

TECHNOLOGY, TESTIMONY, AND TRANSFORMATION: THE USE OF DIGITAL
STORYTELLING IN EMERGING ADULT YOUTH MINISTRY VOLUNTEER TRAINING

by

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Bio:

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Abstract:

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). This completed study examined the impact and application of narrative learning theory, spiritual spiraling, and digital storytelling in the training of volunteer youth workers, specifically emerging adults.

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"Everyone has a story" (Linde, 11; Kenyon and Randall 15). Each story is a storehouse of memories and experiences. Multiple times a week, a chair in my office has been filled with emerging adult volunteers attempting to make sense and meaning of their stories. Through asking questions and guiding them in remembering different facets of their story, new clarity and confidence in their story and the author of it has often occurred. It was if through the telling of their stories they find a whisper of their voice. Over time the affect of their ability to voice their story was not only empowering and transformational for the individual, but radiated to those around them.

In the following pages, we will examine more closely the impact of narrative learning theory, spiritual spiraling, and digital storytelling, and how they can be applied in fuller and more effective ways through the lens of volunteer youth workers, specifically emerging adults. We will briefly examine: 1) What factors cause narrative, oral, and digital storytelling practices to bring power and depth in the spiritual development of emerging adult volunteers? 2) In light of Emerging Adulthood's specific life stage needs as according to Arnett (2004, 2006, 2007, 2012, 2014), how can the use of narrative learning theory, orality, and spiritual spiraling meet those stated needs such as identity formation? 3) In what ways could digital storytelling be beneficial in training and forming of emerging adult youth volunteers specifically? 4) In light of Arnett's perceived needs, what practices can be utilized to practically account for them while preparing and training emerging adult youth workers to invest in the deepening the spiritual development of adolescents?

Emerging Adulthood Characteristics

In order to constructively approach and engage emerging adults in utilizing Narrative Learning theories, spiritual spiraling, and digital storytelling, we first must understand the particular psychosocial needs and characteristics of emerging adults. Arnett has labeled five common characteristics or needs of emerging adulthood, which have remained his constants since he first published them in 2004. The five characteristics are “the age of identity explorations; the age of instability; the self-focused age; the age of feeling in-between; and the age of possibilities” (Arnett, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2012, 2014).

Arnett states that the exploration of identity influences all the others (2014). As students try out who they want to be and who they have been, they are trying out various identities in work, friend, and love relationships. Those that lean into their lives during this time must be aware of the changeable and malleable nature of the emerging adult’s identity (Dunn and Sundene, 2012, 24-28). As much as a student in the hormonal swings of puberty shifts moods, the emerging adult’s perception of identity shifts depending on whom they are being influenced by. Arnett has named this the “Self Focused Age” not singularly because of the fact they are inwardly focused, but because of lack of people they answer to (2004, 2006, 2007, 2012, 2014). Compared to other seasons of life, emerging adults have the luxury of solely answering to themselves. No longer do they have to answer to parents or teachers as a child obeying. Few have spouses, children, and long standing bosses to account to (Arnett, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2012, 2014).

Being sandwiched in an era of now and not yet, emerging adults find themselves feeling “in between” adolescence and adulthood. Arnett’s research in 2004 demonstrated emerging adults perceived themselves as fully arrived in adulthood when they accepted responsibility for themselves, made independent decisions, and became financially independent. Until then, they had a difficult time discerning this to be true. The final characteristic is the emerging adult view of this season of life being the “age of possibilities” (Arnett, 2014). “Few dreams have been tested in the fires of life. Yet when faced with the harsh realities of life, none imagine this is what life holds for them” (Arnett, 2004). As they become connected to a new network of relationships and obligations they develop an independent image from their parents.

While describing these needs in a recent conversation with a previous youth ministry volunteer, a sharp and creative recent college grad whose personal belongings were stored in her borrowed minivan not even a few hundred feet from us, she said with astonishment, “These describe me.” The more conversations I have had with emerging adults the more I have found this to be a norm rather than an exception. Strategically teaming spiritually mature emerging adults with other adult youth workers to serve together is one way the church can authentically engage them. Smith stated in an interview, “The two key words are engagement and relationships. It can't just be programs or classes... Real change happens in relationships, and that takes active engagement” (Beaty, 2009). Chuck Bromar wrote about emerging adult church engagement, “We don’t need leaders to create atmosphere, we need

them to cultivate relationships. It's in the context of relationships that we gain a sense of belonging. And it's out of a sense of belonging in the church that we embrace our identity in the world" (Kinnaman, 228).

Identity Transformation

There has been much work done in the area of identity when it comes to storytelling and the sharing of personal narrative. In the field of education, the ways in which the learning interacts with the subject are critical. Rossiter addresses the need for allotting space in adult learning for this to occur. For the educator "to tell too much or to provide the answers to all questions spoken and anticipated is to render the active engagement of the learner unnecessary. To tell too little is to leave the learner with insufficient guidance or support in constructing her or his own meaning and relationship with the content" (Rossiter, 2002, 2). Scholars such as Rosenwald and Ochberg in their book, *Storied Lives* see personal stories as "the means by which identities may be fashioned" (1992,1). Identities have also been defined as narratives by Yuval-Davis, Kannabiran, and Vieten, as being "stories people tell themselves and others about who they are (and who they are not)" (2006, 202). They go on to claim, "identities are never fixed; they are dynamic and fluid, always producing themselves through the combined processes of being and becoming, belonging and longing to belong. This duality is often reflected in narratives of identity" (Yuval-Davis, Kannabiran, and Vieten, 2006, 202).

"The events and actions of one's life are understood and experienced as fitting into narrative episodes of stories. Accordingly, identity formation and development can be

understood in terms of narrative structure and process," according to Rossiter (2002, 2). Clark claims, "stories always have work to do... they are strategic, functional, and purposeful and our task is to understand what the teller is trying to accomplish through the story" (2010, 4).

Kenyon and Randall surmise, narrative and identity this way, "Our very experience can be characterized from a story perspective. That is, stories are cognitive: they contain ideas. They are affective: they involve emotions. And they are volitional: they involve activity or behavior. Our thoughts, feelings, and actions, even our personal identity, can thus be understood as a story" (Kenyon and Randall, 15). Such learning is grounded in the tenants of narrative psychology, namely that identity is an unfolding story (McAdams, 2006), and that lifespan development is the process of constructing and reconstructing a satisfactory and satisfying life narrative (Randall and Kenyan, 1997). Sasso writes, "Our spiritual and religious identities depend on the stories we choose to tell, as well as those we do not. " (2005, 65-69; Garland 325)

Narratives

Narratives and storytelling have grown from method and mediums into full theories with the work of scholars like of Boje, Czarniawka, and Gabriel as well as the work of Rossiter and Clark (Boje, 2008; Clark 2001; Rossiter and Clark, 2007; Rossiter and Clark, 2008). Rossiter contends, "a narrative approach to development, in contrast with other theoretical orientations, attempts to describe development from the inside as it is experienced, rather than from the outside as it is observed" (1999). Boje defines a story as living with a multiple authors and a collective force that is "in-between dead and alive" (Boje 2008, 260).

According to Rossiter, “many theorists today argue meaning making is a narrative process” (Bruner, 1990; Sarbin, 1986; Rossiter and Clark, 2008, 62). Dirkx points out that telling a story is a conversation, whether it be with one’s self or another (Dirkx, 2006). The sharing of personal stories is a communal experience full of vulnerability. The transformative learning space occurs where there is opportunity to explore the experience. This can happen through conversation or through the sharing of perceptions and interpreted meaning. Tyler and Swartz look at it holistically stating, “it calls on the whole person, using emotion, visual imagery, imagination, and metaphor to access this individual experience and allow for the possibility of integration into something unexpected” (Cranton and Taylor 2012, 462).

The intermingling of identity and being made in the image of God each have a central role in forming a living story. Stories of God working in the lives of His people often have a “life force of their own”(Boje, 2008, 260). In faith stories there are transformational moments full of power and energy where God raises “dead” stories to life. “To be a person is to have a story. More than that, it is to be a story” (Kenyon and Randall, 1997, 1). Joe Lambert, CEO of the Digital Storytelling Center goes so far as to say, "As we are made of water, bone, and biochemistry, we are made of stories" (5). "From Aesop's fables to The Book of Exodus, stories tell us how to live, what values to hold, what is right, and what is wrong" (McAdams, 52). Rossiter states, "Stories have been widely employed as a powerful medium of teaching and learning" (2002, 3).

Historically, some of the most common places for utilizing storytelling in education have been in literacy, English as a second language, and transformative learning (Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 2000). The very qualities that make stories memorable have been found to also establish trust as well as entertain (Rossiter, 2002, 3). "The use of stories is pervasive in adult education practice. Case studies, critical incidents, role playing, and simulations are among the story-based techniques mentioned frequently in the literature" (Rossiter, 2002, 3). 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).

Another facet when considering narrative, is the importance of context having various perspectives and definitions around the globe. Clark was quick to point out in one of her writings that narrative as she used it was to be understood from a Western perspective (Clark, 2010, 3). In the Western context, when examining narratives there are obvious links to learning, especially to experiential learning. Clark narrows this from narrative to "the areas of constructivism, situated learning, and a critical cultural perspective on learning" (2010, 5).

Narratives as a Learning Theory

Marsha Rossiter and M. Carolyn Clark have done much work pulling from narrative psychology and education to argue for a narrative theory of learning. According to

Clark, "Narrative theory of learning connects experiential learning and the notion of narrative as a sense-making medium. Experience itself is prelinguistic; it exists prior to and apart from language. We access it, reflect on it, make-sense of it through language and yet which is to say through narrating it. In short, we learn narratively" (2010, 5).

In Rossiter and Clark's definition narrative, learning means "learning through stories" (Clark, 2010, 6). They prescribe that this occurs in three connected but distinctive ways. First, they suggest we learn from "hearing the stories" (Clark, 2010, 6). Examples supplied are the common expressions of story we naturally think of including but not limited to "religious, parables, myths and moral tales and personal experiences" (Clark, 2010, 6). As the audience of a well-crafted story we listen by entering into the characters' perspectives and into deeper meaning of the story. In education as well as entertainment, "we must fill in, from our own store of knowing, that which is unspoken. In so doing, we create as well as discover meaning and we pose the questions we ourselves need to answer" (Rossiter, 2002, 3).

The second type of learning is from telling the stories. "When we hear, we are the receiver: when we tell, we are the actor, the one putting all the details together and making the experience coherent for ourselves and for others. It is through the active telling that we learn what an experience means" (Clark, 2010, 6).

The third way they suggest we learn isn't near as concrete as the first two. They contend that we learn from stories by "recognizing the narratives in which we are positioned." This type of situated learning enables the teller to think critically about the forces that shaped

them, socially and culturally. They claim that the learning is even "emancipatory" by freeing them from the constraints of not understanding the influences of their past and current situation, and how things can be different in the future. The very identifying of one's "situatedness enables us to identify and critique how that shaping takes place" (Clark, 2010, 6).

One of the concepts that correlates directly to the journey of faith, is that learning can be "conceptualized as a narrative process" (Clark, 2010, 6). In this approach, "educators not only tell stories about the subject, they story the subject knowledge itself" (Rossiter, 2002, 2). Just like for God's people throughout the Biblical scripture, learning is a storied journey. Clark claims, "when we learn something new, we story our growing understanding of it. In so doing, we are able to see for ourselves what we understand and what we do not, and we are also able to see what we do not yet know" (2010, 6). Seeing how much more there is to know and learn expands the perspective of what can and will be. Especially for adult learners, it is essential for them to embrace and take encouragement in the fact the story does not end with their knowing, it continues.

One of the great benefits of storied learning is the ability to track progress for the student and the educator. The very process of "narrating our evolving understanding of something is how we make our learning visible to ourselves and to others" (Clark, 2010, 6) To take a journey that is often processed only internally, and make it external enough for others to see causes the learner to see trends and cycles in their own learning. In pastoral care, this principle could be transformational as well. It enables the learner/ disciple to celebrate growth

and enlist help in pursuing uncharted areas of learning and exploration in ways they wouldn't otherwise. This also opens the door for the educator/pastor to celebrate how far the learner/disciple has come, while simultaneously assessing how far they need to still go (Clark, 2010, 6).

This very concept is what I did with my volunteers as I interviewed, trained, and followed-up with them throughout the year. As I heard their stories of how they had grown from one year to the next, it was in the telling of their stories that I was able to assess and celebrate the progress and growth. The remarkable phenomenon over and over as they shared was that I could visibly see as they came to the revelation of where they were in their storied growth. Often, they left encouraged and challenged by seeing and hearing the story of their own spiritual growth or lack there of. This in turn caused them to use the same techniques in encouraging and challenged the teenagers they were investing in to go deeper in their spiritual walks.

Spiraled Spiritual Learning and Transformation

Elizabeth J. Tisdell has in recent years brought the role of spirituality in adult learning to the forefront. "Spirituality is about an individual's personal experience or journey toward wholeness whereas religion is about an organized community of faith" (Tisdell, 28). Fowler in his faith development theory emphasizes the "significance of unconscious process in how individuals make meaning of ultimate reality" (Fowler, 1981; Tisdell, 28).

Within adult education, Tisdell links 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.” In the reclaiming or “spiraling back” on these experiences, “the past can be infused and remapped with new meaning” (Tisdell, 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.” This is exactly what families experienced on our missions trips and retreats: spiritually transformative experiences that spiraled from symbols and stories.

“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” (Clark, 2001, 88). As the connections between life narrative, transformation, and transformative learning continue to strengthen, “narrative metaphor as applied to adult development sees developmental change as experienced through the ongoing construction and reconstruction of the life narrative” (Rossiter, 2002, 2,4).

In the oral traditions of African and Jewish cultures storymaking and telling are believed synonymous with the value of life itself. 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” (5). Even in the subculture of some American families, “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." (Garland, 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" (5).

"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 heart of the great story God is telling, but also how we connect with and are like other families" (Lambert, 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). In families 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).

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 that "stories make the distinction between past, present and future ultimately meaningless and allow us to taste the eternity that God inhabits" (1994, 40-56; Garland, 2012, 325).

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). This is even more transformative when we identify them within our own lives. Identifying those stories also enables us to open ourselves to new knowledge and perspectives. "Stories of achievement and transformation can function as motivators, pathfinders, and sources of encouragement for struggling adult learners" (Rossiter, 2002, 3). Rossiter 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.

Lambert 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).

Digital Storytelling: The Convergence

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 claims this is "exactly that kind of

scale that disables our memory." He challenges the teller to reflect and take the story "picture by picture" (Lambert, 2010, 8, 41) using still and moving implicit and explicit imagery. 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.

Digital storytelling takes the hearer and the crafter of it on a journey, a journey to connect with their feelings, the places, and the faces of their story. 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. Reflection is a powerful component of adult 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" (Randall and Kenyon, 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).

Because of the hybrid nature of this communication style, the crafting of a digital story connects with the author differently than giving a 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" (129). A few he summarized of Ann Browne's work (1999, 155) are: "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" (Chong, 129). Yet, digital storytelling is intended to flow like a conversation between the storyteller and the audience in a more verbal style. The sounds and visuals are central to this digital medium to convey the "mood, character, and rhythm" facial expressions would do in person or video (Rossiter, Garcia, 41).

It has been found that the very crafting of digital stories has been transformational for the authors of them. Lambert the founder of the Center of Digital Storytelling has found that the students who share their stories in a small group experience a "metamorphosis of sorts, a changing, that makes them feel different about their lives and their identities" (Lambert, 5). 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.

Voice

"As you are putting together your raw material for your story, you are also working to build your narrative voice. Everyone has a unique style of expressing him or herself that can jump off the page or resonate in a storytelling presentation" (Lambert, 8) Rossiter and Garcia in their article on digital storytelling in adult education emphasized the power of adults rediscovering their voices through the use of their physical voice recorded in the story (2010, 43). Many adults are not used to hearing themselves let alone their story being articulated. Many often express their discomfort by suggesting the use a soundtrack instead. At the Digital Storytelling Center Lambert's answer to this common question is, "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 (16). He

goes on to say, "It is true our voices do reveal much about who we are. Perhaps that is why hearing 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).

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, Garcia, 2010, 43-44). The transformational learning is found to occur in this space, but why? Rossiter and Garcia apply narrative psychology 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 adults, 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.

"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 if we were referring to their faith stories is exponential.

I am most excited about the transformation for the teller of the story. If we were able to train them in tangible and intentional ways of how their story matters and is significant, and then help them to connect their voice and emotion back to it, it would bring life and power to their witness in new ways. Digital storytelling could aid young and old congregants in believing they have a story, and better yet one worth sharing. Remarkably, while leaders create digital stories, they 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 this method would embody the elements of a spiraling oral narrative, as they find new meaning in the telling and retelling of their stories.

Challenges

The simple fact that narratives are powerful can create the need to handle this medium with caution. One challenge is the manipulation of narratives and their audiences. 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). When those who are seeking pity or attention share their story, often there is the risk that it will be skewed for the person to be viewed as the victim or the hero. The story's perspective and accuracy bends to the person's recollection. When sharing these skewed life stories with others their warped perception of reality could then be promoted as truth, thus solidifying the alternate story with the teller. There is also the risk of someone else in the church family having been witness to the story and finding discrepancies in how the story unfolded. These discrepancies would be extremely detrimental to emerging adults in the church who already tend to be rather skeptical of the church and those within it (Wuthnow, 2007). For many, that walk into past experiences can be particularly painful. If there are people within the group who are emotionally immature, the experience could be counterproductive.

When using the lens of sharing stories with the larger congregation, guiding individuals to themes or topics that would be personally fruitful as well as age appropriate may be a challenge. "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). Issues of confidentiality and discretion

could be challenging in delineating the when's and if's stories should be shared. What constitutes "age appropriateness" would need to be addressed in the context of an individual youth ministry.

Another challenge facing youth ministry volunteer training is the limited quantity of time and availability volunteers have to give. When attempting to facilitate digital storytelling limited time could constrict the effectiveness of the process. In recounting stories, an entire group may learn of sensitive issues that.

Recounting narratives could also dredge up painful or unresolved emotions, and memories, which could create the need for pastoral care or could publicly disqualify the sharing leader from volunteer service. Garland shares, "family storytelling goes against the grain of how our culture uses stories. In many respects, our culture has professionalized storytelling. We use stories in literature and in the media to educate, to illustrate life principles and, of course, to entertain. Although professionally told stories in books and media are valuable, we 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)

Implications

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 through the crafting of these 2-5 minute epistles. (Rossiter, Garcia, 2007, 38).

In the context of the church, most traditions have strayed away from having live testimony times during public worship 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. Powerful stories 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 storytelling could be used as one medium to recapture the element of storytelling in the public body.

Digital storytelling could aid youth workers in believing they have a story, and better yet one worth sharing. Training leaders to articulate faith stories in this way could produce great dividends. When linking emerging adult youth workers with this practice it would be thought that they do not have much life to draw upon, but I think this would be short sighted. Because of their affinity to technology, for many emerging adults digital storytelling would be a natural and almost intuitive mode for them to reflect and communicate stories. 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 digital stories would be a way to connect imagery and tangibility to an area that is often abstract and nebulous. (Dunn and Sundene, 2012; Arnett, 2014)

When training emerging adult volunteers specifically digital storytelling could be a powerful medium in helping them envision what their future could look like by sharing others stories in the midst of the content. Then to have them see the learning process of faith as a ongoing story and see themselves as a part of it, aids them in finding a sense of belonging and identity groundedness as compared to feeling unmoored and in-between adolescence and adulthood. (Arnett, 2014) As Dunn and Sundene 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. As part of this process, those in their 20s and early 30s often find themselves examining "family resemblances" to discern what they want to embrace and what they want to change." (2012, 110) Since emerging adults have difficulty conceptualizing an objective reality, dependence on themselves, rather than on a traditional belief system makes sense to them. They see it as their personal responsibility to develop a set religious beliefs that is uniquely their own" (Arnett, 2014, 172). Yet, if their story is "played" out alongside those more seasoned Christians stories, they discover theirs resembles the family story, thus facilitating connections and identity markers to the congregation.

Thinking in the context of my youth ministry's small group leaders, if they were trained in owning their story and their emotions within it, as well as their voice they would be significantly more equipped. They could then aid students more adeptly at identifying and articulating their individual faith stories. Everyone would win. The lead youth worker would be equipped with a storehouse of possible narratives to use 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. With tablets, smart phones, new programs, and free apps like Adobe Voice and Storehouse this medium of storytelling is immensely more accessible than in the past.

Further Research

Rossiter and Garcia state, "Much remains to be said about digital storytelling as a narrative method in adult education. For example digital stories in adult education research would be a rich source of qualitative data. Participant produced digital stories constitute a rich and relatively unexplored source" (2007, 47). Measuring the journey and self perceived growth with and without the digital storytelling training and how their story deepens and changes would be fascinating. 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 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)

Another area of research would be how the art of crafting digital stories affects the self-perceptions and the identity formation of emerging adults. As we have seen from Arnett's work the search for identity is a large piece of an emerging adult's characteristic needs (Arnett, 2014). Another 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 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.

Conclusion

In this brief study we examined the impact of narrative learning theory, spiritual spiraling, and digital storytelling, and how they can be applied in fuller and more effective ways through the lens of volunteer youth workers, specifically emerging adults. We have only

begun to answer the questions of which factors cause narrative, oral, and digital storytelling practices to hold power and depth in the spiritual development of adult volunteers.

While examining the advantages and potential for digital storytelling, 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. "The community of faith, too, has powerful rituals and stories that tell us who we are because of who we have been and who we are becoming. During difficult times, rituals and stories of our life as a people of faith sustain us, just as they sustain families. (Garland, 2012, 333) Digital stories are a way those stories could be told and reflected on as a community.

New Christians could find their voice and the beginnings of identity through this medium. As a community digital storytelling could help us "find ways to bring new families into the congregation through rituals by teaching them the stories of the congregation. Inviting them to share and listen to family stories that communicate concern to know who they 'really' are and that they know who their new community 'really' is" (Garland, 2012, 334). Through the spiral telling of their stories, they would gain depth and common language. "The community of faith needs to know not only its own stories, but also the stories of its people. The telling of the stories in turn undergirds and strengthens family identities. In turn, the stories of transformation and growth told will transform in into epic tales that can inspire and teach not only their immediate family, but the greater church family.

In youth ministry, I witnessed the power of transformation that could be undergirded by digital storytelling practices. I am reminded of exit interview after exit interview with Emerging Adult volunteers as they were preparing to launch into other areas of life. As they reflected on their time as a volunteer, they would share how they journeyed with students, yet would always mention how they too were working out their faith stories. Rarely was their personal spiritual walk in the same place as when they first began the serving adventure. Often many were ecstatic or in awe of how much deep and more vivid their faith was and attributed that growth to the leadership experience. Over and over those emerging adults volunteers found their voice and the beginnings of identity, through this medium that would process would be even more profound. Then in turn as they “see” and “hear” themselves and the community of faith within the story, they are no longer stuck “in-between”. (Arnett, 2014) Utilizing digital storytelling as a part of youth ministry youth worker training, emerging adult volunteers will not only have a discovered voice and story, but ministry role which will in turn define them as adults with something to contribute. Through digital storytelling, the power of the ancient art of telling personal testimonies of transformation may have found a new voice.

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