Storytelling in the CBI classroom: pedagogy, practice, and theory

Mamoru Takahashi and Stephen Shucart

Introduction

From casual conversation to self-talking, we use language to organize our thoughts. Storytelling is an indispensable agent for this process of organization. One of the benefits of storytelling is that storytellers understand themselves better through the act of telling a story. Storytelling catalyzes mental growth.

In *Outliers* written by Malcolm Gladwell, there is an interesting story about a baby who kept talking to herself after she went to bed. Her name was Emily and her parents were university professors. A group of psychologists became interested in Emily and began to record her monologue. They published the results as a book: *Narrative from the Crib*. The book elucidates why people talk to themselves.

One of the articles in that book was written by Harvard University psychologist Jerome Bruner. In the article, Bruner presents the idea of John Dewey: "Language is a vehicle by which we bring order into our thoughts about things." Bruner also writes about the similar views of C. S. Peirce, Humbolt, Whorf, and Vygotsky.

Paraphrasing Vygotsky, Bruner says, "she (Emily) can first borrow the skills of the language by having an adult for a partner in dialogue, and then finally appropriate them through internalization."(p.74) In other words, the reason a young child talks to herself is to combine her thought with her language. Language is the vehicle of thought. That's why we talk to ourselves. We are sorting our thought by talking to ourselves. We brood, we recall, we plan by talking to ourselves. And talking to ourselves is the same as telling stories.

In the same book, Jerome Bruner refers to such people as Russian mythologist Vladimir Propp and French formalist critique Tvetan Todovov. This fact tells us that Bruner had realized the causal links between different human activities such as self-talking, casual storytelling, and published myths and folktales.

Some examples of storytelling research

We recognize that the role of storytelling in ESL/EFL is not to prove general assertions, but rather to give various individual examples and present possible cases for future use in the classrooms. We would like to summarize the results of the study in storytelling with the following examples.

The first example of storytelling is from the field of psychology. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) is a record of psychoanalytic research that is based on a method they call narrative inquiry. Even though what they

did was essentially listening to the stories of examinees and writing research papers, they did this not through observation from afar, but rather through spending days with their examinees. They researched or recreated the scattered experiences of their examinees and transformed them into narratives. They not only used the stories told by the examinees, but also letters and photographs. They clearly show us how narratives can be used for psychoanalytic research and treatment.

Jones (2001, 2002) provides a good sample of classroom activities that include storytelling. He shows us how to teach storytelling skills by using a cartoon story and its transcript (2001) and how to let individuals talk about themselves by using "used to" and "would".

Maguire (1998) shows the pleasure and meaningfulness of storytelling from the storyteller's viewpoint. Besides, he gives us concrete ways to employ the practice of storytelling at the end of each chapter. For example, he says that we should recall people, places, events, sounds, and smells. In another section, he says that we should jot down images instead of taking notes while we are "loafing".

Lipman (1999) guides us through his experiences as a storyteller. His advice includes noticing the posture of the speaker, different kinds of voices, and practice in telling informal stories. Breaking down the components of good storytelling, Lipman elucidates four categories: 1. Transferring images (a. spoken words, b. images), 2. Story (a. meaning, b. organization), 3. Listener (a. receiver, b. process, c. effect), 4. Speaker (a. body, b. voice, c. emotion, d. helper). Lipman says that we should actually use our body and voice, check our emotions, and be conscious of what we would like to communicate.

Robinson (2000) provides practical techniques that are based on ideas from Joseph Campbell's concept of "The Hero's Journey"(1949). One of his practical ideas is that we should cut and paste newspaper clippings of the news stories in which people overcome adversity. He says that it is important for us to tell stories to our family members. Storytelling is everywhere. Professional storytellers tell stories, professional writers write stories, psychologists use stories as a means of therapy, and language teachers use stories to teaching languages.

More detailed pedagogical example

Stories (2000), written by Ruth Wajnryb, contains forty-two language activities. "Complications and resolutions", the third activity in the book, is based on the ideas of Eggins and Slade(1997). According to Eggins and Slade, a narrative has a typical form of development. Unlike anecdote, exemplum, and recount, a narrative has a complication and its resolution. A typical narrative has three parts: beginning, middle, and end. The beginning has two parts: abstract and orientation. The middle has two parts: complication and evaluation. The end has two parts: resolution and coda. The eight steps are as in the table 1.

Table 1

Abstract: a summary of the story.
Orientation: place, time, and situation.
Comprehension: the events of crisis.
Evaluation: the narrator's attitude.
Resolution: how the crisis was resolved.
Coda: the finale.

After teaching these steps for telling narrative stories, some sample narratives should be taught to the students, and then the students are left to tell their own narratives to the other students.

In the classroom of *The Wizard of OZ*

One of the authors of this article didn't really recognize the true meaning of awareness of problems (問題意識) until recently. It was by accident that he found the meaning of the words while he was reading a college brochure for high school students written in Japanese. He saw a few lines that described their ideal students. The first line was written about those who are sharply aware of problems, in other words *surudoi mondai ishiki no aru seito* (鋭い問題意識のある生徒). In a sense, the word "problems" is so ambiguous that it's hard to distinguish its meaning instantly in Japanese. *Mondai* (問題) means both questions and problems. So he spent years without really distinguishing the dual meaning of the word *mondai* (問題). To be aware of a problem is to be aware of, for example, a rotten part of an apple. Once we are aware of which part needs to be cut off, we are able to clean the apple and eat it.

Identifying problems and finding solutions are the most important study skills for students who will become scientists or engineers. He asked them, "What will happen if a child must leave home before she is grown up?" (This is a question concerning to the heroine of *The Wizard of OZ.*) Students must imagine the problems that an adolescent will face when she leaves home. His students actually recognize many problems in their lives, but the problems don't stay in their minds. Raising a problem to awareness means you actually verbalize how the problem started, why it is a problem, and how it can be solved. Awareness makes us verbalize the problem we have, and then contextualize the problem in a series of events. And a series of events are nothing more than a narrative. Through the act of telling a narrative, storytellers can understand their problems much better.

He chose the film *The Wizard of OZ* and created teaching materials for it because the film is the story of a transition from childhood to adulthood.

He showed the film for about ten minutes in each class and asked his students to take notes while they watched the film. Then they discussed the main points of the narrative. He told them to pay attention to who, where, when, what kind of problem, and how it was solved. The aim of this activity was to teach them the problem-solution sequence.

In the other half of the class, his students wrote original stories and told the stories to their classmates. They wrote about their problems or a crisis in their lives as is seen in *The Wizard of OZ*. Before they wrote their own experiences, he used an activity entitled: "Complication and Resolution" to teach them the basic patterns of stories. In this activity, students match the six steps of a typical narrative with jumbled paragraphs. They then find paragraphs that correspond to the six steps: *abstract, orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution, and coda.*

After learning the six steps of a narrative, students were told to write an original story. Then they read their classmate's stories and commented on them. After completing their stories, they were asked to practice oral storytelling, and told their stories to the whole class. In conclusion, most of his students experienced storytelling for the first time and they became confident in telling a story in English.

Storytelling and the origin of the Monomyth

> "It would not be too much to say that myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation."

Joseph Campbell (p.1, 1949)

Mythologist Joseph Campbell, in his groundbreaking study of comparative mythology, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, was one of the first western scholars to recognize the underlying universality pattern that permeates all human mythology. He called this pattern the Monomyth, and it is arguably the archetype for all of the heroic stories ever told. In this portion of our paper, we will first present a short synopsis of the monomyth, then discuss its link to the origin of human language. Next we will follow the clew like Theseus in the labyrinth of the Minotaur, to its ultimate source - the premise of this section of the paper - that the monomyth is actually a vestigial memory of the hero's journey of the primordial ape that eventually evolved into modern *Homo sapiens*. Finally, we'll make a brief mention of how the story might continue through the Singularity and into the realm of the post-human.

The Monomyth and the origin of language

Most primitive societies have a Rite of Passage, and Campbell called this the nuclear unit of the monomyth (Campbell, 1949). Thus the Hero's Journey can be reduced to three primary sections: *Departure - Initiation - Return*. In fact, Joseph Campbell, in his definitive book: *Hero With a Thousand Faces* not only had three chapters with those titles, but each chapter was subdivided into five or six parts. Later in this paper we will show how closely this format conforms to the latest research on hominid evolution.

The theme of this paper is how to use storytelling for second language acquisition, and this part of our paper is meant to show why it is such a powerful tool. Some scientists even go so far as to cite narrative and storytelling as the reason humans evolved the capacity for language in the first place. Psychologist Merlin Donald, in his book *Origins of the Modern Mind*, offers this definition: " ...mythical thought might be regarded as a unified, collectively held system of explanatory and regulatory metaphors." (Donald, p.214, 1991)

He goes on to state:

> "...language was first and foremost a social device... it's function was evidently tied to the development of integrative thought - to the grand unifying synthesis of formally disconnected, time-bound snippets of information… The myth is the prototypical, fundamental, integrative mind tool… The pre-eminence of myth in early human society is testimony that humans were using language for a totally new kind of integrative thought. Therefore, the possibility must be entertained that the primary human adaptation was not language qua language but rather integrative mythical, thought. Modern humans developed language in response to pressure to improve their conceptual apparatus, not vice versa."

> (Donald, p. 215, 1991)

Like all good genre mystery stories, it is time to pause for a recap of the clues so far (the origin of the word "clew" is that ball of string Theseus used to find his way out of the aforementioned labyrinth). All over the world, hero myths follow a single archetypical pattern, thus they must all have a common origin, which points to the logical conclusion that the proto-myth must have traveled with the earliest humans to migrate from Africa between 90,000 and 60,000 years ago. Human language quite possibly evolved in order to tell stories, or myths, thus the

myths themselves are pre-existing arche-types that pre-date the origin of complex thought and language, sometime between 125,000 to 60,000 years ago. The question to ask is what archetypical events happened to the hominid species in Africa, and the obvious answer is human evolution.

British scientist Roger Lewin provided the next piece of the puzzle in his book *Human Evolution* (2005). In the chapter entitled "Human evolution as narrative" he states: "First, in seeking to explain human origins, paleoanthropology is apparently faced with a sequence of events through time that transforms apes into humans. The description of such a sequence falls naturally into narrative form." (Lewin, 2005). He goes on to mention the four key events in human evolution: **bipedality** (upright walking), the origin of **terrestrially** (coming to the ground from trees, **encephalization** (brain expansion in relation to body size), and **culture** (civilization). The title of that chapter came from a 1984 paper published in the journal American Scientist by Boston University anthropologist Misia Landau. In that paper she asks the question: "Have myths and folktales influenced our interpretations of the evolutionary past?" (Landau,1984). Even though the premise of her paper was to accuse early paleoanthropologists of subconsciously trying to fit the facts of human evolution into an anthropocentric interpretation of the narrative structure of the Hero's Journey, it was the first indication of the close correspondence between the stages of human evolution and Campbell's Monomyth.

Figure 1 Human evolution and the Monomyth - from (Lewin, 2005)
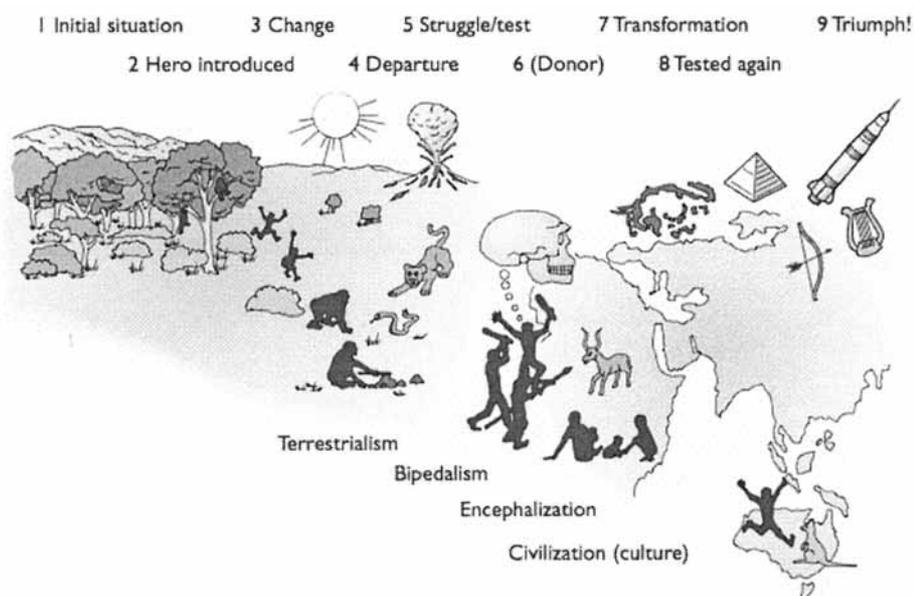
The studies of Complexity Science, non-linear emergent behavior, and the evolution of human language gives us an insight - what if the reverse was true? What if the stages of evolution provided the archetype for the Monomyth, and became the self-similar, self-referential catalyst for complex thought and the origin of language? After researching the multiple threads of hominid evolution, we are able to map it to the archetypical categories of Campbell's Monomyth and come up with the following table. First, a brief summary of what happened before humans separated from their closest primate ancestors;15 million years

ago *Hominidae* (great apes) speciated from the gibbon (lesser apes); 13 millions years ago they speciated from the ancestors of the orangutan; and 10 million years ago

Hominini speciated from the ancestors of the gorillas. So, by the time our story begins, the only great ape *hominina* shared an ancestor with was the chimpanzee.

Table 2

Three primary sections of the Hero's Journey and an additional section
Section 1: Departure

1. Ordinary World - Initial Conditions	**7 million years** ago - Hominina speciates from the ancestors of chimpanzees. Both have a larynx that repositions during the first two years - a precursor of speech.
2. Call to Adventure - The Hero!	**4.4 million years ago** - *Ardipithecus*; an early hominin genus, arboreal, yet proto-**Bipedal.**
3. Refusal of the Call	**4.4-3.6 million years ago** -*Ardipithecus*; *A. ramidus* - though proto-**BIPEDAL,** with feet still adapted for grasping rather than walking long distances, they remained arboreal and refused the call to become **Terrestrial**
4. Crossing the Threshold	**3.6 million years ago** - *Australopithicus afarensis*; "Lucy" - left footprints on volcanic ash in Laetoli, Kenya. They leave the trees for the savanna and became Terrestrial.
5. Belly of the Whale	**3-2 million years ago** -*Astralopithecines* (*a Hominina subtribe*) develop full **Bipedalism**, and lose body hair - a major change in appearance.

Section 2: Initiation

6. Road of Trials	**2.5 million years ago** - *Homo habilis*; competes with other Astralopithecines, beginning of **Encephalization** allows creation of the first stone tools.
7. Approach the Innermost Cave	**1.8 million - 700,000 years old** - *Homo erectus:* **Encephalization** -- brain size 74% of modern man. Control of fire; more advanced cutting tools to hunt big game. First 'Out of Africa' migration.

8. Ordeal	**516,000 - 355,000 years old** - *Homo heidelbergensis, a Homo erectus* sub-species, the common genetic ancestor of Neanderthal and humans with braincase 93% the size of Homo sapiens. Competes with other variants of *Homo erectus*.
9. Reward	**195,000 - 160,000 years ago** - *Homo sapiens evolves from Homo heidelbergensis.* By 160,000 years ago starts to exhibit first signs of behavioral modernity, **Culture**, i.e. proto-language, the use of red ochre for adornment, and fishing with complex tools.

Section 3:Return

10. The Road Back	**150,000 - 60,000 years ago**. Mitochondrial 'Eve' and Y-chromosomal 'Adam', the ancestors of all modern humans. **Culture** - myths, language and society are carried 'Out of Africa' with the second wave of human migration.
11. Resurrection	**60,000-12,000 year ago** - *Homo sapiens* populate the Old and New Worlds. They out-compete *Homo neanderthalenis*, who go extinct 25,000 years ago.
12. Return with Elixir	**12,000 - Present- Culture**, modern civilization; agriculture, writing, industrialization.

Section 4: The Future?

13. The Singularity	**Present - ???** *Homo Technicus;* Transhumanity merges with machines, dispensing with, and transcending, biological evolution.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can clearly see that storytelling is used in various kinds of disciplines. In fact, Wajnryb (2000) says, "stories are told on TV, in the novels, films, nonfiction, management literature, self-help writing, psychology, public speaking, and qualitative research". Many of the classic movies have been based on the Hero's Journey. From The *Wizard of OZ*, to *The Godfather, Star Wars, Titanic*, and *Pulp Fiction*, popular culture echoes of the Monomyth reverberate in our public consciousness (Vogler, 1998). The first part of this paper showed how storytelling can be a powerful tool for second language acquisition, and the second half explained the evolutionary back story, speculating that the archetypes underlying the Hero's Journey

are actually vestigial memories of our evolutionary journey towards consciousness, the modern mind, and the origin of language itself. The narrative does not end with us; today we are on the cusp of transformation to a new level of consciousness. Because the future is non-linear and emergent, no one can accurately predict what is to come. But the tools used in the CALL Lab, like the social constructive Web 2.0 teaching software MOODLE that can be custom-tailored to the high-tech narrative needs, will prepare our students to surf the post-modern cultural shock wave, and smoothly make the transition to a post-human world. As technologist Ray Kurzweil puts it in the title of his book (Kurzweil, 2005), "*The Singularity is Near!*"

References

Campbell, J. (2008). *The hero with a thousand faces.* Novato, California: New World Library. (Original work published in 1949).

Clandinin, D.J. and Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: experience and story in qualitative research.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Donald, M. (1991). *Origins of the modern mind.* Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Eggins, S. and Slade, D. (1997). *Analysing casual conversation.* London: Equinox.

Gladwell, M. (2008). *Outliers: The story of success.* New York: Little, Brown and Company.

Jones, R. E. (2001). A consciousness-raising approach to the teaching of conversational storytelling skills. *English Language Teacher Journal*, 55 (2), 155-163.

Jones, R. E. (2002). We used to do this and we'd also do that: A discourse pattern for teaching the reminiscence story. *The Language Teacher*, 26, 2.

Kurzweil, R. (2005) *The singularity is near.* New York: Penguin Books

Landau, M. (1984). Human evolution as narrative. *American Scientist*, 72:262-268.

Lewin, R. (2005). *Human evolution.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Lipman, D. (1999). *Improving your storytelling.* Atlanta: August Publishing.

Maguire, J. (1998). *The power of personal storytelling.* New York: Penguin Putnam.

Nelson, K. (Ed.). (1989). *Narratives from the crib.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Robinson, G. J. (2000). *Did I ever tell you about the time...* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Swain, M. (2006) Languaging, agency, and collaboration in advanced second language proficiency. In H. Byrnes (Ed.), *Advanced language learning: The contribution of Halliday and Vygotsky* (pp.95-108). London: Continuum.

Vogler, C. (1998). *The writer's journey: Mythic structure for writers.* Studio City: Michael Wiese Productions.

Wajnryb, R. (2003). *Stories: Narrative activities for the language classroom.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.