Storytelling as an Effective Tool
in Adult and Vocational Education

An exegesis and portfolio submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Education by Project

Peta M. McGrath
B.A. Grad.Dip.Ed.

School of Education
RMIT University
February 2008
Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgment has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and, any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

..................................

Peta Maree McGrath

Date ..........................
Table of Contents

List of Figures and Tables 5
Abstract 6
Prologue “Of Possum Scarves” 7
Chapter 1 Introduction 9
Chapter 2 Methodology 16
Chapter 3 What is Storytelling? Why does it work? 25
Chapter 4 Storytelling as Pedagogy 40
Chapter 5 The Digital Storytelling Experience 51
Chapter 6 Acceptance of Storytelling as an Innovation in the VET environment 57
Chapter 7 Conclusion -The practitioner’s development - Growth and Struggle 63
List of References 66

Appendices 72
Lists of Figures

Figure 1 - The Journey – Living the Project 18
Figure 2 - May 2005 -The Journey – View of the Narrator 19

List of Tables

Table 1 – Research Overview 17
Table 2 – Kolb’s Adult Learning Environment in Relationship to Storytelling 29

Appendices

Appendix 1
South Mountain Community College Storytelling Flyer

Appendix 2
Abstract

This practitioner research explores the teaching strategy of storytelling and its effectiveness in adult education, specifically in the vocational education and training environment. It uses an action research approach through case studies, personal experience, and reflection to explore this teaching strategy. In addition, reasons for its effectiveness are provided. These reasons link storytelling to adult learning principles and whole brain theories of learning. The practitioner also discusses the influence on her own practice and the practice of others.

Storytelling is an art form that has experienced a renewed interest in the past few years. Some of this can be explained in the innate human need to engage with others and to tell and share stories. This has been an integral part of our existence, and while technology has in some ways served to diminish storytelling, the swing back has created a thirst for stories in society which can be evidenced in the growth of areas such as digital storytelling, research into stories, organizational storytelling, healing with stories, oral history projects and pastimes such as scrapbooking and genealogy.

Within this exegesis is a discussion of storytelling as an innovation in the VET environment and how innovation can be managed in this sector. This is important as it diffuses the use of storytelling as an effective teaching strategy in the broader VET community.

The exegesis is one part of the project, the other being the portfolio of accompanying products. The major product is the accredited course in Storytelling for TAFE NSW. Links to the portfolio are made throughout the exegesis so that the relationship between the two components is clear.
Prologue – “Of Possum Scarves”

Take a possum scarf and drape it around your neck, and to me, that’s what teaching using the Art of Storytelling is all about.

This may sound like bizarre thinking, but this story began with two U.S. colleagues, a dear friend, and I, who were given the opportunity to work together at TAFE NSW Riverina Institute, on a Storytelling Project.

The magic of story was with us throughout the four weeks we were together, and in that time we laughed, cried, hugged and found pieces of ourselves that would never again be discarded.

Before Linda left, she looked me in the eye with her smile that at the same time conveyed peace and mischief, and said “Peta, I’ve made up my mind. When Rachel and I get to New Zealand, I’m sending you back a possum scarf.”

“Gee... Thanks Linda...” I murmured. My stomach was doing back flips as I mentally began to urge her not to send me, her vegetarian friend, anything that was dead and furry.

It was around six weeks later that a soft brown package arrived, postmarked New Zealand. Slowly, I opened the parcel to reveal a magnificent magenta wool scarf... so soft and warm – a delight to wear. As I looked closer at the tag, the word ‘Possumdown’ jumped out... My heart sank – ‘Possumdown.’ I read no further because it was at once so beautiful but so challenging – wool was fine because they don’t kill the sheep, but what do they do with possums?

That’s it!

Maybe they shear them!

I immediately envisioned that scene. I saw happy possums being herded across green New Zealand fields, dogs barking and rounding them up, and those bright possum eyes obediently disappearing into the shearing shed. The possum-shearers dragged those possums over and clipped a beautiful soft fleece that was thrown in the air with delight. Shearing songs filled the air and naked possums slid down the ramp back into the field.

That vision popped as I read through the tag that said that possums were feral in New Zealand, and that the manufacture of Possumdown – a mix of merino wool and possum fur, was ecologically very sound.

The vision of the possum-shearers was much better.

I left the possum scarf out on my dresser, touching it morning and night, feeling wonder at its softness and feeling revulsion at the thought of the dead possums.
At that time, I had commenced some research on Storytelling in Adult Education, and one evening as I was caressing the soft scarf good night, that possum scarf took on a whole new meaning.

Most teachers indulge in spontaneous storytelling in the classroom by relating personal experiences and anecdotes that relate to the topic at hand. I would suggest that most teachers would not label this as Storytelling, and while the relating of these experiences is often integral to their delivery, they do not value this by actually integrating it into their session planning.

To me, this was just like a plain woolen scarf that is put on without even really thinking about it – you know that it has value – but particularly if it is warm and familiar, you just pop it on without even thinking.

The possum scarf suddenly became a symbol for using the Art of Storytelling in the classroom. The word ‘feral’ literally means wild and naturally occurring. It can also indicate something which is out of control, and I must admit, sometimes I have heard students grumble when teachers relate too many of their own experiences and stories. It can become feral in that sense.

As I said before, much Storytelling happens spontaneously in the classroom – it is naturally occurring. When teachers practice the Art of Storytelling in the Classroom, they immediately make an important part of their delivery into a much richer fabric. Teachers can incorporate their personal stories, source stories to illustrate key concepts or to make a point, use stories as icebreakers and introductions, and encourage students to share their stories. It becomes a valued component in lesson planning, and students are engaged by the Power of Story.

The rich fabric that is created is at once challenging and exciting. More teachers should start wearing their Possum Scarves!

McGrath (2003, p. 27)
Chapter 1 – Introduction

Each of us has been designed for one of two immortal functions, as either a Storyteller or a cross legged listener to tales of wonder, love and daring. When we cease to tell or listen, then we no longer exist as people.

Bryce Courtenay (1994, p.1)

This project is about the effectiveness of storytelling as a teaching and learning strategy in adult and vocational education. It is based on the research and experience of the practitioner, Peta McGrath, who is employed by TAFE NSW, Riverina Institute, Albury Campus. The investigation has led to the project having very blurred lines between project and research with two major elements being discussed in this exegesis. These are:

• a discussion of storytelling and its relationship to the teaching and learning of adults, and specifically storytelling as pedagogy as discussed by example and reflection
• the key parts of the portfolio, such as the development of Storytelling courses, presentations, projects and the enthusiasm for teachers to receive professional development in this area which also clearly demonstrate not only the interest in this area, but are also a testament to the value of storytelling as pedagogy.

The initial project goal was to research the effectiveness of storytelling as an effective tool in adult and vocational education, and to establish a commercial course in storytelling. This has expanded over the duration of the project.

This exegesis discusses the practitioner’s experiences with storytelling in the TAFE learning environment. It draws on her experiences and also uses case studies to demonstrate the uses and the effectiveness of storytelling in teaching and learning. The relevance of this in a methodological framework is discussed in Chapter 2.
The practitioner’s exploration of storytelling became contagious as others wanted to use storytelling as a teaching strategy in the TAFE environment.

The portfolio of products exceeds initial expectations of a commercial course in storytelling. Three Storytelling modules have been written and accredited as a Statement of Attainment in Storytelling in TAFE NSW. As well as this, there are other products that make up the durable record of this project. This experience raised other questions for the project. These are:
Why the interest in Storytelling in this educational sector? and
How does this interest influence the diffusion of perceived innovation in the practitioner’s TAFE Institute and in TAFE NSW?
Both of these areas are discussed later.

The themes of the exegesis are as follows:

- Storytelling as pedagogy in an adult learning environment
- Storytelling curriculum and practice as innovation in a vocational education environment
- The journey of the practitioner as a storyteller and educator

These themes are supported and demonstrated by the portfolio. There are three categories of product in the portfolio:

- Courses
  - Proposal to TAFE NSW to write Storytelling Curriculum
  - Three Storytelling modules written and packaged into a Statement of Attainment in Storytelling for TAFE NSW
  - Collaborative writing of Digital Storytelling Curriculum for TAFE NSW

- Projects
  - International Digital Storytelling Project
  - Learnscope Project in Digital Storytelling
  - Digital Stories
• Presentations and Writing
  o Presentation to Riverina Institute Management Executive
  o Workshops for Riverina Institute of TAFE staff
  o Articles for Professional Development Network
  o Presentation at Networking 2002 Virtual Conference
  o Presentation and Course Launch at Riverina Institute General Education Conference
  o Professional Development Workshops for TAFE NSW State Conferences –Using Storytelling in Teaching and Engaging Young People with Story
  o Writing for Australian Storytelling Guild

At this point, the issue of time and its effects on this project should be noted. This project has taken just over six years to complete and this has meant that the notion of innovation has been somewhat diminished, particularly in the discussions about digital storytelling.

Since this project began, there has been an observable increase in the literature about storytelling in general, and certainly about storytelling applied to education and training. When this project began, much of the literature was focused on storytelling with children, however, since 2000 there seems to be many more resources that apply storytelling to management training, mentoring, coaching, research and higher education. This is evident in the list of references at the end this exegesis, as well as observations while researching. There is still very little discussion of storytelling as pedagogy in vocational education, except in the context of digital storytelling.

Chapter 5 discusses the digital storytelling experience which began in 2002. At that time, as far as can be ascertained, there was very little work happening in the field of digital storytelling. What was occurring was exciting and cutting edge. It must be remembered that even in the last five years, technology has made digital storytelling much more accessible for use in schools and colleges, and even though, as is discussed later, it does not always include an oral story, it still has very sound outcomes across the curriculum.
From this point in the exegesis, I have chosen to use the first person to directly relate my experiences in storytelling to the reader. It is a story that begins with a trip to Arizona, U.S.A.

The seeds of this project were planted in late 1999 when I was preparing for a teaching exchange to Phoenix Arizona. TAFE NSW – Riverina Institute and Charles Sturt University had already hosted an inbound group from Maricopa Community Colleges, and the team of which I was part, was the first outbound team on the exchange program.

As part of my preparation for the selection interview I had completed some research on the Maricopa Community Colleges and came across their Storytelling Institute at South Mountain Community College. The Institute had been operating since 1995. “The operating premise of the Institute is that Storytelling is a powerful medium for teaching and learning . . . The group that makes up the storytelling institute believes in the power of storytelling as a vehicle for learning and building the community.” (Appendix 1, South Mountain Community College Storytelling Flyer)

Observations of the Storytelling Institute at South Mountain Community College gave rise to the idea that a Storytelling Centre at Riverina Institute of TAFE was an opportunity to develop. The South Mountain Community College Storytelling Institute has an accredited Storytelling Certificate Course for training in storytelling. Students at the college can choose Storytelling as a credit course for their degree, or Storytellers can enroll in a non-credit storytelling course to practice their craft.

There seems to be very little offered in storytelling courses in Australia. There are workshops conducted by the Australian Storytelling Guild and a short course offered by Southern Cross University. This is not the case overseas, where there are specific storytelling programs at undergraduate and postgraduate level at colleges and universities in the United States and United Kingdom. The practitioner could see a niche opportunity for Riverina Institute of TAFE to establish a Storytelling Centre, along with a range of storytelling courses, and to offer this type of training locally and flexibly.
The relevance of this approach is supported when the growth and applications of this field are considered. Storytelling is becoming more recognized as a valuable tool in educational circles. “Storytelling is currently an underused but valuable tool for teaching and student learning [but] few educators are well versed in storytelling and the variety of applications available to them. Teachers who are trained in Storytelling become excellent models of literacy for their students.” (Brand & Donato, 2001, p.12).

Psychology also uses Storytelling in the field of narrative therapy. “Narrative approaches to counselling invite clients to begin a journey of co-exploration in search of talents and abilities that are veiled by a life problem.”(Monk et al, 1997, p.3). The idea of exploring the client’s stories is that patterns of behaviour and experience will emerge.

In business, Storytelling is emerging as a management tool to transmit the culture of the organization. Neuhauser (1993, p.13) states, “Stories have been used by every culture for thousands of years as the primary communication tool for transmitting cultural values and rules for behaviour. Stories are used to teach the young, reward the people who live up to the values and rules of society, and punish those who violate those values and rules. Without storytelling, any culture – whether it is a traditional tribe, or a large corporation – would have a difficult time protecting and passing on the best of its culture.” Kaye (1996, p.137) discusses the importance of organisational myths and their relevance to managing change and resistance to change. He states, “Myth-making and storytelling create ‘cultural wells’ from which change agents can draw new ideas. These wells dry up once people cease to care for or nurture the mythologies of their organizations. Shared myths in organizations that have a healthy storytelling culture can thus go a long way to reducing the uncertainties of members.”

Stephen Denning is a leader in the practise of organisational storytelling and advocates stories as a key component in mobilising organisational change and innovation. He sees that storytelling is a complement to abstract analysis. “Storytelling does not replace analytical thinking. It supplements it by enabling us to imagine new perspectives and new worlds, and is ideally suited to communicating
change and stimulating innovation. Abstract analysis is easier to understand when seen through the lens of a well chosen story. (Denning, 2001, p. xvii). Storytelling is also being more widely used in conference presentations (Jayne, 2001) and in training and research areas such as customer service (Lieber & Davis, 1997).

Storytelling also has applications in vocations such as tour guides, librarians, salespeople, marketers, teachers, trainers, religious instructors, and curators of art galleries, museums and other historical and contemporary collections. Professional storytellers are sometimes employed at these venues or in these roles to provide a personalized perspective. A recent example of this is the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance employing Anne Stewart, a professional storyteller to tell stories about war (Webb, 2005). In addition to this is the profession of storytelling itself, with people wishing to pursue the field as a performing art.

Given the examples of the uses of storytelling across a number of fields, we also need to consider the development of this current interest, most particularly, in the context of education.

Storytelling is a learner centered approach to education that is based in the perspective of narrative.

“A narrative perspective holds that human beings have a universal predisposition to ‘story’ their experience, that is, to impose a narrative interpretation on information and experience.” (Doyle and Carter, 2003, paragraph 4)

In an educational setting, to use storytelling as a teaching strategy is using a technique that is natural for learners, and allows the learner to reflect, engage and transfer meaning from the story to their own experience and knowledge.

“The fundamental human need to recount and explore experience, including affective components, frequently results in the composition of some form of narrative; often a story that describes actions, emotions and outcomes in a temporal sequence.” (McDrury and Alterio, 2002, p32)
The structure of the narrative seems to be a key factor that makes storytelling an effective practice in learning environments. Narratives enable learners to see patterns and make sense of them, often through reflection and discussion. The case studies in Chapter 4 support this. Another key factor is the role of the learner in determining the links that these patterns have with their own experience and what this means. Mott et al (1999) discusses the structure of narrative and its capacity to influence the learning environment so that it is engaging.

“By taking advantage of the inherent structure of the narrative, narrative centred learning environments could provide engaging worlds in which students are actively involved in ‘story-centric’ problem solving activities. (Mott et al, 1999, paragraph 3) Mott et al see that narrative based learning has the capacity to be useful because of its role in enabling memory and making learning effective. Effectiveness in this context is linked to meeting the goals of learning.

To use storytelling in an adult learning environment is to use skills and techniques to engage and to motivate. Rossiter (2003) summarizes this when she states that “the actual uses of narrative and story in adult teaching and learning are literally unlimited because they arise from infinite expressions of interpretive interplay among teachers, learners and content. And so we cannot reduce narrative into a handy tool kit of teaching techniques. . . We can appreciate that stories – like education itself- draw us out, lead us beyond ourselves.” (Rossiter, 2003, last paragraph)

Please View the Digital Story “The Magic”
Chapter 2 - Methodology

Two forces that have had to be reconciled in the methodology for this project are the strengths and weaknesses of the practitioner as a researcher, on one hand, and on the other, the use of techniques of which the practitioner has needed to ask the question – ‘Is this really research?’

Reason (2001) discusses what he believes are the differences between action research and traditional management research. As a business practitioner and teacher, any research I have conducted in the past has been in the realm of traditional management research. As Reason indicates, this is conducted in the third person, and separates the research and the practitioner. He also discusses the spontaneous nature of action research.

As I write this chapter I reflect on my abilities as a researcher. I find that I have gathered data and I am presenting it to inform other educational practitioners about storytelling as pedagogy in an adult learning environment. This in itself is a relatively straightforward process, but I have struggled with the higher level theoretical perspectives when I ask the question “What informs this research from an underpinning theoretical view?” A pitfall (and I only say pitfall as I write) has been conducting the research without stopping to think about this question, or even consider that my own nature would draw me to a particular philosophical perspective.

This is not to say that part of the educative process of this Masters by Project has not informed the practitioner about action research. Certainly, the process of conducting the research through methods such as observations, case studies and personal reflection, as well as discussing current literature have constructed a picture of storytelling that provides insights into this area of study. These methods relate to four key questions that were identified to inform this project.
A key shift has occurred in the perspective from which I have collated the information. This is where the stance of narrator, as opposed to practitioner has become a key distinction and this is discussed below. This realization has occurred because of the time taken to complete the written component of this project. This has enabled a shift in perspective that only the passage of time has permitted and the roles of practitioner and narrator are equally important to this project. This role distinction is also linked to the reflective process which is not merely about keeping a journal, but also about gaining insights through meditation and the writing process, as well as the use of collaborative reflection.

In the role of practitioner, I see only the project and how it envelops me. I can only tell the story with all of the emotion and biases of a personal storyteller. The nature of the research and my total commitment to the storytelling process and products in this project has made for a blurring of the events. This is also transferred to others when trying to convey the information.

In the role of narrator, I am able to look for events and put them into a meaningful construct that will enable other parties to make sense of the information. This makes for a more accurate documentation of the journey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What is known about Storytelling as pedagogy?</td>
<td>Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Story of the Practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How do others use Storytelling in their Classroom?</td>
<td>Individual case studies – The Story of Other Practitioners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Is there an interest from other Vocational Educators in storytelling?</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 – Research Overview
This constructivist view is evidenced in the way in which I graphically represented the project in November 2003, to the way in which I represented it in May 2005. I had actually forgotten about the first diagram, as I had submitted it to my supervisor as a graphical representation of my progress and products. It was not until it was returned to me after the second representation that I reflected on the differences and why they had occurred.

The two diagrams can be seen below.

![Diagram 1: November 2003 The Journey – Total Immersion of the Practitioner]

Figure 1 November 2003 The Journey – Total Immersion of the Practitioner
These diagrams represent the distinction between the stance of the practitioner who is totally immersed, and the more objective view of the practitioner as the narrator. Connecting the two perspectives are the reflective processes of collaborative reflection through conversation and discussion, personal reflection through meditation and the writing process itself.

The first representation shows the project as being totally connected, with no clear separations from the exegesis, the products, and what I saw as the journey itself. I was immersed in a range of Storytelling projects and practices, which make up the portfolio of this project. At the same time, these have been the focal point for research by case study and observation. The use of a mind map is significant as a tool in itself, as this can be related to how storytelling works as a teaching and learning strategy. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

In the second diagram the passage of time and reflection has allowed me to see the journey as a continuum of events. There are also additional events that have been added as the project expanded. The passage of time is an important component in
this representation. As my research and project becomes known to others, the momentum speeds up. More opportunities are offered, and more teachers are exposed to storytelling as pedagogy, which in turn has provided more components in the portfolio than originally anticipated, and provided more observational and reflective opportunities along the way.

The diagram is focused on key events across time, and this is where the role of narrator as opposed to the immersed practitioner can be seen. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Dumbledore talks to Harry about making patterns of thought through reflection.

Harry did so, staring at the stone basin. The contents had returned to their original, silvery white state, swirling and rippling beneath his gaze. ‘What is it?’ Harry asked shakily. ‘This? It is called a Penseive,’ said Dumbledore. ‘I sometimes find, and I am sure you know the feeling, that I simply have too many thoughts and memories crammed into my mind.’ ‘Err,’ said Harry who truthfully couldn’t say that he had ever felt anything of the sort. ‘At these times’ said Dumbeldore, indicating the stone basin, ‘I use the Penseive. One simply siphons the excess thoughts from one’s mind, pours them into a basin, and examines them at one’s leisure. It becomes easier to spot patterns and links, you understand, when they are in this form.’(Rowling, 2002, pp518 – 519 and acknowledgement to my colleague Jess Chalmers for helping me to make this link)

A narrator takes the key events and puts them into a context so a pattern can be seen. In this paper, the examples/case studies that are reported create a pattern of effectiveness of storytelling in adult education. The common elements in the case studies that demonstrate the effectiveness of storytelling are the engagement of students in the learning and the willingness to complete learning activities, the observed enjoyment of learning, the ability to recall learned material and the achievement of learning goals in the session.

Reflection by the practitioner has allowed the role of narrator to emerge. The difference in the two diagrams can be seen as the differences between a practitioner
immersed in events, and a narrator describing and interpreting events, so that patterns can be observed and then reported.

Tripp (1995) also comments on this when he distinguishes between Thoughtful Action and Reflective Practice, which he sees as two key components of an action research continuum, with thoughtful action and reflective practice building to action research. Some of the characteristics that Tripp identifies as thoughtful action are relevant to the Immersed Practitioner representation. These identify thoughtful action in terms of its spontaneity – thinking about the next move for only a split second, no clearly defined phases and an unpredictable sequence of events. Tripp’s view of Reflective Practice informs the perspective of the Narrator, as it requires one to take time out. It has clear moments where there is engagement in separate activities, and reflection occurs after action.

The reflective phase of this project recognizes the importance of collaborative reflection through conversation and discussion, personal reflection through meditation and the writing process itself.

The dialogue with colleagues and friends, both storytellers and educators has been an important tool in creating the narrative of this project. “The difference between telling a story to another and telling a story with another is an important one . . . narrative activity becomes a tool for collaboratively reflecting upon specific situations and their place in the general scheme of life. The content and direction that narrative framings take are contingent upon the narrative input of the other interlocutors, who provide, elicit, criticize, refute and draw inferences from the unfolding account. In these exchanges, narrative becomes an interactional achievement.” (Ochs & Capps, 2002, p. 3)

An important example of this was the interaction I had with a colleague who returned from the US Exchange Program one year after my return. I had asked her to follow up on some of the aspects of storytelling that I had been investigating the previous year. We sat down together to catch up and she began to tell me her story. Naturally, I had much input into her story as we compared experiences and our stories became entwined. The most important revelation that occurred as a result of this shared
narrative was a perspective on storytelling that was truly achieved as a result of the integration of our two stories. This perspective separated storytelling into art and process, and the value that each of these brings to an educational setting. This perspective is discussed in the next chapter.

I choose to include my meditative practice as I discuss personal reflection, as it is as relevant a process as journaling, and in fact for me a precursor to much of my journaling, whether it is about this project or personal issues. Meditation is a powerful process by which to gain insight. “The aim of meditation is to create relaxed awareness . . . relaxation and heightened awareness is not often experienced together. But meditation brings them together.” (Anderton, 1998, p. 8)

I personally gain great insights when I meditate. The initial approach strategy I used when proposing the concept of storytelling courses to the TAFE NSW Curriculum Centre came through meditation. Completing my own stories, whether it be for the digital stories or stories for telling in class, have derived much of their inspiration through meditation.

Meditation offers the stillness and focus of mind that allows further inspiration and meaning to be derived. The stillness and focus is extremely important to reflection, as waste thoughts are left behind, so that through discipline, the mind is being placed in the desired direction.

Tests have been conducted into brain wave activity during meditation, and essentially when we move from Beta state (awake and alert) into Alpha State (meditation, relaxed) brain wave emissions slow down but the state of consciousness is actually heightened. It is “a reduction in mental activity leading to a deeper state of awareness.” (Lawrence, 1999, p. 16)

Reflection through meditation has been important in shaping all aspects of this project, and has been an enabling factor. Therefore to not have this discussion, is to exclude a major reflective component of this project.

The writing process itself has also become part of the reflective process. As a digital immigrant, I cannot think creatively through a keyboard. For my brain to function in a creative fashion my preference is to put pen to paper. The work is handwritten and
then put into the computer. As tiresome as this process may appear, it allows a reflective process to occur in the writing. It is much more than writing a draft.

Laurel Richardson (2000) discusses writing as a form of inquiry. She states “Although we usually think about writing as a mode of ‘telling’ about the social world, writing is not just a mopping up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of ‘knowing’- a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it.” (Richardson, 2000, p. 923)

Writing has been part of the journaling process, and this exegesis is the product of two major rewrites. With each major revision of the paper, there has been additional insight that has been included. The writing process has been critical in achieving this, and I believe has played a role in the shift from practitioner to narrator has illustrated in the two diagrams. As Richardson states “I write because I want to find something out, I write in order to learn something that I did not know before I wrote it.” (Richardson, 2000, p. 924)

From an holistic perspective, one can also relate this practitioner’s approach to Reason’s ideas of first, second and third person research practice. (Reason, 2001) Reason’s strategy of first person action research relates to the reflective inquiry of the practitioner, in this case, storytelling in the practitioner’s classroom. The first person practitioner reflection takes on an auto-ethnographic approach, in that it is literally written in the first person as a journal, and is also reported in this way.

Reason’s second person action research moves the circle outwards from the practitioner, so that the research involves others. It is at this point that the case studies from other practitioners become relevant. In this way the case study can be seen as a dialectic which assists the practitioner in the process of reflection. Case studies and observations are used to inform this research. The case study is appropriate as “it can provide a template against which the reader can review his or her own experiences, “(Cherry, 1999, p.105). In this way the case study can be seen to assist the practitioner in a process of comparative reflection.
Key experiences from my own practice and the experience of others have been used to demonstrate storytelling effectiveness. The experiences that I have chosen show different applications of storytelling in the vocational education environment. These show storytelling as a state changer and classroom management technique, storytelling as a method of promoting creativity and reducing barriers to learning, storytelling as a trigger/discussion starter and storytelling as a vehicle for personal growth and change. Digital Storytelling is also included, because it is another application of oral storytelling when it is constructed with storytelling intent.

The third person level of inquiry creates a wider circle to involve a community. In this research the community is that of TAFE teachers in TAFE NSW and other adult training providers both in Australia and overseas.

A methodological problem can be seen in that I have worked on the assumption that storytelling is an effective strategy with adult learners. Having said this, a pattern of effectiveness of storytelling as a teaching strategy has been observed. Whether this is because of the positive approach of this practitioner is unclear, as there is always the possibility of self-fulfilling prophecy. However, as with any other teaching strategy; storytelling must be well prepared in that stories must be clearly linked to an educational outcome. A story must also be told well, and in the professional development workshops that I have conducted, I have observed very big differences in the level of confidence that adult educators exhibit in relation to storytelling. Moving teaching to a level of performance seems to evoke demands that do not sit comfortably with some practitioners. This will be discussed later.

The actual measurement of the effectiveness of storytelling in training, apart from the observation of a pattern of effectiveness, could be the subject for future and higher level research.
Chapter 3 - What is Storytelling? Why does it work?

*Stories are the way we naturally think: the way we sort the natural information in our brain. They are also a way to remember – they cement ideas in our brain.*

*Kate Lutz (cited in Wacker & Silverman, 2003 p. xxxi)*

Please view the Digital Story – “What Makes a Good Story?”

So far, the word storytelling has been used but not really defined. In this chapter some definitions of Storytelling will be explored, and this will be related to the context of adult education and why stories are an effective teaching strategy. The increased level of interest in storytelling will also be discussed.

Berice Dudley (1997, paragraph 1) attempts to define storytelling by saying that “Storytelling is the art in which a teller conveys a message, truths, information, knowledge or wisdom to an audience . . . in an entertaining way, using whatever skills (musical, artistic, creative) or props . . . to enhance the audience’s enjoyment, retention and understanding of the message conveyed. Stories are sometimes told purely for joy and delight.” She also goes on to reflect on the difficulty of defining storytelling by saying that “Writing a definition is like pulling the wings off a butterfly to see how it flies.”(1997, paragraph 6)

If Dudley’s definition above is examined, it can be seen that the definition could relate equally to authors who write their stories in books, screenwriters and directors who tell their story with actors in film and television, journalists who write their stories for newspapers and magazines and people who tell stories to each other. Steve Sanfield (1996, cited in Holt & Mooney, p.7) says that storytelling is part of the human condition. “There is a deep seated need in the human spirit to tell stories, to hear stories, to share stories.”

In this project, we can qualify definitions of storytelling further to focus on “oral storytelling.” The following definitions all share the common element of the teller using their voice to engage the audience in a live situation. Anne Pellowski (1999, cited in Andrews, p. 133) states that storytelling is “the art or craft of narration of stories in verse and/or prose, as performed or led by one person before a live audience: the stories may be spoken, chanted or sung, with or without musical, pictorial, and /or other accompaniment, and may be learned from oral, printed or mechanically recorded sources; one of its purposes must be that of entertainment.”

Peter Dargin, a past President of the Australian Storytelling Guild, agrees with this definition when he says “Storytelling, by its nature, makes a greater impact upon the listener than reading. It is so direct. . . The teller is not constrained by words set onto the page or looking at the page. But it is more. Storytelling is a skill that needs a story and a teller and the how to. Storytelling is an attainable skill,” (1997, p. 63). Dargin puts forward two main ideas in his definition .These are the relationships between the teller, the listeners and the story, and secondly the view of storytelling as an “attainable skill’ which leads to discussion of the training of storytellers.

The relationship between the teller, the listener and the story itself is in itself a reason why storytelling is an effective teaching strategy. It is used for a particular purpose, with a particular audience and is highly personalized. The teller uses a range of performance skills to deliver the story. The key elements of delivery include facial expression, use of voice, body language such as movement and gestures so that emotions are conveyed to the listener. Word choice too, is very important.
Daryl Bellingham (2001, paragraph 6), a storyteller from Queensland states that “The great thing about the ancient, oral tradition of storytelling is that the storyteller gets to change the words. Stories are constantly shaped and reshaped depending on the audience, the circumstances etc.”

The listener relies on the teller for the transmission of the story but does not have a passive role. The listener of the story has much to gain from the process.

“Storytelling develops an awareness of and sensitivity to the thoughts and feelings of the listeners. As the teller looks right at the listeners, eyes meet and an interactive communication exists between them. . . Both storyteller and listener are actively involved. . . Storytelling stimulates the imagination and mental visualization. As the storyteller spins his or her magic, the listener creates pictures in his or her mind of what the setting and characters look like and creates images of the story events. Each listener will “see” images that are unique and special.” (Livo & Reitz, 1987, p. xi)

The role of the storyteller is really about the “art of storytelling” which is focused on the interpersonal skills required to be a storyteller. As previously stated, storytelling is a skill that can be learned. This is also supported by the experience of the South Mountain Community College Storytelling Institute in Phoenix, Arizona. In the report of their first year, it is stated “ Storytelling training is a wonderful way to build community. . . storyteller training is essential, as it is with any other art form, craft or skill. Effective training is especially important for people such as teachers, community leaders and people who are planning to become professional storytellers who are going to perform, motivate, and interest others in the value and potential of storytelling.” (Miyusaka & Calbow, 1995, p.9)

The story is the tool of the teller and storytellers develop a repertoire over time. A story can be chosen for many reasons, but most of all, the teller must enjoy telling it. When building a repertoire, stories can be gathered from a range of sources such as personal stories, family and friends as well as retelling myths, legends, fairy stories and the range of folk tales that exist.
When we relate storytelling to an educational context, we are doing just that – putting storytelling into an educational context, and when we consider adult learners we are telling stories to adults in an educational context, whether that learning environment is in a traditional classroom, online or in the workplace.

When researching the literature for this project, it is an interesting observation in itself to note that up until about the last ten years, the focus of storytelling in education is with children – especially younger children. However, there seems to have been a renewed interest in storytelling and there is more discussion of storytelling and its applications in a range of environments. Some of these have been mentioned in the first chapter.

The view that using storytelling as a teaching strategy is more aimed at younger children seems to prevail within the storytelling community itself. In a special teaching edition of Swag of Yarns – the Australian storytelling magazine (Dargin, 2003 pp. 6 - 10), the major discussions were focused on children. I had contributed an article (see the portfolio) about some experiences with TAFE teaching and I was grouped with a social worker using narrative therapy with children and a domestic violence worker using storytelling with her clients. The introductory statement to our part of the article was “these tellers take teaching with stories into different levels.” This statement indicates using storytelling in these contexts is seen to be different from the norm – the norm seemingly being with younger children. This is a particularly relevant view when we consider that this is the judgment of the Australian Storytelling community. Certainly the Storytelling Guild’s “Storytelling Tips” which comes as part of the Guild’s Newsletter “Telling Tales” is usually aimed at storytelling to children. Examples of this are using puppets, felt stories, telling to pre-schoolers, adapting fairy tales and so on.

Kolb and Rubin (1991, pp. 58, 59) identify five characteristics of the adult learning environment that can be linked to Storytelling. In the table below, I have listed these characteristics and identified how storytelling can support adult learning. In addition, the case studies in the next chapter will demonstrate this.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kolb &amp; Rubin’s Adult Learning Environment</th>
<th>How Storytelling Supports Adult Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Based on a psychological contract of reciprocity, a basic building block of human interaction. In adult learners both getting and giving are critical. In getting, there is the opportunity to incorporate new ideas and perspectives and to practice their use.”</td>
<td>Storytelling is based on the reciprocal relationship of teller and listener. Both partners in this interactive relationship “give and get”. In storytelling, the story can be adapted to incorporate new ideas and perspectives that hold relevance to the listeners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It is experience based. Ideally the motivation for learning comes not from the instructor’s dispensation of rewards and grades but from problems and opportunities arising from the learners, own life experience. Experience shows adults what they need to learn, but their experience also allows them to contribute to the learning of others.”</td>
<td>Stories are a great way to share experiences in a non threatening manner. The stories can be from an appropriate source that is relevant to the situation. Listeners can use this story as a reference point to share their own experiences. This has the capacity to create a rich collaborative learning environment. It promotes engagement in the learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The adult learning environment emphasizes personal application. Since the adults’ learning needs arise from their own experience, the main goal of learning is to apply new knowledge, skills and attitudes to the solution of the individual’s practical problems.”</td>
<td>Appropriately chosen stories can provide a catalyst for personal application, and the opportunity to explore creative solutions in the individual’s circumstances, by what has been modeled or inferred from a story. A teacher can also incorporate a range of story-linked activities to assist this process. It is personalized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The learning environment is individualized and self-directed. Just as every individual’s experience is different, so are each person’s learning goals and learning style. A major concern in the management of an adult learning environment is to organize program resources in such a way that they are maximally responsive to what each learner wants to learn and how he or she learns it.”</td>
<td>Storytelling accommodates all learning preferences by incorporating visual, auditory and kinesthetic cues. “It is the only form that bridges all learning styles; that allows people to pick up information visually (by creating pictures in the mind) auditorially (through hearing the story) and kinesthetically (through what one feels viscerally and/or emotionally) and touches one’s mind, heart, soul and physical being (for example, through laughter). (Wacker &amp; Silverman, 2003, p. xxxii). It promotes recall. The nature of the storyteller/listeners relationship is such that individuals have the opportunity to glean what is relevant for them from the story, and assimilate this into their own learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Story-linked activities for adults can be very open-ended as shown in the case studies.

| “It integrates learning and living. There are two goals in the learning process. One is to learn the specifics of a particular subject matter. The other is to learn about one’s own strengths and weaknesses as learner………Learning is no longer a special activity reserved for the classroom; it becomes an integral and explicit part of life itself.” | Stories, as discussed earlier, are part of the human condition. Storytelling, truly integrates learning and living by providing the most natural way of learning. |

Table 2 – Kolb’s Adult Learning Environment in relationship to Storytelling

The fact that storytelling integrates living and learning means that it is an appropriate strategy that can be incorporated into the notion of Life Based Learning, as discussed by Staron, Jasinski & Weatherley (2006) in the report Life Based Learning – A strength based approach for capability development in vocational and technical education. The view of learning in this report is that of an “integrated and interconnected ecology” (p. 50) that combines leisure, work, family and personal pursuits. It values the learning that takes place in a variety of circumstances and in a variety of ways.

Storytelling then can be seen as a natural process.

If for a moment you can picture “a knotted net like a fisherman’s net, each of us can be viewed as one knot in the net” (1995, Schaule p. 60). This analogy relates to the connections that story brings to people – we share parts of ourselves as well as information.

If you can further visualize the connections of this huge net, it can be related to the process of learning itself, and Buzan’s notion of radiant thinking. Buzan (2002, p. 52) asks the question “What happens to your brain when you taste a ripe pear, smell flowers, listen to music, watch a stream, touch a loved one, or simply reminisce?”

Participating in storytelling (whether it be an oral or a digital story could be easily added to this question. Storytelling is a multi-sensory experience, and if the teller
chooses to do so, smells, sounds other than the teller’s voice, as well as visual cues can all be part of the experience.

Buzan (2002, pp. 52-3) answers his question. “Each bit of information entering your brain- every sensation, memory or thought (incorporating every word, number, code, food, fragrance, line, color, image, beat, note and texture) can be represented as a central sphere from which radiate tens, hundreds, thousands, millions of hooks. Each hook represents an association, and each association has its own infinite array of links and connections.”

It is these connections that for the basis of Buzan’s Radiant Thinking concept of which his Mind Map is an expression. “Radiant thinking (from ‘to radiate’, meaning ‘to spread or move in directions, or from a given centre’) refers to associative thought processes that proceed from or connect to a central point . . . Radiant thinking is the natural and virtually automatic way in which all human brains have always functioned,” Buzan (2002, p.54).

Perhaps this natural way of thinking - the capacity of our brains to work in this way – is what makes storytelling such an effective teaching strategy. At a recent staff lunch, I experienced a powerful demonstration of how a piece of information entering the brain can create hooks and associations in the form of linking into memories and then culminate in the exchange of stories.

The Head of Campus brought out dessert – boxes of chocolate paddle pops. Without exception, as people unwrapped and tasted their paddle pop, they were taken to another place in time. Every person had a story about a paddle pop, from childhood bullies and the public swimming pool to the Ash Wednesday bush fires. The paddle pops were a powerful trigger for these stories. Buzan sees that using the whole brain makes for a powerful and memorable learning experience.

This is also supported by Michael Berman and David Brown (2000, p.4) when they say “According to psychologists, our memories seem to work best when we see things as part of a recognized pattern, when our imaginations are aroused, when we can make natural associations between one idea and another, and when the
information appeals strongly to our senses. An imaginative story, rich in vocabulary, that appeals to the senses, which works as a metaphor, and is cumulative in nature, clearly fulfills all of these criteria.”

Mary Richards (2002, p. 17) discusses that storytelling enhances learning because it evokes emotion and that “the more a story evokes and stirs the emotions, the more likely it is that the message within the story will be remembered.” Richards also discusses storytelling as a whole brain activity, but in addition discusses the enhancement of learning through storytelling because it uses brain waves that make us more receptive to learning. “Stories reduce our brain activity to the Alpha level (relaxed awareness) and make us more receptive to learning and to taking in the message and moral of the story.” (Richards, 2002, p. 16).

Berman and Brown (2000, p. 4) see that it is the rhythm and repetition of a story that “helps to induce alpha brain waves and the optimal state for learning and remembering . . . the process can also bring about a form of regression to childhood days and recreate in us that emotional state of curiosity, which as adults we tend to lose.”

Repetition is well known as a way in which people elaborate and retain information, and then transfer that knowledge. Story embodies a number of techniques that enhance memory. “According to memory gurus, there are four basic organizational structures which guarantee better recall skills: Chain, keyword, peg and loci . . . The story, a powerful memory trace, can become more powerful with repetition and strengthened with elaboration.” (McGregor, 2007, p.14)

As adults, however, we can carry baggage that influences our participation in educational settings and Parkin (1998, p.32), apart from concurring with the previous points, also adds that “listening to a story- whether in a formal or informal setting – is seen by most people as a non-threatening activity; it does not require any active participation, and does not involve any risk, unlike the dreaded role play or more traditional ‘ice-breaker’ exercises! Listening to a story simply induces feelings of relaxed awareness and makes people more receptive to learning.”
One would ask if Storytelling is so powerful a teaching tool and has such along historical tradition, why it is not recognized widely in educational circles, particularly at adult level. A number of factors could be at play here.

First, one needs to look at the recognition of Storytelling as an art form itself. Unlike drama, music, film, or dance, storytelling has not yet developed either a critical vocabulary or a secure footing in academic scholarship. Unlike those other arts, storytelling performances rarely receive professional reviews. As a result, the public neither regards storytelling as on par with other performing arts, nor understands its range and qualities. (Radner et al, 2004 p. 8)

Given this status issue, it makes it difficult to convince educators of the value of applied storytelling unless they gain first hand experience in storytelling and this certainly starts becoming a chicken and egg issue.

Secondly, there are storytellers themselves who are purist in relation to their art form and see that any move towards making storytelling more academic through analysis and evaluation would be harmful.

In other arts, theory and practice are two sides of the same coin: historical and intellectual scholarship complements and nourishes performance, and vice versa. At this point, storytelling lacks this crucial interdependence with storytelling scholarship. . . . But storytellers themselves have tended to protect the art form from analysis and evaluation.” (Radner et al, 2004, p.16)

According to this, storytellers are frightened that any move toward the development of a critical dialogue for storytelling will destroy its creativity and create unwelcome standards for the art form.

Thirdly, storytelling as opposed to story reading can create fear in potential tellers that is on par with stage fright. This is a personal observation and I can describe three instances where I felt surprised that this was the case. While we can say that everyone in society tells stories and it is the very fabric of our society, there is a difference in telling stories and being a Storyteller. I was doing a Storytelling performance at my daughter’s school, and afterwards the teacher came up and said
that she enjoyed the stories, but more importantly, that she liked the way the stories related to the topics currently being studied. I explained that it was not difficult to either source good stories or to adapt stories for an educational outcome. Her response was that she could not do that, and the response was framed around the performance elements of storytelling. I have had a similar response from some TAFE teachers and also from librarians when I have been storytelling. The interesting thing is that teachers will use their experiences and tell stories, but storytelling is viewed as a performance and can be seen as outside the regular realm of teaching strategy.

The importance of gaining better recognition for Storytelling in teacher education is discussed by Berice Dudley (1997, paragraph 10).

“We need to convince curriculum planners in Education Departments:

(1) What a valuable tool Storytelling is when getting a message across to students.

(2) How storytelling can be used successfully across the curriculum- in reading, writing, history, science and many other subjects – in both primary and secondary schools, to benefit both teachers and students.

(3) Storytelling is used in multi-cultural education; it can assist in creating classroom communities; in improving student’s emotional health; enhancing children’s grasp of our social and environmental responsibilities.

Once taught as a subject and used by teachers knowingly as a valuable tool, it can evolve from there to whatever needs arise.”

The use of Storytelling as a strategy in the adult classroom is probably used more frequently than is actually recognized. Its use can be seen when teachers use story to conceptualize facts by using their personal experiences (stories), and the experiences of others (stories); as well as in the use of written and oral case studies.

As educators, we tell stories to students for many reasons: to introduce new material in entertaining and interesting ways, to share practical experiences which demonstrate key teaching points, and to reveal aspects of ourselves. (McDrury & Alterio, 2002, p.36)
We also need to consider that storytelling is on the back foot in an age where information technology tends to isolate individuals and where we focus on low involvement mediums such as television. Emails, SMS on mobile phones and chat rooms tend to leave the individual writing instead of speaking, and doing this individually from a terminal.

“Television is now our big storyteller. But television is a passive storyteller. It doesn’t care if we leave the room to raid the fridge. It doesn’t care if we turn off at the crucial point in the story. Worst of all, television does not allow us to use our imaginations.” (Mooney & Holt, 1996, p.7)

However, Dan Pink (2005) sees that story is becoming more important as we move from the information age to the conceptual age. The whole book focuses on the left brain Information Age, needing to include right brain strategies to successfully survive in the Conceptual Age.

“As important as story has been throughout humanity, and as central as it remains to how we think, in the information age, it got something of a bad rap . . . Stories amuse, facts illuminate. Stories divert, facts reveal. Stories are for cover; facts are for real. . . . In the Conceptual Age, minimizing the importance of story places you in professional and personal peril,” (Pink, 2005, p.100).

As previously discussed, it can be seen that most teachers tell stories in their classes. Stories are often told to relate an experience in the field so that there is a practical example that supports the theory that is being related. This often happens spontaneously, and with further preparation it is not difficult to consciously integrate storytelling into classes.

In May / June 2003, TAFE NSW Riverina Institute hosted their annual exchange program with Maricopa Community Colleges from Phoenix Arizona. Two of the exchange teachers were from South Mountain Community College, which also has a Storytelling Institute. LynnAnn Wojciechwicz and Lorraine Calbow, who teach storytelling, presented workshops across TAFE NSW Riverina Institute to encourage staff to integrate more Storytelling in their delivery. LynnAnn and Lorraine told stories
to illustrate key points of the session and to model storytelling in an adult learning environment.

According to LynnAnn Wojciechowicz (2004) from South Mountain Community College there are eight reasons to infuse Storytelling into educational delivery.

1. Storytelling stimulates learning by accessing the senses of hearing and seeing, along with emotions, therefore producing strong memories.
2. Storytelling builds literacy skills by providing a bridge between the written and spoken word.
3. Listening to stories encourages critical thinking because many stories explore problem solving and decision-making.
4. Listening to stories encourages creative thinking and strengthens the imagination because the listener creates their own images of the story being related.
5. Storytelling enhances communication and promotes emotional development – In Storytelling more than half the story is communicated with eyes, faces, gestures and voice inflections. When we encourage students to tell stories we provide an opportunity for them to feel good.
6. Storytelling creates classroom culture – storytelling engages the attention of those who come to share the story, and it can stimulate interactive and co-operative learning.
7. Storytelling builds cultural awareness and understanding by enabling students to interact with culture (past and present) through narrative, which is the major means by which we make sense of the world around us.
8. Storytelling is a fun way to learn because it captures the imagination of the students and makes learning fun. It also provides an environment for most learning styles.

As I have become more aware of the power of story, I have moved from what I would term telling stories in the classroom to becoming a Storyteller in the classroom. When I think about the power of story in a very literal sense, I relate it to a power like electricity – it becomes a simple matter of throwing the right switch to make a connection to have the lights come on. This idea can become an appropriate metaphor for learners who through the relating of experiences – ‘stories’, literally
have an ‘A-Ha!’ experience, and the lights come on, allowing them to view information and concepts in a way that is now being understood.

But what is it about story that gives it this power? As Lodge (1990, p. 4) comments, “narrative is one of the most fundamental sense-making operations of the mind, and would appear to be both peculiar to and universal among human beings.” If narrative is indeed one of the most fundamental sense making operations of the mind, than it stands to reason, that storytelling or oral narrative has to be a fundamental tool in education. Yet, one hears of storytelling as an educational tool with children, and much less with adults. This comment is supported by Parkin, “Hearing a story helps us to make sense of what might seem an abstract or complex subject through links with tangible or concrete examples.” (Parkin, 1998, p.15)

Peter Dargin, past President of the Australian Storytelling Guild, NSW, also relates Storytelling back to a fundamental process. “As storytellers, librarians and educators we need to foster an environment for learning, for reading, for writing, for seeing and discovering, for speaking, for feeling, for listening and for imagining - and language, oral language is the first literacy.” (Dargin, 1996, p.2)

So, if we consider power within the framework of oral language, our first literacy, we can also derive that storytelling has power because of its accessibility to those at all levels of literacy, ranging from the first literacy or oral literacy right through to those with highly developed literacy skills in the formal sense. “Story is everything. We explain by story. We insert anecdotes into our presentations, our daily life and our stories.” (Dargin, 1996, p.7)

The power of the story tends to occur in the connections that are created between listeners and teller. Storytelling is about conveying the story in an enthusiastic and entertaining manner, and each listener interacts on a personal level. This connection is extremely important in creating a powerful learning experience in an educational context.
The effect of storytelling can be readily observed when students use the initial story told, and transfer this to their own experience. They use the story to make sense of the theory and to apply and compare this to their own experiences. For example, when conducting a customer service session, and be relating a concept such as a “ladder of loyalty” - a short story is told for each step of the ladder that assists in conveying the key point. We may speak of the customer as an ‘advocate’ – in other words we have a customer who is going to market the business for you by saying how wonderful your business is…..and then we might say . . . “I remember when. . .” and while relating the experience is part of this, engagement is the essential key ingredient.

Outside of the TAFE environment, I have observed and practiced storytelling as an influential and effective teaching and learning strategy. As a storyteller to adult audiences at Seniors Week, it was interesting to observe how my childhood memories, encapsulated in a simple story called “Going to Nana’s”, triggered wonderful memories for a nursing home audience. Many stories were recounted over the following cups of teas. However, the highlight of that day was to observe the audience learning directly about the Stolen Generation through a personal story told by the now deceased Master storyteller (and friend) Eddie Kneebone. A number of audience members were in tears as Eddie transcended cultural barriers and told the story that was about the love of family – a common human narrative.

While storytelling stories at a primary school over a number of occasions, a change in the practice of the teachers that watched the story telling was noticed. On two occasions, I told stories that were directly relevant to the curriculum area being delivered and had follow up activities for the children. I also wrote stories that were engaging as they used students and teacher names. The teachers who observed also followed up and encouraged the students to learn and tell one of the stories at the school assembly, which demonstrated storytelling to an even wider audience.

During a local festival celebrating the Ned Kelly works of Sidney Nolan at the local art gallery, I was asked to tell Ned Kelly stories at the local libraries. I wrote a fictitious story that involved a group of animals and Ned Kelly and his gang. The children had to put on black Ned Kelly masks which I made - just simple sheets of
black A4 card with an eye slit. The feedback from the librarians was that the children were totally engaged and they commented on the engagement that they observe with storytelling, as opposed to story reading. I also see that the children keep acting out the roles after the story finishes. This would indicate that the story is memorable and engaging.

The teacher as storyteller makes clear eye contact and relates the story with animation. It is also not about reading a case study, because in Storytelling, the interaction between teller and listener is immediate and personalized. The learner reacts to this relaxed, natural method of conceptualisation. This encourages a comparison of their own experiences and often students respond by saying “Oh yes….I have done that too” or “a friend of mine was telling me. . .” This can create a rich gathering of resources that will reinforce the initial information.

In recent years, there has been an online community of practice (Edna Group) specifically for teachers and practitioners of storytelling in education. This is a group that posts information and experiences to forums so that resources are shared and networks of like minded people, created and maintained. While the focus of the group tends to be digital storytelling, the importance of storytelling is intrinsic to this group, and the technology is a tool to support the story.
Chapter 4 - Storytelling as Pedagogy

“Like fish that live in a sea of water, we live in a sea of stories. Like fish who are unaware of the water, we sometimes don’t see the stories around us.”

*Center for Narrative Studies (2004)*

As I reflect on my experiences in teaching and training over the past twenty years, I know that I have always told stories in that context. Particularly in a vocational environment such as TAFE NSW where a teacher requirement has always been a high level of industrial experience, any teacher brings with them, a wealth of experiences that are shared to assist students conceptualise their experiences. Teachers tend to do this naturally, as do most people, when they are conveying information of any kind, because Storytelling is a very natural way to teach and learn. It is part of the human condition.

“Hardy’s (1977,p.13) observation that we ‘dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, construct, gossip, learn, hate and live by narrative, reveals how pervasive and integral stories are to our lives.” (Cited in McDrury & Alterio 2002, p.31).

I use personal stories in areas such as customer service, team building, marketing and management. Before I was consciously aware of using Storytelling, I knew that the process of sharing stories was not just important, but integral to my teaching. However, it was more spontaneous. Sometimes it became more of a dialogue with questions and comments coming freely from students. Practicing storytelling in the classroom means that I put a higher level of preparation into my stories, and I have a heightened awareness of using my voice and body, and choosing words that will make the story a powerful experience. The following cases are a snap shot of some of my experiences and how they have influenced my practice.
Storytelling in Management Education

The management module – Managing Self was a subject that I was teaching as part of the Diploma in Management and Leadership at Albury Campus. This subject covers the personal awareness and effectiveness of managers and the content includes self perception, self analysis, assertiveness, time management, stress management, personal planning, goal setting and risk taking.

The learners in this group had been studying together for three years and were in their final year of the Diploma in Management. With the exception of one student, they were all employed in management positions and were extremely comfortable with themselves and their environment. The students were also familiar with me, as I had delivered previous modules in their course.

Storytelling was used in three ways:

- To demonstrate key learning areas and to link activities to learning outcomes
- Using personal stories to create a climate of sharing
- Students telling their story as an assessment task

One motive that I had was to extend the student’s ideas and experiences with the topic of goal setting, as they had done goal setting in other management subjects, and their initial reaction was “not this again!” The idea was not just to set goals, but to look at creating a balanced life, and identify conflicts between a number of goals that could effect work/life balance.

“The Effigy of Life” was chosen as a story to focus on this idea. This story is from The Prophet Returns by Gunter Schaule. The Effigy of Life uses a temple with its foundations, six pillars and roof as a metaphor for the key areas of life that must be balanced in all areas for it to be stable. It was an appropriate story to use to get students to think about the key areas in their life that need to be balanced for well being and success.
I then learned the story to be told. I had a copy in front of me when I conducted the class. I mostly told, but also partly read the story as I wanted to see if this had any impact on the students. The students then completed the goal setting activities that I had linked to the story. The goal setting, as well as other activities, became part of a portfolio for assessment. Included in this was a journal.

On my session plans, I included personal stories that demonstrated how life experiences can impact on career path, and also how one can group situations to see patterns emerge over time. This proved to be very useful for students as they could use past behavior to predict the possible impacts on future success and career path. This also helped to create an environment for the students where it was safe to share personal stories. It should also be said that what people shared was clearly their choice.

A major assessment event for this subject was a presentation. The use of the word “story” proved to be effective when asking the students to give a presentation. In this subject where students were required to give a presentation about their career, I asked them to “tell the story of their career”. Students were also asked to incorporate at least two of the following: a song, a picture or painting, a poem, a collage, a role model or person that they admired. I found that students were far more creative in their approach to the assignment and also gave more of themselves in terms of personal discussion. Their feedback indicated that their level of enjoyment in completing the work seemed higher.

Storytelling was used in this context for a number of reasons.

- to demonstrate/model an effective training tool
- to model potential risk taking when this was part of the topic area
- to energize and engage students in what they initially perceived to be a less important and easy subject
- The group members were comfortable with each other and were not threatened by moving into the realm of personal storytelling

A number of outcomes and observations were made with this particular case study.
All students, except one, related their story (assessment presentation) to “The Effigy of Life” story, and all mentioned it in their journals in a positive way. Evaluations were also completed and when students were asked to state the most memorable parts of the course, in terms of their own learning, two things were on the top of the list – “The Effigy of Life”, and their personal stories.

The quality of the personal stories with the incorporated music, pictures etc as described above was extremely high, and were highly personalized and at times very moving. A number of students felt the emotion as one of their peers showed photographs and talked about the key role that his recently deceased father had played in directing his career and what it was like to now be in charge of the family business.

Another important observation was that students were using the word story to describe what they were doing. Story had become the accepted way in which the students were operating throughout this subject.

This approach also led to discussions about the ethics of telling personal stories. The participants discussed confidentiality as an issue, as well as selecting an appropriate story to tell for their audience. Word choice was also an important part of this discussion.

This experience helped to further define my practice of storytelling. It allowed me to explore personal storytelling in management and personal development and this experience triggered further interest for me in the field of organizational storytelling. This has meant applying storytelling to areas such as change management and planning. This area has now been on ongoing part of my own professional practice.
Storytelling in Music Education

Another very different area of application was having the opportunity to train music students in storytelling. Students were completing composition as part of their Certificate IV in Contemporary Music and the students were required to compose music and lyrics. An informal conversation with their teacher led to a storytelling workshop for these students.

The students on this program were aged from 17 to 30 and most had completed the Certificate III in Music, so were familiar with each other and had the basic skills required to compose music. They had been struggling with this element, particularly with writing lyrics and then formulating appropriate music.

Storytelling was used to promote creativity and to encourage the writing of lyrics with the students. Around the same time, I read some articles in National Storytelling Network USA magazine – July /August 2002. The articles were about the connections between voice and music and I was able to apply some of the principles to the workshop.

The students were given some triggers to encourage them to write. Examples are “I remember when,” and “a place I love”. This was completed about three times across the session, and then students were encouraged to share their stories. They were also encouraged to listen to their voices as they told their stories, in terms of volume, rate, rhythm and pitch, and then to transfer this into terms of rhythm, tempo and melody in relation to music. They were then asked to incorporate this into their composition. This was where the music teacher took over! The exchange of stories through telling provided the students with an effective tool to assist in music composition.

Once again, there are some observations that can be made that demonstrate the effectiveness of storytelling with these students. The effectiveness of the session was evidenced because the goal of the learning (to write lyrics and to begin to compose appropriate music) was met. The students were engaged in the storytelling and were motivated to achieve the learning goal. The students felt that this was a
simple technique that they would continue to use for this purpose. They were surprised at how quickly a story could be triggered from the writing cues. They really liked the idea of telling their stories and observing all the characteristics of voice that indicated emotion and that this could be transferred into melody, tempo and rhythm. By the end of the session, the majority of the students had a draft to do further work on with their music teacher, but also had a tool for composition that that they could use in the future.

As a management teacher, I do not have the opportunity to work with music students but volunteering to teach storytelling allowed me to have this experience. This workshop gave me a heightened awareness of the voice and the emotions that can be conveyed through a simple story. It also demonstrated to me another application for teaching adults with storytelling in a discipline outside of my own.

**Storytelling in Professional Development Workshops**

As documented on the portfolio, I organized four storytelling workshops for professional development of staff and a Storytelling dinner, during exchanges with the Maricopa Community Colleges, Phoenix Arizona. Due to the interest in Storytelling that I had started on my exchange in 2000 and that my colleague continued with her exchange in 2001, teachers that were involved in storytelling were sent to Australia on exchange in 2002 and 2003.

These experiences were integral in confirming my belief that storytelling is a field that is growing all the time in Australia. It seems that people have not just an interest in story, but are thirsty for story.

The Storytelling dinner was an opportunity for community people, as well as TAFE staff to network with others who were interested in storytelling and digital storytelling. Attendees included child care workers, university educators and IT people. With just word of mouth, over 40 people gathered to share dinner and stories.
More formal than the dinner were the four workshops that were conducted for Riverina Institute staff. The focus of these workshops was different due to the differing skills of the presenters. In 2002, the aim of the workshop was to introduce storytelling as a teaching and learning strategy in the adult classroom. In 2003 the workshop focus was to experience the power of story, be introduced to storytelling skills and to be shown ways in which storytelling could be used in the classroom. In all cases the level of interest was high – all workshop places were full. In fact in 2002, the Wagga Wagga Campus workshop had such high demand; it was moved to a room to accommodate 40 plus participants.

The staff training department was taken by surprise by the level of interest, but there are some key factors that need to be considered. When one considers who came along to the workshops it can be seen that the highest level of interest in storytelling came from General Education staff, particularly those that teach literacy. The following reasons may account for this.

1. These teachers already have an interest in creative writing and story.
2. These teachers have a keen interest in looking for alternative ways to promote literacy, and as our first literacy, storytelling is integral to this.
3. These teachers are often delivering to indigenous and other equity groups where storytelling could be seen as an appropriate cultural strategy.

Having said this it is also important to note that other disciplines were represented. These included business, information technology, fine arts, child studies and to a lesser extent trade teachers. I don’t think that this indicates that trade teachers do not tell stories; it is just that they don’t see the word storytelling as meaningful. Most teachers will tell stories, but not identify themselves as storytellers. This was tested at the first workshops where teachers were asked the question “are you a Storyteller?” at the beginning, and again at the end of the workshop. Without exception, people left with the understanding that they are storytellers; they just had not recognized this aspect of themselves until it was brought to their attention. Anecdotally, I am aware that trade teachers will certainly share experiences of their trade with students as it assists in providing working examples and provides personal credibility for the teacher.
The most interesting observation of the 2002 workshops was that participants were given a creative trigger to write a story. All participants were able to write a short story. Then people were asked to share their stories. When voice was put to these stories it was observable that emotions rose. Whether the stories brought tears or laughter, it was clear in reviewing the evaluations that all participants gained an insight into the connection of voice and story.

The evaluations were also important as they showed that participants wanted more development in storytelling. This provided much encouragement for me to write the storytelling courses. Storytelling 1 – An Introduction, is a 40 hour program that provides storytelling skills and is aimed at educators and trainers, business managers, child care workers, musicians, performers who may wish to become Storytellers, as well as tour guides, priests and ministers – any area where storytelling may be utilized.

The Course Storytelling 2 – Building the Craft is designed as a consolidation module and also has the positive effect of bringing storytelling into the community. It aims to create a safe environment for practicing stories and building a repertoire. It also allows feedback and confidence building for the beginning storyteller.

I have also conducted two professional development workshops for staff at the state level. The one I have chosen to discuss here is one I conducted for TAFE NSW General Education staff at the Helping Youth at Risk conference. My workshop was “Engaging Young People through Story.”

The participants were all teachers who were teaching young people who were often disengaged socially and economically. They were looking for strategies that could be used to engage, encourage and motivate their learners, but at the same time assist in developing a range of personal and educational skills. When I asked if anyone had used storytelling before, only one person said that they had. This was a person who had attended one of my previous workshops.
In the time frame, I showed the Digital Story –“What Makes a Good Story” and told two other stories –“Stone Soup” and “Houdini and the Locked Door.” The stories were chosen to demonstrate how storytelling could be used to promote learning. “Stone Soup” was used to show how co-operation and individual contribution can make for an outcome that is more beneficial to the whole group. We also discussed how the story could be used to get individuals to each contribute an ingredient that would make a group meal. Out of this story, a basic life skill such as cooking could be combined with communications skills and show important values.

“Houdini and the Locked Door”, I intended to use as a trigger to show teachers that they had the skills of storytelling – they just had to recognize them. While this still happened, I had to tell this story earlier than expected, because of a distraction in the workshop. As I was introducing part of the workshop, I saw a participant looking at her mobile phone and then she loudly announced – “I need to speak to the group”. She then proceeded to tell the group that Shapelle Corby had got twenty years! I used the Houdini story to refocus the group.

The stories that were chosen were used to model storytelling practice, and to show teachers that they could use this strategy. Part of the workshop was given over to discuss storytelling resources which was something that teachers needed if they were going to try storytelling. Another important component was to show how a range of activities across the curriculum could be linked to a story.

This was a very popular workshop. Participants had to choose between three concurrent workshops and it was gratifying to have a full house of approximately 50 people. Part of this was also the title that I gave the workshop –“Don’t tell them it’s Storytelling –they’ll think it’s going to Suck!” As I pointed out to teachers, I would not introduce myself as a storyteller, particularly if I was teaching a class of Youth at Risk students. I would just tell a story, and then provide the linked activities to that story.

I received lots of questions and positive comments immediately after the workshop, and I still continue to receive emails asking for advice on implementing storytelling, and for assistance with resources. One teacher even faxed through a cartoon
thanking me for “an inspiring workshop”. The cartoon said “I’m for the basics! They should stop this new-fangled stuff and get back to the 3 s’s – Speaking, Singing and Storytelling!

This experience reinforced my energy for storytelling and its application with adult learners. It was also very clear from this workshop that other practitioners were keen about storytelling and its applications, and were hungry for information.

While this is also true of Digital Storytelling, I have chosen to devote the next chapter to this genre because it is an application of oral storytelling. The previous case studies in this chapter are focused specifically on the use of oral storytelling as an effective teaching strategy with adults.

Storytelling was a successful teaching strategy in all of the cases related here because of the relationship between teller and listener. Stories were adapted to meet the needs of the learners and created a strong collaborative learning environment. Participants were engaged by the story and this promoted engagement in linked activities that followed as part of the session. The stories were multi-sensory and appealed to all learning styles and were therefore seen as a natural and comfortable way to learn.

Digital Storytelling is an application of oral story telling techniques that makes use of technology to archive the story. A personal story is identified using creative methods such as visual triggers or journal writing, personal artifacts such as photographs and objects are gathered and scanned. These are then placed into a software program such as Moviemaker or iMovie, and along with the teller’s voice recorded and sometimes music, all elements become a digital story. (As seen in The Magic or What Makes a Good Story which are part of this project)

The Digital Storytelling experience is included because of the interest that the VET community has had in this area (see Chapter 7) and also that this is simply an extension of oral storytelling for a technological society. In this way, it supports the effectiveness of storytelling as a powerful teaching tool for adults.
An observation that I have made with teachers using storytelling is that one can observe three levels in the application of storytelling as pedagogy. These are:

- **Unplanned** – spontaneous – telling stories “off the cuff”
- **Semi-planned** – habitual stories used with purpose in a particular context but not on the session plan
- **Planned** – Storytelling as Pedagogy – stories included on session plans – actively sought and included to achieve a purpose and linked to activities.

These levels became evident when networking with teachers in the delivery of professional development in storytelling. Teachers will think of a story that is triggered in the moment, and relate it to reinforce the theory or discussion that is occurring at the time. In this way, the story is told and is spontaneous.

Another common theme was the habitual story or anecdote that a teacher always tells in a particular context. The reason is the same as the unplanned story, except that it has been tried before and its value to the learning of the students is proven in the mind of the teacher. They include the story because they know it works. The first two occur frequently, and teachers do not consider themselves storytellers when doing this, until it is pointed out to them that this is actually what they are doing.

This awareness will sometimes lead to the third level of storytelling, where we truly have storytelling as pedagogy. In this case, stories are planned and included in session planning. When particular topics are being covered, stories will be researched and used because of their appropriateness to the learning outcomes of the session and the links that can be made to other activities. This process enhances the engagement of the learners, and it is this level that is reflected on in the case studies in this exegesis.
Chapter 5- The Digital Storytelling Experience

Digital Storytelling – A Personal Account

In 2002, Linda Hicks and Rachel Woodburn from Scottsdale Community College came to Riverina Institute as part of the Maricopa Community College Exchange Program. They worked with me and my colleague, Hana Patetl on a Digital Storytelling Project. Linda and Rachel had studied at the Digital Storytelling Center in Berkley, California, and then developed and conducted an experimental Digital Storytelling Program at Scottsdale Community College. This is discussed below as a case study in its own right. Their course continues and Linda and Rachel have had a number of overseas trips where they have worked specifically with indigenous groups and conducted workshops on Digital Storytelling. They were very keen to bring this craft to Australia, and they decided that the best way to do this was to take us through the process.

The two participants were my colleague and I. Both of us had been on exchange to Maricopa Community Colleges and we were both advocates of storytelling and its applications. The focus of the digital storytelling experience was actually on choosing a suitable personal story to tell. This process was a very interesting journey in itself. Rachel and Linda took us through what they fondly refer to as “the process” that they share with their students. Essentially, we completed in three days what their students would complete over eight weeks of classes.

The downside of this is that in three days there is a lack of reflection about the creative process. The three main creative triggers that were used were a range of objects from pine cones to buttons, unfinished statements and music. As Lambert (2000, p.1) so aptly states “coaching the storyteller through the conception of their story is a dynamic process, not a prescribed one. An entire range of issues must be considered while offering suggestions, both technical and emotional.”
It was incredible to observe how a simple object could trigger powerful memories, and then, when sharing the story behind the object, how giving voice often unleashed emotions. The four of us often ended up in tears because of these triggers and the fact that we were not inhibited. We all trusted each other. One can remember and write and not react, but as soon as one gives voice and there is a sharing of emotion, the connections can be profound.

One cannot underestimate the emotional impact of voicing a story. The experience here was interesting in that when the written story is given voice, it provokes a set of emotional reactions from the teller and the listener. It seems that one can remember and not react, but one voices and there is a sharing of emotion and an immediate connection with the individuals that share the experience.

Linda and Rachel also shared some of their student digital stories with us. It is not until one sees a Digital Story that one can conceive what it is all about. If I have to describe a Digital Story, to me it is like a story moment that is frozen. In oral storytelling, the voice is powerful in adapting the story as it develops and adapts at particular times and for particular audiences, whereas the digital story captures the story using the voice of the teller, music and images, and these are all relevant to the time when the story is made.

This experience gave me a range of storytelling tools to use with my own students, but also introduced me to the concept of Digital Storytelling. Even though, I always consider myself an oral storyteller, the digital experience, if reliant on oral storytelling to underpin the technology, is a very powerful tool for personal expression. I have also established life long relationships through the sharing of stories and this process.

A major part of my learning in this case study was about the connections of emotion and voice, and the care that we need to have with students who may share stories that perhaps may not be ready to tell. The power of voice has been reinforced by this experience and in digital storytelling; this must be the focus of the story.
The focus in digital storytelling must be on the story and the teller’s voice. There is constantly a danger that technology may take over and become the focus which is not what this is about. This also creates a potential danger, in that people skilled in information technology and not skilled in storytelling, and dealing with emotive personal stories, may feel that they have the skills to facilitate in this new area. When writing the Digital Storytelling Course in collaboration with an IT colleague, I ensured that the teaching qualifications included this requirement, which meant that an IT and a Storytelling teacher could work in collaboration and use their complementary skills.

Sadly, this has not been the outcome, even at my own college, with IT taking ownership of the course and unfortunately not providing the broader access to the course to students who could most benefit from this process. As a result, I have written a broader course to provide the access which is called Archiving Personal Stories. This new course is about to be accredited as one module of the Storytelling Statement of Attainment.

The Digital Storytelling process has been an excellent mechanism to gain interest in storytelling generally and there have already been applications that have occurred and have been discussed. Representatives of the South Mountain Community College Storytelling Institute teach oral storytelling courses, and they agreed that the digital stories were an excellent method of gaining interest in storytelling, by those who may not be attracted by the word.

Working with students from indigenous and multi-cultural backgrounds is a very real application of Digital Storytelling, and can be a powerful mechanism to share experiences with others. In this way, there is the potential to bridge communities through the story process and begin an individual and community healing process by the use of emotion as an essential part of the narrative. The conceptualization of experience in individual stories can become a valuable family and community legacy.

This was clearly demonstrated when my colleague documented the story of her Czechoslovakian parents as they fled from the Hitler regime and came to migrant camps in Australia. While this is no doubt a very powerful legacy for future family generations, it is important historical documentation.
It is important to note that when educators look at the courses Digital Storytelling/Archiving Personal Stories, that all students irrespective of their level of computer skills have access to this craft. With assistance and simple technology the teller can still maintain independence in putting the whole personal archive together.

There are a number of skills that are developed and extended in the digital process. In analyzing the sequence of events that occurs across a digital storytelling program, one can clearly see the following skills/areas being utilized and/or developed:

- Creative writing techniques
- Storytelling skills particularly using the voice
- Interpersonal communication skills which are developed through sharing stories within a group
- Organizational skills – in storyboarding and ordering information
- Decision making in terms of selecting the appropriate story, editing it and selecting appropriate images and music
- Research skills in terms of gathering information and artifacts
- Time management skills in terms of completing work in a time frame
- Technology skills - using digital camera, digital video, scanners and software packages

It can be seen that some of these areas fall into the area of generic competencies as identified by Mayer in the Mayer Key Competencies. In a paper Richards (1998) identifies the need for a cross curriculum approach for complementary language and computer literacy, and that these are part of the generic set that is identified in the Mayer key competencies.

One can see that while this could be a topic for further research, that Digital Storytelling is an appropriate mechanism for this type of skill integration. This is supported by the following Case Study and the evaluations provided by students.
Linda Hicks and Rachel Woodburn have been conducting a Digital Storytelling program at Scottsdale Community College, Phoenix, Arizona since 2000. A key strength of the program is the complementary skills of the deliverers and the fact that they truly do team teach. When team teaching it is important to recognize mutual strengths and weaknesses and work together to maximize group learning. Linda is a Communications teacher with a passion for Storytelling, while Rachel is a photographer and graphic artist also with a passion for Storytelling. The focus on their class is to maximize the focus on the story and minimize the focus on the technology. Certainly both are required when delivering Digital Storytelling, but if the focus is on the technology and the story is weak, the end product lacks power. (I observed this with some Information Technology students at Riverina Institute who chose to not work on their stories because they were more interested in the bells and whistles of the technology. The product at the end simply displayed technical skills and lacked connection with the audience when compared to products that had spent time focusing on the story and getting it right.

The effectiveness of Linda and Rachel’s Digital Storytelling program was evident in the student feedback and outcomes. The student group consisted of students aged 16 to 60 and from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds and experiences. Computer experiences ranged from familiarity with video editing programs such as Premiere to having never before touched a computer. The program works because of the focus on the oral storytelling and a flexible team approach to achieving the story outcomes.

Feedback from students focused on the following areas:

- The creative exercises used to trigger stories worked effectively
- Finding one’s voice is integral to the entire process and that this will be different for each person
- That storytelling is essential to all communication
- Emotion is a natural part of giving voice
• The process is further developed because of a flexible learning environment that meets individual student needs by allowing them to work on individual projects.

Students identified the following as their key learning areas from the process:

• Storytelling skills using a range of mediums
• Communication skills, particularly through telling stories, but also through listening to others
• Story writing skills
• The power of storytelling as opposed to story reading
• A range of skills utilizing technology
• Organizational skills
• Time Management
• Self confidence in using their voice in front of a group.

The interesting observation when one looks at the two lists above, is that the focus is clearly on storytelling and not on the technology. The same is true when one views a digital story. One hears the story from the teller, sees the images that the teller has chosen to support the story and feels the emotion portrayed by the story. The technology does not get in the way of this.
Chapter 6 - Acceptance of Storytelling as an innovation in the VET environment

Once upon a time, in a land far, far away…….there lived a very beautiful princess.

This princess was a brunette and was extremely smart. In fact she was so smart that she chose never to be married. She inherited the kingdom from her parents and was an excellent monarch. She ruled the people fairly and the economy prospered.

Until one day, a handsome prince on a magnificent white charger rode up to her.

She looked up at the vision before her, and knew that this was an opportunity not to be forsaken.
The princess negotiated with the prince, purchased the horse for an excellent price and now has a very successful thoroughbred business.

Adapted from Parkin (1998, p.76)

On 7 March 2001 I met with my colleague Hana Patetl, who had just returned from her teaching exchange to Maricopa Community Colleges, Phoenix Arizona. The purpose of our discussion was to follow up on Storytelling as I had asked her to continue the relationships that I had commenced the previous year. I noted in my journal after that meeting that we shared a vision. We both felt that Storytelling could be really big, and that “we (Riverina Institute) would be getting in on the ground floor”. Our discussion was about introducing Storytelling into our institute for professional development of staff to use story in their classrooms, but also to develop Digital Storytelling as an area, because we could see the potential across the curriculum.

We could see the applications in diverse subject areas. As a literacy teacher, my colleague could see the applications in her classes. She could see that oral storytelling and digital storytelling could be a sound and non –threatening way of developing writing skills. As a business teacher, I liked the idea of using chosen stories to demonstrate facts and theories and to link activities to these stories. We could also see the underpinning organizational and technological skills that learners would develop.
This vision progressed when Linda Hicks and Rachel Woodburn came on the inbound exchange and the four of us worked collaboratively on the International Digital Storytelling Project in June 2001. Linda and Rachel had conducted the first U.S. community college program in Digital Storytelling just six months before and took Hana and I through the process. The emphasis on this was on oral storytelling, and the technology was simply a tool that enhanced the story.

As a result of this project, we were able to present to our management executive who seemed excited at the time, we presented at the online Conference Networking 2002 and I was requested and wrote and article for the TAFE NSW Professional Development Network. All of this initiated a great deal of interest from across the VET Sector. I started to receive emails from people who wanted advice and assistance on Storytelling and Digital Storytelling and requests to be involved in projects in other Institutes. We also gained a great deal of interest from the VET sector in our Digital Storytelling Learnscope Project. It was exciting to be seen to be the leaders in this field. (These presentations and projects are all included in the portfolio.)

The funding of a Learnscope Project in Digital Storytelling was in itself an affirmation of storytelling as a potentially effective learning strategy. The funding is only provided to projects which are seen to be of value to the VET community, and will be viable. There are always many applications competing for this funding. The project supported the professional development of five teachers to develop the technology and storytelling skills to use digital storytelling in the classroom.

This was a true innovation in Riverina Institute and across the VET sector. Other practitioners could see the applications across the curriculum as well as the potential for building community with students from diverse backgrounds.

Innovation seems an almost inappropriate term when applied to storytelling in teaching, when one considers the long history of storytelling as teaching tool; however, we need to consider the term innovation itself. Consider innovation as “the implementation of new and improved knowledge, ideas, methods, processes, tools, equipment and machinery, which leads to new and better products, services and
processes,” (Williams, 1999, p.17). We can see that applying Storytelling as a teaching tool in the VET Sector is certainly improving knowledge, ideas and methods and that Storytelling and Digital storytelling had already begun to lead to better educational outcomes as discussed in the case studies.

Two critical elements that must be combined for innovation to be continuous and to be truly beneficial in a VET organization are identified by John Mitchell (2003, p.2). These are that “innovation in VET teaching and learning results from practitioner’s skills and actions” and that it requires “a strategic response by the organization’s senior management . . . to foster innovation.”

The practitioner must be supported by the organization in order for innovation to occur and to be maintained. Mitchell (1999, pp.2-3) identifies support in terms of what impedes or fosters innovation as follows.

Innovation in teaching and learning can be impeded by countless factors, such as managers ignoring client pressure for innovative delivery or overlooking the social capital of staff or discounting the value of the staff knowledge of industry and staff networking with members of the industry. Other factors impeding innovation include a lack of resources, staff resistance, student opposition and an inability to convert creative ideas into innovative services that can be implemented. VET system factors can both foster and impede innovation . . . in some situations the audit and compliance aspects of VET are seen to be dampening innovation, but in other situations staff and their RTO’s are innovative in response to such constraints.

These factors are all relevant to my experience with Storytelling, but I would like to add two other factors that can impact. These are the ability of the practitioner to sell their ideas to those that have the capacity to influence the adoption of the innovation, and secondly, the power that this person has to progress the idea. These are discussed in the following examples.

My initial approach to writing storytelling courses was not received warmly. In March 2001, I had emailed a manager at Access and General Education at TAFE NSW, Sydney and the response came back that although this seemed like an interesting
area, TAFE NSW was a vocational education provider and that new curriculum needed to have vocational outcomes. However, a change in management provided an opportunity to ask the question again. My approach this time was a phone call asking if I could submit a proposal for Storytelling courses. The comment this time was that I told an excellent story over the phone and that the proposal was welcome. The proposal led to one draft module – Storytelling – An Introduction, which led to a further two modules – Storytelling – Building the Craft and Archiving Personal Story. Archiving Personal Story was an interesting journey as it came as a direct result of politics between Information Technology wanting ownership over Digital Storytelling. Archiving Personal Story broadens the base of how a story can be archived for future generations, and it not only about digitizing the story. (These courses are all in the portfolio). When I finished writing these courses, the Access and General Education department invited me to launch the programmes at institute and state level and to conduct state level professional development (also included in the portfolio).

These workshops demonstrated huge interest in Storytelling and it was gratifying to see what started as a “gut feeling – I think I’m on to something” translating into actual interest. The first workshop held at Technology Park in Sydney was to launch the new courses and to demonstrate oral storytelling as a teaching strategy with adult learners. Participants at the conference were provided with workshop choices as there were three workshops running at any one time. The venue I was to be in, was changed twice from a room for 25, to a room for 50 and finally to a room for 70 which ended up with standing room only. Participants also asked numerous questions and the allocated time had to be extended. With the accreditation of The Statement of Attainment in Storytelling, the modules are available throughout TAFE NSW, and I receive emails on a regular basis with requests for advice.

An interesting aspect of this is that my own institute lagged in gaining enrolments in the program. This is due to my substantive position as a Head Teacher of Business and not being able to gain release to teach in this area specifically. The Department of General Education at Albury Campus has had enrolments in Storytelling from Semester 2, 2006.
Digital Storytelling has had huge growth around the country to date, but limited growth in Riverina Institute. This was demonstrated when a colleague was asked a question in an online forum, “What happened to Riverina with Digital Storytelling? – they started it and now we don’t even hear about them!”

As discussed previously, myself ad my colleague Hana Patetl had embraced Digital Storytelling. After our Learnscope Project, more professional development was required to make it happen in the institute. Teachers needed development in storytelling techniques and also the technology that was used in the process of digitizing a story. At the time, we lobbied for support from our Research and Innovations Committee as well as our staff training department, however, the support was not forthcoming. The expertise that was required has been a slow process of development that has only come out of the goodwill of teaching staff, and it is only now that user friendly programs are more available that it has become easier for staff to deliver Digital Storytelling outside of the context of higher end information technology and to a diverse range of students, particularly those that do not begin the process with technology skills.

What has happened is that the initial innovators have become the laggards. This can be evidenced by others such as Robyn Jay, who with the support of their institutes, have become the innovation leaders. In the e-zine *ICVET –New Ideas and Practices*, Robyn Jay (2006) discusses the engagement of learners and teachers with Digital Storytelling, and says “In adapting the concept as a tool for VET teaching and learning, issues and challenges will arise, but it is already happening; the digital storytelling tsunami is on its way to your college!” (Jay, 2006, paragraph 3)

However, Jay also indicates that storytelling in itself requires acceptance in the VET sector. She states with reference to Digital Storytelling as pedagogy “What do we call this new pedagogy based on/designed for use in modern IT learning environments? Certainly the term “storytelling” won’t sit comfortably with many VET practitioners and we already way beyond traditional “storytelling” in our uses.”(Jay, 2006, paragraph 12). It is interesting to note that my personal experience at state level with a range of practitioners does not support this – that storytelling is a term that is becoming very acceptable. It also demonstrates an emerging debate in
defining digital storytelling. Jay’s emphasis seems to be on the technology, however, as an oral storyteller, my emphasis in Digital Storytelling is on the story and the voice is always that of the teller. The technology is simply a tool that is used to archive the story.

This view is also supported by another practitioner, Jason Ohler. He states “I had a revelation many years ago in a Digital Storytelling class. As the technology became more powerful, some of my student’s stories became weaker. What I discovered was that some of my students were focusing on the power of the technology rather than the power of their stories. That compelled me to hire an oral storyteller to work with my digital storytelling students before we added the technology to the digital storytelling process. The results . . . were . . . transformational.” (Ohler, 2006, Different Kinds of Stories and Storytelling section))

As previously mentioned the two components of the practitioner and the organization as essential partners in fostering innovation and what can be seen with storytelling in its traditional and in digital forms, is that where there is an enthusiastic practitioner (or group of practitioners) and a supporting organization, the innovation flourishes. In the cases here, certainly the broader NSW TAFE and VET communities have adopted this innovation.
Chapter 7 – Conclusion -The practitioner’s development – growth and struggle

“When the heart goes to work on a challenge the connection is always stronger. Often the parts of the story that someone might initially discard are most powerful moments in telling. The Spanish poet Antonio Machado says:

Look for your other half
The one who walks beside you
And is often who you are not.

This, for me, is where storytelling becomes a path of inner development. What makes me choose one story and not another...Jacob Boehme said,'Whatever the self describes, describes the self.' “(Ramsden, 2005, p. 14)

Across the time that I have been completing this project, there is no doubt that I have made clear decisions about my practice in relation to Storytelling. However, there have been a number of other elements in my journey that are worthy of discussion. These are the struggle to write about storytelling, the tension that exists with traditional oral storytelling and the influence of technology, performing as a storyteller to a range of audiences, and becoming a better educator and informing and improving the practice of others in my learning community. I will discuss each one of these aspects of the journey.

Completing the Masters by Project has been almost an “epic” in the making. The portfolio of products exceeded expectations, in that courses were not only written, but were accredited in TAFE NSW and are experiencing enrolments. This clearly has demonstrated the timely nature of this project and confirms the need for storytelling education that was perceived back in 2001. The exegesis has been a struggle, and it for me has been an illustration of the acceptance of story versus fact as discussed in the Dan Pink quote earlier in this writing. It was not until I actually attempted to capture my story as an oral tale, that I was able to have a whole brain approach and diminish the left brain dominance that was causing writer’s block.
As a practitioner, I have also reacted to Digital Storytelling - technology is often seen as the traditional enemy of the storyteller. The tension that I have experienced is the one that many traditional storytellers have with Digital Storytelling, and this tension has served to swing me back into oral storytelling as it forms the basis of any other applications of Storytelling.

It is interesting to look around at the various definitions of Digital Storytelling now. As the innovation has become accepted as practice in a range of areas across curriculums, my observation is that there is limited oral storytelling that underpins much of the so-called digital storytelling. Much of what we now see is photo-stories with music, rather than images with a particular story that is told by the teller. This has also led to technology teachers and students focusing on the technology, rather than focusing on the story. As stated, this was why, I wrote the course “Archiving Personal Story”. This put the course into the communications program area of curriculum for TAFE NSW, as opposed to the Information Technology area for Digital Storytelling.

Having said this, technology can also be the ally of the storyteller. Websites have made it easy to share stories with a global audience, and there is now even iTales where storytellers can contribute stories and listen to those of others.

An important part of my journey has been accepting offers to perform as a storyteller, and I continue to do this. As an adult educator, it was interesting for me to perform to a range of audiences, from pre-schoolers to old aged people in a nursing home. The extremes of the range both present challenges for the storyteller. I have used puppets, digital stories, essential oils, pictures and music to all add value to the original stories that I wrote, as well as the traditional stories that I sourced. Given that much of my early life was devoted to the study of drama and acting, this part of the experience has been like welcoming home an old friend.

The most important aspect of the journey has been becoming a better educator and informing and improving the practice of others in my learning community. My professional growth has been enormous as I have developed a love for story and its effectiveness with my learners. I know that the telling of stories builds an
understanding of trust and collaboration in the classroom, and it certainly benefits all styles of learners as indicated in the case studies. As a Head Teacher, I also have opportunity to influence others very directly in my learning community, and teachers of accounting, law, retail, marketing and management in my own department, as well as a number of teachers in other departments, use story as a teaching strategy. The librarians on campus have also become part of the community of practice and find new storytelling resources on a regular basis. It has also been gratifying to have the statewide exposure in TAFE NSW, largely due to the curriculum centre and the Sydney workshops.

The portfolio that accompanies this exegesis supports the interest and effectiveness of storytelling as an effective tool in adult and vocational education, and ironically, it seems the more technically savvy we become as a society, the greater the need to interact with each other through story. As Dan Pink (2005, p.113) says, “The Conceptual Age can remind us what has been true but rarely acted upon – that we must listen to each other’s stories and that we are each the authors of our own lives.”

Having been through the struggles and growth in relation to storytelling has meant that I now wear my possum scarf with pride and dignity. The fears that I had about wearing it have been dealt with by shifting my attitude in line with my practice. I trust the storytelling process and I have observed its benefits first hand. Others too have seen this and embraced storytelling as an effective teaching tool in adult and vocational education. More teachers are wearing their possum scarves and it is indeed “a rich fabric that . . . is at once challenging and exciting.” (McGrath, 2003, p.27)
List of References


Davis, D 2000 Writing as A Second Language: From Experience to Story to Prose, August House, Little Rock.


Mott, B Callaway, C Zettlemoyer, L Lee, S Lester, J 1999 *Towards Narrative-Centered Learning Environments*, Multimedia Laboratory, Department of Computer Science, North Carolina State University.


Accessed 15/09/2008


Ohler, J 2006 *The DAOW of Storytelling*, http://www.jasonohler.com/storytelling,


Schaule, G 1995 *The Prophet Returns*, Phone Media, Seaforth, VIC.

Staron, M, Jasinski, M & Weatherley, R 2006 *Life Based Learning – A strength based approach for capability development in vocational and technical education*, ICVET, TAFE NSW.
Tripp, D 1995 *Action Inquiry*, [http://www2.fhs.usyd.edu.au/arow/o/m01/rtrtipp.htm](http://www2.fhs.usyd.edu.au/arow/o/m01/rtrtipp.htm)


Williams, A 1999 *Creativity, Invention and Innovation*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

Wojciechowicz, L 2003 Storytelling Workshop Notes

Appendix 1
South Mountain Community College Storytelling Flyer
Appendix 2