

Intention and the Unexpected

Manifesting the Storytelling Librarian's Goals

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Telling stories to children requires planning and creativity. With thorough plans and tools, the storyteller librarian intends to benefit children.

However, what often occurs during storytime is ultimately not in the librarian's control. One can hope storytime goes well, but transforming that hope into a manifested outcome begins with intention. Intention is a means of activating our will and creativity to do what is necessary to accomplish goals. Setting intentions for dealing with the unexpected includes what we desire to happen. This helps create a type of container for storytime that includes skills, tools, and desires.

Here I'll explain how to work with intention in ways that benefit the storyteller librarian, referred to in this article as storyteller.

Intention as Container

Intention directs thinking; feelings influence the storyteller and overall storytelling atmosphere. Safety is an essential quality when working with the imagination. Feeling safe is a prerequisite for self-expression for children and storyteller. Therefore, setting an initial intention for safety is a good beginning point. Moving from the rational concept of safety to the feeling or sense of safety, imagine that the storytelling space is a container. The container can be the room, your grandmother's rose vase, or somewhere or something that brings up a sense of safety. Feeling safe allows everyone to relax, enjoy the stories, and express themselves, should that be part of circle time. Carrying the image and sense into the actual space may result in implementing changes to the space. Perhaps the seating is changed, or a vase of roses, an object, or a picture is brought in and placed somewhere to remind the storyteller of the space being safe.

Desired outcomes for the storytelling session expand the container. These intentions, when created prior to circle time, help storytellers stay aligned with their goals. It is important to clarify desired outcomes because they shape intentions.

For my summer fieldwork in graduate school, I took a storytelling workshop taught by story coach Kendall Haven. We had to bring a six-minute story to work with during the four-and-a-half-day workshop after which we would tell the story on the last day.

I had two intentions for this workshop. The first was to experience telling stories, and the second was to learn something new about the stories I wrote for others, so I wrote a story for myself to tell. The story flowed out easily on paper, however unlike any other story it had no ending. The thought of telling a story in front of people terrified me, but I decided not to indulge the fear and instead be open to new experiences.

I took my first step to becoming a storyteller on the first evening, following the formal class and peer reviews. My peers, all professional storytellers, wanted to know how I met the character in the story and advised me to use it as my introduction. Haven told us to "tell it [story] to learn it; don't learn it to tell it."¹ I discovered the introduction by talking about my character and how we met. Not unlike writing, I told this in several different ways until I was



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satisfied. After four days of doing different exercises to improve our storytelling skills, it was time to tell our stories. I still did not have an ending. At this point, I hoped that images would appear to complete this story as I approached the time limit.

Swiss psychoanalyst Carl G. Jung wrote that “when we concentrate on an inner picture and when we are careful not to interrupt the natural flow of events, our unconscious will produce a series of images which make a complete story.”²

Dreading the worst and excited that I, too, would be learning about this story, I volunteered to go first. Jung’s words came true; the images appeared sequentially, and I finished the story successfully. My intention to learn more about the stories I wrote manifested in synchronistic experiences, not unlike what happened to my clients.

Storytelling Tools and Intentions

Below are several tools I learned during the workshop that storytelling librarians can use to create intentions.

- Storytelling is an intimate type of performance. Therefore, it is important to create an intimate relationship with the audience. This is achieved just before telling the first story by looking briefly into the eyes of each audience member (or as many as possible).³ Haven emphasized that when we are telling “we are the center of the world.”⁴ When telling stories to an audience, it is “as if” you are telling your friends a story and accompanying them on a wonderful journey.
- Bringing listeners into the story’s world includes the sensory details. For example, if the story takes place in a forest what is the temperature? Is it damp? What are the smells around you? Is it still or are there monkeys chattering? If it takes place near water, are frogs croaking or is water splashing as they dive in? These small details help listeners deepen their imaginal journey.
- Finally, storytelling is a co-creative experience in that the audience contributes to the story in unspoken ways. For example, if you have told a particular story many times you may have noticed how each time you tell the story it differs slightly from the previous telling.

Setting intentions based on the above tips begins with finding a story you love and want to share. As you practice telling or reading the story, consider adding sensory details. Prior to being with

the children, remember that as a storyteller you are the center of the world. In front of the children, establish rapport through eye contact, trust what pops into your head during the telling. This may include changing the planned story after the one being told.

For example, it is important that children are fully engaged during the whole session. Therefore, an intention could be holding the children’s attention. Assuming this is your intention, do you feel you have enough storytelling tools to do this? How do you want to respond and feel when the children seem uninterested?

Perhaps feeling self-confident, nonplussed, and positively challenged may be the intention set for each session. It may be helpful, then, to imagine a storytelling session in which you feel confident, calm, and the children provide stimulating challenges. Imagining is a way to embody the feelings that you can remember in the future. How do you want to respond and feel when the parents or nannies are distracting?

Answers to these questions may be calmly saying something or even getting them involved. Imagine a scenario that requires setting limits for the adults, so the children can remain focused. If something unexpected happens, how do you want to respond and feel? Perhaps creative and able to think on your feet. This will be your intention in these situations.

After intentions have been made and experienced with your imagination and feelings, it is time to let them go and trust that the intentions that were set will manifest. Deepak Chopra wrote, “Like real seeds, intentions can’t grow if you hold on to them.”⁵

Trust may not come easy to many people; however, consider the entire process above as a fun, playful experiment and, like a child, watch what happens. Numerous scientific experiments on the effects of intention are reported in Lynne McTaggart’s book. She also devotes several chapters on how to create intentions. In Dr. Wayne Dyer’s book, *The Power of Intention: Learning to Co-Create Your World Your Way*, Dyer discusses intention and what to look for when evaluating its effects.

The intentional container is a combination of thinking, imagining, and feeling. Determining the goals storytellers desire to accomplish with the children, how one wants to respond to the children and unexpected circumstances, and how one wants to feel during storytelling time can be intended. Creating intentions, when cultivated as a practice, can pave the way for a beneficial and enjoyable storytime for everyone. &

References

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3. Haven, “Your Brain on Story.”
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5. Deepak Chopra, “5 Steps to Setting Powerful Intentions,” Chopra.com, July 1, 2020, <https://chopra.com/articles/5-steps-to-setting-powerful-intentions>.