

A NARRATIVE APPROACH TO SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

<p>How confident are you?</p> <p>< 1 2 3 4 5 ></p> <p>UNSURE OF MYSELF VERY CONFIDENT CRAZY SELF-ASSURED</p>
<p>How excited are you about learning?</p> <p>< 1 2 3 4 5 ></p> <p>NOT AT ALL VERY EXCITED OFF THE CHARTS EXCITED!</p>
<p>How well do you get along with others?</p> <p>< 1 2 3 4 5 ></p> <p>I DON'T GET ALONG VERY WELL I LOVE PEOPLE & THEY LOVE ME!</p>
<p>What do you do when things get hard?</p> <p>< 1 2 3 4 5 ></p> <p>I STRUGGLE I TRY EVEN HARDER I LOVE A CHALLENGE!</p>
<p>How hopeful are you about your future?</p> <p>< 1 2 3 4 5 ></p> <p>IT'S DEPRESSING VERY HOPEFUL I KNOW I WILL SUCCEED!</p>

The theory and the practice of MyScore

The narrative SEL instrument developed for Project CHANGE

Theory of Change

the theory of how you expect
this change to happen

the change you/the program
wants to make in the world

THEORY OF CHANGE- SEL to SLL is SEL ON PURPOSE

MyScore is built on a narrative theory of change.

It seeks to apply a narrative approach to the burgeoning field of SEL- (Social Emotional Learning) and shift the focus from skills and competencies to stories. In that way, SEL becomes more the story it is in the service of, to support people to become SLL (Successful Life Learners) That is the story we seek to construct, inspire and illuminate. For many, that is a new story for SEL, one we summarize as SLL, (Successful Life Learner) or SEL on Purpose.

The outcome we aim for in our work is a new story, a new frame of meaning, rather than just a new set of skills. Put another way, if we insist on skills, the new set of skills we impart to our students as a product of our mentoring is **interpretive skills**, a new applied hermeneutic that better honors their human experience. We are making the claim **that 'storying the self' is an essential SEL competency.**

We want to invite our students to see and hear their lives differently. Instead of seeing their struggle as signaling failure or always being a victim, oppressed by trauma, disadvantage and despair, they come to see themselves inhabiting the story of a courageous and successful life learner. (SLL) That is not to underestimate their circumstances, or the serious disadvantages they sometimes face, but to help create a belief that **adversity does not have to define them.** That is the point of the influence that Project CHANGE is spreading through its members. Why is that important? James writes as William James writes, can change if we can change our attitude to it. He wrote, "***The greatest discovery of my generation is that a human being can alter his life by altering his attitudes.***"

STORY AS AN OUTCOME- NOT AN IMPACT

As a result of the mentoring, advocacy, and continuing emotional support that a member gives a struggling student over a year, that student will grow into to a truer, deeper, and surer self-awareness (**"I believe in me".**) That includes their attitude to their emerging identity, their own ability to learn, to get along with others, and to cope with the challenges that life inevitably throws at them, (and all of us.) The influence that a member acquires grows out of relational power more than just instructional power.

Challenges might impact this population more significantly because our clients, through no fault of their own, often start way behind. As a result of our service, the students will grow a larger hope that increases their chance of shaping a larger future for themselves. It is less a goal to be achieved than a life orientation to be adopted, or a direction that we encourage the student to move toward, to replace a deficit mindset with a growth mindset. In the final analysis, the best evaluator of that change is not us but the students themselves. **They must be able to claim it to live it.** What matters is not what others know about themselves from the outside, but what they know and live on the inside. Change on the outside happens, we believe, because the energy for it emanates from inside. That is how our students will show up and shine through in **the epiphany** that growing up is meant to be.

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS OF THE APPROACH- THE CONSTANT GAP BETWEEN STORY AND REALITY



One of our guiding assumptions in 30 years of storywise work is that while story claims to be the voice of reality, it never is. Stories are unrepresentative at best, and unreliable at worst. They distract us from all the rest that is out there, so as to pay attention to the point or the point of view of the teller.

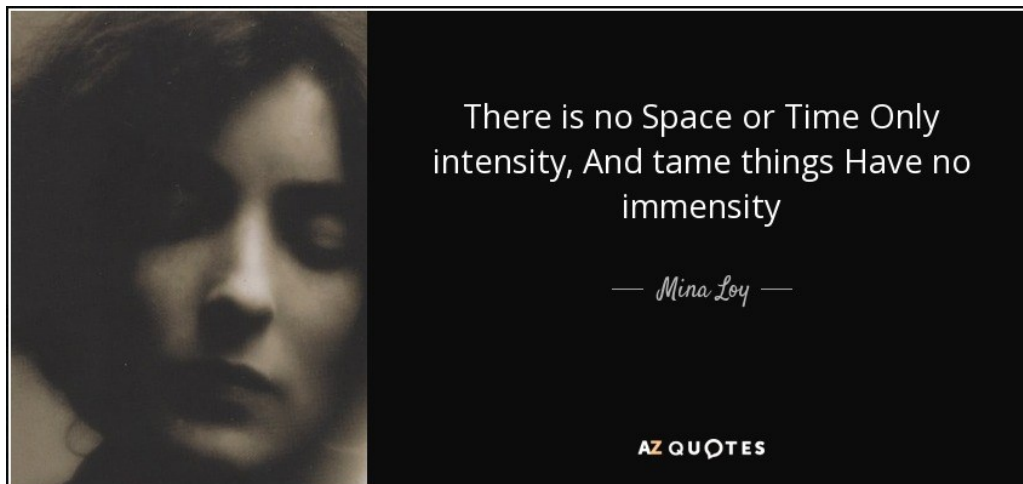
Consequently, most **of reality goes un-storied**. Think about that for a minute because that is quite a claim! But it is not hard to demonstrate.

THE WORLD- A GIFT WRAPPED IN TOO SMALL A STORY

A quick glance at history will give us some insight. Before modern geology revealed the true age of the earth, enlightened humans believed that the Garden of Eden was a mere 5000 years previous. That was the span of time we allowed or imagined from Genesis's creation up to our own times. That story left out an incredible 13 billion years of creation, and 200,000 years of human evolution. There was so much more reality than our stories could compass.

The same thing happened with our sense of space. We once imagined that the sun and earth and the planets pretty much summed up the universe, with a few stray, distant galaxies. The latest Hubble telescopes tell us a vastly different story, making our sun not much more than a comma in the billion, billion stars in the sky, most of whom we still cannot see, and probably never will. Again, how narrow were our stories about a reality that has rendered them not only irrelevant but somewhat miserly. Given the rate of scientific exploration, we can only presume that our current, "enlightened" view of time and space and the human dimension are just as puny and provincial as they were back in those days. We think imagination is what expands our reality, and it surely does. But reality keeps showing us our view of the world is too small.

We are stuck with the imbalance between our finite antenna and the infinite reality they set out to measure. Our human ability to detect, sense, and make meaning of what is out there is constrained because everything has to be human sized. The sacred notion of “Mystery” once kept us humble enough to realize we live in a world that will always be beyond what we can perceive or imagine. But not anymore. Modernity boldly claimed to dissolve mystery. But the real mystery was our arrogance. Size becomes the measure of our instruments or our hubris, not the reality they measure, for the nature of reality is ultimately immeasurable.



TAMING THE IMMENSITY

Does that mean stories are bad? Not at all. Quite the opposite. Just because stories are inaccurate does not mean they are not useful. Rather, it argues that we need them more than ever. **How else can we tame the immensity?** Stories chunk reality into reality bites, so we don't fall down a black hole. But we should not be blind to their lies, limits and distortions.

What gets storied is always an edited or censored version. **More is left out than is left in.** Story levels and narrows reality down to the level of our human understanding to powerfully deliver our anthropocentric world view. And it's magical. Just look at what it can do to time. Humans cannot live for much beyond 100 years, but by magic, we can turn 200 years into one sentence.

“From 1200 to 1400, Popes were fighting the Holy Roman Emperor.”

Experience can be fleeting, but if you are a storyteller like James Joyce, you can turn 24 hours in Dublin into a 783-page book that will take you a month to read, and a lifetime to pretend to understand.

Look what we can do to space.

He travelled from Sydney to NYC to deliver a speech at the opening of the UN session.

The journey that takes 24 hours or more (I have done it too often) takes 5 seconds. Story is that ticket to ride, and we don't have to pay for Extra Economy, just listen.

“Story” makes life fit into the form of our comprehension, within the space of our imagination. Time is so long, and space is so big, and our human duration in space-time is so brief. We have to cut reality down to size to fit us and fit our human sense of time and space. Because we cannot measure up, we measure down.

In time's ever rushing flow, everything escapes, unless we can punctuate it, with a comma or a full stop, what we Americans even call a 'period.' Our traditional story opening reflects that. **“Once upon a time”** we say, to stake out a singularity amidst the “flowing infinities of time” in which we live, so that this one moment, this one memory is not lost to our consciousness. Stories are our way of relishing some experiences before they drop out of sight or accelerate over the cliff of oblivion like all the rest. Stories freeze that time, that frame, that feeling. Even though we know the arrow of time drives relentlessly forward, and we cannot go back to that real moment in time, we humans have managed to redeem something of its feeling and its meaning. Who was there? Who did what? Who said what? What did it lead to? We can make it sound as if it is happening now all over again, for that first time, in the surprise and the fear or the thrill. Such magic allows life to have a second chance, a second act.

Even though we know it is a deception, we get a chance at recreation that gives us creative license to even outdo reality, enhance it, romance it, and turn certainty back into chance. Stories make reality feel more real. As Ajit Maan from Narrative Strategy writes,

“Observing the unfolding of events often does not move people emotionally the way the representation of the unfolding events does.” (p.10)

Since reality in its totality escapes human grasp, we can only perceive within the limits of what our senses and brains can apprehend. The Latins, who knew most of everything, had an expression for that. **“Quid quid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur.”** The [LaFourchette Gazette](#) translates it best, “we receive things not as they are but as we are.” If an artist made the universe, then we are but one of his/her masterpieces. We do not see the world as its creator might. Da Vinci sees Mona Lisa’s smile, but does Mona see Leonardo’s stalking her? No.

One thinks of the bible where Job is arguing with God and being set straight on this point, that “God’s ways are beyond human knowing.” (Job, 38,) But of course, that does not stop us humans presuming that we are across reality. We take for granted that it is ours to divide and divine, total and entire. Until it is not! Every time I hear myself or someone else say “But the truth of the matter is,” or “The reality is” I sense the Almighty having a big belly laugh at the presumptuous humans she has made.

REALITY STRIKES BACK



Just when we feel we have it tamed and domesticated, reality tends to roar back, wild, and free. It is what happens when a tsunami hits the high walled coast of Japan, the fire rages to destroy prime California forest, or the Maui resort, the tide floods the millionaire mansions on the Miami seashore, and at home, our docile pet Fifi attacks our three months old baby. Then

we realize that our dogs by nature are originally wild, and nature itself is not to be trifled with. Who the hell do we think we are? Lord and Master of what? Genesis got something way wrong! We like to keep our reality on a leash or behind cages, or taken in small chewable doses, usually with an artificial sweetener. While reality remains forever wild and free, dangerous, and dynamic, our stories will forever try to domesticate it. Narratives tend to circulate around a topic long enough to stabilize our understanding of it, and then stagnate into the form that makes their transmission more successful. They succeed by spreading, not by hewing to any accuracy. Accuracy is not the point. Circulation and replication are. That is why Richard Dawkins calls them 'memes.' A thrice told story does not mean it is true. It only means it is tellable and spreadable. And by the third time, it is telling us, not us telling it. We are captured.



I have an Israeli friend- Miriam, who does amazing intercultural work, her specialty being Israel-Palestine relations. She sings and presents this powerful story of how, as a young woman, she struck up a friendship with a Palestinian Mom. Their friendship blossomed and became the source of my friend's successful art show. Now, I have heard her present that same story for 20 years. It is sealed in the brilliance of her own virtuoso performance which makes it always moving, but the script never changes. I remember once, asking for an update. It turns out the

real story-not the exhibit- ended with the two going their separate ways, with no further contact. Too many ensuing Middle East terror attacks perhaps. But the story is locked in its own time freeze. Reality would only ruin it. It must end in the way that most meets the dramatic requirements of the form. Reality rarely complies with such rules. As Oscar Wilde quipped, "life imitates art" but it's usually a much poorer show for it. Reality does not have to keep to the script or feature a triumphant hero or introduce complication in the third act. Reality loves a mess, or in scientific terms, complexity.

Spinning the web of illusion is what pays a professional storyteller's bills. But in a way, I wanted the second act to Mariam's show. The account of why it did not endure sounds far more interesting to me. Did the story put too much weight on the possibility, or the promise that Israel and Palestine could sustain an enduring friendship amidst ongoing war and occupation? Or did the Palestinian discover the teller's history with the IDF intelligence? With so much of the story untold, and the rousing ending, art makes life into a lie. But it IS a great story. That friendship between young women who should be enemies was so uplifting, for as long as it lasted, but sadly, it did not last. They did not live happily ever after.

Yet, like all great stories, it keeps getting told, not because it is true, but because it is tellable. And it is told to represent a reality or a possibility that hindsight will tell us was a dream then, and perhaps a delusion now. When life changes beyond recognition, old stories can become a dangerous distraction to the current reality. So why keep peddling it? Someone is selling dreams. A reality filled with such tragic urgency, like what the Israel-Palestine scene has now become, will always demand a better story. But that's the thing with all our stories. They don't quit. We know the earth revolves around the sun, but still we say, the "Sun rises." They persist like a "stuck record" into a time when no one uses records or understands what being stuck even means, even means, even means, even means.

Very soon, these twice- and thrice told stories morph into tradition. They carve out a sort of narrative groove or gutter, or some would say a rut, into which other stories flow or collapse into. They become orthodox canons of faith, forming fact-resistant myths, or dogmas, and genres. **Reality is forced to fit into the straitjacket of our time-bound and culturally blinkered understandings of it.** Stories normalize and tame the wild surprise that nature is, and level out the shock waves of history. They cut time and space down to human size. We know what we are losing in translation but look what we can gain. We can create an alternative life that does not have to be real, where nobody dies, every monster is a prince in disguise, and our “happily ever after” can keep us afloat in the deluge. Stories act like lifeboats on our stormy seas.

Stories invite humans to live for a thousand years, like Moses, or inhabit Mars with H G Wells, or fly through space in your underwear rescuing damsels in distress- something that is only possible in comics and stories or Netflix. We can reimagine the 1950's as the Golden Age of America, when everyone had a job, a home and nothing to fear, except say nuclear obliteration. Ah yes, what wondrous lives we weave with our lies.

Stories are superb in making the unreal real, but they come with dangerous side effects that should be written as a warning on the packet. They make the real unreal and ultimately deceiving. Again, stop and read that again. Stories leave us even less capable of dealing with reality. We presume old stories get worn out and die with newer understandings. But not so. Sometimes old stories so populate our imaginations that we reject the newer, better, more useful. When everyone knows that reality is not like that, we are right to question the motive of why anyone would persist in telling stories to distort it even more. No modern preacher anymore will chronicle the Garden of Eden happening around 5000BC, or tell us apples are forbidden, or the sun is the sole galactic giant of our solar system. Not anymore. But young women from Israel and Palestine who meet in Texas can change the world. If only we could still believe that. We cling to our fictions.

NO MEDICINE CAN COMPARE WITH A GOOD DOSE OF REALITY



Compare a picture of Niagara Falls with actually being at Niagara Falls. I used to do that. The Corcoran, an art gallery in DC, had this magnificent painting of the Falls by Francis Church. It was incredible. I loved just sitting under it, taking it all in. Then, I got the chance to go to Niagara Falls and realized what the painter was trying to do. That painting never covered me in mist or totally refracted the aura of rainbows caught in the rising sun. He tried. I never wore a rain jacket to the Corcoran. There is nothing like the real thing. The awe comes with the actuality, with being up close and personal. Wonder, they tell us, relies on proximity.

I am sure we have had similar experiences. We have a post card of the Grand Canyon and are drawn in by the perspective. Then we go there, and peer into the vast space, and realize how little the picture captures of the reality.



Another example. I watched the recent movie on Elvis and was captured by the Las Vegas scenes, in venues I'd known. The film put me back there, in the front row. But alas, I know that "Elvis the Musical" is no competition for seeing the King in person, whom I never got to see. Yet stories can seem like they take us there. The form may be fake, but the feeling feels real. I was all Shook Up.

Stories do even more than what paintings do. They can take us there and make us embody the experience. We can feel it on our skin. "I was leaning out over the edge of Niagara and could see the precipitous drop, and the spray was softly kissing my cheeks, and people were taking photos of me smiling, and then, and then, I felt myself go with the flow, literally, as my sneakers started to slide." I felt like I was falling into Francis Church's painting.

BASED ON A TRUE STORY

Stories work as all art does, by suspending our disbelief that they are not real, by making them feel so real. They are real in as much as how they make us feel, presenting an artist's truth with that obligatory emotional punch in the guts, or swoon of the heart. We are not meant to think



of going after any verifiable facts." Based on a true story" is enough to vouch for it. If we start worrying about boring details like facts, or "is this true?", the story obviously has not entranced us enough. I remember watching Oliver Stone's "JFK" and suddenly thinking, this is no "Warren Report." A reaching after facts usually means the spell is broken.

As the Irish used to say, "Here's the facts. Bend them anyway you want." That is what the art of a story does, deciding what characters to leave in or leave out, where to start and where to end, and what constructed drama and suspense will most enthrall an audience enough to want to listen to the end. Life is haphazard, sad, and let's face it, often plain boring, but story turns the expected into the edgy, and the unexpected into threat. It turns the prosaic into the performative, and the mundane into tableaux of magnificence. Such magic. No wonder ancient cultures revered the storyteller, making gold out of dross. That is an awesome power. A story casts a spell.

WISDOM TEACHERS



Wisdom teachers like Jesus, Scheherazade or Nasiruddin know this deceit too well. They begin to tell parables that scramble predictable narratives into jokes, riddles, and kaons. Their stories will not allow you to take away easy meanings, because reality is never like that. The

good Jew was supposed to help the injured traveler, not the good Samaritan. Samaritan and

good were contradictions. The emperor thought he was so totally magnificent in his invisible cloth woven of air, and only the kid dared voice the truth- The king is starkers!!! Stories like this suck us in and then reveal how deceived we are.

Our modern wisdom teachers often opt for the form of comedy, for comedy can carry the freight of reality more than tragedy. (See Dyson -Tragedy is not our business) We have a saying about laughing till we cry, which hints that the two are related.

CAVEMEN IN A CIRCLE AROUND A FIRE



Evolution says we humans used stories so we could consolidate our knowing, long before we had writing or books. How scientists know all that is a story in and of itself. They weren't there obviously. Yet, evolution seems to explain everything and nothing. I know I am getting the usual verbiage when a writer starts to tell me about the ancient storytelling circles, cavemen around a fire and the stories of the hunt. It is a trope for dopes.

They also say stories help us predict the seasons, the next drought or flood, or tell us when to plant our crops, but here's the rub. If that is accurate, it traps us in precedent. Stories work best when they can name the inevitable surprises of life. Origin and Destiny and Redemption are thoroughly mapped. Religion can even push out the calendar to give us consoling stories of Life before Birth, and Life after Death. Throw in visions of heaven and hell, and you have a compelling story. Just ask Dante. In fact, the genius of religion is to add eternity before or after human passage, or both. How irresistible is that? We get extra time as a bonus to belief.

But before stories got all so teleological, (written to get to an end that is also the purpose) and before Jesus and the saints sang "Let's get Metaphysical," stories are so darn practical. Don't trust strangers, especially if they are dressed like Grandma but have wolf ears. Don't let your ugly sisters boss you around if you aspire to meet Prince Charming. Don't build your house with

The 1750s were not unfamiliar with that feeling that the times were going out of joint. A few comets in the sky gave them suspicions that change was afoot. And 1914-1919 was also a bit of a downer, losing 50 million to Spanish flu, courtesy of the US army, a long way from Spain. If we want to go right back, we lost almost half a nation and a million people in the civil war. But we had Ken Burns and the History Channel to make that feel like it turned out OK. It took its toll but eventually became tellable. Once you tell it, you feel as if you can tame it, fame it and claim it. The Civil War is now better remembered as a Ken Burn's TV series on PBS than where Gettysburg happened. Remember the Civil War? Yes, I saw the whole series.

History properly told is nothing but one disaster after the next, but memory turns our human quest of folly into bliss. We can redeem time, it turns out, but only in retrospect. Stories can tame the surprise and the horror of the day by turning it into dramatic suspense. Two planes were flying low over Manhattan one September morning, and it was such a stunningly clear morning, no one was that concerned, thinking the pilots had perhaps wanted to treat their passengers to a fly by over the World Trade Center. Terror becomes tamed when it becomes tellable. And so much of the human loss is lost. Even telling the tale of loss takes a toll on what is lost because storytelling is as much about forgetting as it is about remembering. We are apt to forget that. We get that though, when we remember, we always observe a minute of silence. We recognize silence is perhaps the best testimony to the pain.



UP THE REVOLUTION

Revolutions and Wars manage to shake the past's hold on our imaginations for a time and crack open whatever cements our complacency. They allow or more likely demand an openness to a radically new future. But we can just as easily resist. We just want to crawl back to bed, turn off the alarm so we can sleep in as we dream of a past that no longer exists and probably never

did.

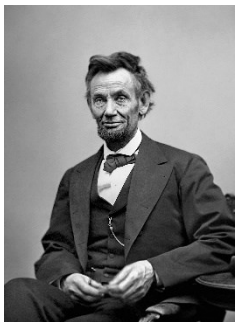
Crisis demands a defining decision. Do we go forward or to go back.? There is no staying in the here and now. As Rilke says, “staying is nowhere.” Kingdoms, Nations and Governments, Corporations and Churches all face the need for reform and renewal. The Church even has a name for it “*semper reformanda.*” Sometimes institutions manage to adapt and embrace change. But more often, they change back, and decide on restoration over reform. They want their “the good old days” back. The USA emerging from the 1960’s and the end of the Cold War seems at such a crossroads right now. Past or Future folks? Which way do you want the nation to go? Professor Fukuyama’s “end of history” plot suddenly swerved back to fight the Cold War all over again, North Korea aggressing, Russian invading, nuclear threats, and China on the prowl. We were SO over it, or so we thought. But History stormed back with a vengeance.

LINCOLN’S WISDOM

One leader who knew that a nation had to change back, or change forward was Abraham Lincoln, in 1862. After a year of losing the civil war and weeks before signing the Emancipation Act, he knew his fractured nation had no other choice. He wrote to Congress:

“The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, we must think anew and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country.”

Lincoln tried to change the constitution to guarantee true equality, but on April 4, 1865, reality intervened at Ford Theater. Losing Lincoln gave the “Lost Cause” what they needed to rewrite the story and re-institute slavery by other means. You can win a war with blood, sweat and tears, yet still lose the peace with lies- I mean, stories. Lee had barely signed the surrender at Appomattox in 1865 before penning a “Well Done” to his troops to say we lost the physical battle but won the moral victory. History has treated him kindly, but he and the South never lost their sense of moral superiority. Inverting the cause of the loss produced



the Lost Cause. The real cause of the war was lost, in stories that won more victories for the slavery that persisted another century.

POWER

Power displayed by governments and corporations, is built on a certain way of knowing and so, large institutions usually have no interest in change. To hang on to their power, they resist change all they can. We have a mantra we use in our work:

those in power don't want change, and those who want change don't have power.

If your power is attached to a lie, and the truth is starting to seep through the cracks, then what do you do? Embrace the truth, or bolster and defend the lie with even more vehemence. Current examples abound. Fox News knew it was propagating lies about Election 2020, but those lies were the product their customers wanted. Truth was a threat to profit. They would not change. Reality was no match for fantasy when it comes loaded with dollar signs and my fellow Australian, Rupert Murdoch. What good would ever come out of Adelaide after Don Dunstan?

STORIES CAN MAKE OPPRESSION SEEM SO NORMAL

The way we know the world, what we consider natural and normal, is what sustains the powers that glue it together. If you grow up black in the segregated south, that is how the world is, not what anyone has made it so. It feels natural. Your house is falling down, and the nearest Metro is five miles away, and there are no trees on your street. The Sanitation Department is down the street, a street where 50 years ago, your ancestors built a thriving black community. That is the world as it is and it is what it is, we say. But it was made that way. It never is what it is.

We never have any suspicions that those powers have an interest in educating us to see our plight as a part of nature. Our oppression is as natural as the polluted river flowing through the

town. We never had a chance, by birthright. But oppression of the 1840's is mapped on to the landscape and the real estate of the 2020's and no one is allowed to talk about it. Covenants against Blacks and Jews and Catholics divided up where I live, so the Jewish Deli exists this side of Beach Drive and not the other side, because this is the old segregation line. Rock Creek Park was an apartheid border. Over there is white Bethesda, even to this day. And I am in Silver Spring, where America shows up more often as Ethiopian and Dominican and Black. That is no accident. But if you don't know the history, you think it has always been this way.

Power mapped the territory on which we later build. We had no choice but to build our lives on the foundation of their assumptions, to pray on them, to vote on them, seeing our interests as the mirror of theirs. As good citizens, we are taught to strive and consume in pursuit of what the world they manufactured sets before us as success. It is only when there is a war, or a crisis, or a revolution, that we realize that the fix is in, and we have been duped. We have been as resistant to change as they are and been hypnotized into acting against our own best interests. Sometimes we wake up too late. We vote a huckster into office because he seems as angry as we are. Sometimes that is all that matters. Anyone channeling our rage is "our guy." Who cares about his policies. Someone else is enraged. His facts might be wrong, but his feelings are right on.

The same conundrum is evident in our politics, except it goes even further. We have always been urged to make "America Great," but now we are being urged to "Make America Great-Again." Progress means regression. In reality, there is no going back, but in politics or religion, there is always this temptation to embrace the fantasy of going back. The Garden of Eden or the Promised Land, or the happy days of the 1950's pretend to be our past, that could come again to be our future. We forget they are more myth than history. An apt titled book called this "The way we never were. "The good old days? What good old days?"

STUCK IN PARK



If Jules Verne was making a new V8 Time Machine and it had an old-fashioned gear box, D for Drive would have been made redundant by now. In our government, it no longer seems to exist. Our current debt crisis is a case in point. We spent the money without any argument, but now we are arguing if we will pay it off. Who could run a household like that and survive? Our political

Time Machine has somehow acquired 5 R for Reverse gears, and D for Drive has been so little used in the last 20 years, that the latest model has replaced it with three gears of P for Park, to replace it. We think we are stuck, but no. Actually, we are parked. The engine of change has broken down or rusted out for lack of use.

The closing words of the "Great Gatsby" seem never so true, ***"So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."*** No wonder that religion based on unchangeable dogmas loves to go to bed with so many fascists, intolerant of challenge and change. Their interests in 'no change' or 'change back' end up being the same. Meanwhile, Jesus weeps and God joins Atheists Anonymous. Don McClean's anthem American Pie sums it up best.

*And the three men I admire most
The Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost
They caught the last train for the coast
The day the music died*

ALIBIS OF IGNORANCE

Stories, as bright and breezy as we narrative practitioners want to make them, more often end up being more alibis of our ignorance than tales of our enlightenment. It is what we used to know because reality has already moved on. Time has run out on “Once Upon a time.” Genesis is still such a beautiful story, even if we know now it’s a Babylonian story the Jewish scribes plagiarized or repurposed, using 7 days of creation as a precis of 13 billion years. Stretch a story that far and it eventually breaks. Reality breaks it, like it breaks a lot of our stories that we still cling to.

Trickledown economics still makes us nostalgic for those halcyon Thatcher/Reagan years, when through easing the taxes on the rich, the wealthy invest in jobs for the poor, and all boats rise. At least the yachts in San Marino did. And if you are a greedy Supreme Court justice, you can join the club. That is another fairy tale about as accurate as Genesis. Stories preserve our ignorance and our superstitions. It is fascinating how we fall in love with them, or how we become ‘story activists’ or ‘story evangelists,’ which is how I and my colleagues once or still describe ourselves. Then reality sneaks up and knocks you stupid. As the comic says about conservatives, they are liberals mugged by reality. It is supposed to wake us up, not turn us into mugs.

But we don’t know any better. Because, like my Israeli storyteller, if the stories still work in the telling, we don’t need to know if they never work in the living. If Fox knows the audience wants to hear the lie of a stolen election, they will continue to deliver it in their “fair and balanced” way. The Church had the technique down pat. Stories of hell could scare people into virtue, and they would still be telling them if they still had any grip. Guilt is so retrograde these days. Now the new priests of therapy have filled the gap with “original Trauma” to replace ‘original sin’ as they lull us all into paying for healing and pretend that the human condition can somehow be overcome. Jesus used to save, but the bank of salvation has run dry. Now our

closest Utopia can come from a pill or a couch or a life coach.

MONETIZING LIES- FALSEHOODS WORTH A FORTUNE

We used to think that truth would always win. Jesus promised it would make us free, but he didn't tell us the whole truth- that it will not make you rich. Let's face it. **Lies make more money.** And we don't want to miss out. Money is how you accumulate power in a system where everything is For Sale, and everyone has a price. We are either commodities or customers. With social media, we become both. Think of all the politicians and judges you can buy. You have to protect your assets and grow your market share. So, if a \$tory is selling, keep selling it. Election denial, Covid skeptics, climate change deniers, deep state- these are just some of the popular offerings. Someone is benefitting from the lies, and what are these lies? They are well told stories, stories that have honed their deception into hiding. They express the reality of power more than the power of any reality.

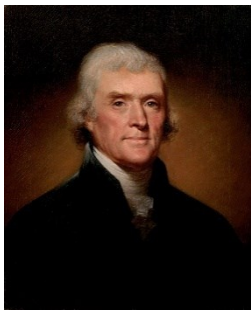
Thus, us poor mortals, we find ourselves trapped in the web of powerful interests who peddle the ignorance that sustains their dominance. They don't want us to catch on. And sadly, we don't want to cop on. Buy my magic pillows and put a fascist back in the White House. It's all one big snooze. Voting no longer is the way to have your say. Guns and riots are better visuals than hanging chads.

CHANGE HAS TO CHANGE

The system of peaceful change is now in question. Between impact and trauma, our two favorite modern words, change must come by exchange of blood rather than by exchange of ideas. As JFK said presciently, ***“Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable.”*** JFK would know, since he fostered enough bloody revolutions in his short term, like Vietnam and Cuba. I love it that great leaders say the most profound things at times, and later, act as if they were rhetorical flourishes and nothing more, or a nice phrase his speechwriter invented. FDR's “Nothing to fear” became a government with a lot to fear. There was a world war on, and because of our fear, we were fighting it. JFK's “Ask what you can

do for your country” turned out the Peace Corps and the Moon Shot, but it also became ironic when JFK was meddling in Cuba or escalating engagement in Vietnam. But we don’t blame them, because as Reinhold Niebuhr wrote, American irony is bred in the bone. He summed it up this way. *“Our age is involved in irony because so many dreams of our nation have been so cruelly refuted by history.”* He wrote that in 1952.

THOMAS JEFFERSON- MASTER OF LIVING A LIE



That famous founding father and slaveowner said “all men are created equal” and was a freedom “tragic,” never giving up on the ideal, and never giving it to anyone else. How eloquently he writes, condemning the ‘moral depravity” of slavery, but happy to be depraved enough to not stop raping his slaves, those he longed to free, so as to increase his progeny as property. His estate sold off 130 of them when he died to pay his debts.

When you add Bush and Clinton and Obama, we see so many presidents promising peace as they bombed their way to war. **Weapons of mass deception (stories) are everywhere.** But reality makes a comeback eventually, giving us the crisis that offers us a chance to change. We realize, sometimes that we are complicit, that the lies that most destroy us are the ones we tell ourselves. And as I am gently suggesting to you, my dear reader, lies are simply another word for stories.

For all that, nature is not spent. Reality keeps offering to expand our narrowing horizons. The Church thought Genesis perfectly summed up the creation of the world in 7 days until astronomy and physics had more to say. Scientists thought that the earth and the sun and the planet was the whole universe, until Galileo looked through more powerful lenses into the night sky. Reality keeps breaking our stories open, even if we end up silencing those who dare to open the windows for fresh air, people like Steve Biko, Socrates, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Jesus. The truth will set you free is also the truth that will get you killed.

CHANGE OF IMPACT – IMPACT OF CHANGE

Reality defies the stories that pretend to define it. For proof, just think of your daily weather forecast. Even they cover themselves with probability scores. Yet, that existential tension is not anything to despair about. Rather, it provides ‘narrative room’, or the space for change and radical growth. But this calls on us to reimagine what change looks like. That old category needs a makeover. Change needs to change.



WHAT IS CHANGE? THE NEED FOR A NEW IMAGINARY

Change is usually described in terms of “**impact**” which, when you think of it, is a deeply violent term. The dictionary says, “*the action of one object coming forcibly into contact with another.*” The meteorite crashes into the earth and makes a crater as an impact. The cars crash and we see the point of impact- the gash on the chassis where the collision occurred. The pub brawl leaves one drinker with a broken nose and the other with a bleeding ear- the impact of the fight. The wounds are the impact. Or as we call it now, “**trauma.**” The two terms are not unconnected.

To sum up change as “Impact” is to see change as essentially the result of collision, a clashing of forces pit against each other, the war of change versus the status quo. If one does not change, then one is **resistant**, or deliberately blocking reform. We must fire you, or send you out for re-

education in the Gulags, as the Soviets did. **Resistance** is another physical term, something slowing things down or creating friction or electricity. The whole process as described is inherently violent. Its logic is- Impact as change provokes resistance that must be overcome and along the way, it reliably produces wounds, losses, grief, trauma, all in the cause of the desired new state. We “have to break a few eggs to make an omelet” school of conflict transformation. Mao and Lenin were its master chefs. Trump tried his souffle version, but it didn’t quite rise to the occasion.

“Change” imagined thus easily becomes the rationale for war. “Regime Change” which we saw being so futile in Vietnam and Afghanistan has not stopped us trying it again with Russia. It is why we think guns and tanks and armies are our most reliable way to change people or nations, or how police bring law and order to the streets. We title our campaign “Operation Iraqi Freedom” which is code for a bloody invasion. We want to make an impact. We must overcome any resistance. We give “resistance” sexier names like insurgency or terror, that mask the fact that it is people fighting to save their lives, their freedom and their nation from invasion. **Impact does not mean change. It means damage.** It creates the “trauma” that we then so solicitously want to treat. It is a vicious circle that makes a virtue out of our violence.

We make wars to change the world, and then deal with the failure by labeling the victims “traumatized” so an army of therapists can clean up what an army of soldiers have wrought. What a manufacturing system, with profits to be gained on both sides of the transaction. The Military Industrial complex funds the harm for profit, and the therapeutic- pharmaceutical complex funds the healing for profit. It is a racket. Until recently, the military did not want to own any war caused diseases. PTSD was just malingering. But after 9-11, even the military can see there is money to be made in the harm-healing complex. And a nation of victims will be much easier to convince to go to war next time.

We wonder while everyone says they want peace, peace can never happen, not because of irreconcilable difference but because of economies of scale. Peace would be way too expensive. We just passed a budget of 867 billion for military spending for 2024 while Congress's Department of Peace, the US Institute of Peace got a paltry 56 million. This is not about defending the nation but defending the defense industry so they can make another 741 billion a year. What a boondoggle to add 1.5 trillion to the economy. War is good business. And our history shows us, for World War One gave us the world stage at Versailles and gave us world dominance after World War Two. War might be bloody, but it sure puts a nation to work.

LET'S CHANGE THE STORY OF CHANGE- HOW FAR? NOT HOW MUCH?

What if change is more about relations and influence, or creating a new space, and then inviting people to move into it? Change becomes the difference between positions, from where you were compared to where you are now. In the world of profit and loss and accounting, the sum is the difference between how much you had before and how much you have after. We still use that, the Pre and the Post. The difference is a quantitative measure, as in 5% more profit, or 45% expansion of outlets. A retiring leader is lauded if he doubled the recruiting. It is about How Much, and not How Far? It has to be substantial, meaning it must have substance.

That is where we get confused because increase does not mean change. It just means growth. It works in describing a work sheet as much as it describes cancer. What if we shift change from weight or quantity, to movement. **How much have we made** is different from **how far have we come?** We can become millionaires and not budge from being a greedy overachiever. We overcame war and progressed to what seems like peace but how far have we come? And which direction are we moving now? At the time of writing, 70% of Americans think the nation is going in the wrong direction. The response to that question has never dropped below 55% so one suspects we Americans wouldn't know the right direction if it hit us over the head.

After Hiroshima, we made thousands of nuclear weapons, so the threat of destroying the world only increased, but how far have we come from Nuclear Destruction? The doomsday clock tends to move us relentlessly closer to Agamemnon.

Change as measured by capitalism, where you are either a commodity or a customer, inevitably becomes about the bottom line. But narrative tells us that there is another way. Change changes when it ceases to be a product of increase and becomes a product of movement. Progress has to stop meaning 'profit' or points on the S&P 500 and revert to what the word progress stems from, to walk forward, to advance.

Yes, it is movement that is change, and not collision or the result of some assault. It is more a dance than a collision. That sort of change cannot happen without creating or clearing a space that people can move into. Change gets crowded out by congestion or distraction. Sometimes we have to clear the space and narrow the focus. What our new story of change is going to look like has already been imagined by the Poets, not unsurprisingly. Rumi says.

There is quiet. A breath. Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing, there is a field. I'll meet you there.

MIND THE GAP



If **CHANGE** is a space to move into rather than the product of increase, or a casualty of one body crashing into or overwhelming another into, (impact) we can drop our weapons, our armor and our measuring sticks. We can also drop our QuickBooks estimates on Salesforce. Change is no longer Friday night football, this relentless contact sport of impact and resistance, winning and wounding. It has nothing to do with Wall Street. If change catches up to quantum physics and manifests as space, we have to reconsider how we measure it. It is not some inner change of substance or essence or soul. It's not transubstantiation. We are not looking for a crater or

damage on a chassis. We are not weighing profit and loss. We are creating room to advance, to breathe in a different way, a world healthy enough to survive in. We are oxygenating the process, not incinerating or monetizing it. What would a new imaginary of change begin to look like?

We have to begin to imagine Change as that which happens between, and not within. Then, we would need to see it in terms of position, direction and movement (PDM), and clear away or create the space for it. Change becomes a relational reality, the difference between positions A and B, or 1 and 2. As activists, we are looking for the gap. This is the gap to mind, as they tell us on the London Tube. The space between reality and story becomes not a lack to lament but the fertile territory of what was never surveyed before. It is the only territory where change can happen. Change becomes a **real**-ization, of becoming more fully aware, more fully alive to all that in life that goes unstoried. As St. Irenaeus said, that is the glory of God, “a (hu)man more fully alive.” Let’s move there and make the invitation for others to join us, as Rumi says.



THAT'S UNREAL

Change becomes a 'REAL-ization,' the process of getting more reality into our stories. In moral terms, it is the quest for honesty and authenticity. Reality is always "more than." The reverse is also true. **Change is about getting more of the unreal out of our stories, and out of our lives.** Stories will always represent less than. As one writer termed it, we engage in this lifelong process of letting go of what is no longer working, letting be of what we cannot change, and letting grow what is emerging. It is the art of Passover. If sometimes the new emerges from the ruins of the old, then the belief in resurrection is not a dogma of one's faith but a life principle in evidence everywhere. Watch the Spring turn the sleeping trees to green. Yet, the soul traditions have known this for eons.

The spiritual practice of letting go, of fasting, or renunciation is equally transformational, in clearing away the space junk and poison that litter our lives with their legacy of lies, myths and legends. Such Asceticism is an ancient path to renewal.

This is also the goal of serious criticism, to sharpen up our bullshit detection, to be myth busters. This used to be called the scientific method, but we got so distracted by banning books, cancelling people, and identity politics that reality got pimped.

Getting rid of the more dangerous parts of unreality that plague our lives allows us to better grasp life's promise, before we lose it, as we must. Life is headed to a cliff and time is all we got, folks. It's always running out. It is not a renewable resource.

No, we do not live forever. No, Love does not last. No, we only live once. And Democracy is not power to the people. We could go on with so many other consoling fictions of our lives that trap us in unrealities that never hold up over time. I am reminded of that title of the book we read as teens "I never promised you a rose garden" and that is life. But if so many of us experience life as tragedy, as disappointing, as fake, or one big trauma of a joke, we have something all wrong. As Freeman Dyson wrote so elegantly, "Tragedy is not our business." But

what if life sets us up for a romance that was bound to fail? What if most of what we expect from life was always a fantasy? And in believing the lie, we miss the miracle that IS real. As the poet Jack Gilbert writes,

*The Lord gives everything and charges.
by taking it back. What a bargain.*

And in another poem

*We must risk delight. We can do without pleasure,
but not delight. Not enjoyment. We must have
the stubbornness to accept our gladness in the ruthless
furnace of this world. To make injustice the only
measure of our attention is to praise the Devil.*

What if our culture, our economy, our leaders lie when they promise equal opportunity for success and happiness for all of us? They are romancing what is unreal. We believe it and then await the inevitable ambush of reality that will make life feel so tragic because it never delivered what was promised. As hard as we try, we cannot ever seem to overcome the human condition. The lie that assures us that we can, sours us from embracing the wonder of any life, and turns it into one of rejection and regret. Being born feels like being born a victim, not a gift. Such a lie undoes a life. It leads to cultural suicide. We die feeling denied what we believed we were entitled to, but only because someone sold us that story!

disillusionment

One of our core cultural stories is the source of our unhappiness, and it goes by the name of the American Dream. Even in reform, capitalism's claims that it can become more compassionate or generous are a Ponzi scheme covering up what, by its nature, is always selling greed over need. Our economic ideas are as out of date as Adam Smith, and as

retrograde as voodoo. Apologies to voodoo. **Education in our day is necessarily the painful process of disillusionment.** It is a jungle out there. Change is about realizing this. Life demands we accept it on its own terms, not ours. And eventually, life wins.

Even if our situation leads to despair or depression, that is not necessarily a disease but just a medicinal dose of reality. Our despair can serve as a necessary vaccination against hoping too much and appreciating too little. By embracing our cynicism, we can take the first step on the road to recovery. Imagine a day when we can rejoice in our cynicism, because it means the layers of lies are breaking down, the scales are falling from our eyes. Feeling so divided and miserable can be the reason to cheer up. We may have left school or college, but life will continue to educate us. Hence, we have to become successful life learners. SLL. The only path to healthy change is to keep learning, keep adapting, keep growing into the future as it is emerging as surprise. Life decides on a curriculum that all our PhDs or SEL training will never have prepared us for. So, the dual imperative is “Be ready to learn” and “Be ready to change.” We don’t have to wait till life’s exigencies bear down on us to start learning that We can start with what life is presenting where we are. Being at school where that is not exactly the curriculum is no excuse.

HOW WE TREAT OURSELVES

But wait- it is not all bad news. If everyone else wants to give us a hard time, at least we don’t have to become our own persecutors. **Resistance begins with how we treat ourselves.** We don’t have to become the modern slave to a market that only values what we can promote, sell, or where we hurt. We do not have to join this army of innovators trying desperately to prove they have value by what they invent. Since when did life become a business, or a “set of the “Apprentice” Reality has to reinvent itself every day. We just need to get with the program and claim the innovation we are.

Nor do we need to sell our soul to Hollywood, or the media and think that celebrity means we have made it. Social media is another fleeting landscape of false dreams. Why should anyone care what you thought when you were 13, or what you ate at La Madeleines when you graduated from high school. Narcissists never had such an ego engrossing tool to play with as social media. Never was so much posted by so many about so much that mattered so little.

GOING INTO TREATMENT-SELF-RESPECT AS OUR SANCTUARY

How we treat ourselves is fundamental to everything else, to how we treat others and how we treat our world. Climate change activists insist we stop trashing our ecosystem, but before that, we have to stop trashing ourselves, stop polluting our consciousness, and start treating ourselves with more respect. It is not to feel sorry for ourselves. It is to owe ourselves and one another the truth. Lincoln saw that we were imprisoned by our stories, and that liberty meant we had to allow crisis to break their spell. Some call it trauma, and others call it awakening. Some already claim to be woke, but that signals one is already there. Reality has other alarms in store to show that might not be the case. Perhaps we are only dreaming we are awake.

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING - SEL



For us, SEL is part of a larger revolt against the system that wants my emotions to be merely the impulse to buy what I do not need, or attend what I don't care for. It is the world that under the premise of compassion, obsesses over my wounded life only so the health industry can commercialize their ever-expanding Empire of Painkillers. We are so used to abusing ourselves that we think it is normal. The impostor syndrome has come to define human experience, as if we do not belong here. We humans are making the world inhospitable- for us! How crazy is that? But now we even have an alibi.

TRAUMA- ITS TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS

We call it “trauma” to lessen the guilt of our self-imposed wounds. We substitute healing for helping, changing back to some lost ideal of wholeness instead of letting being broken stir us to a new beginning. Adam and Eve were thrown out of the Garden of Eden, and God did not see the point of restoring them to their lost innocence. He did not assign them a social worker. They had eaten the fruit that made them know good and evil. There was no going back. Healing might seem a noble endeavor but there is a difference between being sick and being wrong. Cure the illness and correct the mistake. You don’t cure the mistake, which is what we too often seem to want to do. Even there, in the moral space, we have allowed trauma to invade conscience to the extent that now, in confession to the priest, we don’t have to say “Forgive me father for I have sinned,” but rather, “Forgive me Father, I have morally injured myself.” Instead of penance and repentance, we now administer empathy for monsters. When the snipers who kill children in Gaza can claim the same condition as the families of the children they have murdered, then the world has gone mad. Trauma has become the latest alibi for torture.

INVITATION TO CHANGE

Creating a new space for change requires being invited more than being challenged, poked or provoked. We don’t have to impact anyone. Resistance need not be our excuse for more violence, more trauma. It means rebels will no longer be the bearded ones screaming angrily in the streets but rather, those who practice radical hospitality meaning-**everyone is welcome**. That is far more powerful than everyone is equal. Let me say that in another provocative way. What is the use of everyone being equal if not everyone is welcome?

RADICAL HOSPITALITY



This is what Saint Benedict did when he wrote the Benedictine Rule and began the monastic movement. It is what the Catholic Social Activist, Dorothy Day, did every day. When signs in the South said, 'No Blacks allowed', or 'Jews need not apply', or 'Catholics are excluded', social revolutionaries are building larger dinner tables, not taller

barricades. When in our day, Muslims are banned and transgender kids are treated with suspicion, we need to cross our own borders to welcome them. For even when the law demanded change, voting rights, desegregation, based on the principle that all people deserve respect, we know not everyone was welcomed. Not everyone is welcomed today. Segregation is more than just a denial of humanity. It is a denial of a fundamental human hospitality.

Today, it is fashionable to be “woke” and claim that one is anti-racist and all the other bumper stickers. But if that is the case, why is change so hard? Perhaps we who claim to be the enlightened or ‘woke’ in theory, are equally enchained by our outdated version of reality and what change means. We are enchained by our enchantments. Our old stories have become our prisons. As William James said, *“A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices.”*



MY DAD- DO NOT GO GENTLE INTO THE GOOD NIGHT

For many of us over 60, we are too old to change, or see no reason to stop bemoaning the state of the world. We are on the way out, so our disenchantment might help us say goodbye, with less regret. My 90-year-old father Berny, was like that. He had been in active combat in WW2 and risked his life on 30 combat missions. His generation had beaten back Nazism and Fascism. Yet, the modern malaise felt even more of a betrayal of what he had fought so hard for. Given his life and what he endured, he was entitled to his cynicism. It was

hard won. I spent many a night trying to argue him into my optimism. When I gave up, I came to see his despair as something else. It was another form of radical hope because he would not go gently into the night accepting that things had to be the way they were. That is surely what a lot of our despair means. For his generation, they wore their disillusionment like their medals, as a badge of honor. And they had earned it.

IS THERE A WAY OUT, A NEW EXODUS?

But what do our young people feel right now? What does their life experience teach them? When our young people show up cynical and disillusioned before they have even reached a majority, we have to ask- what happened to their future? Is their despair our only legacy? What about those they will bring into the world? Does the cycle repeat itself? Do we give our young people a path out of our mess? Do we point them towards finding their own way? We have to. But are we?

It seems every day, there is another training on trauma or micro aggressions, or dealing with the shameful legacy of racism. The hateful past has not passed at all. But we as educators seem hell bent on a mission to remind our offspring how hard life is going to be for them, cleaning up our mess. It does little to instill self-belief in a rising generation, projecting our anxieties onto them under the guise of education. Infecting them with our despair is causing a reaction. But there we are with our theory of change, insisting that we make an impact. Do we inflict more wounds?

LEARNING LOSS?

After the pandemic, we and the experts are screaming “learning loss,” while the students are just so happy to be back with each other. They sign on to learn what they need to learn, not what we are catastrophizing about. Sure, there are gaps that we know they have in some subjects, but if they never knew they lost anything, perhaps they never needed it. How can you miss what you never knew enough to care about? Notice the subjects we are obsessing about. The subjects that most feed the capitalist system, like math. Can we also admit that the pandemic might have taught our kids some life lessons that put their normal education not only at risk but put it in a totally different perspective altogether. We are so trapped in that old industrial story of what we think education and learning are meant to be, we won’t let our deficit frame go. We have to recover, Catch Up. We are falling behind. Who said it was a race? Education has become a sprint race of tests and accelerated learning as if we can make up for what we did not provide. Do we stop to consider that our kids, having lived through an epoch defining event like the pandemic, can see some life lessons on offer? They were faced with life and death, and we are obsessing about reading levels.

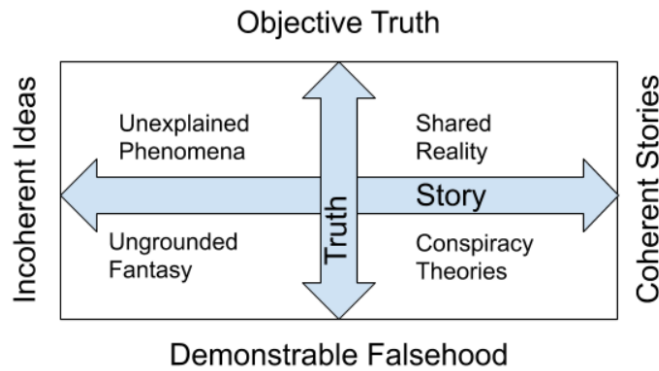
Then we add insult to injury. We repeat the rumor that our kids are now depressed, lonely and on the verge of suicide. One recent headline blares **In a crisis, schools are 100,000 mental health staff short** We provision a new army of trauma counsellors to unload from the yellow buses every morning, along with the kids. We send a huge message to our students that we don’t think much of their coping skills. They look at us bemused, most of them, thinking how we could possibly know anything useful to them, after totally mishandling the covid crisis. We were the ones acting like kids triggering our kid’s anxiety about us as parents. It wasn’t their trauma. It was our incompetence. What over frantic parents we have all turned out to be? Young people are better than that. And they push back.

Classrooms coming back in person across the nation witnessed what was described as poor class discipline, and teacher burnout and attention deficit disorder all because our kids couldn’t sit still anymore. But they were sending us a signal. After a year of freedom, you bring us back to the

factory and expect us to conform, and to like it? Most of the discipline problems arise from what the kid knows intuitively, that this 1950's school idea is mostly crap. We killed it with COVID, but it comes raging back. It cramps their new Tik Tok style. We then obsess about cyber bullying and ban their phones and do all we can to corral these free spirits back into the strait jacket of learning. Recognize the old story? But the revolution is happening. And unless teachers join this revolution, our kids will grow up educated in stubborn resistance to what no longer fits their needs. Young people deserve their own future, better than the one we feel we have doomed them to.

THE GENERATION THAT IS EMERGING

The revolt is there, but it's not in our story-yet. That is why we need a new breed of mentors and teachers to catch the student learning what they need about life to be a successful life learner. They present their health and inventiveness pushing back on our story of their illness. They push their future up against our insistence on the past. They create a larger circle of inclusion, black, white, immigrant, native, gay, bi, and think it quite natural, while us parents are banning books that have gay characters, or dare tell the true story of slavery. "Nothing must be allowed to upset our kids" says the law in many States. As if worse than climate change, or worse than our kids learning that that old tree once was the site of a lynching, the greatest tragedy to befall our offspring is for them to be upset! How fragile do we think our kids are? Or is that our projection on to them? We are the ones who are fragile and frantic. Surely, the students have more to offer than what is implied in the cautionary tales we are telling them. They are not buying it. They are voting with their feet, not showing up. Absenteeism is rife. They are voting with their attention, deciding that they can rely more on their phone to light up their lives than what is in front of them on any normal class day. Some see it as the decline and fall of another lost generation. What we are seeing is an eruption of hope. MyScore wants to be part of that revolution. It already is.



REALITY VERSUS STORY

This contest-The Story of reality Versus Reality itself has been the frontier of most cultural battles in history. And **reality** usually prevails in the end, thank God, but in the meantime, what tragedy do our delusions inflict on us and our kids and the rest of humanity? Is the earth flat or at the center of the universe? Are women by nature inferior, and are slaves' part of a degraded branch of evolution, and was slavery a good career move, at least in Florida, as a chance for slaves to learn life skills? Let's rename slavery as Skills Success. Is the color of your skin or the size of your brain or other appendages the main determinants of human potential? We used to think so. Sadly, some still do. But back then, it was real. There was no debate.

In a time of great change like we experience ourselves living right now, when the old stories no longer work, reality takes on a tortured look. We think something is wrong with the world. It is everyone else and everything else- not us. Times are out of joint. It does not seem right, but folks, chill, reality is fine. It has lasted 13 billion years, and most of the time without us. It is our meaning making systems that has become decrepit. Alzheimer's has spread to the culture. We forget what we forgot. And all we remember, or all we are invited to remember, are the traumas and the insults and the grief, all that went wrong, or all the wrong that they did to us, hence our trauma. It is never anything we did wrong. If it is, its moral injury. What an ingenious way to export your guilt. Sounds like what they call Irish Alzheimer's, to **forget everything but the grudges**.

MEMORY TO HEAL AND NOT TO HAUNT

Memory offers the most human way of healing, reconciling our present with our past, to make whole by covering over, or forgetting the holes, creating the necessary fictions that make life worth living. But the whole idea of “Trauma” seems to have taken over and moved out of the legitimate medical field of a physical wound, to apply wholesale to all parts of our wounded humanity. Trauma is tracking everywhere, pathologizing the human condition. Freud said all that he could offer was to replace neurotic pain with normal human suffering. There was no panacea. Yet, we read our founding document as if all humans have a God-given right to happiness, and therefore, every discomfort is the enemy. We diagnose all forms of unhappiness as potential psychological diseases that we have to cure, or an enemy that we have to squash. As they teach in Florida, never upset the children. A recent New York Times article even suggested that loneliness is now a mental illness. They will soon replace therapy dogs with therapy robots. And we can have our own AI to spit out material that sounds as mad as we are. The founding documents say we are entitled to pursue happiness, but happiness is pursuing us, at a price, and won't let go. Now is the winter of our discontent, said Shakespeare, and now it has become our winter and our Autumn and our Spring.

Again, like “impact” being a collision and how we understand change, ‘trauma as wound’ is how we now seem to understand growing up. Seems like we have given up on growing in goodness and wholeness and healing. I always loved the final sentence in the Gospels after Jesus is lost in the Temple and is found, and returns to his parents to **“grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and all the people.”** (Luke 2.40) Isn't that what we want for all our kids? Today we grow in trauma and struggle, and out of favor with God and all the education experts.

The Kingdom of pain is capitalism's new frontier for profit-making. Since the church lost market share, and suffering no longer gets preached on as a path of grace and redemption, the life coaches and therapists are enriched by suffering. And because we make pain into another transaction, this core part of the human mystery is trivialized, and another huge chunk of reality

bites the dust. Redemptive suffering exits the story. Our ancestors, who survived famine and plague, who crossed the seas in leaking ships, would blush at how feeble and precious we've all become.

Life for young people is all about growth. How dare we make it all about pain? Or deficit? Or Learning loss? Or them feeling safe and never being upset? Not having any discomfort from the curriculum that tells the stories of our flawed history. We are infantilizing our kids because we refuse to grow up ourselves and face reality square on. Our history has become excuse or blame. Our stories have become our evasions, and even our ten-year-olds can see it clear as day. It is a bleak prospect that we are talking ourselves into. We have grown through our pain and come out sadder, yes, stronger, perhaps, but certainly wiser. How else do humans learn to become human? But our scars, they tell us, are there to remember our pain and not our development or endurance, or our courage. We are supposed to see pain as self-diminishment, as if it breaks some fundamental promise of life. The only way to make life happy is to be happy dying. Otherwise, our pursuit of happiness is doomed from the start.

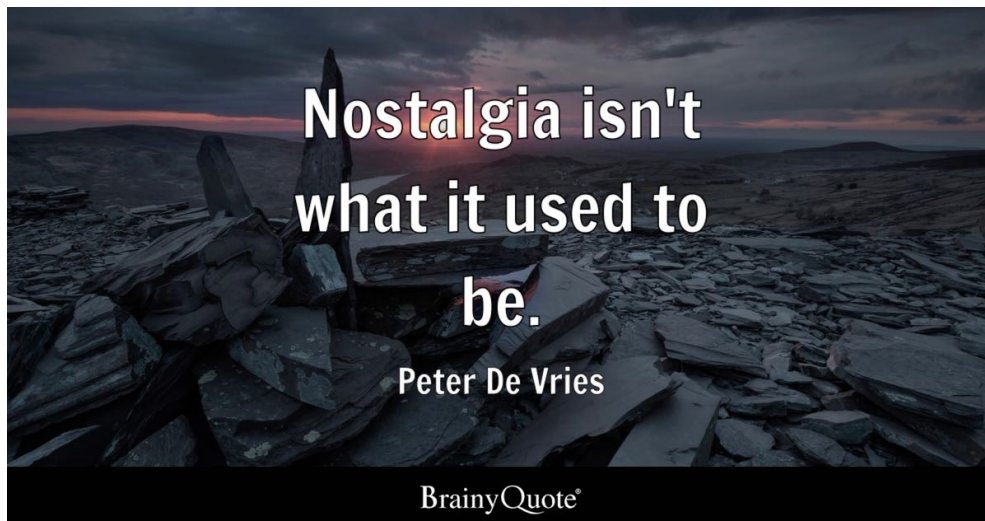
Trauma is a specific diagnosis for people who have suffered terrible suffering. That makes perfect sense. But when it is generalized to cover almost everything else, it spreads the lie that the human condition is meant to be free of pain and tragedy. When faced with the consequences of our own or other people's failures, or the rages of nature, it tells us we are entitled to a claim for healing or repair. If we feel we created our own life out of our own merit, we now think life owes us for everything we lose. But life is fundamentally a gift. And it comes with certain conditions, such that no one is born into life without pain, and no one escapes life alive. The suggestion that universal trauma entitles us to some special response is as ludicrous as humans believing they were angels, or they gave birth to themselves.

The reason that now everyone claims trauma's affects is as much about audience. How else can one pay attention to the human condition that at times, gets us down. Victimhood has become the currency. Pain was meant to make us feel solidarity, to know that we all were born through

the pain of our mother's labor, and that we all have to face it. But in the consumer world, we have to think "Why Me?" and turn solidarity into singularity, and howl like Lear at the moon for life being so unfair to ME. Buddha says that Suffering is about us. We all cry. Capitalism makes it about me. Where is the healing that I can buy at competitive rates? Health insurance is a big business. And it is expensive. That means only the wealthy are healthy. The unfairness of life is one thing, but the injustice of the man-made social safety net is just another part of rapacious capitalism that breeds inhospitality. We are doing this to ourselves. Who are the impostors here? It is not us but those selling us the lie that we are.

THE GREAT FORGETTING

We forgot what we learned in 1918 when 50 million died of Corona Virus. We forgot what we fought the civil war over, (it was slavery) We forgot what the civil rights movement was about, voting rights and economic justice. We are forgetting what women took over 100 years to win. The world moves relentlessly ahead, and half our leaders try to move us just as relentlessly in a reverse evolution, to a place of safety that does not exist, our mothers' breast, the warm bosom, or back into the womb or the wound. Either seems just as safe.



The irony is that having emerged from the pain of struggle, we now want to go back to a past that had no pain, and a history that never existed. **Nostalgia is the Novocain that kills hope.** It teaches immaculate conception, saying the mother that bore us went through a painless labor,

because we were so cute. Like kids too scared of adult responsibilities, we seek the comfort of fairy tales again. "Once upon a time" America was great, and life was happy." Or in Lake Wobegon, "where **all** the women are strong, **all** the men are good-looking, and **all the children** are above average."

Nostalgia is also the neurosis of our times. We have lost our courage to face forward, to embrace risk and uncertainty and pain. After 911 and recession and 20 years of useless wars, all we want is security, not freedom. We want to be safe and sure, not stretched by the human paradox and awed by life's unfathomable mystery. Risk is to life what surprise is to a story. But we have killed our stories and substituted sermons and cliches. As Benjamin Franklin said, **"Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety."**

We have normalized our past and erased our future or put it in PARK, because there is too much unresolved past to deal with. But the future doesn't wait or care. It moves us on, even if we are standing still. If there is a future, we have turned it into a casualty ward. Trauma, meant to address and heal the past, has fast become the only future we can imagine. **We lost our nerve because our stories are as diseased as our imaginations.** Our Utopia has been replaced by dyspepsia. Half our lives are wasted on getting upset about something, being offended by someone, or joining the choir of angst and alienation in our comfy bourgeois mansions. Our discontent is the only thing that makes us happy and our complaints are our badge of courage. As Robert Hughes described it, we thrive in a "Culture of Complaint."

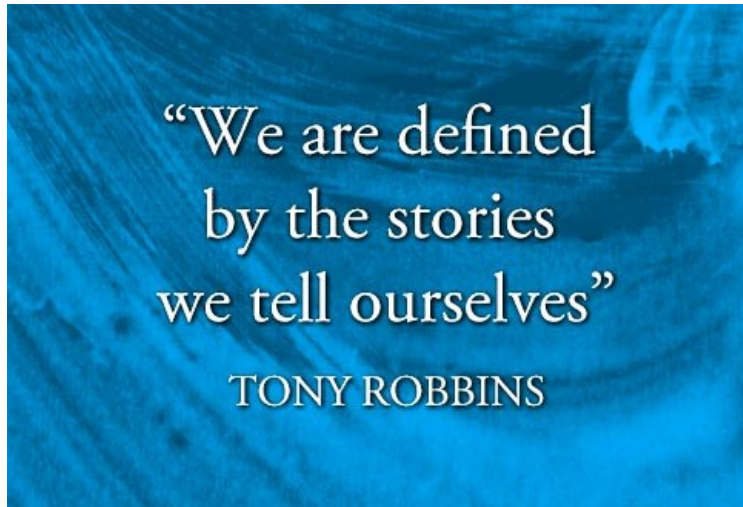
Unless we embrace this radical re-alignment between story and reality, and step back courageously into the space of surprise, mystery, and not-knowing, we can end up with what anthropologist Clifford Geertz calls **"thin descriptions"** of experience-leaving most of reality out. Our culture's stories become polluted with space junk, stereotypes, judgments, and sermons. These turn our own stories into impersonations, not persons, and impressions rather

than expressions.

BACK TO THE GREAT STORIES OF OUR TRIBE

Stories of the self as told by the great writers of our tradition like William Shakespeare or Edgar Allan Poe or Virginia Woolf or Leo Tolstoy are full of horror and humor, complexity, contradiction, and depth. They are shot through with comedy and irony. We need to apprentice ourselves to them once more. But when colleges are deciding that literature and the humanities are not marketable anymore, we must push back to insist that we have to be schooled in life. Education is all about becoming successful Life Learners. SLL

We are not born as humans. We are born as mammals. We are only enrolled in the human project, and it takes a lifetime. There is a reason we call these teachings the “Humanities” because humanity has to be taught, even more urgently than biomedicine or AI. It can never be presumed. After 9-11 and Syria and Covid, or George Floyd being publicly choked to death, we witness so many of us who have failed to grow into the human. How could we forget that? E. F. Schumacher wrote that we need a “Make a Human” kit for everyone born, and that it contains some of the essential learnings we as humans know from our history that every baby must master to make their lives worthy and worth it. (A Guide for the Perplexed)



THE STORY WE TELL OURSELVES ABOUT OURSELVES

For us, SEL or mental health can be approached as the story we tell ourselves about ourselves. Yet it too suffers from being part of the diseased narratives of our times. The stories we inherit from a consumer culture badly infect our children. They grow up on TikTok, obsessed with celebrity, safety or weighed down with trauma. These are “thin descriptions,” poor renderings of the human spirit. We have to find a way to keep inviting more reality in and evicting the preconceptions or damaging judgments that are just more space junk freeloading in our souls. We must teach respect and dignity from the inside out. Our young people must realize themselves, come to thrive in the reality that they inhabit and more and more, learn to create. Instead of showing up in our story of concern, they have to progressively show up in their own story of learning and growth. That is our job as parents and educators, mentors and coaches.

DESIGN BACK FROM THE RESULT – REVERSE ENGINEERING

Having clearly defined what we intend to come out at the end, we now reverse engineer the process. We move back to the beginning and to the design that will best manifest that desire. We have articulated the story that we want to invite the student into through our influence. We normally say “interventions” here, but even that term comes from the same mechanical

shop of change, where it sounds more and more like “interfering” or what a military does in a foreign country. It lacks any emotional intelligence, even as a term. Jack you are upsetting the kids. I am going to intervene to help you gain self-control.

The quest is to help the student create for themselves the story of a successful Life Learner-SEL on Purpose. It is what we all need. (SLL) Now we must build back from that to ask what are the key elements of such a story? If story is the outcome, story design will inform the input.

MyScore is designed to address the key components of that story build. Sounds like a Habitat Build, I know.

CAP STORY ANALYSIS

Every storyteller has their working definition of what a story is. It is weird because not many of us agree. But for the purposes of function, we at storywise have our shorthand for what a story basically needs. For us, it is constituted by three essential elements- what we call in summary CAP. Character- Plot- Audience.

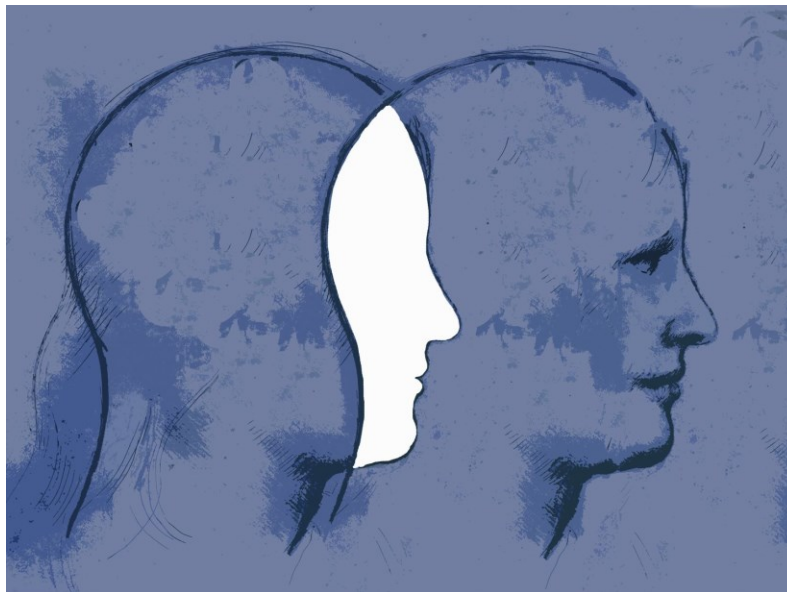
There can be many other elements, we know, but design needs to be simple, workable and economical. Let’s look at these.

1.Character, a person or conscious being who acts, or is acted upon. A story of a rock acting like a rock, is not a story, but a story of a rock being conscious that it is a rock, that is a story. I think they made a movie about it called Rocky. Or maybe I was stoned.

2. Plot. Something happens which changes the position from where we started. If the Beginning is Position One, and the End is Position Two, Plot is that change that happens in between these positions, and is the measure of the difference between the two. In other words, plot in a story means change, and plot twists means we are following the path of surprise. Plot, we insist, is not necessarily about conflict, per se. Interpreting a story in the terms of position is an important concept because we can map it, make it visual. Notice we are looking at change as movement, not measurement, or we are measuring the movement in the

space, not the summation or the aggregate. We are not being substantial. We are not going to claim a 45% increase in profits. We are going to claim that a corporation has moved closer to profitability, where the 45% is merely one indicator among many. Progress is a bigger story than profits, just as growth is a bigger story than math scores. Progress means where we have advanced. That is what its etymology originally meant.

3. Audience- the listeners or viewers who hear, notice, see what has happened as significant. We claim that if there is no audience, there is no story. The media know that instinctively. Fox news certainly does. An audience is who decide what matters because nothing matters unless it matters to someone. Or it only matters because of who it matters to. I ended a sentence in a preposition, I notice, but what are rules other than to break for?



INSIDE AND OUTSIDE- EACH PART OF CAP HAS TWO DIMENSIONS

We further divide each part of CAP into two dimensions, two worlds, two conversational spaces, the inner and the outer, and their operative verbs, Internalize and externalize.

1. **Character**, Inner and Outer, internalize and externalize.
2. **Plot**, Inner and Outer, internalize and externalize.
3. **Audience**, Inner and Outer, internalize and externalize.

Let's examine each of these.

1.INNER AND OUTER CHARACTER

There is an inner and an outer character.

That means internally, the character first sees herself from inside her own consciousness. If I tell the story as the 3RD person, omniscient narrator, I can tell you that inside story. But in life, we as the audience or observer are not privy to that internal world. All we know is our own interiority (and even that is a stretch at times.) In life, should the other disclose the inner feelings of their heart, we still can only take it in through the filter of our own inner understandings. The chances of creative distortion are huge. But story can imagine inner feelings, and elaborate on them in ways we never can in reality. Some critics would claim that human interiority was largely invented with the novel. They gave us a script for our angst, and all our psycho dramas. There is a little bit of Proust lurking in all of us.

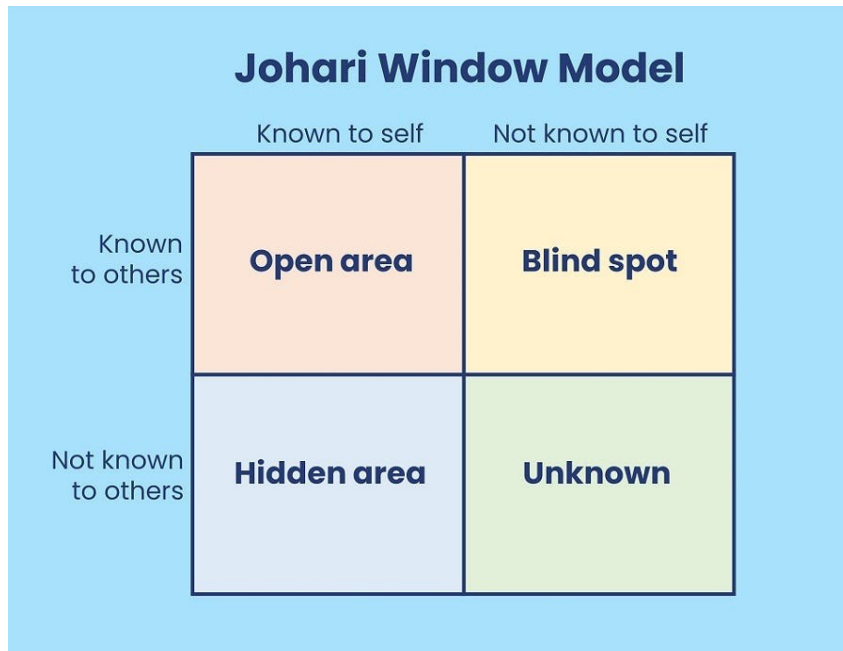
Budding writers are told again and again "Show, Don't Tell" so what we readers need to see is not just the endless monologue, but camera, lights, and action. It is cinematic. Where is the camera, and what is the character doing, saying, relating? In the novel, the writer can describe a punch in the nose, but it does not leave the page splattered with blood. We don't normally get a nose bleed either. **But action reveals the character**, the outside that we can see showing us what might be happening inside, that we can only guess. As Michael White loved to point out, this interior/exterior reading of human action is very modern. Ancient times saw human

action as the fruits of fate or the gods, or bad omens, not anything inside a person's psyche. That inside space was not invented yet.

Modern understanding of persons relates the felt territory of the inside to the observable territory outside. We see a student acting out and we immediately ask, "What is wrong?" and "What was he thinking?" or "What was he feeling?" Our theory of mind, as they call it, entails building a coherency between these two domains and so much of our language about the person maps onto these spaces. A troubled kid has attention deficit disorder and he acts out. Or a kid is withdrawn and depressed and we need to bring him out of his shell. Inside and outside are our personal domains for reading a person.

FAMILY AND FAMILIARITY

In life, if this other person happens to be in our home or habitat, we don't need to play their therapist. We know them by habit. This same character is someone we can feel or react to or notice from the outside. We see them at work. We have coffee break with them and laugh at their lame jokes. We meet their children at Christmas parties and see what kind of parents they are. We have what we might call a storyotype for them. Jim is shy, and Mary is loud, and Jeremy is a prankster and Larry is a saint. Often, we know them in ways they might not know themselves. Let me say that again. We know more about them than they know, and that is commonplace intelligence. We are not snooping.



The famous Johari window has spaces for what we and only we know about ourselves, (the inner world) and what others know about ourselves that we don't know. (The Blind Spot) From the outside, the inner world of any person is a mystery. And from the outside, what others know about us from observing that we do not know is also a mystery. What did Robbie Byrnes, the Scottish bard, say, *'O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us / To see oursels as others see us!'*

CONTRADICTIONS

When what others know about us contradicts what we think we know about ourselves, we have the recipe for misunderstanding, and the makings of a good comedy or tragedy. We all know that kind of person who thinks they sing like Pavarotti and who sounds to us to be totally tone deaf and always out of tune. Yet that space marks the area of growth, and discovery. We all to some extent live in the false reality of our own exaggerated self-regard.

DESCRIBING THE INNER AND THE OUTER- attitude and aptitude

There are many terms for this inner life. Some call it soul or psyche. Michael White called it the Landscape of Consciousness. We choose to sum it up by the word- **attitude**. It exists in the realm of being, one that we summarize in our MyScore 5C's as the Be-Attitudes. We mean it to express how a person sees their own life, and the position they take up toward or against it. That can be scaled from the positively positive to the negatively negative. What is the attitude to their own being. (Apologies to Jesus and the Beat writers)

Confusion Matrix

	Actually Positive (1)	Actually Negative (0)
Predicted Positive (1)	True Positives (TPs)	False Positives (FPs)
Predicted Negative (0)	False Negatives (FNs)	True Negatives (TNs)

Outer life is another term that gets labelled variously. Michael White calls it the Landscape of Action. We call them **aptitudes**. We want to see them as the outer manifestations or the endorsements and enactments of the inner attitudes. They could also manifest as contradictions of the same. **Aptitudes** are the behaviors that keep showing up, meaning the behaviors we lean into, by habit or are good at or we think are good at. They exist in the realm of action, of Doing. We summarize them as the Do- Aptitudes.

We map the human realm inside and outside as the territory of being and doing, of attitude and aptitude. Or as Frank Sinatra sings, "Do Be Do Be Do." And the span between the being and the doing, the space between the story and the reality, the thin description, and the thick description, as the space in between that is charged with the potential for change.

That is the area we are exploring. That is the space someone can be invited to move into. What we do as mentors and coaches is establish the positions that set up the natural polarity of growth, which is to become more of what we want to be.

What we will excavate is the points where there is more reality in the outer realm than is being storied in the inner realm, setting up a tension, a contradiction or an exception that can be the invitation for us to invite another **to claim more of their own reality.**

Or, equally as often perhaps, there is more “invented reality” in the inner realm than can be evidenced in the outer realm, and that tension, or gap, or exception can become the invitation to a new humility and a new quest for unlearning. We forget that education that is unlearning is just as powerful as learning, and that the first can be a huge barrier to the second. What do we have to unlearn to be able to learn again? Imagine doing a late in life PhD on the topic of “My Brilliant Ignorance.” Perhaps all adult education courses need to begin with a course titled, Unlearning 101.

What we are counting on, or what we are assuming, is that our story does not contain even half of our reality. Our stories get stuck, or hold our lives in PARK and do not bare the footprints of change we leave every day in our lives on the earth and the people in it. The charge to “Get Real” is the command to grow into the fullness of the space that we are occupying. The human story in our capitalist obsessed world has shrunk. It has become both puny and punitive, . When human persons are reduced to consumers, the sum of their needs, and their buying power as a market, then the human story is seriously endangered. Religious tradition used to challenge this reduction. The founder of a religious order that I used to partner with was fond of insisting, **“Remember what you are in the eyes of God.”** If we replace the market- those who will buy or sell, with the appreciative audience of the God we imagine, we inevitably get a different human story. Sometimes it pays even for atheists to believe God is on their side.

2. INNER AND OUTER PLOT

There is a plot of what happens internally, in the storm and strung of our emotions and our interminable, unsufferable inner conversation. “You did it again, Klutz” or “What if they see you are scared?” or “You knew that this was a bad idea, Schmuck.” We say out loud to a wall “What have I done?” and anyone nearby will wonder “who are we talking to?” The hills may be alive with the sound of music, but usually, walls don’t talk.

This drama of the inner plot is the foundation of psychoanalysis. Freud was so focused on it, what he termed the internal dynamics or psychodrama. Inside there is a whole other world. The words he uses to describe it make the psyche sound like some clunky steam engine, with pressures and repression, suppression, oppression, regression, and projection. Lots of steam being let off, it seems, and blowing fuses, and anger management to let it all ‘out. Aristotle’s catharsis for the steam age.

Storytellers love to take us inside. It is the recipe of suspense. Will he jump or not? Will he marry the prostitute or not? Will she turn around and see the shadow of Frankenstein looming behind her? If nothing is happening on the outside, Hitchcock can make it all happen on the inside. Terror is the inner infection of fear that reaches far beyond the limits of ground zero. Film makers know this, but so do Al Qaeda. The inner plot is where we find the motivation. As the saying goes, “it doesn’t matter how big the dog is in the fight, but how big the fight is in the dog.” The Freudian assumption is that the inner affects the outer. Your ego and your id are dueling with your Super-Ego and you haven’t even got out of bed yet. Life is a waking dream. It is exhausting keeping your Id from making you into an idiot and your superego into a superhero. And as the Skyhooks song goes, Ego is not a dirty word.

There is also an external plot which is the readily observable and measurable impact of our or anyone’s action on the world. We can see the bullet holes in the GPO in Dublin from 1916, and visit the now overgrown trenches of the Somme from 1917. Revolutions and wars leave

external markers that history pays attention to. It is what Marx believed moved history. Not the inside ego but the outside economy, the material conditions that shape social relations. He said that the outer shapes the inner. You didn't get out of bed because of your internal psychodrama, but because your boss had exhausted exploiting your surplus value in a week of 10-hour shifts in the coal mine. The real drama is in the exploitation by the owner class, not the fact that your mother didn't hug you, or your father was not the good enough father. Plenty of "impact" statements to be discovered in the outer plot.

TRAGEDY



The energy of a story often rests with this inner-outer tension, the harmony or disharmony between these inner and outer plots, and how they play off each other. The hero thinks he is unstoppable only to fall short of Everest by inches. Funny, the mountain did not share his confidence. The hero overestimated his ability, and underestimated what he or she was going to face. Pride goeth before a fall, we used to say. This disconnection has all the makings of a good tragedy. As Walter Isaacson wrote recently about heroes in his biography of Elon Musk, "As Shakespeare teaches us, all heroes have flaws, some tragic, some conquered, and those we cast as villains can be complex."

COMEDY



When the balance goes the other way, the hapless fool or the butler who makes the princess happy, is the makings of a good comedy. Dramatic irony is created because we know more than the actors know. We know the boyfriend is really a werewolf though the damsel does not. We know that the key Advisor to the President is not some mystic but the lowly Chauncey Gardner. The character underestimates themselves and yet, haplessly muddles into the world with a childlike

trust that things will turn out right. And miraculously, they do, or they don't but we are still bemused.

3. INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL AUDIENCE

Finally, there is the internal audience that every story has, even if it is only the teller herself in how they hear themselves. **How we hear our own story is always from the inside.** It is always going to be way more meaningful to us than it is going to be for anyone else, something we too easily forget. "Why don't you get it" we ask. "It's so flaming obvious." But the makings of the self is an inside job. And we have the only key. We have the inside track.

The audience outside the narrative are the hosts of viewers or listeners or readers. The external audience hears the story through the distorting lens of their own story and the cultural norms for normal. They cannot but help colonize it with their own set of anxieties and concerns. The son proudly tells the parents he made the ski-jump team, and the mother hears that through the story of "O God, he might break his leg again."

The same story heard from inside or from outside is often two different stories, just like a mountain seen from far away soon becomes a hill and the hill a mountain. Change is about position, not power. Or it is about the power to position. Any and every story, in the creating of a Point of view, (POV) is exercising its power to position you in a certain way, to see in a certain way, and to hear in a certain way. When we do not see that position shift, we are blind to its power and prone to its lethal effects. How often do we hear a story and feel like a judge and executioner? We are being positioned to judge. Gossip usually does that well. Did you hear what the boss did to his secretary at the Christmas party? It is not normally that he gave her a \$1000 bonus and bought all her kids presents. No, it is usually going to be something more juicy.

Other stories at least allow us to be the jury, to make up our own minds. Trust but verify, the story says. Don't just take it on my say so. But there do not seem to be too many stories like that around these days. Audiences are treated as dumb and having to be fed the conclusions. In Narrative Strategy's work with the Pentagon, they teach the Generals how to tell stories of Afghanistan and win the wars by controlling meaning. "The art and science of narrative when done well does not allow the audience to derive their own meaning. The narrator controls this." Story is the perfect tool for totalitarians. And they just don't exist in Russia.

Inside and outside is the territory rich in misunderstanding. One experiences this in fiction workshops where the budding author defends his unconvincing text by saying "But it really happened to me on the subway." And the reply of the audience is, "Well, that might be true, but it did not happen to me on the page." One is on the inside and the other is on the outside. **Two different positions for the same story deliver two different stories.** We attend to that when we pay attention to position, and keep asking "Where are we?" if we want to account for difference. Where am I being positioned, if I want to pay attention to power. As William James said, "My experience is what I agree to attend to."

KEEP ON MOVING ON- PROGRESS MEANS TO ADVANCE



The point of the story is to keep the listener moving on, engaged, on the edge of their seats, following the unfolding drama of what comes next. As a bodily experience, it will often mesmerize us, even stun us, such that one feels immobilized by the thrill and the thrall. Story keeps you moving even as it makes you sit up and sit

still. No wonder the best way to get kids to calm down is "Children, let me tell you a story."

There is magic that never ceases to awe us.

Story allows us to time travel. In other words, even if the event has already happened, or the story has already been told many a time, what drives a story forward in the telling is how it leans into its own unknown future that is yet to be revealed and realized. Story is travel that transports the mind. The entry ticket is the price of your listening.

KIDS AND STORIES



For kids, stories are portals into realities they are not grown up enough to deal with but can at least imagine. The monster who devours his children, the death or the love of the prince turned to a frog, and the damsel with the long hair who is locked high in a tower. As Bettelheim taught, stories for kids are life rehearsals. For us, they are also exercises in growth, to understand not just that there is a fantasy world out there inhabited by gremlins and dinosaurs, but there is a bigger world to grow into than the one they currently exist in. The stories offer a space for enlargement, at least for the child's imagination. They create the territory for a child to explore.

A child asks Grandpa to 'tell me the Cinderella story again' which might exasperate Gramps because he is sick of those Ugly Sisters, but the repeat allows the kid to experience surprise and shock in a context of controlled knowing. They feel safe enough to be in danger, secure enough to take risks. Stories are more than knowledge. They are experiences. They open a kids' imagination to a world beyond, and to the world that they can grow into as heroes, princesses and princes. Fairy tales serve a prophetic purpose in forging a child's imagination. Disney might help populate it but never be a substitute for it.

OUR STORIES ABOUT OUR SELVES

If stories from fairy tales can have such a haunting affect on a child's heart and mind, imagine the power of the story that the child tells themselves about themselves. When they dress up at Halloween or Purim as Wonder Woman or Superman, they are feeding that inner imaginarium- which is like a greenhouse for growing stories. But once a kid grows out of some of these imaginings, 'puts the things of childhood away' as Saint Paul says, what story are they left with that they are telling themselves? Are they Cinderella? Are they Little Red Riding Hood? Are they Dracula? **What story are they going to grow into and act out of?** About the world? About other people? About the Government? But most of all, about themselves. The story of self. That surely is a core Social Emotional Skill, to get that right.

Why do we never address that? Do their adult stories haunt them in the way that campfire horror stories used to? If their father said they were losers, or if their teachers told them that they were nothing but trouble, do they ever get a chance to grow out of the spell of that bad karma? Just because the kids grow up does not mitigate the power of stories to shape their lives, and none more so than the story they come to construct about themselves. What is their "Once upon a Time" when it comes to storying "My Time?"

LETS RECAP



WHERE WE HAVE COME SO FAR

Before moving into the 5c's let us summarize. We have argued the following:

1.-The result we set ourselves in our work is to plant and grow a story, not acquiring a skill or achieving a goal. Narrative transformation is not something that can be adequately measured by quantitative means. If CASEL is about a skillset, MyScore is about a Mindset. It is about how the student relates to their story of self. That is as much relational as it is instructional.

2. The story we are after is not about emotional intelligence alone or the 5-part framework of CASEL but rather the unfolding of the school of life for a young student, to ensure they are enrolled in the course of becoming a Successful Life Learner. (SLL) They were enrolled in that school the day they were born, and we are all alumni, even if we are not invited to the reunions.

3. If the result is a story, we need to reverse engineer it, and design a story by knowing how story works. That story, we believe, is already built into the biology of the young person and our role is to provide the scaffolding to ensure it grows out and upward, strong and healthy.

3. A story maps the path to difference, of positions between beginning (Position One) and ending (Position Two) It is about change, not conflict. "Impact" and its complementary terms "resistance" or "intervention" are for us the wrong metaphor altogether. If we are about stories and change, we need to have a less violent model of change.

4.- The story we are designing is the story of a more successful life learner. Using SEL to get to SLL- it is SEL on purpose. By that we mean that SEL serves a much larger purpose than just emotional intelligence, or social competence. What SEL alone does not address is the future.

5.- Key elements of story are character, plot, and audience (CAP)

6.- Each of these elements of CAP can be further mapped in its inner and outer dimensions, which gives is a design grid or a map. It sets up a polarity for the play of energy, and territory to expand into.

7. We name the inner world as that of **Attitudes** and the outer world, we name **Aptitudes**

8. Engagement with story or its intensity as an experience result from the tensions the story sets up between the inner and outer mapped across CAP and within each of story's dimension.

9. Our exploration as mentors is to enter that territory of in-between and level up the emerging reality to the unfolding story. The story should grow as organically as the child is growing up. If kids can suffer learning loss, they can suffer learning loss just as easily.

PART TWO

How confident are you?				
< 1	2	3	4	5 >
UNSURE OF MYSELF		VERY CONFIDENT		CRAZY SELF-ASSURED
How excited are you about learning?				
< 1	2	3	4	5 >
NOT AT ALL		VERY EXCITED		OFF THE CHARTS EXCITED!
How well do you get along with others?				
< 1	2	3	4	5 >
I DON'T GET ALONG		VERY WELL		I LOVE PEOPLE & THEY LOVE ME!
What do you do when things get hard?				
< 1	2	3	4	5 >
I STRUGGLE		I TRY EVEN HARDER		I LOVE A CHALLENGE!
How hopeful are you about your future?				
< 1	2	3	4	5 >
IT'S DEPRESSING		VERY HOPEFUL		I KNOW I WILL SUCCEED!

APPLYING THESE PRINCIPLES TO BUILD MYSCORE

CO-CONSTRUCTING THE SUCCESSFUL LIFE LEARNER-SLL

With this understanding of narrative, we now formulate the 5Cs.

THE 5 C'S OF LIFE LEARNING

We now apply these principles of narrative design to creating an instrument that fosters the student's story of becoming a successful life learner, SEL on purpose. As a story, it needs CAP,

a **character**- inner and outer

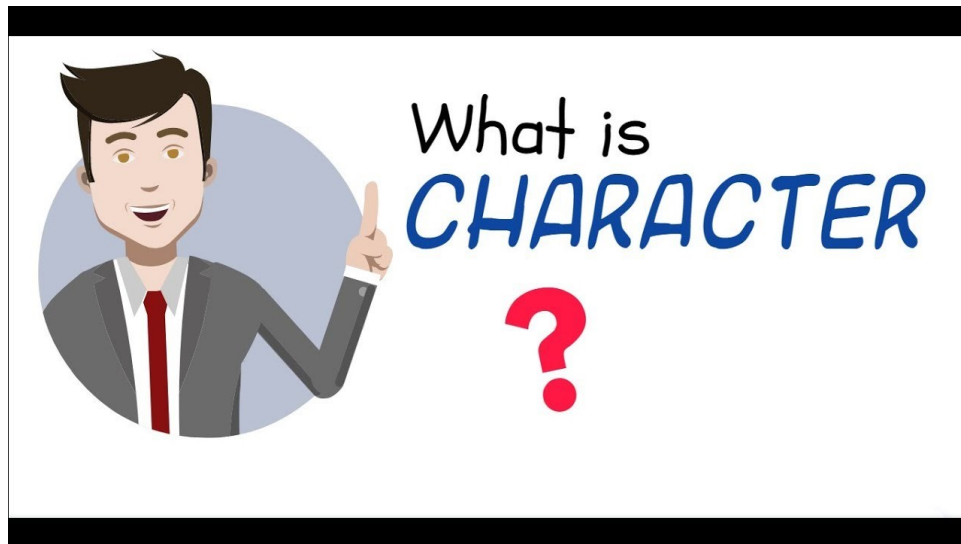
a **plot** - inner and outer

an **audience**- inner and outer

As we place the student into this framework, we can start to see how the play of reality and story, inner and outer, past and future, before and after, will change the in between. We are laying out a map here, using geographical and chronological shifts to deliver a wholesale epistemological overturning. We are looking for a change in direction, in orientation, rather like the legendary sunflower that grows with its flowers always turned to the sun. Children do not grow up in the dark. **They must be exposed to the sun of their own emerging brilliance.**

The gap between the story and reality is the territory we want to survey. We want to coach them into a richer description of their lives. School comes to dominate the story of who they are and what they can become, but school is such a thin morsel of their total lives. It has too small a bandwidth if all the student is asked to do is sit and absorb. **The point of a school for us is to teach the students how to learn how to learn.** The core curriculum we present is how they learn to learn about themselves. Even if school is not a success story, as it is for too many students, that does not mean it does not provide fertile material for a student to learn about themselves, and how to negotiate in an environment that is not exactly tailored to how they grow or learn. Learning that, even if the labels of the school report suggest failure or struggle, is in the SLL curriculum of a success.

School won't be the first or the last trial of life the student will have to face. Learning from that larger curriculum, the school of life is what, we believe, to be the key to a worthwhile life. It is what education is meant to be about.



C-1 CHARACTER.

C1 is Confidence, our first question. **"How confident are you?"** gets at the character in the story. How solid a sense of self does this student have? Do I believe in me? With a weak character, or a diffused identity, it becomes harder for a student to see themselves as achieving or owning anything in their lives or developing any sense of agency. They will tend to see the world as acting on them as a victim rather than acting on it and being cast in someone else's story. Change is what they suffer, rather than what they make. C1 speaks to character formation, in the sense of story making. We are not talking about Character as "ethos" or moral development, though they are not unrelated. Personal responsibility assumes first that there is a person who can respond, and there is a person to give an account. **There can be no authority in life unless we come into our own sense of authorship.**

Our way into that territory in the simplest language is to speak of "Confidence," whose root word is faith, *con fidei*, to believe in. There is a creed that goes with C-1, that we tell ourselves

about what we want to impart to the student- **We want you to believe in yourself and your own value and your own values, that you matter and because you believe that, you will gladly acquire the skills you need.**

Growing up, we are largely influenced by the outside, others in our lives, the people we love and want to win attention from. As we mature, we want to shift the balance from outside in to inside out, **that you no longer are a creature of audience but a creature of conscience.** You honor your own needs, and you claim the space for your own voice. You matter! To you.

We ask, “how does the student feel inside about self?” When we read their score, we are going to take their inside score and consider it as **position one.**

We then move to **position two** and become the audience or the observer. We take in all the outside behavior of the same student that we can witness in the classroom or during our program. How do they carry themselves? What do they do and say, the space they take up? What is the reaction of others to the space they expand themselves into?

With two positions set up, **P1 and P2**, we now have a story to work on by filling it in. Is the inner story in sync with the outer story? What is left out of one or the other? Does the Be Attitude of the student inside match the Do- Aptitude displayed before us outside in observable behaviors.

We are not just going to catch them on the odd chance that they are confident. No, we are going to presume that young people are built to grow and learn and walk more confidently into a world that they increasingly see themselves as making. We presume that even in the direst circumstances, there are parts of a young person’s life that are working for him or her, or that are only just emerging. We have to go look or be in search of that in **our role of amplifying witness.** We are NOT looking for more problems or disorders or issues that have to be addressed. There is a veritable army out there already vigilant for every child’s fall from grace. Often, we will see the buttoned-up behavior of a struggling kid in class who only excels in the

field of play outside. We are there to catch the student in a story of confidence, especially if they have scored themselves in MyScore as not feeling that they are. We are comparing the Be-attitude (Position 1) with the Do-Aptitude. (Position 2)

COUNTER AUDIENCE



When we understand stories as being as much about audience as they are about tellers, we bring a new curiosity to the situation of a student who repeatedly scores C-1 Confidence with low scores. We begin to ask- Who is telling her that she has no value? Or who is acting in such a way that this is what she is internalizing? We first of all realize we are the counter audience to that feedback. We counter it by acting to the student in ways, large and small, that demonstrate her value, that she matters. That could be as simple as recognition, using her name often, or asking the student for some assistance, or inviting them into a role that is significant to you or the group. At the same time, we are consciously recruiting a counter audience and to grow that by enrolling others in the story of the student's growth. Michael White was adept in writing letters and notes and inventing creative certificates to mark progress. The MyScore uses the WOW card. It takes a village to raise confident kids. We will not change a student's sense of self-value unless we grasp the dynamics at play in the story system in which the student tells themselves that story. The sense of the self might feel its owned personally but it is constructed socially and culturally.

SUMMARY

In narrative design, we now have a

C- a Character

ready for a story to show up in. In terms of plot, before anything else, we need a Future, an expanding horizon of possibility.



C-5- MOVING INTO THE FUTURE-PLOT

If we have a character, we have a portrait but not a story. For the story to happen, the character must move from where they start to where they want to go, and act into a future of something that is ‘Next’. We often tell stories that rehearse the past, but we cannot act into the past. That is the territory of regret and not regress. No matter how hard people try, it no longer offers choice, except to what to make of it. We can’t remake it as action, or even as choice but only as memory and meaning. When good things come out of bad choices, we can canonize the sin like the Easter Exultet does, “O Happy Fault” we sing, “O Necessary Sin of Adam.” But if there are more memories to be made, and we are not ready to sign off, then what calls us forward is what lies ahead.

Unfortunately, our culture has privileged the past as the best explanation of the present. We are because of where we came from, not where we are going. But for a student or a child, that

makes little sense when all their future lies ahead. Therapy assumes that if the present is not working, the work is to excavate the past and heal it for what was hurt. But human beings are Homo Prospectus, writes Martin Seligman, and the past only survives in memory in service to the future. What we need is a usable past more than just a healable past. If that is the case, the creation of the future as an expanding horizon of possibility is critical to a young person's motivation to learn. That is where we must generate the propulsion, (if Freud allows us to use jet engines instead of steam.) The future acts as the magnetic field. The past pushes and the future pulls. How do we make the future for the student more compelling? Even the word we so often use "career," comes from the root to move quickly forward.

HOPE "How hopeful are you about the future?"

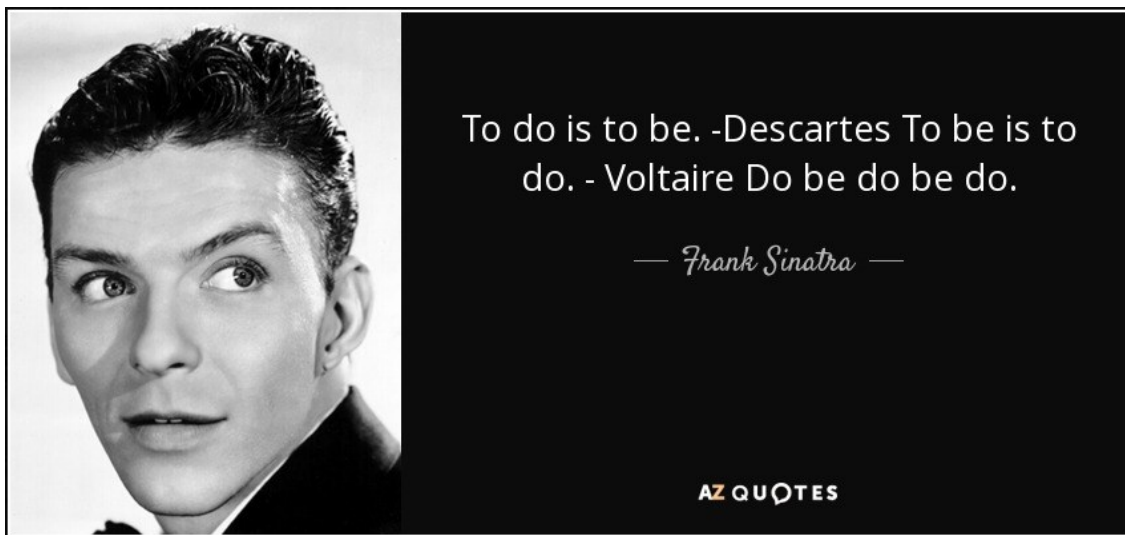
C5 is Career-Future focus, the "What Next" driver of a story. A story turns a moment and what follows it into momentum, from "once upon a time" to "they all lived happily ever after." If a student does not have any sense of tomorrow, he or she gets trapped in the immediate urgency or problem of the day, or comes to see tomorrow as just a boring repeat of yesterday. In terms of learning and overcoming, one is stuck in Park because one cannot see a way forward or see a path out. Also, what is there to learn if there is nothing new under the sun? Same old, Same old is hardly an invitation. The future offers an invitation to learn, explore, discover.

Every story moves a past already told into a future created in the act of telling, taking us from here to there, from then to there and beyond. Because Hope is an engine of story, it is critical. If a story has no hope, why do we keep listening? Why do we keep telling? Current research continues to show that a sense of hope is more predictive of future learning success than any other factor. (Seligman Homo Prospectus) Let me say that again. Of all the factors, the sense of a future is determinative. Our therapy culture insists that the past matters more, but one wonders if that is declared true mostly by those who have more of it than a future. Normal SEL processes pay no attention to the future. It cannot be reduced to a skill or a competency. It is what we might call an imaginary. What If SEL for SLL involves creating a set of imaginaries for the student. What kind of framework might that be? It is already what used to be part of

classical education. Creating the imaginary is called stories.

How do we invite the student to act into a story of hope if they do not feel much of it on the inside? How do we even do that for ourselves? We ask, “how hopeful are you” and record the inner score of the student as **Position One**- Attitude.

Then, we take up **Position Two** to compare the inner Be-Attitude of the student to what we observe of the Do-Aptitude or outer story of his behavior. We place the record of attitude beside the evidence of aptitude, the Be beside the Do. Think Frank Sinatra.



Most times, the student will display more confidence in action than he or she feels on the inside. In a way, growing up is a story of Risk. Your biology is going to push you forward and upward whether you want it to or not. In that case, our job is to catch that part of the confidence plot that is outside and in evidence in the student’s actions but are not owned yet in the inner story that he or she tells herself. What we are doing is replenishing the plot. A young person’s reality is a fertile field for harvest that allows us as mentors to broker the uptake of their growth into their inner stories. The future is not a skill we teach. It is a horizon we help them to find, define and widen. The pledge of faith that we want to share with our students is

“I want you to believe in and value the future you are growing into and is growing into you, and for you to come to see beyond the growing pains of your past to give you your platform to perform.”

COUNTER AUDIENCE

We are also setting up a counter audience to the audience that has storied the student as



somehow “less than,” or “immature” or “struggling.” Or more to the point here, someone with no future. “Mary will never get a job if she acts like that.” “Tommy is never going to get anywhere unless he drops the attitude.” The narrative talks about counter stories but here, we mean a counter audience.

Often the situation of peers or parents or family tells the student a story that disqualifies them from owning that part of their independence that would show that they are growing in their self-hood. Biologically, anyone under 18 is one huge laboratory of growth. To allow any story to become a label, or a diagnosis when the thrust of life is all toward growing up and growing through, is locking someone in a history that is meant to be mere scaffolding. We want to contest the “less than” inner story with an ever expansive “more than” outer story. We want to replace lack with abundance, because biologically, in height and mind and size and brainmass, that is where this young human is heading. And the future represents the space to grow, change and learn. We want their story to keep up.

The counter story to hope is not just despair, but helplessness. What is the point, the inner story says, echoing the judgments of the outer choir or the chorus of peers, teachers’ parents? Hope is triggered by action towards a future goal, and by feeding the imaginarium of future roles. The age-old question of ‘what would you like to be when you grow up?’ is an invitation to dream, but also material that can be acted on. We must also beware of adulting the child with parental anxiety or teacher burnout. The adult world is a distressing place for many of us, but we must not contaminate our kids with our pessimism. They do not deserve that. The best way

The MyScore is inviting the student to score themselves and thereby express their competency for self-knowing. That is never tested in school in any formal way. Yet it is tested every day in the playground, or at home, social media, or in the challenges and risks that growing up throws at young people these days. Does the student know that learning to deal with failure is a core life skill? Does the student know that working out difference with peers is a life competency? Does the student see themselves as being able to be successful learners through these often-painful experiences? Do they allow their natural curiosity to light up before a new frontier of knowing, no matter what it is?

Neuroscience tells us that young brains are built to be self-organizing learning machines. C2 invites the student to step more deeply into that story. I believe in me, with a future ahead of me, and I am growing and learning. Learning is what propels change. If there is no learning, there is only status quo or stagnation. Don't stay in Park. Release the brake and Drive.

COUNTER AUDIENCE



If a student does not see themselves as a learner, and that they are not excited, we can grow a suspicion that there is a powerful counter narrative to that emergence, either in the form of a failed exam, or test, or grades, or a teacher who has told the parents that the child is falling behind. We must win some voice of influence in that student's life to be able to provide an alternative view and give the student some choice as to what plot line they want to grow into. Mentoring is building the trust to have an influence, more than it is a teaching a specific set of skills, but of course, it can be both. AmeriCorps members are in the role primarily as mentors and coaches, and that role is precisely not to be the teacher or the trainer. Your value as a teacher is reflected in pass/fail scores. A mentor does not have that to deal with.

We ask C-2, "how excited are you about learning?" and record the inner score as **Position One-Attitude**. We then move to **Position Two** and take time to observe the outer story of behavior-

Aptitude.

We are assuming that **A student cannot not learn**, but where does their attention go? Where is their energy most available? A member will look to witness the student learning, or getting back on track, or lighting up to novelty and want to mirror that image back to the student. “See”, we say, “you are excited about learning,” even if you don’t recognize that when you did the MyScore. A student might be bored stupid in math and come alive in Biology or be more excited about soccer practice or Fortnite. Then our job is to catch that epiphany and shed its light back on the student as a learner. We can tell them, yes, **they are not excited about learning except when they are excited**. We invite them to include more of their experience in a revised story of self. The pledge of faith we want to endow our student with is **“I want you to believe in and experience and value the excitement of learning for its own sake, something that is less a skill and more an attitude that reflects a fundamental trust in life as a teacher.”**

EPIPHANY



If we are to place the genre that our student story belongs to it is epiphany. In religious terms, it means the feast of the first manifestation of the messiah. Since during the formative years of 3 to 18, there are many first appearances, **we are audience to the epiphany of our students growing into what they want to become. There are halos everywhere, if we look with the eyes of angels.**

SUMMARY

In narrative design, we have
a Character, C
and we have a plot line heading into the Future, P
and we have one of the verbs of the story, P1
to learn.



C-3 Collaboration. If a student is to learn, he will have to learn from others. That is part of the deal. That means that a core part of the curriculum is how to take into account what others do and say, and how you relate, how you handle conflict and how you cooperate. These are essential life skills in anyone's textbook.

And as for the story, we know every successful story needs an audience. If there is no one to listen, or no one to share, how does one gain a sense of self? The self does not exist except in relation to another. It is what the Africans call Ubuntu "I am because we are." We want our students to be excited about learning and we are not being specific. We could mean geography or games, or soccer, but one life skill we know we all have learned is how to get along with others. That is specific to the SLL plot.

The question of C-3 is also about audience, and who else is on the journey with you? Who else can validate your own contribution, or challenge you when you are misled? The developing story needs day to day editing by the everyday reality of other people. Of course, in youth development, one calls this the need for socialization, or what CASEL calls social awareness and relationship skills. In the frame of growing up, that makes eminent sense. MyScore places collaboration on the path to growing a story of becoming SLL, a successful life learner, SEL on purpose.

This simple, almost colloquial “get along” question taps into other frontiers of growth for a student. It points to her sense of solidarity and empathy with others, his ability to co-operate, to become part of a team, to experience the value of one’s own gift. We know from psychology that students are not built to be hermits. There is a natural bias for pro-social behavior and for connection. This question invites the student to assess this strength of their story and let more reality in and to claim what and how they are learning social skills. What for them is the “other.”

In our work post covid with students, they tell us through MyScore that they miss the collaboration, the chance to be around their peers the most. While school systems obsess about loss of learning, the students’ own needs tell us that they have missed critical growth goals as much as learning goals, and that reality roars back by asserting the former over the latter in their priorities. The reality of growing up breaks the learning agenda set by the schools. Finally, genes prevail over grades, as they always will.

We ask, “how well do you get along” and record how the student measures his inner story and record that as **Position One**-Attitude. Then we move to **Position Two** to observe that student and the outer story that she is creating in Aptitude. We assign ourselves to become the witness to any acts of cooperation that might have escaped the plot that the student is seeing in their low score, and restore or resource that part of his life back into his story. We are replenishing the stock of collaboration that got disqualified by some failure or some plot point that disrupted the socialization process, like Covid did, or death or sickness or family disruption will.

There are studies that show that childhood is remembered not as a coherent story so much as a series of sparkling moments of joy, or achievement or recognition. In the same light, childhood can be blighted by moments of humiliation or failure that are accentuated or made to predict a future of failure. Failure and obstacles, the question MyScore asks in C4 is crucial to understanding what a student is having to deal with. The pledge of faith that members are

asked to invite the students to believe is **“I want you to believe you are a contribution to the team, and that the whole is much more powerful than the individual parts when you and everyone else has a chance to share their gifts.”**

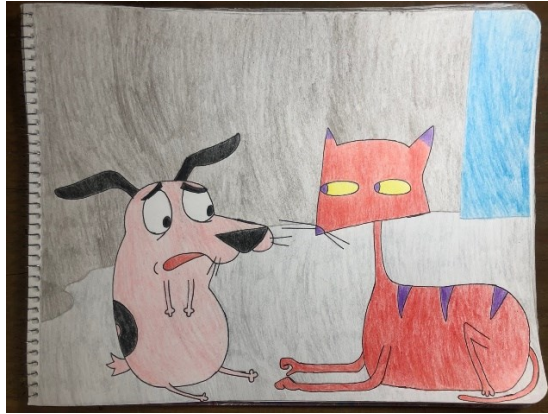
COUNTER AUDIENCE



Perhaps it is some other audience that refuses to validate the collaboration skills of the student. We are presuming here that the plot trajectory of every young person is towards cooperation, health, wholeness and learning. When that is not happening, we presume that something is getting in the way rather than something is wrong with the student. Perhaps we need to control our parental anxieties and realize that often a story of failure is not about the student’s ability, but about the anxiety of those adults around them. What we have learned in using MyScore over the years is that despite COVID and school shutdowns, the students invariably score C-3 the highest because it’s what is in their life curriculum, even if there is not much room in the school curriculum for it.

SUMMARY

In the building blocks of narrative design, we now have
a Character
and a Future to live into (Plot)
and the verbs that operationalize that narrative are
to Learn and
to Get Along, to learn together.



C-4 Courage.” What do you do when things get hard?” Joseph Campbell’s The Hero’s Journey has become a popular formula for TV shows, movies, and books. The core of it shows how the story of a hero revolves around what she has to overcome, the dragons she must slay, the fears he must quell, the fiery pits that she must escape from. We can have a story of a character with a future, with many colleagues and friends, who is learning well, but who never has to face any hardship or take any risks. That might be a story of success, but it is not a successful story. **Growing up is the story of strength grown through stretching.**

The hero or heroine is stretched by the test. It is through the trial that he or she comes to know a deeper strength, a deeper courage, and it is only because of what she has to face that she discovers hidden depths. If there is no challenge, there can still be a story but one without anything at stake. It leads to shallow character development. This is an essential life skill, how we face into what might overwhelm us.

As far as constructing a story, every narrative reaches into a frontier zone, where something new can emerge. That is what brings drama and surprise to the unfolding, when we encounter that space of stretch that opens to a frontier of risk and opportunity. We believe therapy tends to overelaborate the disorders of growing up, and places them in the context of a problem needing fixing, or a sickness in need of treatment rather than in a more organic context of growing through. If the problem tells the story, or has the starring role in the play, the future of

Possibility is clouded out. We aim to place the problem in the context of the possibility and that the problem often as not is not blocking the way but making the way. It is the way through, the Exodus.

We tie ourselves up in knots of meaning, or what Michael White called a Problem Saturated story. If that is the only story that can get students' care or attention, then so be it. But that bespeaks the over attention we pay to deficits. MyScore wants to offer an alternative story, one that honors the student facing the stretch, and considers them as being on their own hero's journey, rather than on the journey to despond or despair. They are on a journey to their own independence, passing through many new frontiers of the unknown and dealing with the uncertainty that this provokes in those charged with their care. On this contested ground, they tame failure and fear as just another step along the way. To turn every challenge into another form of wounding or trauma is to sidetrack the growth process.

Obstacles are necessary parts of the curriculum so long as they are real growth challenges, and not manufactured to meet the needs of the parent, who might be struggling to stay relevant to this emerging adult. The parent must deal with the shock- what happened to their child who is now seeming to be someone else, not every year but every second day! The ever growing courageous and confident child will always present a threat to the unconfident and uncourageous parent or teacher.

We ask, "what do you do when things get hard" and we record the inner score as **Position One-Attitude**. Knowing that this is how the student feels on the inside, we take ourselves to **Position Two-Aptitude**, and take time to observe the student in the outer story, of her behavior and demeanor and choices. We want to be witness to where the student is acting into a story of courage even if she does not feel that on the inside. We are replenishing the plot of courage. The pledge of faith we want the student to buy into is **"I want you to believe and value your staying power and to back yourself facing into hardships and challenges, never giving up on yourself or life's promise, no matter what."**

COUNTER AUDIENCES

Too often, the student has forgotten, disqualified, downgraded, or even dismissed the courage



they act from because it does not fit someone else's story for them. They may have fled the violence of revolution of their home nation and risked death, but they show up in the USA as illegal aliens, who are blamed for everything that is going wrong.

How can a kid not be infected with such bile? But these refugees display the greatest fortitude of all. We invite them to own their own courage, even the courage to admit that they need more of it. We invite them into the journey of becoming the hero of their own life. That might mean that we are the counter audience to an audience that allows the student to give up, or to believe that he or she is not capable, or presents some sort of burden or alien threat. As President George H Bush once said, beware the soft prejudice of low expectations. We are not there to present excuses for the students to expect less of themselves.

Students in recent days must deal more and more with adult and parent anxiety that has spread as fast as COVID and has heightened parents' vigilance. The belief we hold that students are well equipped, more often than not, to deal with the challenges of growing up seems to be on the wane. Students are headlined as needy, disturbed, victims of learning loss, social media, Tik Tok robots, fentanyl fiends, and always on the verge of self-destruction. Allied to this trend, there seems a growing need for the helping classes to be needed, and of course, while there is much work to be done, we would be naive to dismiss the profit motive behind a lot of it. The economy of therapy has exploded into a vast expanse of wealth creation. Demand is overwhelming supply. One begins to ask is the demand meeting the need or creating the need?

SLL- SEL on PURPOSE

The story of SLL, the successful life learner is one of a character who gives herself her own best therapy, who embraces the challenge as part of what makes the story interesting and allows her character to grow depth and courage through the times of testing.

He or She asks for help but is not helpless. He or she may face problems, but they are not the problem. She might struggle but struggle is another word for stretch. We are there as guardians, to protect and promote their sense of wonder as they read their emerging world, through ever renewing eyes. They each bring something unique into the world. We cannot let them be trapped in old stories, just like we do not allow them to wear old unfitting clothes.

We want to nurture the growth of their hope on the inside, one that will tackle the spread of toxic hopelessness on the outside. Our role is to grow that hope and feed that future. It is a future, we as helpers must recognize, belongs rightfully to them, not us. This spirit is captured so beautifully by Hannah Arendt who wrote about what she called natality:

“The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, ‘natural’ ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new [people] and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born. Only the full experience of this capacity can bestow upon human affairs faith and hope.”

Narrative Therapy maintains that what makes us helpless is how deeply we internalize the problem into our identity, and extensively we externalize our agency on to the helper.

	Internal	External
Agency	Internal Agency – I can help me (4)	External Agency- I can't help myself- I need a helper (3)
Problem	Internal Problem- I am the problem (1) it's all my fault	I may have a problem but I am not the problem (2)

We say “we or they” are the problem,(1) rather than dealing with a set of problem behaviors.(2) (We are the problem- not the problem is the problem) We say that we need help from outside (3) because we cannot solve it for ourselves. We do not feel any agency around what is troubling us. The space of (4) is unpopulated. (We need addiction counsellors and 12 step recovery and recognize we are helpless-Step One of the 12 step)

NARRATIVE THERAPY

As Narrative Therapy founder Michael White would say, **we have been complicit in our own incapacitation.** We have adopted a spoiled or contaminated identity that renders us helpless to help ourselves. It is a vicious circle. The fact that we drink too much is used to prove that we are an addict, and as an addict, we are defined as someone who cannot help themselves, that we cannot but drink and therefore, incapable of solving our own problems. Why? Because we drink too much. That is how one two-steps into AA, 12 step and recovery. The act defines the character as unable to act, and therefore, we sanction ourselves as counsellors to act on their behalf, to stage an intervention. But how often is that an expression of our power than their powerlessness? It is a strange double loop.

What the story needs instead is for us to externalize the problem and internalize the agency. We are not the problem. The problem is the problem. And the problem is not the problem so much as how we are relating to the problem. In the storywise approach, we claim it is the way we are storying it as a problem, making the problem the star of the show, and editing out so much else in reality, and particularly anything that will contradict the dominant problem story. We have got ourselves trapped in the genre of the age, where things are going to rack and ruin, or where the young people are lost to their devices, and the rest. The complaint, of course, is as old as Socrates. It might not be a sign of the age, but a sign of the aging.

Problem saturated stories are by definition thin descriptions that leave out the very qualities that one needs to build our lives back. Yes, we can ask for help and heal together, C-4 is saying, but we insult our own capacities if we adopt a thin story that edits out most of our resistance or resilience or our courage. We must thicken the plot and replenish the stock of courage.

SUMMARY

In our narrative design, we have

a Character, (c)

and we have a Future to live into (Plot)

and the **three** verbs that operationalize the story are

To Learn, (Plot) about life in its essentials which are

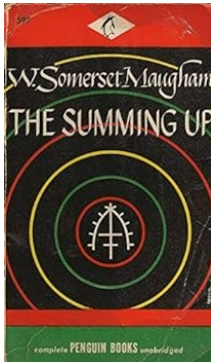
to Get On with others, (Audience)

and to have courage facing the growth challenges along the way. (Plot)

That is the way to build a future and become a Successful Life Learner- SEL on Purpose.

SUMMING UP

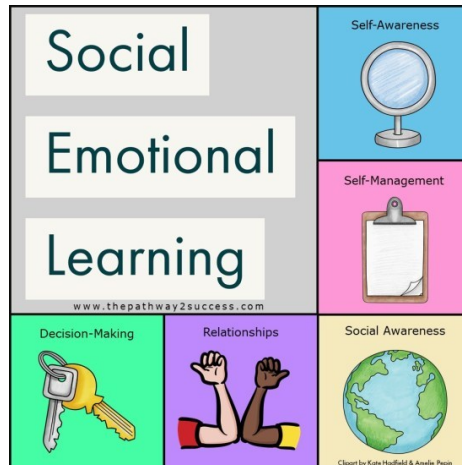
HOW THE 5C'S ALL FIT TOGETHER



The 5C's at first feel like a set of random questions that make sense individually, but do not necessarily comport into any pattern of relevance. Why are we asking about "things getting hard" and "Hope?" Why not ask about whether they feel they can trust an adult, or whether they like their teachers, or are afraid of math, or if they feel they are getting enough help. These too are good questions. But each of them is exploring the students' needs, and their relations to us as potential helpers. The deck is already stacked, to explore their neediness. It presumes that students have problems that others, not they, can solve. They are not focused on the inner drama of the student, or what they are telling themselves. The questions are more what we as concerned adults want to know. We are overdosing on anxiety. The student is making an appearance in our story for them. And goodness knows how we are making an appearance in their story as 'us.' **What entangled storied lives we lead!**

5 C'S AND CASEL- LADIES AND GENTLEMEN OF THE JURY

What if our care, what we intend from the inside, is mostly experienced by our students as a lack of confidence in their ability to grow through whatever life throws at them. Didn't we grow up through the Cold War, and didn't our parents grow up through World War II? Did we turn out so badly because we lacked trauma informed teachers or SEL training?



Others will point to the well-developed CASEL framework on SEL learning. Why aren't we asking about self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, Social- relationship skills, and responsible decision-making? These are considered the gold standard of SEL methods. But we dare to see it slightly differently. The SEL language itself sounds so adult and so corporate, to be talking about self-management, and responsible decision making. Say them to a 10-year-old and you realize how adulting they are? We say confidence, curiosity, collaboration, courage and career-future focus translated into open ended plains peak of "Get along" and "Get excited" and "What do you do?" We want to be close to the ground of their experience, rather than skiing up the slopes to the peak of lofty concepts invented by PhD researchers at Duke.

It is as if we are in the principal's office, or the teachers staff meeting discussing the latest 'acting out' incident of the students. We can hear the dean of discipline telling little Johnny that he needs to be more responsible, and telling little Mary that she has to make responsible decisions and regulate her emotions better for a better managed life. The CASEL 5 pillars are the construction of the dream student from the perspective of a teacher or parent. This is what we want our kids to learn, and this is how we want our students to behave so we can more easily teach them. That is not the story MyScore is constructing. One is outside in. MyScore is inside out. And it places SEL into a bigger human story, of becoming a Successful Life Learner.

“What is the point?” is a question we are prone to ask about any story we hear. We dare to ask it about SEL. What is the point of SEL? Ask CASEL when you put it into Google and it says:

CASEL's framework takes a systemic approach that emphasizes the importance of establishing equitable learning environments and coordinating practices across key settings of classrooms, schools, families, and communities to enhance all students' social, emotional, and academic learning.

OK. There is that high concept language again. SEL is about SEL. It seems it's self-justifying. Dig a little deeper and we will get SLL somewhere in there.

SEL can help all young people and adults thrive personally and academically, develop and maintain positive relationships, become lifelong learners, and contribute to a more caring, just world. We define social and emotional learning (SEL) as an integral part of education and human development.

In the end, MyScore and CASEL are on the same Team. But with our sense of narrative, we believe that SEL needs a good story to make it compelling, as much as a kid needs a good story to grow into a successful Life Learner. Story is an essential SEL competency. That is the point of SEL. SLL is SEL on purpose, or as they call that Canadian Radio News show, “On Point.”

Another difference is that MyScore operates with the assumption that the student is at the center of the circle of growth, not the teacher or the school or the parent. The 5 competencies at the heart of the CASEL framework are listed as skills, and while there is further expression of why these skills are necessary and important, the focus is around emotional literacy, which is at the heart of the origin story that grew CASEL in the first place. It was about emotions, not learning, or it was learning in the service of emotions. If you intend to teach it as part of any

school system, you have to formulate it in terms of what teachers do, which is teach. These must be teachable and therefore, they have to be skills, because you can teach skills.

But if one considered life as an art, that might be much harder for teachers or anyone to impart. We all know that some of our best teachers taught us by who they were for us, not that they taught us to love botany. **There is the secret curriculum that a school teaches a student about life, that goes mostly unrecorded but never unremembered.** Most of the emotional learning that goes on is through relationships, not skills sessions. It is relational and not instructional.

We are not asking so we can help so much as asking so that the students can help themselves and each other. The knowledge we seek is akin to folklore or Indigenous knowing, not expert or rationalized and neatly labeled. If a student scores all 1's, that does not signal a diagnosis. It signals an act of self-knowing that gives us a starting **Position One** to work from. To score oneself as low on any of the 5C scales is an act of courage, of not pretending, of not going along with the trends. A child is telling us that they are facing into a tough reality. In ways, that is more a sign of health than a blissful or giddy card of all 5's, where everything is sweet and dandy.

MyScore wants to take us into the noisy corridors of the student mind, and into the messy lunchroom or playing field, along with their peers. We are not asking what we expect and hope from them, but rather, asking about them, and what they expect and hope about themselves. With that data, we have a reference point (**Position One-Beatitude**) to then observe from Position Two (**Do-Aptitude**), the outer story of the student manifests every day in class and on the playground and in after school programs.

We want to be able to catch the student acting into the story of SLL, SEL on Purpose, the successful life learner that biologically and hormonally, they are programmed to become, but

which they may have lost because a counter story and a counter audience has become more influential. Or it might be that in all the questions they must learn to answer correctly in their schooling career, they are never asked questions about the one subject they are the world expert- themselves. That is one competency that no one can compete with. MyScore builds on that core competency.

Yet in the normal school day, their story and their voices have been dismissed or disowned. If the student seems stuck, it is probably something to do with the limited theater of our observation. Even then, should a student seem to score low and lower, MyScore offers a way to invite that student into an alternative plot and offers them a validating audience for a comeback. A student finds the way by walking it. The mentor's role is to open up the space and be part of the invitation and lead the chorus to champion the effort. It is part of a radical hospitality.

At the heart of it is the narrative design of the questions. What we are after is a story of SLL, a successful life-learner, a story that surely, we all aspire to be living, a story we claim is an essential SEL competency and a continuing lesson that life teaches us. For that, our 5 simple questions give us a character, a future, **and a plot of learning together to overcome, (LTTO)** a story design customized for the high needs students that we are serving. But come to think of it, this is the plot we as teachers and program directors all need as well. That is why, when we come to think if it, and we think if it now at the end, we are writing this manual for you as much as for the students you serve.

As MCPS Superintendent Monifa McKnight said to us in 2022, how can you get a MyScore that I can use for my teachers and staff. That might mean we have to start writing a manual for them next. Or maybe they can make a start by reading this first. A MyScore for teachers and parents isn't going to be that much different from the MyScore for students.



OR

TO BE CONTINUED