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**“I HOPE WHEN I AM GONE,  
THEY WILL REMEMBER MY STORIES”:  
STORYTELLING METHODOLOGY IN EDUCATIONAL  
RESEARCH**

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**Abstract:** This article emphasizes the historical role of storytelling as a way of coming to know. We discuss storytelling in research contexts. We look back on storytelling methodology as a way of looking ahead. Storytelling methodology challenges more conventional approaches to research. It approaches research in a way that is relational, reciprocal, and respectful. Bringing together three studies in the field of lifelong learning, we highlight the storytelling methodology with a focus on intergenerational learning and share key themes that storytelling across generations shares.

**Keywords:** stories; storytelling methodology; lifelong learning; research; voice

**Telling stories is what kept my mother alive, kept her heart beating through loss after loss after loss—that is how I came to understand the power of storytelling. (Fatou Wurie, cited in Bowles et al., 2023, p. 11)**

Storytelling methodology challenges more conventional methods of research. It approaches research in a way that is relational, reciprocal, and respectful. It assumes that people are storytelling beings who live storied lives, individually and socially, and whose stories express feelings, experiences, values, and traditions that increase understandings of ourselves and others, and build our communities (Thompson, 2024).

In this article, we first provide a brief historical overview of storytelling methodology including storytelling from different perspectives. Then, we highlight the various ways that storytelling methodology has been used by education researchers in Canada. We share two key themes from three research projects that used storytelling methodology, namely, voice/speaking, and listening/hearing. We highlight how the storytellers' experiences are impacted by gender, age, and race. We then conclude with a discussion and recommendations for researchers interested in storytelling methodology.

**You are a multitude of stories. Every joy and heartbreak, every disappointment and dizzying high—each has contributed to the complex one-of-a-kind person that you are today. (Bowles et al., 2023, p. 3)**

This article is situated in the field of lifelong learning. Lifelong learning can be defined as “the development and enactment of knowledges and practices that make a difference to individuals, social groups, communities, and/or society at large” (Brigham et al., 2021, p. x). Holding a range of purposes, from political to social to cultural to economic, lifelong learning can be used in informing, instructing, training, inspiring and mobilizing (Willis, 2002). Lifelong learning holds an “everydayness and everywhere-ness” nature, where every moment can offer opportunities for learning (Brigham et al., 2021, p. xvi). Part of this everyday quality is in the stories that we tell and hear.

Stories are an organic part of learning, tapping into the experience of learners (Lawrence & Paige, 2016). Looking back at the history of storytelling in learning, our understanding and use of stories may be so internalized that we may not be aware of how much we rely on them in our daily lives, or how valuable they are in a teaching and learning context (Landrum et al., 2019). As Patricia Webster and Leonard Mertova (2007) state, stories in a lifelong learning context are well positioned to explore both the complexities and subtleties of human experience in teaching and learning.

Our learning and development are culturally and socially bound, and an important aspect of these processes is found in the interaction between people from different generations (Stephan, 2021). Intergenerational learning creates opportunities for generations to learn more about each other and to understand the perspectives and insights of other generations. Intergenerational learning opens up space for meaningful conversations across generations, where they can co-create new stories to help make sense of a complex society, including the aging process (Mitchell, 2016). As intergenerational learning involves transmitting knowledge, attitudes, habits, and experience from one generation to the next (Boström & Schmidt-Hertha, 2017; Franz & Scheunpflug, 2016; Mitchell, 2016), sharing stories can give insight into how things have progressed or regressed with time (Lawrence & Paige, 2016). This is vital when adding to research on women's lifelong learning and experiences, especially concerning women's movements, struggles, and advancements that happen today and throughout generations. Without storytelling or analyzing the lived accounts of women, we lack insight on how future change might be created.

**From our very first breath, we are in relationship. With that indrawn draft of air, we become joined to everything that ever was, is and ever will be. When we exhale, we forge that relationship by virtue of the act of living. (Wagamese, 2016, p. 44)**

The word *story* comes from the Latin word *historia*, meaning an account of events or a narrative that intends to entertain. The word *historia* comes from Greek, meaning to inquire. *Narrative* comes from the Latin word *gnarus*, which means to know or have knowledge of (Lee, 2016). To tell stories is, therefore, to entertain, share knowledge, inquire, create connections, and make meaning of experiences.

Storytelling is fundamentally a human activity (Huber et al., 2013; Shishko, 2022) that can hold a transformative role, as we come to know who we are in new ways, to whom and where we belong, and reveal to others what is deep in our hearts (Kovach, 2009; Stone, 1996). By telling stories and by placing the events in a specific context, we give them a particular meaning. As we tell the story, we transform what we know into structures of meaning (Tappan & Brown, 1991). When we tell someone about our day, for example, we connect separate events into whole sequences so that events can be understood within a context or meaning frame (Rossiter, 1999). In a sense, we become the stories we tell ourselves and others (Randall, 2014). Stories serve various functions, including as ways of knowing (explanatory), ways of connecting people (relational), ways of remembering (historical), ways of creating reality (creative), as well as ways of envisioning the future (forecasting) (Sunwolf & Frey, 2001).

Storytelling has been a fundamental cultural practice in many communities, not least of which are Indigenous and African communities. Historically and currently in these communities, Elders play a key role in sharing stories for preserving and transmitting knowledge about local history, community resilience, identity, culture, values, and practices. In all communities, storytelling serves as a means of intergenerational learning, social bonding, and a validation of the importance of oral stories and lived experiences as legitimate knowledge.

From an Indigenous perspective, knowledge is subjective and produced collaboratively through relationships and sharing (Christensen, 2012). This includes a strong oral history, based on the telling and sharing of stories (Christensen, 2012; Corntassel et al., 2009; Cunsolo Willox et al., 2013). Stories can be lived experience stories, which are shared “with a compassionate mind and love for others” or traditional cultural teaching stories (Archibald, 2008b, p. 2). “Stories form the cultural, mythological, and historical fabric to daily life” (Cunsolo Willox et al., 2013, p. 133). Stories are often used as a teaching tool in Indigenous communities where the listener can learn lessons from the personal perspectives of the storyteller (Wilson, 2008). Indigenous storytelling is crucial to the cultural and political resurgence of Indigenous nations and is deeply connected to their homelands (Corntassel et al., 2009). For example, in *Strong Women Stories: Native Vision and Community Survival* edited by Kim Anderson and Bonita Lawrence (2012), activists and scholars of varied backgrounds share stories that highlight critical issues, including colonialism and patriarchy, and the ways women are negotiating challenges, rebuilding, and reviving their communities.

Indigenous storywork, according to Joanne Archibald, comprises of seven principles, namely respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy (Archibald, 2008a). Each Indigenous nation has rules and protocols for stories that are intended for teaching and learning, and it is important to recognize that there are different genres of story, and different intentions, protocols, and ways to make meaning (Archibald, 2008b). For example, when sharing a lived experience story that one has heard from an Elder, one would acknowledge the original storyteller, the Indigenous culture, and provide other contexts of the story.

From an Africentric perspective, interconnectedness is a core value, with knowledge of oneself, the past, one’s roots and situating oneself with a focus on ancestral greatness (Parris & Brigham, 2010). Storytelling espouses person-to-person connection, weaving together personal and collective welfare with that of the community (Lawrence & Paige, 2016). African people are rooted in oral traditions and storytelling holds a central place in African cultures (Ngũgĩ, 1982). Stories form part of African Indigenous education, where every experience and event creates an opportunity for a

story to help educate others from serving as inspiration, giving insight, evoking thinking, and shaping values, where “for indigenous Africans, and indeed for all peoples, it is as basic as being human” (Mosha, 2000, p. 55). Chawla (2011) adds:

Stories breathe their own breaths; they are organic in nature, and dynamic in process. They are as primal to us as the organs in our body and evolve as we do. We can control them to the extent that we choose the stories and the times we tell them. But even when we punctuate, reframe, retell or edit, we cannot but let them escape. (p. 16)

**Sharing stories aloud is one of humankind’s best attributes—our magical ability to shape-shift into each other’s imagination. Stories bring other people’s experiences to life, so we can see, and very often *feel*, events that didn’t happen to us. (Bowles et al, 2023, p. 4)**

Storytelling provides a framework through which researchers can investigate experience and gain access to the complexity of human concerns and actions (Rooney et al., 2016). “Stories are sense-making tools told in the present with a view to the future” (Rooney et al., 2016, p.147). They are pivotal to understanding society and behaviour (Rooney et al., 2016) and essential for sharing cultural knowledge (Bruner, 1990; Landrum et al., 2019). Through stories we can expand our understanding of social determinants by giving insight into the daily contexts in which decision-making takes place (Banks, 2012).

Storytelling methodology rejects objectifying humans in research such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) describes: “the objects of research do not have a voice and do not contribute to research or science ... An object has no life force, no humanity, no spirit of its own, so therefore 'it' cannot make an active contribution” (p. 61). Instead, the methodology centers the storytellers, their voices and stories, and their human dignity (Errante, 2000). Moreover, the storytellers decide what stories they wish to share and how they wish to tell their stories, while the researcher listens with an open heart and mind. This requires prioritizing trusting relationships between the researcher and storytellers as Késa Munroe-Anderson (2018), who used an Africentric storytelling methodology, explains:

[M]y relational ontology was key to me being able to successfully complete this endeavor. [My research] would not have been the research that it turned out to be had it not been for the relationships I held prior to starting this journey and those I developed and grew along the way. (p. 291)

Robina Qwul'sih'yah'maht Thomas (2005) who used storytelling methodology with former Kuper Residential School students, says that for her, the methodology has:

enabled me to respect and honour the Ancestors and the storytellers while at the same time sharing tragic, traumatic, inhumanly unbelievable truths that our people lived. It was this level of integrity that was essential to storytelling. (p. 253)

As Qwul'sih'yah'maht Thomas (2005) and Munroe-Anderson (2018) assert, the methodology can create safe spaces for marginalized perspectives and stories that expand awareness of social injustices while working toward change across various marginalized groups. Such stories can challenge the dominant Eurocentric metanarratives, and push back against anti-Black racist, anti-Indigenous racist, misogynistic, patriarchal, and colonialist discourses that attempt to silence them. Further, April Baker-Bell (2017) explains that storytelling methodology, for Black women and girls, provides “a method for collecting our stories, writing our stories, analyzing our stories, and theorizing our stories at the same time as healing from them” ( p. 531).

**We, a trio of women researchers, alongside older women storytellers, opened collections of memories and found imagination, courage, strength, joy, laughter, heartbreak, and humanity, that they gently lifted out one at a time, with care and open hearts, to share with you.**

In this section, we briefly describe our three research projects in which we used storytelling methodology. We then share our findings in two broad themes.

Xandie gathered stories through one-on-one, in-person conversations with the storytellers, with a focus on privileging the voices and lived experiences of these older adults. She involved four participants (two women and one man, who identified as White, and one man who identified as African Nova Scotian; all over the age of 65). The research process included the use of a conversation guide, but it did not follow the format of a structured interview. Rather, the storytellers engaged in a natural, more intuitive conversation, sharing stories based on the prompts from the conversation guide. In addition, Xandie asked the storytellers to share an artefact with her, and its story, as part of the conversation. This artefact could be any object of their choosing. Sharing an artefact was not a requirement for the conversation and not all storytellers chose to share one. The diversity of artefacts shared a commonality in how objects matter and hold meaning. Specific objects can represent memories or serve as metaphors for a theme, thereby holding a place in that person's story (Randall, 2024).

Susan's study involved one-to-one interviews with Elders, either face-to-face or by using Microsoft Teams. The study involved 45 African Nova Scotian educators, youth, and Elders, but we focus only on the 20 Elders for this article. The interviews were conducted by one researcher, either Susan or a research assistant, using an interview guide that was flexible. The resulting transcripts reflect conversations that touched on defining Elders in the African Nova Scotian community and what their roles are, or could be, in the community and education of younger generations.

Cassandra's study involved families of three generations of women to explore intergenerational learning through storytelling with a focus on grandmothers, mothers, and daughters in Nova Scotia. She included four sets of families, consisting of three female family members in each set. The families identified as Indigenous, immigrant, White Canadian-born, and African Nova Scotian. For the purpose of this article, we focus only on the four grandmothers, all of whom were 66 years and older. Cassandra gathered stories face-to-face using an interview guide. The stories were audio recorded and transcribed. The stories the women shared were primarily about the various influences that shaped their learning experiences throughout their lives.

**I want to touch you deeply, beneath the surface, where our real stories lie. Touch you where the fragments of our beings are, where the sediment of things that shape us forms the verdant delta of our human story. (Wagamese, 2016, p. 44)**

Storytelling has the potential to empower and/or amplify unheard, quiet, or muted voices such as those of older adults and other marginalized people. While people continue to experience the impact of fixed authorities who insist on speaking for others and who use standards that others have set (Greene, 1994), it is possible to purposefully create spaces for storytelling where the storyteller can share their own lived experiences so the stories can be heard and re-told. Explicitly contemplating the impact of historical and structural factors on marginalized people, including older adults, we can learn about and critique power and injustices.

A common theme in the three studies is voice/speaking, which we discuss first, followed by the theme listening/hearing.

## **Voice/Speaking**

*One of the things I appreciate about ...our parents, is sitting around the table, talking. They gave us the gift of rhetoric. And I thought, wow! And how many families shut that down. But that I think is actually very important. And I think I*

*didn't write this down as what I wanted to do with my children. But I think my husband and I and my children's in-laws, this is where we're alike. We allow children the gift of rhetoric and we try to encourage it. My father was very encouraging. And my mother was too. But my father, considering his generation, was determined his daughter would get an education, determined his children would have the qualities that he did not get from home. [Evie in Thompson, 2024, p. 34]*

Evie highlights how the intentionality of voice and engagement in discourse is encouraged and valued by all members of the family, no matter the age or gender. She refers to rhetoric (which is the art of speaking effectively) as a gift and as something her whole family has embraced across generations. This lifelong learning practice is part of Evie's and her family's culture. She acknowledges "many families shut that down" despite how important speaking effectively is in life.

Grandmother 4, who identifies as Asian in Cassandra's study, shares how being shut down was her lifelong experience. She explains how being silenced under threat of violence by a male parent from an early age has shaped her life and how she often felt/feels that it wasn't/isn't safe to speak as a girl and now as a woman. She reflects on witnessing her mother choose silence out of fear, which suggests how deeply rooted being made to feel inferior has kept her, and previous generations of women, quiet.

*My childhood was hard especially because I was a girl, but my brother didn't really have it easy either. It was just hard in a different way for him. [...] It was how things were then. As a young girl, we just did as we were told, and we didn't question it. We were too fearful of what would happen if we did and felt inferior all of the time because we were made to feel that way. I don't remember saying barely two words to my father unless it was "Yes, sir". I used to be mad at my mother, ... for many years but now I think she was probably afraid too and just did what she needed to do without saying a word. Girls were not to be heard then, but I feel it was the same for women when I was young too. Not much changed from my mother's generation. Women are made to feel inferior and unsafe. Our voices don't feel like they'll ever be heard really. [Grandmother 4 in McDonald, 2021, pp. 73–74]*

Grandmother 4's words, "Our voices don't feel like they'll ever be heard," help to make power (e.g., patriarchal power, paternal power) and injustice visible from her own lived experience while reminding the listener that systems of power relations persist. Her expressed injustice of being silenced and her dubiousness that "our voices" will ever be heard may, for some listeners, be a call to action.

Urbi, an African Nova Scotian Elder in Susan's study, shares her concern that in the community, Elders' voices are being silenced and devalued, as the Elders are given fewer opportunities, spaces, and time to speak and be heard. She explains that her voice and the voices of other Elders are being "diminished" because of formal institutions, like schools and daycares.

*If you look at it, there is so much time that young people spend in the school. And so, by the time that you come home, the time that an elder can influence you is greatly diminished. ... Lives are so busy. Parents are working. Sometimes children are being raised in single parent homes. They are in daycares... all that time they are not getting any interaction with elders and so as time goes on [elders] become less and less relevant.*

She adds:

*[Formal] education has played a role in letting people believe that they know it all. And so, the elder sometimes is put down or not revered. And it could be that you would have someone who is younger than an elder, but the younger can challenge the elder. So, because of the education now, a lot of people could argue that the elder is not always right and so, it takes time for people then to realize that [elders'] knowledge has its worth.*

These stories highlight the importance of, among other things, family, where voices are encouraged, silenced, or not heard (due to, for example, not enough time or interest in hearing Elders' stories, or discrimination when "the Elder sometimes is put down") and the long-term impact this has on the storytellers.

Aila, in Xandie's study, shares a story where she confronts a stereotype of older people, who apparently should not have "strong voices." She shares:

*The world that ... seniors navigate in, like I'm 78, I'm not exactly shy. ... It's pretty shocking how we do not value seniors in this culture. And we're invisible. You know, I said to somebody one time, there's no point in me wearing makeup. I do wear makeup. But I said, you know, nobody looks at us anyhow. But it was very interesting. One day I was at a restaurant, and I was leaving. That's [during the pandemic] when we were wearing masks. And I knew the servers well. So, while I'm waiting to pay, I'm chatting to the servers and we're laughing and bantering back and forth. So, when I went to pay, the girl at the cash said to me, the cutoff for senior's day was 50, I think. And she said, "Are you a senior?" And I said, if I take this mask off, you'll give me 50% off. I said, I'm very definitely a senior. And, but I'm curious, what made you think I may not be? And it was very*

*interesting what she said. "Your voice is strong. Oh. And you're laughing." So, you think of how many seniors are tired, they're not healthy, and they don't feel they have much reason to laugh. And maybe they're just kind of coping. So, if I can get to the cash and pay, and get out to the car, that's my limit, right? [Aila in Thompson, 2024, p. 38]*

Aila's sharing of the cashier's comment, "Your voice is strong," suggests an expectation that an older person is not expected to be heard clearly or with volume in public spaces. Perhaps this expectation is also related to Aila being a woman, given the persistent sexism in society. Aila is highlighting how older people must learn how to "navigate in a world" of which they have always been a part, but because of cultural and social norms that discriminate against older people, the world is like new territory for older people to traverse. Ageism is evident in the assumptions of how older adults *should* have soft voices, low energy, and nothing to laugh about. When a group of people are seen as not having value in society, when their contributions and perspectives are perceived as having little to no worth, their voices will be diminished, dismissed, and/or silenced from public discourse, decision-making, and policy-making. Aila's story, told with some laughter, opposes the idea that older people should quietly fade into the background, physically, and orally. As sexism and ageism are naturalized and ingrained in the everyday, people learn and share these negative social practices. This perpetuates implicit and explicit discrimination.

The stories show how ageism and societal expectations can conspire to silence and diminish the voices of older adults. Stories can have meaning and impact but first they must find listeners who are willing to consider perspectives different from their own, to ask questions, and to remain open to learning from others' experiences. Stories allow people to connect to other people's happiness, pain, and varied life experiences which lead to a deeper understanding and encourages change (Lewis, 2011). Shifting our focus to the theme of listening and hearing, we explore how genuine engagement with others' stories can foster understanding, connection, and a more inclusive community.

## **Listening/Hearing**

*[It is] important to think about something from someone else's perspective. And it's not necessarily just empathy, like being in their shoes, but just considering an alternative. I think rather than just disagreeing with somebody; to ask questions to explore why they have that view. ... Because so often, I think, and we all have to watch it, somebody expresses a view and you don't like it, and you kind of close off, well, why do they have that view? And, you know, what led them to believe, you know? And, yeah, so exploring their opinion, I guess,*

*would be, yeah. And that's, I think that's so important, but it also takes time. ... I think people can certainly learn about different cultures, religion, politics, life experiences, different perspectives, general information, keeping up to date. And I think, too, that's very important as you age, because it just focuses attention on your age when you're not up to date. [Aila in Thompson, 2024, pp. 41–42]*

Instead of just hearing something, Aila speaks of thinking more critically about what one hears and one's reactions to that, as well as consideration of alternative perspectives. She goes on to talk about the impact of listening to stories and what we can learn when we listen. For her, it is not only the learning opportunities that come with listening to stories, but also the opportunity and importance of keeping up to date. By staying up to date, you may not be perceived as being older. Aila goes on to say: "You have to keep learning. And I mean, I think everybody has something to teach you. Everybody does. If you're listening, you will learn something from everyone." Her attitude highlights the importance of valuing other people and their potential contributions. Storytelling needs a space for listening so that learning can happen.

*In my daughter-in-law's extended family, there's often 16 of us around a table, two tables put together, you know. The kids are there. The kids are always in it. It's generational. And that's a very Irish thing to have a generational family gathering. Everybody's listening. Some of the family might be rolling their eyes. Some of the children might be playing and sending text messages. ... Everybody is listening, you know there might be covert commentary going on. And you know if the children make a point which completely escapes us 'cause we're so out of touch, we listen. We listen. This weekend there's a birthday for one of the extended family. Certainly, if my granddaughter comes up with a comment then the other two, there's four, six, five altogether, the others will comment, and we will listen. [Evie in Thompson, 2024, p. 33–34]*

Evie, in Xandie's study, refers to the deliberate intergenerational engagement. There is intentional telling and listening, and a space made for everyone who is present. Evie repeats the phrase "we listen," which emphasizes the importance of this intentionality. She comments on how the older family members are "out of touch" and how listening is a means to stay up to date. There is an acknowledgement of not knowing and an intergenerational teaching moment to understand what is being said. This seems to be a common occurrence at Evie's family gatherings.

Nayyo, an African Nova Scotian Elder and retired schoolteacher, in Susan's study, emphasizes the many important lessons and perspectives that Elders can offer if people would listen to Elders' voices:

*Elders are those that you would look up to so you tend to sit down at their feet and listen to them [and] can feel a comfort in just listening to [a] story, [and you] could also be learning lessons. People tend to listen to people's testimonies of things that have happened to them and the lessons learned rather than just giving them facts. That resonates better and then they can identify with it. Whatever story it is, you relate it to whatever activity that you are doing. ... The more that you reveal about yourself and your experiences the more it would rub off [on] the other.*

She adds:

*Elders are the guardians of the youth, and I will talk from my experience. [In my day] we afforded them the utmost respect because they would not lead you wrong, they were always looking out for you and helping you to identify your path forward. You learn from them, a lot of times they would speak proverbs, folklore, or whatever. They also modeled a lot of what you do around family. So, for me Elders are the guardians of the community, they pass on oral history, they demonstrate traditions, they see us as a collective not 'you belong to that household,' no, you are a community child. And I think my generation is probably the last generation to really experience true Eldership in community. I think our communities have evolved in such a way that they replicate or want to replicate the European communities who do not value or see the Elders the same way as the African communities. So now when I see the young folks in the community; they could care less about the Elders, the lack of respect and in some cases, that is even modelled at home. They are like, 'I'm not going with those people, they're old and they don't know what they are talking about.'*

She concludes with a hope to include elders in schools:

*[We must] embrace the Elders and bring them in, but really, in my heart I do not believe that is going to happen because it is still very much a Eurocentric system. [Unlike how we] talk about Elders in terms of the African, First Nations, or Indigenous experience, but Eurocentric systems do not talk about Elders.*

For Nayyo, listening to Elders holds the promise of learning life lessons, wisdom, historical grounding, and ancestral and community connection, while receiving guidance, advice, and role models. She laments the loss of "true Eldership," and the respect for Elders and what they have to offer. Her concern that Elders are being dismissed because "they are old" highlights ageism, which she attributes to the

influence of the dominant (European/Eurocentric) culture in Nova Scotia. Her story reflects how things were in her generation.

In Cassandra's study, Grandmother 1, an Indigenous woman and a survivor of an Indian Residential School, reflects on her experiences growing up, highlighting sexism and colonialism which impacted her life choices.

*When I was a girl, we had a lot of responsibility at a very young age. I remember starting to do chores at only five years old. It started as simple little things like helping with the dishes or sweeping and funny enough I actually remember enjoying it because I could be like the older girls. I was second to the youngest of six sisters and two brothers. Schooling wasn't seen as important for the girls in the family. We went every day until grade eight and then most of us left school if we were lucky. Most of us had to attend a residential school and it wasn't a very good place to be. Very few of the girls went beyond earlier grades but the boys went until grade 11 or 12 because having a good education seemed more important for them. It was hard on them though. It really wasn't a nice place. Being a girl in my day seemed like the most valuable things to learn was how to take care of a household and find a good husband who could provide for our own family one day. I honestly don't remember ever being told that school was important, but I definitely heard it said to my brothers on many occasions. I feel my parents eventually regretted that with everything that happened. It was just the way things were, and we didn't question it. The girls had certain duties, and the boys had others even if we felt it was unfair. That's it. [Grandmother 1 in McDonald, 2021, p. 53]*

Grandmother 1 shares how traditional gender roles and expectations shaped her life growing up. The girls were expected to take on household responsibilities while education was a priority for the boys. Her story shows how these differences influenced her choices and opportunities throughout her life and how it was rarely ever questioned or discussed. These gendered perspectives not only affect girls' self-identity but also the expectations placed on them and their opportunities to fully engage in education (Sanford, 2005). For Grandmother 1, school was seen as less valuable for girls in the family so they might not identify as being as capable as boys and start to focus on their interests or hobbies on more gendered activities.

**Don't say in years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now. (King, 2003, p. 32)**

The themes of voice/speaking and listening/hearing were common in all three studies and incidentally reflect the important aspects of storytelling methodology. To

speak and be heard is to have power over one's life. To be silenced is to have that power denied (Ahrens, 2006). Just as some research methodologies objectify research participants and/or conceal first voices under, for example, percentages, charts and tables, so too do they reduce opportunities to listen, hear, and learn from those first voices. Voices set free to speak to others and among others, in research and in lifelong learning contexts, including in families and in the community, can direct listeners to transformative knowledge (Christensen et al., 2018). Explicitly considering the impact of historical and structural factors in stories creates space for critiquing socio-cultural practices, experiences, beliefs, and the normalized inequities that come to light.

The storytellers in our three studies maintain that, if no one is listening, then stories are silenced, people become invisible, and certain knowledge will be lost. They assert that invisibility dissipates, and knowledge of the past connects with the present and future, when there is someone to listen to and hear stories.

The role of younger generations as listeners, as audience, came through in the three different studies. The connection between learning opportunities, social connectedness, and sharing lived experience was emphasized when the storytellers spoke about sharing stories with younger generations. This intergenerational connection speaks to concepts of learning about one another and learning from each other (Schmidt-Hertha, 2014). Stories can provide opportunities to both pass on and preserve culture, language, history, values, and community (Lewis, 2014). By passing down stories and knowledge from generation to generation, there is a sense of hope that the next generation will gain value and learn from those (Ingersoll, 2024).

**“All that we are is story. From the moment we are born to the time we continue on our spirit journey ... It is what we arrive with. It is all we leave behind.” (Wagamese, cited in CBC Radio, 2019)**

Storytelling in lifelong learning plays a critical role. It creates space for people to both share their experiences and reflect on them. As both a methodology and a way of knowledge sharing, storytelling creates space for reclaiming and taking forward ways of knowing in, for example, Indigenous and African Nova Scotian culturally embedded knowledge, that creates space for different ways of knowing in the Eurocentric academy. In storytelling methodology and in lifelong learning contexts, the storyteller is recognized as a legitimate knowledge producer, and stories are acknowledged as legitimate sources of knowledge. As storytelling is an engaging two-way process, the story listener, or story-catcher, can affect the telling of the story through their verbal and non-verbal responses (e.g., active listening or distracted behaviours and/or sounds). In fact, the story often develops from the interaction of storyteller and story-catcher.

Through sharing stories, there is a way to understand power imbalances, as well as in narrative, discursive, and material spaces which can activate and promote healing. It is critical to look for ways to “re-educate mainstream settler colonial audiences by promoting alternative stories to those that have dominated colonial pasts and presents” (Christensen et al., 2018, p. 175). Yet, if those listening to stories do so with an ageist, racist, or sexist filter, the impact and value of the stories will be reduced and the transformative potential lost.

Finally, Ardra Cole (2004) says, “Research, like art, can be accessible, evocative, embodied, empathetic, provocative” (p. 16). We agree and believe that storytelling research methodology can be all those, and can, therefore, move decision-makers in ways that statistics and reports often cannot (Banks, 2012).

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