of the life narrative" (2002, 2). Clark suggests, "Because of the connection between narrative and identity, stories offer enormous potential as a mode of personal change. Sometimes that change comes from identifying with a person's experience in a new way" (2001, 88).

Remembering the past is on a personal level vitally important to "identity construction" (Clark, 2010, 4). Brockmeier claims, “every narrative about my past is always also a story told in, and about the present as well as a story about the future” (2000, 56). Hopkins writes, “Our narratives are the means through which we imagine ourselves into the persons we become” (Hopkins, 1994, xvii). Writer and theologian Frederick Buechner suggests "stories make the distinction between past, present and future ultimately meaningless and allow us to taste the eternity that God inhabits" (1994, 40-56).

The broadened ability to envision the future is a key component to the spiral perspective of narrative, Clark posits it is when one can identify with a character who has changed, then one can envision and personally embrace new possibilities and change (2001, 87-89). Even more transformative is when we identify new possibilities within our own stories. Identifying those stories also enables us to open ourselves to new knowledge and perspectives. Rossiter writes of struggling learners, "Stories of achievement and transformation can function as motivators, pathfinders, and sources of encouragement”(Rossiter, 2002, 3). Rossiter also

suggests, "the process opens the way for learners to choose alternative narratives" (2002, 4). This process also allows new meaning to spring out of the old stories.

It has been found that the very crafting of personal narratives has been transformational for the authors of them. Lambert the founder of the Center of Digital Storytelling tells of individuals who share their stories "recognize a metamorphosis of sorts, a changing, that makes them feel different about their lives, their identities" (5). They have found power in this medium largely through the process of sharing their story and learning from hearers' questions and their own responses. Often this provides "missing pieces to help the teller find deeper meaning in their own story" thus inviting the storyteller to own a more complete version of their story" (Lambert, 16-17).

In the oral traditions of African and Jewish cultures storymaking and storytelling are believed synonymous with the value of life itself (Lambert, 2012, 5). In those traditions Lambert writes, "Story is learning, celebrating, healing, and remembering. Each part of the life process necessitates it. Failure to make a story to honor these passages threatens the consciousness of the communal identity" (2012, 5). Even in the subculture of some American families, Diana Garland in her book *Family Ministries* writes, "family stories are like music, made up of both words and melody. If we know the melody of a song, we can almost always sing along. If someone gives us the word and melody, however, is different. We have to hear it and practice it to give it back with our own voice" (2012, 314).

Stories are viewed as so deeply important that Lambert writes, “Honoring a life event with the sacrament of a story is a profound spiritual value for these cultures. It enriches the individual, emotional and cultural development, and perhaps ultimately, the more mysterious development of their soul” (2008, 5). Story gives handles to the often nebulous and abstract concepts of spirituality. Fowler in his faith development theory emphasizes the importance of processing even subconsciously has on how an individual makes meaning of ultimate realities (1981).

In the church family this is a communal journey of storied learning. As one story leads from the "familiar to the unfamiliar, they provide an entryway into personal growth and change" (Rossiter, 2002, 3). "Sacred stories may connect us to many themes of faith, themes of love, joy, creation, rebirth, repentance, and forgiveness, friendship, covenant, and faithfulness. Because these are universal themes, sacred stories tell not only about how we are somehow part of the great story God is telling, but also how we connect with and are like other families" (Lambert, 2012, 329). In the dynamic construction and reconstruction process of a self-story one has the "profoundly empowering recognition" that they are not only the "main character but also the author of the story" (Rossiter, 2002, 4).

Training

One gap in the Living Library model especially is that the focus is entirely on the reader. Little to no attention is giving to the “book” who has the most vulnerability in the project as well as the most power to shape their own narrative, others opinions, and the tenor of

the experience for all involved. There is little to no mention in the Human Library host documents about training of or caring for the "books" before or after the event. Training would be an incredible opportunity in aiding the storytellers in reflecting on their story and the meaning in it. Because of the dialogical format of this type of storytelling, it is more challenging because of potential lack of linearity as they share their story, which will create even more opportunities for restorying and spiritual spiraling. Storytellers will also benefit from training in how to discern which parts of the story to share at which level with students. They also depending on the topics need training in coping mechanisms on how to respond with essentially dramatic and/ or painful memories that could come from the questions received.

For those crafting their stories in advance, as in the digital storytelling medium; the challenge of which parts to edit out of the story and which to leave in is a constant battle. "Along with language arts educators and psychologists, we are aware that most of us carry around the little voice, an editor, which tells us that what we have to say is not entertaining or substantial enough to be heard. That editor is a composite figure of everyone in our lives who has diminished our sense of creative ability, from family members, to teachers, to employers, to society as a whole" (Lambert, 7). Knowing this entering in, aids a facilitator of digital storytelling training to have sensitivity and empathy for those in the midst of a potentially disequilibrating experience. The goal as Lambert puts it is to "successfully bring people to a point where they trust that the stories they have to tell are vital, emotionally powerful, and unique" (Lambert, 7). The power this could hold when referring to telling their faith stories is

exponential. For some who have been through traumatic experiences of prejudice and harrowing life stories, the questions that are asked and the recalling of their story could be a trigger to trauma that had previously worked through.

One challenge of both of these mediums is how to navigate the difference in having a purpose of bringing light to an issue and having an agenda. The story has a risk of becoming lopsided if one is too consumed in a negative way with the message they want to send rather than just telling their story in its fullness thus allowing the listener to draw conclusions. When doing this training with students or leaders, this would be a great opportunity to share how the Holy Spirit works within their story to bring about clarity, perspective, and at times conviction in the hearer. Clarifying what our role is as the storyteller and what only God can do is critical. This is also a great opportunity to teaching tellers how to remain vigilant in stewarding and protecting their narratives from distortion. This is an element that could be very fruitful in training with accountability of the community of tellers making it increasingly more powerful, impactful, and clear.

I believe there is as much potential for transformation in the teller of the story as there is for the hearers. If we were able to train them in tangible and intentional ways that their story matters and is significant, and then help them to connect their voice and emotion back to it, life and power will be brought to their witness in new ways. Digital and dialogical storytelling could each aid young and old congregants in believing they have a story, and better yet, one worth sharing. Remarkably, while leaders create digital stories or prepare to be a

"book", they are ideally guided to reflect on the when's and why of their personal story. In that process, they could be reminded of the ultimate author of that story, God. There is much to be affirmed about how these methods would embody the elements of a spiraling oral narrative, as they find new meaning in the telling and retelling of their stories. For those "books" that are checked out again and again the restorying and spiraling will be a powerful experience for all involved.

Clark states, "there is always an audience, real or imagined, the other, or even the self and that fact shapes the structure and determines the purpose of the narrative" (2010, 4). The opportunity to teach tellers about the power of their story and how it influences would be transformational for many students, who often hear and believe unquestioningly. To cast light on how some can be self-seeking with their story to get pity or attention, or skewed the narrative to be the victim or the hero could be instructive. The reality is each story is dependent on the perspective and accuracy of the teller' recollection. A piece of powerful training will be "weather guard" the living library book's stories from becoming augmented by the types of question and biases, which have been presented by the current or previous readers. In community this can be a strength rather than a challenge of this medium.

Another benefit and tension to be managed in the youth ministry community, is in the church there is also the risk of someone else in the church family having been witness to the story being told and view discrepancies in how the story is told. It is in these circumstances that the discernment of the larger community is a powerful benefit. Discovering and

stewarding the stories of individuals in themes or topics that would be personally fruitful as well as helpful to community will be the exciting confluence. "Splitting in all directions to age graded programs may provide a place for individuals to tell stories about their families' lives, but that is very different from providing opportunities for family members to share in talking about their family and their faith to one another and to other families" (Garland, 2012, 333).

Another area of training would be in issues of confidentiality and discretion to accurately and carefully sharing others' details. Like in many other areas of ministry, the Lead Youth Worker will need to address what constitutes "age appropriateness" for the ministry group. In dialogical storytelling, the "book" could potentially answer questions in ways, which could be contrary to the held beliefs of the host group. Youth workers may want to plan time to introduce and debrief how to navigate alternative worldviews and having dialogue with those who hold different opinions may be beneficial depending on the subjects being presented. In some situations perhaps a host for each book would be helpful, to maintain awareness on what narratives and perspectives are shared by the book and the reader. In that same area, for some recounting narratives could also dredge up painful or unresolved emotions, and memories, which could create the need for pastoral care.

Another challenge facing youth ministry volunteer training is the limited quantity of time and availability volunteers have to give. When training youth workers and volunteers to share their stories whether digitally or dialogically limited time could constrict the effectively of the process. Technology availability could make digital storytelling more time

intensive on the preparation end. With tablets, smart phones, new programs, and free apps like Adobe Voice and Storehouse the medium of digital storytelling is immensely more accessible than in the past. Being a living book has time constraints during the event itself, but has the added benefit of employing eye-to-eye conversations where wonder and questions are welcomed.

Garland shares, "family storytelling goes against the grain of how our culture uses stories" (2012, 333). Garland contends that in many ways literature and media have "professionalized" storytelling to "to educate, to illustrate life principles and, of course, to entertain" (2012, 333.). Although these can be of value, Garland suggests especially in Western society a need to "reclaim our own family stories as the rich resource for knowing one another and learning the things that matter from one another" (2012, 333). One of the primary appeals of a Living Library is the authenticity and rawness of the "books" stories and answers to their questions.

Implications for Youth Ministry

In the context of education, Rossiter and Clark identified three general areas of narrative application in teaching and learning (2007). The first was the utilization of stories in the classroom to illustrate content. The second narrative application is the process of storying the curriculum. In this process teachers not only tell stories about content, but through their pedagogical choices they construct a narrative of the content as a curricular story. The third general area is autobiographical learning, in which the teacher is aiding the learner in making

autobiographical connections with the content. Digital storytelling could be employed in each of these areas as means of telling stories, storying and learning about themselves though the crafting of these 2-5 minute epistles. (Rossiter and Garcia, 2010, 38). Living libraries could be employed in all of these areas as well with the added benefit of the restorying each time they share their story as a "book" on loan.

In the context of the church and youth ministry, many traditions have strayed away from having live testimony times during public worship and youth services for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to the risk of what the teller might say, time constraints, and the risk of divergence from the carefully designed thematic elements of the day. Some powerful stories may have been lost in cessation of these acts. In full time ministry, I have encountered scores of youth and adults hungry for faith stories to be told and ones to grow into. Digital and dialogical storytelling could each be used as a medium to recapture the element of storytelling and wonder.

Refreshing our use of storytelling mediums and training on how to share stories could aid youth workers in believing they have a story, and better yet, one worth sharing. Training leaders to articulate faith stories in digitally and dialogically could produce great dividends. Students could also grow from learning to share stories in these ways. Because of their affinity to technology, for many students telling their stories through technology would be a natural and almost intuitive mode for them to reflect and communicate stories. Telling their stories dialogically would be stretching in healthy ways in that many students are more

accustomed to online sharing than sharing eye to eye. It would also be deeply formative for them to experience the stories of others through this medium. As they seek examples of lives to emulate and stories to attach their identity to, the use of these stories would be a way to connect imagery and tangibility to an area that is often abstract and nebulous (Sundene and Dunn, 2012).

Both of these mediums in the context of youth ministry have the potential to be very powerful, memorable, and meaningful. The rare advantage of learning firsthand about others' viewpoints, preferences and approaches could cause their worldviews to fuller and more well rounded. To create a place to dialogue with a book, and then reflect and debrief in a guided way could be life transformative by aiding students in co-creating pathways of navigating, responding to, and stewarding answers to perceptions different than a Biblical worldview.

By being strategic about the living library books and digital stories selected, storytelling could be a powerful medium. When building the "collection" of books and storytellers, ideal candidates would be reflective individuals able to articulately narrate their story without feeling threatened. These types of books would quickly become "best sellers" as they creatively and winsomely share stories of redemption, provision, and transformation in all corners of life.

Digital and dialogical stories could aid students in envisioning their identity in Christ, future vocational calling, and relationships while nudging them beyond preconceived notions,

fears, and assumptions. To have students see the learning process of faith as an ongoing story and envision themselves as a part of it, contributes to them discovering a sense of belonging and identity groundedness. As Sundene and Dunn wrote, "though it takes a lifetime to completely answer the 'who am I?' question, there is a drive in young adulthood to discover some of the puzzle pieces that will help clarify the emerging adult identity… often find themselves examining "family resemblances" to discern what they want to embrace and what they want to change" (2012, 110). Recognizing those "family resemblances" begins as early as grade school. Yet, if a student's story is "read" alongside those more seasoned Christians stories, they discover theirs resembles the family story, thus facilitating connections and identity anchors.

If a team of youth workers and students who viewed their lives as books worth reading were arms with how to tell their story in powerful and impactful ways, they would be nearly unstoppable! They could then aid each other in more adeptly at identifying and articulating their individual faith chapters. Everyone would win. The lead youth worker would be equipped with a living library of narratives to unfurl throughout the year. The students would benefit from leaders more capable of recognizing stories worthy of telling as well as a honed ability to articulate their own. And the students themselves would discover a new way of telling their amazing story of transformation and grace.

Further Research

By the very nature of digital and dialogical storytelling mediums the quantity of rich qualitative data is near endless. In 2010, Rossiter and Garcia stated, "Participant produced digital stories constitute a rich and relatively unexplored source" (47). Measuring the journey and self perceived growth with and without storytelling training and how a participant's story deepens and changes from directed reflection would be insightful. As Lambert wrote, "Finding and clarifying the insight, and creating the digital story have taken the storyteller on a journey of self-understanding. A story and the insight it conveys may have evolved throughout the process" (Lambert, 2010, 27). Follow-ups to the process of creating, training to tell their story, and the retelling of their story could involve questions like Lambert has used at the Center of Digital Storytelling like, "why did you choose the story you told?" and "how have you changed as a result of telling this story?" (2010, 27). Even comparing the first time a Living Library book shares their story and how it evolves and changes emphasis and details would be fascinating.

Another area of research would be how the art of crafting digital stories affects the self-perceptions and the identity formation of students as they "read" living books. Another relatively unexplored area is how people select the stories they tell and what those tell about their values and influences. Kenyon and Randall call the stories we like to tell "signature stories" (47-48). They claim that signature stories "reveal much about the ways we compose our lives in our memory and imagination (or would like to be perceived by others), and the ways of characterizing ourselves and emplotting our lives to which we are typically inclined" (Kenyon

and Randall, 47). In digital and dialogical stories, I believe this would be much the same phenomenon and would be fascinating to study the trends of what significant stories individuals choose to tell and what that tells about them. Another aspect that would be powerful would be what if any impact did the hearing of stories or interacting with a living library book have years later on the reader. Additionally, to what degree did those conversations or experiences impact the attitudes, choices, and perceptions of the participant?

Conclusion

This research will explore more closely the impact of narratives, narrative learning theory, living library strategies, and digital storytelling and how they can be applied through the lens of youth ministry. We will briefly examine: 1) In what ways can narrative learning oral and digital storytelling practices bring power and depth to the spiritual development and identity formation of students?; 2) In what ways could digital storytelling and living library learning strategies be beneficial in youth ministry for evangelism and discipleship?; and 3) What educational implications and risk factors must youth educators be aware of in utilizing digital storytelling and living library methods?

In this brief study, we have only begun to answer the in what ways narrative oral and digital storytelling practices add impact and depth to spiritual development and identity formation. We have also touched on the utilization of digital storytelling and living library learning strategies to benefit student ministry for evangelism and discipleship. We have also

investigated a few educational implications and risk factors youth educators must be aware of in utilizing digital storytelling and living library methods in ministry.

In youth ministry, I witnessed the power of transformation that could be undergirded by dialogical and digital storytelling practices. I am reminded of exit interview after exit interview with graduating seniors as they were preparing to launch into other areas of life. As they reflected on their time as students, they would share how they journeyed with their leaders while working out their faith stories. Rarely was their personal spiritual walk in the same place as when they first began attending. Often many were ecstatic or in awe of how much deeper and more vivid their faith was. They attributed that growth to the relationships that had formed and the ways they engaged in the larger story.

While examining the advantages for dialogical and digital storytelling mediums, I grew more excited about the potential power they hold. Not only could these digital narratives capture the life stories of faith, adventure, tragedy, and successes, like other forms of storytelling, the medium of digital storytelling has great potential to motivate, persuade, and encourage. Just as Jesus was able to harness the power of the parable to teach his followers, today's technology gives us the opportunity to connect with people at their deepest spiritual level. The community of faith needs to know not only its own stories, but also the stories of its people. The telling of those stories in turn undergirds and strengthens the community. In turn, the stories of transformation and growth could transform in into epic tales, which then inspire and teach the next generation of Christ followers.

Utilizing digital and dialogical storytelling as a part of youth ministry students and volunteers will not only have a discovered voice and story, but their roles as disciples with something to contribute. Through digital and dialogical storytelling, the power of the ancient art of telling personal testimonies of transformation may have found a new voice and new venues.

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