

CVTC Book Club: *Storycatcher* by Christina Baldwin

Book Club Members:

Cherrie Bergandi, Bob Brown, Dale Dittmer, Ruth Heraver, Julia Raehpour, Grace Rich, and Tammy Stone

The members listed above created a chapter of the CVTC book club around reading *Storycatchers* by Christina Baldwin. The book focused on the importance of story, both the telling and “catching.” In our group meetings we found that discussing the value of story as expressed by Baldwin led us into telling our own stories, whether about work, family, or childhood. Therefore, it seems appropriate to let members express their own stories about the book and its lessons for education.

Ruth’s story:

“Used as teaching tools, stories help us avoid the worst and reinforce the best outcomes” (page 94). Reading this book has helped me create an atmosphere of community in the classroom. Asking and expecting students to share their stories has helped us all understand each other better. When a student hears a personal story and can relate to it and connect it to the new information presented in class, learning is taking place. As the author states in the first chapter “stories crystallize thought.”

Julia’s story:

I was initially attracted to *Storycatcher* because my own teaching style includes telling my own story in an effort to help students’ grasp theories and other course content as well as to find their own voice to share their own stories. I was looking for tips and strategies to draw out the students’ stories and *Storycatcher* gave me this, though not in the way I’d initially thought it would.

The book was not brimming with bullet points or methods, rather it unfolded the author’s story and helped to bring into focus the importance of “story.” As our book club met, we realized that rather than having a structured “plan” or pre-selected questions to answer about the readings, we simply told our own stories around a table and shared in each others’ lives in a deeper way.

The freedom of sharing “story” and the potential for a new depth of understanding both the content of the story and the storyteller has stuck with me. I’ve enjoyed watching my students begin to tell their own stories in a new way as I’ve put on my mitt to “catch” them!

Bob’s story:

At the end of each chapter, Baldwin has a section she calls “Becoming a Storycatcher.” These sections include ideas for the beginnings of stories that can be used for writing or conversing about the role of “storycatching” in a person’s life. Many of these could be used in the classroom in a variety of ways.

While many of these might be most directly pertinent in general education class – psychology, sociology, and some communication classes like Oral-Interpersonal Communications come immediately to mind – they also could be used as part of an “icebreaking” activity in ANY class during the first week of a semester or a critical thinking activity at any time.

Examples include the following:

- “Choose a family heirloom or artifact and write down as much of its history as you know. Where did it come from? How old is it? How did it come to be valued in your family? Who has it now? What will happen to it in the future?”
- “What would you like others to remember about you? Create a journal entry that contains information you would want to leave behind to be found when you are gone.”
- “What decisions made in the last three generations (of your family) are you grateful for? What decisions are you making now that you hope your grandchildren will be grateful for?”
- Put yourself six years into the future. Describe the community or organization you really want as if it exists now. What is life like? What relationships exist among people? What are you contributing?”

Grace’s story: Since my classroom is primarily online, I’ll describe three ways the *Storycatcher* book has impacted my online teaching.

1. Chapter 1 talks about how story connects us. I’ve added a story facet to the typical online introduction. I ask students to “tell us something that you think not many people know about you. For instance, I might tell you that the year after my husband and I got married we toured much of Europe for seven weeks on one 250cc Honda motorcycle--in the rain! The factoid doesn't have to be of "gee-whiz" quality, but it will help us pick you out of the virtual crowd. [smile]” Students aren’t reticent about sharing with each other!
2. In Chapter 5, *Storycatcher* explores how story adds insight and meaning to our lives. In one assignment for a records and information management course, students research and create a records classification system. I now ask them to submit a short pre- and post-reflection paper that asks for specific examples of how the lack of a proper classification system has affected their personal and/or professional lives and how, after the project is finished, to reflect on how the process of creating the system impacted them. I want them to see their role as a change agent, not just as a worker bee.
3. *Storycatcher* asks readers in Chapter 10 to consider their place in the order of things. I’ll now ask the students who are completing the final project in the fifth class of the Records and Information Management certificate to choose one last goal/hope/dream/project for their company (all the students are nontraditional student professionals working in the field of records management) and then pick another student with whom to share it. I’ll ask them to email each other in one year and share the status of their world.

I don’t know whether it would have happened anyway, but I like to think that it was through the extra use of story in this semester’s class that three of the students made the effort to contact each other at a national convention in Texas. The students were from Virginia, New Mexico, and New York.

Cherrie’s story:

Like many of the other members of the club, I feel that I’ve always invoked the power of story in my classroom. Baldwin even cites Bruner’s work on the way that we all learn through story, and I believe that this is a common element in all subject areas. This technique certainly lends itself to a communications class, but who can’t understand a difficult concept more clearly after hearing a real life example, a story? I remember passing a classroom back in the high school I used to teach in and hearing a friend conducting her math class. I was amazed to hear her explaining a difficult

math theory through telling a story about how this math principle was used in “the real world.” I told her later that I would have certainly excelled more at my own high school and college math courses if someone had taught mathematics using that method. Story explains; story enables us to make connections between the familiar and unfamiliar; it is, perhaps, a common teaching method that becomes new to us again when presented by Baldwin through her own stories.

Our little group of storycatchers believe any educator would enjoy brushing up on the technique by reading Baldwin’s text.

CVTC Book Club

“*Storycatcher*” by Christina Baldwin

Julia Raehpour – Book Report Submission

December 2006

(the impact the book has had on my teaching and learning in the classroom)

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The preface in the book summed up what “story” is all about...

Preface:

*The 3 premises about “story” –

1. How we make our experience into story determines how we live our personal lives.
2. What we emphasize and retell in our collective story determines whether we quarrel or collaborate in our community.
3. What we preserve in larger human story determines what we believe is possible in the world.

All in all, I would recommend “*Storycatcher*”. There are little jewels and reminders in each chapter and the end benefit is a wonderful re-focusing of what “story” means and can do!

-Julia

Describe the impact the book has had on your teaching and learning in the classroom.

Submitted by Grace Rich

December 2006

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Storycatcher’s impact

Ruth’s story

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