

Modern Day Griots Speak: Storytelling, Healing, and Pedagogy–Part One
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Introduction

“Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity.”ⁱ

The aforementioned quote by Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie speaks to the importance of stories and how stories are shared. Her 2009 TED talk, “The Danger of a Single Story” warns that showing or describing people repeatedly as one thing determines what they become or are considered to be. The single story often permeates our teaching and learning contexts through privileged and/or dominant narratives. The unfortunate norm of privileged or dominant voices that overshadow the pedagogical narrative in educational spaces, oftentimes perpetuates unjust, unloving, and divided learning communities. A dominant or privileged narrative is a story that is told in service of the dominant groups’ interests and ideas.ⁱⁱ It is often the voices of persons of color, women, those of lower socioeconomic status, LGBTQIA+, the disabled, or the religiously diverse whose stories are marginalized, dismissed, or demoralized.

An example of a privileged narrative that demoralizes would include Florida Governor Ron DeSantis arguing that some Black people benefited from being enslaved as he defended his state’s new African American history standards.ⁱⁱⁱ This dominant narrative silences alternative accounts, and this particular story of Black people benefitting from slavery dispossesses, maligns, and disallows the truth telling about slavery that African Americans experienced. In 2019, journalist Nikole Hannah Jones authored the 1619 Project, which was a series of articles and writings that commemorated the 400 year date of when Africans arrived in Hampton, Virginia, bringing attention to the expansion of slavery in the United States.^{iv} This historical storytelling brought forth

criticism by conservatives who continue to debate about the role of critical race theory in the classroom.^v More recently, critical race theory has been defined as “the study of how racism shapes laws, policies and society.”^{vi} Critical race theory is told in service of the dominant group interests and ideas.

In the midst of this backlash, between politicians, educators, legislators, activists and concerned citizens, students are being denied opportunities to engage, explore and experience storytelling that empowers and humanizes, as dominant and privileged stories serve as silencing tactics to quench authentic storytelling in educational contexts. Stories matter. Many stories matter, and building a more just, loving, diverse, and inclusive learning community that promotes belonging is possible when a variety of voices contribute to its growth. This project, **Modern Day Griots Speak: Storytelling, Healing, and Pedagogy** seeks to create spaces of listening and learning through the power of storytelling. Through a series of conversations with Black Women Storytellers (Modern Day Griots) who are living their calling and vocation at the intersection of the church and academy, I am exploring the intricacies of storytelling, healing, and its connection to pedagogical praxis. These modern day griots share their stories and experiences through an African Diasporic inspired lens that enriches the people and places where they do the work their souls must have.^{vii} Their knowledge, wisdom, and collective experiences of the connectedness of storytelling and healing provide a framework for a healing pedagogy centered on individual and collective narratives that encourage wholeness and human flourishing.

Significant to healing and flourishing is curating safe, sacred, and brave spaces that raise critical awareness around issues of diversity and promote intentional relationships across differences. Lessons from Modern Day Griots teach us that storytelling, healing, and pedagogy have the potential to create a learning community that is caring, equitable, and values the seven

dimensions of diversity—race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender, ability/disability, religion and age.^{viii} Through the sharing of stories, learners and teachers can come together to speak, hear, listen, learn, increase awareness, empathize, truth tell, and heal.

This research project is in process. Part One of the paper will introduce the Modern Day Griots, it will explore how they define storytelling as well as describe their personal encounters with storytelling. Finally, it will summarize the necessity of storytelling for communal flourishing.

Who are the Modern Day Griots?

The Modern Day Griots are Black Women who range in age between the early thirties to the late eighties. There are eleven of them in all. They reside in the northeastern, southern, western, and mid-western regions of the United States. Ordained ministers, academics, and administrators describe their calling and vocation. However, the Modern Day Griots identify as so much more. Without revealing their names, I will introduce them in their own words. At the beginning of our conversation, I invited each storyteller to tell me about themselves as if we were meeting for the first time.

As I explored their words, I found both similarities and differences, yet there was one commonality that described all of the griots—they all connected with people around stories. Whether they self-identified as a visionary leader, author, psychologist, theologian, thinker, liturgical dancer, or a scholar pastor, it is through narratives that they facilitate the unapologetic sharing of voice among persons with whom they share and hold space.

Living as their authentic selves, the griots are straight shooters. They have no time for foolishness, yet they embody compassion and assist people to see gifts in themselves that they do not always recognize. Their mission is to help others flourish and thrive. These storytellers encourage others. In their roles as Christian educators, lecturers, photographers, youth ministers,

worship leaders, spiritual entrepreneurs, mentors, and grief counselors the griots curate sacred, safe and brave spaces for women of color to tell their stories, ask questions and not be content with the superficial.

Working for social justice, teaching in the correctional system, or serving as caregivers, the griots speak up and stand up for themselves and others. Significant is their commitment to take seriously the experiences of Black women who navigate multiple forms of intersectional realities. Listening to and hearing the Modern Day Griots stories, I became aware that each one has faced or are facing adversity like champions and are committed to paying it forward. I could describe them as phenomenal, encouraging, wise, inspirational, trendsetting, unapologetic, and transformative. Actually, they are all of this and more, however, I choose to call them “children of God, who love God and love God’s people.” Society doesn’t describe or view the griot’s stories as dominant or privileged. Oftentimes their stories are overlooked, dismissed, or omitted, but nevertheless their stories are worthy and valuable.

This project delves into storytelling and healing and how they inform pedagogical praxis. The major content of this work is informed by the narratives of the Modern Day Griots, including definitions, quotes, examples, experiences, and practices delineating the power of storytelling. In Part Two, the connection between storytelling and healing will be explored. Finally, the intersection of storytelling and healing will inform the construction of a healing pedagogy that will serve as teaching and learning strategies in building more just, caring, equitable, and diverse learning communities.

Storytelling Defined

Eleven Modern Day Griots. Eleven conversations. Eleven definitions. A collective rendering of insights, ideas, and words of wisdom about storytelling. Storytelling is an expressed

experience of the sacred self. It embraces a trajectory of remembering, recalling, retelling, and unfolding of one's lived experiences. The truth of storytelling connects persons in the moment, as an active, living form of sharing that encourages authenticity. It connects all of humanity.

Storytelling is an intentional experience of building relationships based on sharing the truth of who a person is as well as their personal perspective. Storytelling encourages formation, cultivates development and provides insight into that which is considered ordinary. Empowering and giving voice describes one of the many purposes of storytelling, as storytelling is redemptive, clarifies visions, and conveys a variety of messages to those who listen. Like a tree with many branches, storytelling transforms, inspires, embraces, heals, and emboldens human flourishing.

Through the conversations, the griots conveyed the power of storytelling, how it shapes, forms and cultivates. With eloquent expression, each griot described storytelling from a personal perspective, an encounter that gives credence to storytelling as an art and life form that gives voice to something greater than oneself. We encounter stories everywhere.

Storytelling Encounters...

Storytelling as a Lesson Learned. When thinking about stories and storytelling, the term “lesson” comes to mind. A lesson is considered as a piece of practical wisdom that comes through study, observation, or experience. Stories are vehicles whereby lessons are transmitted from the storyteller to the listener. For example, the authentic sharing of testimonies can lead to lessons learned. The lesson learning griot shared in this way. “Once I shared my testimony with a friend. I shared my experience with a specific issue. She listened...We discovered that she experienced something similar, but I was not aware of that. I was simply telling her what I had been through, what I learned. She could see the “lesson” in what I shared...That’s what I mean by lesson learned.”^{ix}

Sometimes lessons learned come in the form of testimony, but they can also come from unexpected places. A storyteller might be planning to tell one story or part of a story, when they sense the need to share another story because it is necessary and needed at that moment. In other words, discernment or insight prompted her to tell a story that was relevant at that time. Storytelling as lessons learned also encourages being fully present—being focused and engaged during story sharing. Lessons learned during storytelling moments are enhanced when the storyteller evokes emotion or appropriately expresses her feelings. This enables the listeners to feel, as well as engage their senses and imagination.

Storytelling as lessons learned are meaningful when shared from the storyteller's personal experiences, but using illustrations, testimonies, examples and stories from other's work are also acceptable. This practice teaches us that the goal of stories as lessons is to highlight significant points that foster meaning and purpose.

Storytelling as Authentic Witness. “Stories reveal who you are, the particular things that happen to you, things that center on you.”^x Although stories center around human experiences as a whole, each person, each storyteller's voice is authentic, based on her personal experience. Centering Black women's stories, showcasing their authenticity and complexity, storytelling as authentic witness delineates how Black women show up in the world unapologetically and authentically.

“I show up as myself. I want to be myself. I don't want to fit into the typology of what others think a Black woman should be.”^{xi} This quote from the authentically witnessing griot was followed by a conversation about Black women and the stereotypes that seek to demean them and destroy their self-esteem. To counter the negative stereotypes, authors Daina Ramey Berry and

Kali Nicole Gross salute Black women as resilient and versatile while fighting centuries of oppression—particularly racism and sexism.^{xii}

However, in storytelling spaces, very rarely are the narratives of Black women considered as household names. Without a doubt, America would not be America without the stories of Black women. For instance, the Civil Rights Movement could not have accomplished what it did if it were not for the authentic witness and work of Black women.^{xiii}

Authentic witness means telling a story on your terms. An authentic witness represents the storyteller's true nature or beliefs. Diane Nash, a recognized student leader of the Civil Rights Movement shared her authentic witness about the power of non-violence in this way— “Do not depend on elected officials to make the necessary changes in society...Non-violence is a very powerful way to make social change in society without maiming and killing your fellow human being...But violence tends to increase the problems rather than solve them...I really would think that people would be wise to study nonviolence, and use it.”^{xiv} Diane Nash told her story authentically. She did not speak of what she heard from the sidelines of the Civil Rights Movement, but of what she knew as an engaged and involved participant. From the sit-in movements, to the freedom rides, to the lunch counter protests, and community organizing, Diane Nash was an authentic witness. Storytelling as an authentic witness teaches the importance of showing up in the world as who God created you to be.

Storytelling as Oral History. “Speaking one’s truth about one’s understanding of God, and one’s understanding of humanity, and having a level of confidence about what one brings is of value. Recognizing that your validation is not contingent upon someone else’s affirmation.”^{xv} Storytelling spaces that make room for modified oral histories provide contexts for healing, shares the Oral Historian Griot.

Oral histories gather, preserve, and interpret the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events. Considering oral histories as a healing tool, an interview format where an interviewer prepares questions, records the interview, transcribes it or summarizes it, adds to the historical record by archiving memories. Angela Sims cites that “to remember is an opportunity to document lived experiences for future generations.”^{xvi}

To contemplate 21st century archived history, there are questions to be asked. What memories do we hold about humanity and human agency? How have those memories affected how people relate to each other? Generation Alpha, those born around 2010 or 2011 through 2024, might learn the significance of historical events of the early twenty-first century through oral histories. For example, spoken accounts of the international social movement, Black Lives Matter (BLM) that signaled condemnation and critique of the unjust killing of Black people by police. The BLM movement demanded that society value the lives and humanity of Black people as much as it values the lives and humanity of white people.^{xvii}

Voter suppression is also archived in the DNA of the United States twenty first century historical landscape. Voter suppression is witnessed as imposing strict Voter ID laws, cutting voting times, restricting voter registration, and purging voter rolls.^{xviii} The stories of oppressive and unfair treatment of racial minorities, poor people as well as young and old voters and how they were kept from the polls registers as historical memory. In addition, on January 6, 2021, the attack on the United States Capitol that disrupted a joint session of the U.S. Congress in the process of affirming the presidential election results. A life changing situation, the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, led to isolation and societal shutdown. It altered the course of life and humanity. Modified oral histories record memories, personal commentaries, lessons, and narratives of

remembering. Storytelling as oral history teaches us that it is important to be mindful that our stories and our histories are continually in the process of evolving.

Storytelling as Life Application. “Looking at the Old Testament story of Ruth and Naomi, and their relationship, I ask my Bible study class, “How do we apply the word to this situation? When someone is depressed, what might help them? What kind of friend do they need? What do we learn about depression from this text? When someone can’t see the hand of God in their situation, what can the community of faith do? How would you be a friend to Naomi?”^{xix} These questions asked by the Life Application Griot point to life application of the scriptures.

Applying scripture to our lives and sharing a relevant story about that process is storytelling as life application. Application helps people understand what to do or how to use what they have learned.^{xx} Application persuades people to take action. The previous question, “How would you be a friend to Naomi?” Naomi is depressed. She has lost her husband and sons to death. Considering life application in this context, what can I do? How can I help Naomi? Application focuses on the truth and use of God’s word to specific, life related situations.

Storytelling as life application invites the storyteller to reflect on his or her life in light of the scriptures. In other words, putting biblical truth and principles into personal context, and asking the question, “What does this mean to and for me?”^{xxi} Although Ruth and Naomi’s story invites personal application on behalf of another person, scripture also invites us to personally engage scripture in ways that motivates us to change.

In storytelling spaces, sharing narratives as life application can be explored in the following ways. 1) Identify and receive the message of scripture. 2) Ask, “How does this passage apply to me? 3) Identify what action needs to be taken, or what needs to change. 4) Make a plan to change or take action. 5) Tell your story in a way that synthesizes the movement from the message of

scripture to personal life application. Storytelling as life application brings the Bible to life through personal stories in conversation with the biblical text. This practice teaches us that biblical storytelling is an effective way to connect with scripture and live a life of faith.

Storytelling as Active Listening. “Mema tell me a story. I’m listening.” This memory shared by the Actively Listening Griot recalled her desire to listen to her grandmother’s stories. She listened attentively as her grandmother shared parts of herself. Listening included paying attention and taking notice of her grandmother’s words—tone of voice, inflections as well as her facial expressions, body posture and gestures. This demonstrates what active listening looks like.

Storytelling and active listening complement each other because engaging in active listening practices build connections between storytellers and listeners. Active listening is not only hearing the words of another person, but seeking to understand the meaning and intent behind those words. For example, when hearing her grandmother’s stories about how their family struggled during the Great Depression, and how God always made a way, as she grew older she began to understand that she could always count on God.

In story sharing spaces when a storyteller tells a story, I would offer three active listening practices for listeners to explore. They are 1) Be fully present in the moment. Block out distractions. 2) Listen to understand rather than to respond. Build your empathy muscles. 3) Withhold judgment and advice. Extend grace. These practices are beneficial for the storyteller and listeners. The storyteller is more likely to feel heard and valued and listeners are fully engaged and are immersed in the storytelling experience.

Depending on the storytelling context, active listening could also include asking “open ended” questions for further exploration. Questions emerge out of the life events of the storytelling community. For example, when listening to her grandmother’s stories, the Actively Listening Griot

had questions about “What does it mean for God to make a way?” She continued to listen to story after story about God providing something her family needed at that moment. For instance, God made sure that the food “stretched” for the family. Everyone had something to eat, and no one went to bed hungry. As she grew older, she was able to connect this story with Jesus feeding the five thousand. Within this storytelling context, active listening served as an opportunity for theological inquiry. This storytelling practice teaches us that attentive listening is a necessary component of being present in the moment.

Storytelling as Sermonic Expression. “Discerning what the people need is critical. I enter into storytelling with the deep guiding question, “What is it the people need?” Telling stories and being “real” helps people to embrace themselves in ways they hadn’t before.”^{xxii} This Sermonically Expressing Griot preaches the stories of biblical women through a womanist hermeneutical lens. “A womanist hermeneutical lens incorporates womanist theology and womanist biblical interpretation, informed by Black women’s experiences of struggle, resistance to oppression, survival and community.”^{xxiii}

Storytelling in this manner flips the biblical text and turns patriarchy upside down. Telling the stories of biblical women and presenting them as resourceful, courageous, ingenious and exhibiting behaviors and actions that challenge and subvert patriarchal systems speak of liberation.^{xxiv} Storytelling as womanist sermonic expression invites a deep dive into scripture, womanist theology, hermeneutics, and life application. It approaches the biblical text, the stories and experiences of Black women in ways that are responsible, by learning more than what’s on the surface. It requires in depth exegesis of the biblical text through a lens of liberation.

Storytelling as sermonic expression, tells stories honestly and authentically. It invites “Talk Back to the Text,” where the storyteller/preacher leads the gathered community in conversations

around the text after the sermon. “Talk Back” invites reflective and contemplative listening as well as a time of inquiry. It calls for serious introspection and thoughtful communal examination of “God’s Word,” through the tenets of womanism. Storytelling as “womanist” sermonic expression includes healing and wholeness for all people.^{xxv} This practice teaches us that Black women’s truth in conversation with the biblical text invites critical thinking and expression.

Storytelling as Lived Experience. “It’s hard to talk about what you have little experience with. I cannot tell you about the experience of being a biological mother, because I have never given birth, but I have “mothered” many children.”^{xxvi} Giving birth and nurturing are two different things, but both are characteristic of mothering. Storytelling as lived experience cites that one’s life experiences matter in storytelling.

One can tell about the experiences of others, but sharing a testimony about a lived experience is of great significance. Telling stories about other people’s experiences is inspiring, especially when sharing the lived experiences of Black women. For the Griot whose stories yield to lived experience, she shares her perspectives of the stories of freedom, struggle, challenges, dreams fulfilled, dreams deferred, and of overcoming that are both life giving and death dealing. Life giving because they encourage, motivate, sustain, lift up, build resilience and inspire hope. The stories can be death dealing because of the unfortunate circumstances of life—oppression, racism, abuse, chronic/terminal illness, and untimely death. Nevertheless, lived experiences point to the human condition.

Storytelling as lived experience points to the reality that stories are a universal part of every culture around the world. Expressing lived experiences authenticates a story, and real people shape the telling of that narrative which leads to human connection. Lived experience taps into knowledge that people have gained from their experiences and choices in life. As previously

mentioned, biological motherhood may not be a reality for some women, but nurturing children as one's own is.

The griot whose story yields to lived experience, cites that sharing lived experiences reflect diversity. A diversity of stories, voices, perspectives, and opportunities to learn about others. When telling stories about lived experiences, it is encouraged to reflect on the following questions: 1) What has happened or is happening in my life that I would like to share? 2) What is the bigger story that surrounds my personal story? 3) How might my story connect with the stories of others? 4) Why is my story important and of worth and value? 5) How do I communicate my story in a way that is helpful to others? Storytelling as lived experience is an integral way to share life with others. Lived experiences in storytelling bring depth to the narrative moment. Storytelling as lived experience teaches us that our narratives connect us as humankind.

Storytelling as a Teachable Moment. A teachable moment is any time that a teacher points to a situation that connects with what's going on in the present, or what the student has seen, heard or experienced. The Griot of Teachable Moments identifies this as the story behind the story. Teachable moments facilitating understanding. For example, when telling a story about resilience or the ability to withstand or recover quickly from difficulties, the griot introduced a story about Civil Rights Activist Betty Shabazz and how she survived and thrived after the death of her husband Malcolm X. As she prepared to tell the story, she asked her students to consider the following questions: 1) What are some hardships Betty faced? 2) What are some hardships you have or are facing? 3) Name a tool that keeps you resilient? She then shared the story in great detail, naming hardships and ways that Betty survived. The teachable moments of resilience manifested as the students were able to see themselves as survivors based on their life experiences.

Storytelling as a teachable moment facilitates a clear illustration of the principles to be highlighted. Making the message clear draws connections between the story and the point you are trying to convey. If the teachable moment does not match the concept or idea or the story, it might be best to omit it. Ask, what is the principle linked to in the story? How can you tell the story in a way that listeners can grasp what you are trying to communicate?

The Griot of Teachable Moments, uses the stories from African American history and culture as a resource for exploring moments that teach. She says, “sharing the teachable moments from the ancestors is how I honor them. When telling stories, I ask myself, what ancestral lessons can I draw from? How can I share with my students what they have taught me? I don’t know what I would do without the legacy of my ancestors.”^{xxvii} In storytelling spaces, engaging in teachable moments gives the opportunity to draw on multiple illustrations from a variety of contexts and viewpoints. This practice teaches us to discern and listen for thoughts and ideas that encourage teaching and learning.

Storytelling as Recalling Your Own Story. “It signals a recalling of what has happened, a retelling of the past. Recalling events from the past can be painful, but there is healing in the storytelling, as a person confronts it and speaks it,”^{xxviii} this Griot shares passionately. Storytelling in this way is an opportunity to explore deep convictions and beliefs about yourself, your interactions with others, which in turn affects how you view yourself and your approach to telling your story.

One area in which this griot highlights recalling your own story is sharing the “call story”, or one’s first awareness that a form of ministry would be your life’s work.^{xxix} Edward Wimberly explains that reconnecting to an original call facilitates our revisioning of how God has acted/acts in our lives.^{xxx} Revisiting the call not only helps us to remember God’s action in our lives, but

gives us hope to keep on keeping on. She shares the following principles: 1) Be centered on the one who calls. 2) Be conscious of the road ahead. 3) Be courageous in the line of fire. 4) Be committed to make a difference.^{xxxix} In the process of recalling your “call story” consider the beliefs and convictions you hold about yourself, your relationships with others and your roles in life as you share this significant part of who you are. The “call” represents the overarching framework in a person’s life that gives them meaning. It provides a picture of everything a person does in life. Also called “our purpose” or the reason why we have been born. The “call” informs what a person does in ministry. It is a pathway to fulfilling “the call.” Storytelling as recalling your own story necessitates returning to one’s call periodically to examine where you are in life and evaluate your life’s journey. The practice of recalling your story teaches that spiritual renewal is integral to healing and wholeness.

Storytelling as Rap. Rap music is popular among young people of various racial and ethnic backgrounds. It is also loved by those who remember its inception fifty years ago in the Bronx, New York when Hip-Hop culture was introduced to the world. Since then, Hip-Hop has evolved greatly in major ways beyond its origins in the Blues, Jamaican Toasting and Jazz cultures. There are multiple subgenres of Hip-Hop music including Bounce, Gangsta, Crunk, Mumble, Hyphy, and Christian rap. Christian rap is the focus of storytelling as rap.

The Rapping Griot reimagines the biblical text through lyrical expression. Rap, also known as emceeing, is one of the primary artistic elements of Hip-Hop culture. For the sake of biblical engagement in storytelling spaces, rap encourages storytellers to connect their stories with the biblical narrative as a means of witnessing God’s presence, action, and engagement in their lives. By merging their stories with the biblical text storytellers make meaning, express their feelings

and connect to their faith. This connection between their lives and the biblical story is what Anne Wimberly calls storylinking.^{xxxii}

Storylinking is a model of African American Christian education connected to slavery where storytelling serves as a process of pairing one's lived experience with the biblical narrative. This model offers opportunities for reflecting on one's life story, also called the everyday story and linking that story with a faith story from scripture. Then conveying those lyrical messages through rap. Through this work, storytellers engage in deep, insightful, meaning making "God Talk" as biblical and personal narratives are expressed through rap. This intersection forges connections with what was read in scripture and paired with experience through lyrical expression.

Storytelling as rap inspires reimagination in narrative spaces. The rapping griot has innovatively created "7 Last Bars," a Good Friday worship experience connecting the biblical texts traditionally preached as the Seven Last Words of Christ. She recruited rappers and built her production around her own agency, creativity, and freedom. In her words, "the inspiration came through. Each lyricist came through. The last lyricist was on fire, and he set the stage for us to take communion."^{xxxiii} As witnessed through the 7 Last Bars, storytelling as rap has a major impact. This practice teaches us that biblical stories and personal stories work together to create expressions that change the world.

Storytelling as Sacred Space. "Sacred space is a metaphor for telling your personal narrative. It includes intentionally receiving from God the power and grace for abundant living, as well as being aware of and witnessing the times in life that are scarce and lacking. This sacred space comes with knowing that you are who God says you are,"^{xxxiv} this Griot explained.

Storytelling as Sacred Space is helpful for personal formation and spiritual growth. She continued, "Stories are the expressed experiences of the sacred self. A space that is co-created with

God and with others. Deconstruction and reconstruction, reinterpreting, restructuring, and refraining comprise this idea of telling your personal story.”^{xxxv} Storytelling as sacred space invites a context for deep communication, deep listening and attention. When a storyteller speaks as a person of sacred space, it promotes respect and reverence that honors the storyteller’s dignity.

Celeste Deschryver Mueller shares a process of writing and sharing personal narratives. The process includes 1) Accessing Experience (Remembering). Enter into a quiet space. Choose a single moment/memory to remember. Recall as many details about that moment as possible. 2) Write that memory as a non-judgmental story. Write out the experience word for word. Do not explain or justify the events. Continue to maintain a quiet space. 3) Sharing and Listening. Read the stories to each other. Honor the experiences that are shared with silence rather than comments.* The process of preparing to share the personal narrative is communal and values the work of all engaged. Storytelling as Sacred Space creates space for God’s transforming presence and work.^{xxxvi} This practice teaches that our stories are sacred and worth value.

Conclusion

The Modern Day Griots have expounded upon eleven storytelling practices that are significant to flourishing and healing within teaching and learning contexts. Their insights speak of the power of storytelling to inspire, to create meaning, to deepen identity, to facilitate a sense of purpose and belonging, and to connect us to realities that are richer and deeper than our own. These collective encounters communicate that storytelling is the essence of being human. Through our stories, humanity is woven into a tapestry that reflects the traditional African phrase, “Ubuntu”, “I am because we are.” In addition to linking us together, storytelling also heals us. Part Two of this project will explore the connection between storytelling and healing.

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