

A Social Work Journey: Three Paths, One Story

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Field Education Specialist

Objective: Ways storytelling impacts learning and enhances cultural competence from a field education specialist perspective.

- **CONNECTION:** Storytelling has impacted the way I connect with students in my role as a field specialist. Stories unify us and allow us to feel seen, heard, and understood. We each have our stories and different experiences that lead us to the field of social work. "Our lives are ceaselessly intertwined with a narrative, with the stories we tell and hear told, those we dream or imagine or would like to tell, all of which are reworked in the story of our own lives that we narrate to ourselves." (White & Epstein, 1990).
- **EMPATHY:** The Professional Learning Community afforded me the opportunity to explore the impacts of storytelling on my role as a field education specialist. Storytelling has been an established communication method and tool across many countries, cultures, and races (Brett, 2019) This valuable communication tool can provide support, empathy, trust and understanding to the students I work with on a daily basis. Fostering open communication between the students and field specialist by sharing personal field experiences and field placement stories and encouraging feedback, this deepens trust and empathy. Empathizing with one another allows for development of rapport, compassion, and trust. This humanizes the interactions that take place electronically and in-person.
- **INSPIRES ACTION AND CHANGE:** Sharing stories and the diversity of human experiences engages people emotionally, cognitively, and morally. It can create a sense of belonging, identity, ownership, and dialogue that challenges stereotypes and assumptions and stimulate critical thinking and conversations that empower students telling their stories and others listening; to take action and be the change they would like to see in the world.

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Academic Advisor

Objective: Ways storytelling impacts learning and enhances cultural competence from an academic advising perspective.

- In academic advising, you develop a deep understanding of students' backgrounds, goals, and challenges. Storytelling helps you empathize with their experiences, fostering a supportive and empathetic advising environment.
- As an academic advisor, you respect and value the diverse narratives and viewpoints of students. Storytelling allows you to honor and acknowledge the unique stories and perspectives of each student, creating a more inclusive advising experience.
- Academic advisors help students navigate challenges and achieve their goals by providing guidance and support throughout their academic journey. Storytelling plays a crucial role in this process, as it highlights stories of resilience and growth. By sharing these narratives, advisors inspire students to persevere through obstacles and setbacks, showing them that overcoming challenges is possible. These stories empower students to realize their full potential and believe in their ability to succeed. Additionally, through academic advising, students are empowered to advocate for themselves academically and professionally. Storytelling encourages students to articulate their goals, challenges, and needs, fostering self-awareness and confidence. By sharing their own stories and experiences, students learn to advocate for the resources and support necessary to achieve their academic and career aspirations, ultimately becoming active participants in their own success.

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Assistant Professor of Practice

Objective: Ways storytelling impacts learning and enhances cultural competence from a faculty perspective.

- As an Assistant Professor of Practice for the School of Social Work, I have witnessed the significant impact of storytelling on learning and cultural competence. Storytelling promotes cultural understanding and empathy, connecting my students with a diversity of cultural backgrounds and perspectives. Through the stories shared in our classroom, students gain a deeper appreciation of the diverse cultures, traditions, and values that shape our world (Zort et al., 2023).
- I have observed firsthand how storytelling encourages the exploration and sharing of cultural values and heritage. When students listen to or share stories that encompass the breadth of cultural practices, beliefs, and historical events, it ignites a curiosity and respect for the significance these elements hold in different communities (Penalba et al., 2020). By incorporating cultural elements into our storytelling, we, as educators, create a vibrant learning environment prompting students to introspect about their own cultural identities and broaden their understanding of others' cultural heritages.
- I understand that storytelling is a crucial tool in tackling societal challenges and promoting social justice. Integrating themes of social responsibility, equity, and inclusion, it enables students to critically examine societal norms and challenge stereotypes (Harris, 2023). This approach enhances their understanding of complex social issues and cultural dynamics, fostering a deep sense of social awareness and a commitment to advocate for change. Through storytelling, we not only educate but also prepare our students to be empathetic leaders and agents of change in their communities.

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References & Resources



