Through accessible language and candid discussions, *Storytelling for Social Justice* explores the stories we tell ourselves and each other about race and racism in our society. Making sense of the racial constructions expressed through the language and images we encounter every day, this book provides strategies for developing a more critical understanding of how racism operates culturally and institutionally in our society. Using the arts in general, and storytelling in particular, the book examines ways to teach and learn about race by creating counter-storytelling communities that can promote more critical and thoughtful dialogue about racism and the remedies necessary to dismantle it in our institutions and interactions. Illustrated throughout with examples drawn from contemporary movements for change, high school and college classrooms, community building and professional development programs, the book provides tools for examining racism as well as other issues of social justice. For every facilitator and educator who has struggled with how to get the conversation on race going or who has suffered through silences and antagonism, the innovative model presented in this book offers a practical and critical framework for thinking about and acting on stories about racism and other forms of injustice.

This new edition includes:

- Social science examples, in addition to the arts, for elucidating the storytelling model;
- Short essays by users that illustrate some of the ways the storytelling model has been used in teaching, training, community building and activism;
- Updated examples, references and resources.

Lee Anne Bell is Professor Emerita and The Barbara Silver Horowitz Director of Education at Barnard College, Columbia University.
The Teaching/Learning Social Justice Series

Edited by Lee Anne Bell
Barnard College, Columbia University

The Teaching/Learning Social Justice Series explores issues of social justice—diversity, equality, democracy, and fairness—in classrooms and communities. “Teaching/learning” connotes the essential connections between theory and practice that books in this series seek to illuminate. Central are the stories and lived experiences of people who strive both to critically analyze and challenge oppressive relationships and institutions, and to imagine and create more just and inclusive alternatives.

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Storytelling for Social Justice
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Lee Anne Bell

For more information, please visit: www.routledge.com/Teaching-Learning-Social-Justice/book-series/SE1023
I dedicate this edition to all who dream of a better world where issues of justice drive our policies and actions toward each other and toward the living environment that sustains us all. I especially want to recognize young people whose emerging/transforming stories keep us moving toward the social and environmental justice on which our survival as a planet depends.
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This second edition of *Storytelling for Social Justice* has been enriched by the ideas, energy and creativity of so many people in my personal and professional life. My own experiences with using the model for teaching and training continue to show me its power as an educational and organizing tool. Hearing the stories of how others have used the model to address racism and other forms of injustice in their own teaching, training and activism has been affirming and inspiring. I am especially grateful to the eight people who wrote the short essays included in this edition that illustrate how they have adapted and used the model in a variety of contexts. I hope their examples generate further creative uses of the model.

I am also deeply appreciative of the anonymous responses from a survey of users and the detailed feedback from three reviewers about how they use the model, its strengths and their suggestions for improvement. I have taken this feedback seriously in revising this new edition.

**Acknowledgements From First Edition**

The Storytelling Project Model at the heart of the project described here took shape during 2004–2005 through the collaborative work of an amazing creative team of artists, public school teachers, scholars and Barnard/Columbia undergraduates: Rosemarie Roberts, Roger Bonair-Agard, Thea Abu El-Haj, Dipti Desai, Kayhan Irani, Uraline Septembre Hager, Christina Glover, Anthony Asaro, Patricia Wagner, Zoe Duskin, Vicki Cuellar and Leticia Dobzinski. Our work together was one of the high points of my professional life. I especially want to honor the contributions of Rosemarie Roberts, who co-led
the Storytelling Project with me as a post-doctoral fellow at Barnard from 2004 to 2007. Her insight, passion, commitment and wisdom were a constant source of inspiration throughout the three years we worked together.

Four Barnard/Columbia undergraduates worked with us in 2005–2006 to conduct research on the Storytelling Project Curriculum in two high school classrooms: Svati Lelyveld, Brett Murphy, Vanessa D’Egidio and Ebonie Smith. Their enthusiasm for the project and commitment to the high school youth with whom we worked were invaluable. I am grateful to the students, teachers and administrators in the small high school where we conducted our research for their responsiveness to this experiment and for the many insights they shared as we worked through the curriculum together.

This project would not have been possible without Marco Stoeffel and the Third Millennium Foundation, who provided financial support and encouraged us to experiment and take risks. The International Center for Tolerance Education offered a spacious and inviting setting for our work as a creative team and for the summer institute for teachers where we first tested out the model.

A Visiting Research position at Vassar College in 2008 enabled me to work in a majestic library surrounded by beautiful grounds to walk when I needed a break from the world in my head. I am especially grateful to Chris Bjork and Chris Roellke, who welcomed me to Vassar and provided friendship and support during my time there.

I could not have completed this book without the patience and support of my wonderful Barnard colleagues and a sabbatical that afforded essential time to immerse myself in the project and complete the manuscript. In particular, María S.Rivera and Lisa Edstrom have been unwavering in their support and I feel blessed to work with them on a daily basis.

At various times I was sustained by conversation with friends and colleagues who provided encouragement and a sounding board for my ideas: Maurianne Adams, Dipti Desai, Markie Hancock, Kayhan Irani, Jackie Irvine, Linda Marchesani, Ina Mitchell, Celia Oyler, Kathy Phillips and Ximena Zuniga. Kathy Phillips, in particular, read every word and offered insights and perspective from her decades of work as an educator and community activist. The book is immeasurably enriched by her close reading and detailed feedback.

Catherine Bernard, my superb editor at Routledge, was responsive and supportive throughout the project even as her second child and the completion of this book arrived at the same time!

I am indebted to the three anonymous readers who provided thoughtful, critical feedback on earlier drafts. Their comments pushed my thinking further and helped me keep my audience clearly before me as I wrote and revised.

I am lucky to participate in an embracing community of friends who are always available for encouragement, laughter, and welcome diversions. They are too many to name but please know that I love you all. Also, thank you,
Ami, for helping me to learn to stay in the present moment and, Anna, for helping me to believe in my own voice.

Finally, I am so deeply grateful to Ravi, who read draft after draft, cooked nourishing meals, dragged me out for walks and generally propped me up whenever my confidence and energy flagged. Your support and love make everything possible. I promise normal life can now resume!
How we talk about race matters. It provides a roadmap for tracing how people make sense of social reality, helping us see where we connect with and where we differ from others in our reading of the world, and it defines the remedies that will be considered appropriate and necessary. While talk in and of itself can’t dismantle racism, a critical analysis of how we talk about racism as a society and as members of differently positioned racial groups, provides a way for us to see ourselves and others more clearly, understand the racial system we have inherited, recognize the different roles played by blacks, whites and other racial groups in this history, and come to grips with the urgent work still to be done to dismantle racism and live up to the promises of equality and democracy in our national rhetoric and governing documents.

*Storytelling for Social Justice* focuses on race talk and the stories we tell ourselves and others about race and racism in our society. The book presents a conceptual and pedagogical model for teaching about race and racism through examining the kinds of stories we tell and for developing alternative stories that account for history, power, and systemic normalizing patterns that justify inequality. The Storytelling Project Model (STP) analyzes racism through four story types: stock stories, concealed stories, resistance stories and emerging/transforming stories. Using the arts in general, and storytelling in particular, the book examines ways to teach and learn about racism through creating race-conscious counter-storytelling communities that can promote more critical and thoughtful dialogue about racism and the remedies necessary to dismantle it in our institutions and interactions.

When I wrote *Storytelling for Social Justice* almost ten years ago, I was concerned with challenging stock stories that are presented as Truth, posing as seamless narratives that are in fact partial, but are portrayed as the whole story.
To challenge the hegemony of stock stories, I wanted to unearth and honor other stories, historical and contemporary, of and by marginalized communities and social justice activists that relate their knowledge, perspectives and aspirations—stories that are too often omitted from history books and contemporary discussions. I tried to make clear that I was not talking about individual or idiosyncratic stories but rather about broad narratives that echo through the experiences, hopes and desires of those who are left out of mainstream stories that bolster the status quo. These counter-stories—that I call concealed, resistance and emerging/transforming stories—speak to broader truths about social conditions, contribute to a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of racism today, and suggest ways to counter racism and act toward justice. In the first edition, I illustrated such counter-stories in the Philadelphia speech of then presidential candidate Barack Obama, where he articulated the different stories that shape and reflect the divergent experiences of white people and African Americans in the United States. Such counter-storytelling, I argue, seeks to expand understanding by being respectful and inclusive of the lived truths and historical experiences of marginalized groups.

At the time I could not have imagined the situation we find ourselves in today—where the term “alternative facts” has entered the lexicon to justify complete fabrications. The term came into use when Kellyanne Conway, advisor to newly elected president Trump, used the phrase to defend press secretary Sean Spicer’s false statement that the crowds at the Trump inaugural were larger than those at the Obama inaugural, a demonstrable lie that was pointed out at the time by news commentators. “Alternative facts” as used by Conway fits the definition of propaganda. “Propaganda is indifferent to truth and truthfulness, knowledge and understanding; it is a form of strategic communication that uses any means to accomplish its ends” (Walter Cunningham, *The Idea of Propaganda*, 2002). “Alternative facts” are intended to undermine the credibility of legitimate sources of knowledge, foreclose critical engagement and honest debate, and ultimately undermine trust in the democratic process.

The above usage of “alternative facts” should not be confused with the information and perspectives presented in counter-stories. Counter-stories offer an additional set of true facts as an alternative to those currently taken as the full story. While historians, as academics in other fields, constantly debate, expand and revise what is taken as truth, such debates are not made in an “anything goes” manner. They recognize that social processes, including social power, shape how facts are selected and interpreted, often in the interests of the dominant group. They reanalyze what has come before and add new knowledge in order to create a more honest record of the historical experiences of all actors in our society. Often this knowledge-building and critical analysis comes from scholars of color and women who enter the field bringing different experiences, standpoints and analytic frames. They provide a fuller, more rounded picture of social life in the United States aimed at living up to our democratic ideals as a
Introduction to the Second Edition

society. Vigorous debate and discussion, and intellectually honest challenges to received knowledge and powerful interests, are key to this process.

“Alternative facts” as used by Trump and his people are not counter-stories. They are false narratives, fabrications that distort, outright lies that deny history in order to support inequality. They are meant to subvert and confuse, to sow distrust and to foreclose challenges to power and received knowledge. “Alternative facts” are destructive because they pervert language and stifle debate. My use of storytelling to unearth counter-narratives that empower marginalized communities is the very opposite of “alternative facts.”

Counter-storytelling truths are generous, not exclusive. They seek to expand knowledge, to reveal what has been left out, suppressed, misunderstood and ignored in order to build broader understanding of our history as a society and to challenge the country to live up to its ideals. The essence of such truth is not reductive but expansive—seeking to understand the experiences of those at the bottom and margins of society in order to create more inclusive and honest knowledge of our social condition. My hope is that through becoming more aware of our racial narratives, their roots in our history and their role in sustaining institutional patterns of inequality that persist, we can be more receptive to the evidence of racial injustice around us, more thoughtful about remedies required and more urgent in our commitment to work for justice.

Audience

Storytelling for Social Justice is addressed to people who want to challenge racism and other forms of injustice in their institutions, communities and personal lives. While many of the examples in the book focus on young people and teachers in public schools, the ideas in the book can be usefully applied to any institution and community where people gather to understand and challenge racism and other forms of injustice so as to work toward more equitable and inclusive environments.

Educators in K–12 and higher education, for example, use the STP model to develop curriculum and design courses in a range of areas including: composition, research methods, media studies, pedagogical theory and practice, literature, sociology, history, and teacher education. Students in public school and university classrooms learn to use the story types as a framework for analyzing texts and structuring arguments in written papers and projects. One faculty member has used the model to organize a travel course to Montgomery, Alabama, to show how racial history is constructed and given meaning through storytelling. Many K–12 teachers have used the model to develop curriculum and school-wide projects. Community consultants and activists have used the story types as a frame for looking at community histories of racial conflict and resistance to develop strategies for addressing racism in the present. While the emphasis continues to be on race and racism, the story types have also been
adapted and used to examine sexism, classism, ableism, heterosexism/homophobia, nativism and other social justice issues in both school and community settings.

**Changes in the New Edition**

While the second edition continues to put educators and youth in the forefront, I have worked to keep a broader audience in mind and to make more explicit the connections and uses of the storytelling model that are possible in multiple settings. While the arts played an important role in creating the model and continue to provide powerful pedagogical tools, in this edition I also show how social science methods can illustrate the model and provide valuable ways to teach about the story types. In this edition, I have also updated examples and references and added new information, resources and cases to round out description of the story types and to expand pedagogical tools for teaching about them.

*Essays by Users:* I’m delighted to present in this new edition short essays by users that illustrate some of the ways the storytelling model has been used in teaching, training, community building and activism. These essays are interspersed throughout the book. The essay by Lauren Anderson that follows Chapter 2 illustrates the power of the Storytelling Model to challenge complacency about racism and other forms of injustice in a pre-service teacher education program and shows the value of the story types for helping teachers think critically and create coherence across curriculum. Following Chapter 3, Kayhan Irani describes how she uses the model in a yearly summer Civil Rights Institute in Arkansas, where participants examine concealed stories in local history including those of Japanese internment and resistance as they visit the site of a former relocation camp. Yolanda Sealey Ruiz then shares how teachers in her diversity course have used the model to unearth narratives that challenge a single story as they seek to recognize and affirm their own experiences with racism. Following Chapter 4, Susan Glisson demonstrates how she uses storytelling in her work with communities in the South to acknowledge the effects of segregation and negative police/community interactions and to plan concerted action in the present. After Chapter 5, Vanessa D’Egidio and María S. Rivera Maulucci illustrate emerging/transforming stories in an elementary school and university classroom respectively. D’Egidio explains how she uses the story types to make curriculum meaningful to her students so that they see themselves as actors and agents who can shape the future in their classroom and in their school community. Rivera Maulucci’s essay describes the development of an Arts and Humanities course framed around the story types that uses the resources of New York City to develop critical literacy. After Chapter 6 John Madura shows how he uses statistical methods to facilitate movement through the forming and storming stages of the model to create a counter-storytelling community that enables students to more honestly name and confront ideas...
they and others hold that sustain racism. In a final essay, Zoe Duskin shows how she uses the model as a school leader to create school communities where it is safe to share stories about race and other dimensions of identity. Duskin believes that the process of creating shared stories is what “gives a school soul.”

These powerful essays illustrate the many ways the storytelling model can be used in diverse environments. My hope is that these examples will inspire other practical and inspirational methods for using the model to challenge stock stories, unearth concealed and resistance stories and generate emerging/transforming stories that contribute to broader, more inclusive visions of and actions toward justice in our society.

Chapter 1, “Critical Teaching/Learning About Racism Through Story and the Arts: Introducing the Storytelling Project Model,” describes the Storytelling Project and introduces the theoretical framework for the Storytelling Project Model as a scaffold for organizing curriculum, teaching and training in different arenas. I review the four story types through which we conceptualize racial discourse in the model (stock stories, concealed stories, resistance stories and emerging/transforming stories) and discuss the challenges of creating a counter-storytelling community in which honest investigation of racial storytelling among diverse groups can take place. I discuss the power of the arts as a vehicle for examining racial stories in diverse communities and for helping us to imagine otherwise.

Chapter 2, “Stock Stories: Reproducing Racism and White Advantage,” offers the first iteration of the Storytelling Project Model in practice, highlighting the construct of stock stories. I provide a definition of stock stories and discuss how they function to protect and reinforce the racial status quo. I use the example of the American Dream to illustrate how stock stories support inequality and describe activities we developed in the project to deconstruct and critically analyze this iconic stock story.

Chapter 3, “Concealed Stories: Reclaiming Subjugated Memory and Knowledge,” offers a second iteration of the Storytelling Project Model in practice, highlighting the story type of concealed stories. I define concealed stories and trace how they circulate within communities of color and among white racial progressives as sources of critical literacy and sustenance for survival in a racist society. I look at the role of social memory in perpetuating stock stories and the potential of memory work to expose and critique the self-interested nature of stock stories that are taken for granted as natural. I illustrate concealed stories through activities that draw on racial memory to expose the genealogy of racism, tracing how individual stories are linked to broader patterns. I show how the juxtaposition of stock and concealed stories through visual art, versions of historical events and social science data can open up new understanding of how racism works.

Chapter 4, “Resistance Stories: Drawing on Antiracism Legacies to Map the Future,” turns to the third story type: resistance stories. This chapter offers a third
iteration of the Storytelling Project Model in practice. I define resistance stories through contemporary examples that draw from and build on resistance in the past. I discuss youth resistance as a valuable source for developing curriculum that engages concerns of young people to make education meaningful. Drawing on our research in two high school classrooms in New York City where the Storytelling Project Curriculum was enacted, I illustrate how we use resistance stories to look at racism through theater games, poetry, murals, oral history and action research in local communities.

Chapter 5, “Emerging/Transforming Stories: Challenging Racism in Everyday Life,” offers a fourth iteration of the Storytelling Project Model in practice, highlighting the final story type of emerging/transforming stories. I define this story type and discuss why public schools, despite all their limitations, still offer an important site for struggle against racism and other forms of injustice. I use the example of an undergraduate teacher education seminar to demonstrate how the Storytelling Project Model can be used to help teachers understand racial positionality, think more critically about their practice, and develop curriculum that engages students as social critics and actors.

In Chapter 6, “Cultivating a Counter-Storytelling Community: The Storytelling Model in Action,” I trace the Storytelling Model through a five-day intensive summer institute for teachers to illustrate the development of counter-storytelling community. I draw on theories of small group dynamics and intergroup dialogue to highlight stages in the development of a race conscious storytelling community and to illustrate key points in the process.

*Storytelling for Social Justice, 2nd Edition* offers a practical, critical framework for thinking about and acting upon stories about racism to develop common ground with others to work for racial justice. Now more than ever, such work is urgently needed and essential to enacting and living up to our ideals as a diverse democracy.
as a society when we listen to and learn from the multitude of stories available for our consideration as we seek to dismantle racist structures and patterns in our society. It invites people to tell their own stories and through such telling envision a future that embraces inclusion, equity and justice for all of the diverse people in our country. As Martin Luther King reminds us, “We are in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly” (quoted in Barlow, 2003). It is our hope that the ongoing examination and construction of such stories can be powerful tools for motivating and sustaining antiracist work and generating democratic change.

In the following chapters we illustrate the Storytelling Project Model through several iterations and examples in practice. Each chapter highlights a different story type, examining that story type in depth and showing how it links to other parts of the model. Each also explores applications of the model and further draws out the role of storytelling and the arts in developing our understanding of race and racism. Interspersed throughout are essays by individuals who describe how they use the Storytelling model in their own educational and activist work.

References


across groups. Usually all groups describe similarities where ideas about the American Dream overlap and important key differences in the two speeches. We consider the area of overlap to be the heart of the stock story of the American Dream. The circles where the politicians diverge we view as liberal and conservative versions of the American Dream stock story. Taken as a whole they illustrate the power and pervasiveness of this stock story across ideology and political position.

We then ask groups to consider what is outside of the Venn diagram altogether. What is in neither circle? Who is not included? What stories are left out? What is not mentioned at all? What is invisible? What cannot be said? This is where concealed stories may be found that can help us look at the American Dream from a different angle. This activity motivates a critical view of stock stories and initiates a search for concealed stories to discover what they reveal about the American Dream that the stock story does not.

African American poet Langston Hughes vividly evokes what happens to those who faithfully embrace the Dream but are continually thwarted from receiving its promised rewards in his poem “A Dream Deferred.” This poem can be another focus for engaging in the analytic process described above. Hughes captures a yearning for the American Dream, a willingness to work hard for it, as well as the anger and bitterness engendered when its promise is continually postponed—“maybe it just sags like a heavy load, or does it explode?” Held up as a contrast to the stock story, the poem provokes us to consider: What would need to happen for the American Dream to truly work for everyone in this society? What would need to change? The next chapter takes up and explores concealed stories and illustrates further how the juxtaposition of stock and concealed stories can be used to support greater understanding and more critical analysis of stories and social patterns that perpetuate racism.

References


Conclusion

As participants consider the concealed stories that shape experiences with race and racism, uncovering stories from history, social science data, poetry and their own experiences, they gain tools for critiquing stock stories about the American Dream, mobility, meritocracy and access that are valorized in the media and mainstream discourse. They begin to see that the stock story can be contradicted and challenged, and that tools exist for uncovering information that can help us develop an informed critique of the status quo as a basis for thinking about actions we might take to challenge and change these stories.

Through contrasting stock and concealed stories, we use the information in concealed stories to unpack and critically analyze the polished stock stories at the center of American life and trace their connections to larger patterns of discrimination and exclusion in our culture. The juxtaposition of stock and concealed stories provides a vantage point for seeing differently, unsettling the presumptive truth in stock stories and showing them to be as partial and incomplete as any other story—and thus open for contestation.

In contrasting stock and concealed stories, we can work the juxtapositions backward or forward. We can start with stock stories and then look for the concealed stories underlying them. Or we can begin with concealed stories, analyzing what they reveal about stock stories that we take for granted. Once we have exposed the stock stories and unearthed the concealed stories that show the self-interested protection of advantage, we can turn to resistance stories. How have people fought against stock stories in the past? What can we learn from resistance stories to inform antiracist practice today?

Note

1. The images discussed here and in the next chapter can be found through googling the artists named. I encourage readers to view and share with others these powerful images and recognize the important role of contemporary artists in addressing injustice and imagining alternative possibilities.

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Concealed Stories


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knowledgeable, activist and committed and who have sustaining systems of support, often encounter a school culture that makes it exceedingly difficult to enact antiracist curriculum and teaching practices. Yet, without teachers who have a vision of what socially just teaching can be, there is little hope that we can create the kinds of classrooms and schools where all children see themselves as central to the curriculum and agents of their own lives. Teachers who create or join communities of support are more able to withstand the pressures of the status quo and think together creatively about curriculum, teaching practices and working with communities to support their vision for just and democratic schools.²

The Storytelling Project Model offers a compelling framework that new teachers, and others who work against racism, can use to actively critique the stock stories that reinforce inequality and racism, seek out concealed and resistance stories about the history, struggles, strengths and aspirations of the diverse groups in our society, and use this knowledge to develop emerging/transforming stories that enact and sustain more inclusive and just educational and social practices. As a practical conceptual tool, it is our hope that the model is one that can be built on and added to over the long haul, operating as a caution against smug assumptions of all-knowing truth and as a reminder of what is possible when we listen to the multiple stories available for expanding our understanding as we work with others toward a multiracial democratic vision.

Notes

1. Thea Abu El-Haj, a member of the creative team, introduced us to this speech and the close reading process.
2. Several valuable networks of support for teachers do exist: for example, NYCORE—New York Collective of Radical Teachers (www.nycore.org), Educators for Social Justice (www.educatorsforsocialjustice.org)—, Rethinking Schools (www.rethinkingschools.org) and Teaching Tolerance (www.tolerance.org), to name a few. The Barnard Education Program has developed a New Teacher Network for this purpose that is linked to teacher support networks in Boston and Philadelphia created by CETE—Consortium for Excellence in Teacher Education.

References


As the final days of each school year approach, I ask my students to reflect on their learning, our curriculum, and my teaching. This feedback provides me with invaluable insights leading to continuous self-reflection and growth as an educator. In an end of year survey, a former student wrote:

My biggest take-away would have to be that there is more to history than what you may think. One of our biggest goals is to challenge and go beyond the Master Narrative, and I think this is different than just studying something; it’s going deeper into history and learning more about perspectives. I think this is very important for students because we are the next generation. We have to make the change and learn more about our past in ways others don’t. We need to influence the world to be better and learning history besides [dominant narratives] is very important in making us learn more and understand more of what happened and why. . . . As I view myself, I also realize I can make a difference in the world as a young, student activist. Many kids and students have protested, and they have made change. This gives me hope and courage that I can be a part of the change and help the world even if it is just by sharing in class; it matters.

Students and teachers have stories to learn and stories to tell. Our collective liberation depends on this powerful exchange of voice, memory, care, knowledge, and action.

Vanessa D’Egidio has been a 7th grade social studies teacher in New York City for the past eleven years. She is passionate about teaching and engaging students in critical thinking, discussion, and action around social justice issues both in and out of the classroom. As a curriculum writer and advisor for Teaching Tolerance, she contributed to their K–12 literacy-based anti-bias curriculum, Perspectives for a Diverse America. Vanessa was awarded a Fulbright Distinguished Awards in Teaching Program grant to pursue educational research in the Netherlands. Next year she will begin a new position as coordinator in the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) department at Fieldston School.

Note
matter, but also understanding how various stories/backgrounds influence the decisions and perceptions that people hold towards the subject matter. It is an ever-growing process of learning.

I think my mind has shifted away from simply viewing critical literacy as a tool to confront the imposing structures of a student’s life within society. . . . Students should not just be taught to analyze the world around them and the civic structures that oftentimes serve as oppressive forces in their lives. Instead, students need to be taught to imagine other ways of being in this world. This imaginative way of thinking is what’s most central to my understanding and vision for developing critical literacy in the classrooms I hope to establish.

Across these reflections we see how students embrace a narrative view of the world that requires the telling of one’s story and listening to the stories of others. We also see how critical storytelling fosters individual and collective growth, imagines a better future, and engages actions that build towards more emancipatory, agentic, and activist learning experiences. Moreover, students see the arts as a key vehicle for imagining, uncovering, excavating, and expressing their critical literacy stories.

María S. Rivera Maulucci is Professor of Education at Barnard College. Her expertise in teacher education draws on sixteen years of experience teaching at the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels. Her interdisciplinary scholarship focuses on how teachers learn to teach for social justice and the role of language, identity, and emotions in teacher development.

References
commitment and generating action. Ideally, teachers who hold these commitments can create race conscious counter-storytelling communities in their schools, among colleagues and with students, parents and community groups. Such communities that can help them sustain the vision and persistence to work against the grain of stock stories, uncover concealed stories, draw lessons from resistance stories and generate emerging/transforming stories that can lead toward a more just society shaped by all as active and valued compatriots in multiracial democracy.

Notes

1. Background: In summer 2005, we offered a weeklong summer institute for educators in New York City to introduce the Storytelling Project Model and test its accessibility and usefulness for teachers. Teachers throughout the city were invited to sign up for the institute and could receive in-service credit through the New York City Department of Education. We asked participants to fill out a questionnaire about their interests in and knowledge of racism prior to the institute to help us assess their entering knowledge and to build activities around their questions and concerns. Given our limited space and our desire to build community in which risks could be taken, we closed the institute at twenty participants. The group was a diverse mix of elementary and secondary teachers (though primarily secondary), with one librarian and one social worker who taught incarcerated youth. The group was about one-third male and two-thirds female, and included whites, blacks, Asians and Latinos.

Five members of the creative team facilitated the five-day institute, two artists (Kayhan Irani and Roger Bonair-Agard) and three educators (myself, Rosemarie Roberts and Zoe Duskin). Two student interns (Brett Murphy and Ebonie Smith) documented our work as we proceeded by keeping notes and videotaping parts of the proceedings. We met in the same generative space where the creative team had worked so productively when we were developing the model and we used many of the activities developed and honed further in our work together. We met for eight hours a day, Monday through Friday, for a very intensive week of exploration and engagement.

2. The Storytelling Summer Institute for New York City teachers deliberately sought a racially diverse group of teachers and the facilitation team was equally diverse.

3. Many of the activities we designed are available in the Storytelling Project Curriculum. A free downloadable PDF is available at www.barnard.edu/education/storytelling.

4. A version of this and the next activity is available in Bell, Love and Roberts (2007).

5. Adapted from the online guide accompanying the DVD, available from California Newsreel at www.californianewsreel.com.

6. All quotes are taken from evaluations participants completed at the end of each day of the institute and summary evaluations after the five-day institute.

7. See Bell, Love and Roberts (2007), Appendix D, for additional questions.

References


Note

1. Depending on the narratives, students could also rank the strength of the narratives they encounter and then evaluate their own certainty about the ranking and even the truth content of each story.

References


