

The storytelling project: innovating to engage students in their learning

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This research explores the development of issues surrounding and reactions to the use of non-accounting stories in accounting to engage and motivate first-year students. The stories were drawn from the students' main areas of study. Students were challenged to draw analogies between a story and accounting. This process allowed them to create common meanings and understandings as they participated in a group dialogue about the relevance of each story. By using stories in areas with which the students were familiar, they were able to appreciate links between accounting and other disciplines. Initially the lecturer told the stories but in response to student feedback, students were encouraged to find or develop stories to share. Students found both the factual and fictitious stories enhanced their learning. When the students became storytellers, they took ownership of their learning and a more critical approach consistent with a deep approach to learning. Despite some initial concerns expressed by the lecturer, the storytelling project has led to increased motivation among non-accounting first year students who are undertaking some limited study of accounting.

Keywords: accounting education; deep learning; engagement; motivation; narrative; storytelling

Introduction

In 2005, I taught an introductory undergraduate accounting course to 86 first-year students who were not pursuing an accounting degree but were required to undertake at least one semester of study in accounting to complete their degree requirements. An entry from my reflective journal explains my frustration with the group:

I have eighty plus students in accounting this semester. All of them want to be elsewhere. I asked them what they thought of when I mentioned the word 'accounting': dull, boring, too many numbers. Not a single positive comment. One student told me he was only doing accounting because it allowed him to plan his study schedule to have a day off. Most said they were doing it because it was compulsory. I feel angry and resentful. When I calm down, I am going to think of a way of turning the attitude of these students around. (Lecture's reflective diary 3 March 2005)

In an attempt to enthuse students about accounting and make the course more relevant to them, I introduced stories to my lectures. The unique feature of the stories was that they were not about accounting. They were taken from the main disciplines

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that my students were studying. I approached the storytelling as a game. I told the story, continued with my planned lecture and then asked the students how the story linked to the accounting topic. My aim was to engage the students in accounting by using a medium that they would enjoy but perhaps not expect in accounting and to try to draw them into engaging with accounting by showing that it was not so different from the disciplines with which they felt more comfortable, even though the jargon and way of expressing accounting information was unfamiliar to them. By altering their negative preconceptions about accounting, I hoped my students might approach their accounting studies with more interest. The use of stories was to be a short-term experiment in engaging my students but, five years later, it has developed so that students now find or create and tell most of the stories. My students call it the storytelling project.

The development of the storytelling project, student reactions to it and what it has taught me about my students is documented here to provide a teaching option that others with unmotivated students might want to consider. My experience has been that stories have the power to help unenthusiastic students find a way of engaging with an unfamiliar discipline and learn to take responsibility for their own learning. Since everything I have done is grounded in the teaching and learning research literature, and not uniquely in the accounting literature, the storytelling project should be transferable in concept to other disciplines.

After referring to the literature to support the use of my teaching approach, this article describes the development of the storytelling project, the student response to it, issues encountered and lessons learned. The literature review provided a framework to support and inform development of the storytelling project.

Literature review

Students are more likely to take ownership of the meanings and structures presented within a new domain of knowledge if they can link it to the familiar (Ramsden, 1992; Stein, 1998), such as their main area of study. Such linkage has been shown to increase motivation of first-year students (Shotwell, 1999; Turner, Lesseig, & Fulmer, 2006). Students who are able to develop contextual links engage more enthusiastically in new domains of knowledge; by drawing on the familiar, they gain confidence about a new discipline sooner, which increases their interest in that discipline (AVCC, 1993; Barr, 1995; Brookfield, 1991). Interested students are engaged students (Entwistle & Ramsden, 1983; Ramsden, 1992).

I decided to use stories because they are a traditional way of transferring knowledge, which is why many cultures retain their strong legacy of storytelling; they provide a way of understanding the world (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). There is a plethora of literature exploring the multiple benefits of stories for enhancing learning (Bergman, 1999; Boje, 1995; Davidhizar & Lonser, 2003; Haigh, 2005; Miley, 2005) though much of it focuses on factual stories that enhance knowledge of a discipline, such as stories concerning the tacit knowledge of a discipline or stories based on individual experience (Pio & Haigh, 2007). These learning benefits extend to parables (Bonsignore, 1988; Coles, 1989; Forray & Stork, 2002; Pio & Haigh, 2007). The stories used in accounting were similar to parables in that they required the listener to draw analogies from the story to the accounting topic.

Storytelling is a means of engaging people, whether in their workplace (Drake & Lanahan, 2007; Durrance, 1997; James & Minnis, 2004) or at an institution of

learning (Frisch & Saunders, 2008; Higgins, 2008; Zerba, 2008). I wanted my students to engage with accounting as deep learners (Biggs, 1999a, 1999b) who examined the discipline critically and tried to link new ideas to existing cognitive structures, although even mild interest from my students would have been an improvement. Listening to a good story is always fun. Activities that are interesting, challenging and create opportunities for students to have fun can enhance their learning experience (Powell & Andresen, 1985). I hoped the stories would provide an element of interest and a link to the familiar, and applying the story to accounting would provide the challenge. By taking stories from topics drawn from the students' main areas of study, I hoped the students might see both accounting and those other areas differently.

I had several concerns about the storytelling project that fell out of the literature. Would the students dismiss the stories as peripheral or, even worse, irrelevant? My intention was that the stories would provide an opportunity for reflection as the students tried to link them to accounting concepts. Reflection allows students to explore their experiences, challenge current beliefs and develop new practices and understandings (Boud, Keough, & Walker, 1985). Would the students enjoy the stories and view them as enhancing their learning experience? I did not expect all the students to enjoy the stories. Students learn in different ways. Storytelling offered a different approach to learning in accounting, but student learning is enhanced by providing multiple methods of learning (Entwistle, 1981), so I felt that I was taking a calculated risk in using storytelling.

Effective learning is supported when students are actively engaged in the learning process (Hatfield, 1995). Knowledge created in the classroom learning environment has well-documented affective, attitudinal and social benefits (Slavin, 1995), especially if students have constructed their own meanings (Leveson, 2004). The essence of the storytelling project was the power of the stories to challenge students to develop and understand accounting meanings. Students are more likely to take responsibility for engaging in their own learning if they have participated in a dialogue about it (White, 1988). Would my students want to engage with the stories and dialogue about them as a group? I was concerned that I was being overly ambitious but I also teach Finance and a fundamental tenet of Finance is that risk is proportional to reward. The stories were a risk but my examination of the literature suggested they had potential for great reward as motivators and for engaging my students with accounting. Finance also says that the greater the risk, the greater the potential failure. Since I felt the atmosphere in the lecture theatre could not get any worse, I ignored my concerns about possible failure.

There will always be perceptual differences in individual interpretations of knowledge (Walters-York, 1999). I neither wanted nor expected students to agree on the interpretation of the stories. Disagreement was welcomed as part of the process of constructing shared meanings. Dialogue reduces classroom passivity so students engage more enthusiastically in their learning (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). As they learn to tolerate ambiguity and differences in interpretations, I believe they are learning an important life skill.

Teaching philosophy

In 2005, I presented stories without comment on their relevance to accounting. The students engaged with accounting and each other as they discussed the relevance of

the stories. From 2006, the storytelling project became student led as they found or created stories. This is more consistent with my teaching philosophy, which favours a student-led constructivist approach with structured opportunities for student reflection. Reflection is a critical part of the learning process (Hughes, Toohey, & Hatherly, 1992). It was the potential for reflection of traditional moralistic fairy tales and Biblical parables that initially attracted me to storytelling as a medium of instruction. Student feedback from my students consistently suggests that in becoming familiar enough with an area to find or develop a story, students develop their own process of reflective practice.

Developing the stories

The development of storytelling in accounting is summarised in Table 1.

Although I did tell my students some accounting stories about company collapses and corporate fraud, it was the non-accounting stories that motivated my students. Previously, I have told accounting stories to students enrolled in an accounting degree as a way of introducing them to the history and culture of the accounting profession. However, I was teaching students who would not become practising accountants so they had no particular interest in stories that would assist in their socialisation into the accounting profession, and my aim was to motivate them to engage with accounting, not add to existing knowledge of accounting.

I started using non-accounting stories to explain accounting concepts such as recognition, realisation and conservatism so my students could see that although accounting had unfamiliar jargon, the meanings were familiar. The stories were an attempt to provide a familiar lens through which students could understand accounting. Informal feedback on the stories was immediate and positive. In formal open-ended feedback, students commented that the stories had altered their perceptions about accounting in a positive way. There was no control group against which I could measure the effect of the stories but the improved atmosphere in the classroom was palpable. The student response to the stories showed me that the stories had broader potential in accounting teaching. They could be used to encourage discussion about the role of accounting in society and were a way of giving relevance to technical accounting that could provide the scaffolding to support students' arguments.

To develop the stories, I started with the concept of business as a battle. Most of my students were studying history and all were in the Australian Defence Force, so

Table 1. Development of non-accounting stories used in accounting.

Year	Storyteller	True or fictitious stories	Frequency of use of stories	Approximate frequency
2005	Lecturer	True	Infrequent	1 lecture per fortnight
2006	Lecturer	True	Frequent	1 lecture per week
2006	Students	True	Infrequent	4 lectures per semester
2007	Students	True	Frequent	1 lecture per week
2007	Students	Fictitious	Infrequent	4 lectures per semester
2008	Students	True	Infrequent	1 lecture per fortnight
2008	Students	Fictitious	Frequent	1 lecture per week

I looked to military history for appropriate stories. It provided ample material. For example, during the First World War, Naval vessels were camouflaged by painting zebra-like stripes on them, which made it hard to determine accurately their speed and direction, information essential before opening fire on them. The camouflage was known as ‘dazzle’ painting or ‘razzle dazzle’ (Behrens, 2003), a term now used colloquially. Sometimes the hardest things to see are those in plain view. It just depends how they are presented. Annual reports place a great deal of information in plain view but the way it is presented can make that information hard to ‘see’ or decipher. Those who do not know what to look for will fail to ‘see’ accounting disclosures, just as it was hoped the enemy would fail to see the camouflaged ships. A short story on a Naval battle where vessels were camouflaged led to discussing whether accountants have a responsibility to present information so all users comprehend it, the cost of meeting user needs, and difficulty of identifying all users then prioritising their information needs. This provided an introduction to accounting techniques that can obfuscate information, then discussing the importance to society, investors and the firm of the disclosure choices accountants make. This was followed by considering the limitations of accounting information, particularly in the areas of social and environmental disclosures, so a simple story provided a pathway to a broad range of accounting issues and some technical accounting to illustrate the issues discussed.

The disguising of Alexandria during the Second World War was used as a lead-in to discussing the ethics of accounting. A magician named Jasper Maskelyne joined the British Army during World War II and was posted to North Africa where he used his stagecraft to fool German bombing crews. Before Germany had radar, bombing targets had to be sighted visually. Maskelyne was able to make the Suez Canal disappear and set up a ‘dummy’ Alexandria that fooled enemy bombers. Alexandria was a key Allied base and so a key German target. Before the battle of El Alamein, Maskelyne was able to use his unique talents to create a phantom Army and hide the real Army from German reconnaissance aircraft. In military parlance, this story concerns deception, a recognised and useful military strategy. This story led my students to reflect on whether deception is used to alter perceptions about a firm and the ethics of deception in business. Students examined annual reports of public companies to determine whether accountants use deception. They discussed the extent to which accounting can use numbers to mislead and whether it is unethical for accountants to take advantage of latitude provided in the rules governing accounting disclosures.

Discussions on the stories were often far-ranging and many continued long after the lecture ended. Smaller groups of students with particular interests started meeting electronically. This has continued and contributions to the lectures from these groups have covered topics as diverse as whether non-accounting knowledge is subjugated in business (from a Foucauldian perspective), whether accounting should consider individual investor needs and who should bear the cost of doing so (from a political perspective), whether the benefit of annual reports justifies the cost (from the economists) and whether disclosure legislation should be tighter (from a legal perspective). Discussions of this sort encourage the students to consider accounting’s impact on society rather than reducing it to a series of technical competencies. These discussions help the students develop higher-level thinking skills (Biggs, 1999b).

Another unexpected bonus of the storytelling project is that since students starting taking responsibility for developing stories, they have prepared more thoroughly for

classes. To tell a story, students must firstly engage with the accounting area to which that story relates.

Student reaction to stories told by the lecturer

In 2005, when I was the storyteller, I introduced the stories at the start of a lecture. After briefly recapping at the end of the lecture, I then asked the students to reflect individually then in pairs on the linkage of the story to the lecture topic. Telling the stories took a maximum of five minutes. The process of reflection and dialogue took ten to fifteen minutes. The stories gave students some familiar terrain to help them move into the unfamiliar world of accounting.

The students rarely reached a consensus on the application of the stories to accounting, often presenting different but equally valid views. I was regularly surprised by comments made, until I realised that the students knew more about the non-accounting areas than I did and this was reflected in the links they made. Debate and disagreement were important to the process of the students constructing meaning individually and then justifying, validating and testing meanings with peers. As they created landscapes of possibility (Walker, 2001), the students became more technically competent in accounting. They needed these technical skills to analyse accounting information. This led to the students more thoroughly preparing for classes, more insightful comments and improved scores for assessment tasks.

As the students grew accustomed to the storytelling format, they would come into the lecture asking whether there was a story. Stories were not used every time. Apart from the fact that I simply had not developed enough stories to do so, I did not wish to overuse the technique and in the first year of the storytelling project, I incorrectly believed that only a few topics were suited to the storytelling format. I revised this view after reflecting on 2005 student feedback in which all students strongly agreed that the introduction of stories had been a critical incident that altered their perception about accounting in a positive way. Students commented that the stories made accounting easier to understand, relevant to their interests and fun. I had scored an unanticipated trifecta.

The classroom atmosphere changed during storytelling. Students sat listening in absolute silence, without moving. Many sat forward as if waiting expectantly. Their body language indicated that they were totally focused on the stories. Initially, I found this unnerving; after all, these were students whose reasons for studying accounting ranged from 'it was compulsory' to 'otherwise I had to do statistics' (personal communication n.d.). After the lectures, I was always surrounded by students wanting to continue discussing the stories and their application to accounting or who wanted to tell me stories they knew, to test whether I thought their stories expressed the same point. It was as a direct result of their post-lecture stories that I thought the students might enjoy becoming the storytellers, with them choosing the manner and extent of my involvement in the process.

In 2005, the most frequent positive frequent comment from formal feedback was that the stories I told were a valuable learning aid enhancing understanding of accounting, acted as memory joggers (by recalling the story, the accounting was easier to recall) and enticed the students to further explore accounting. The most frequent negative comment was that I did not tell enough stories. Now the students have become the primary storytellers, I raise current news stories from the main disciplines my students are studying and give 'an accounting take' on them, because the storytelling project has taught me the importance of constructing links.

Developing student-led storytelling

Education should involve an exchange of knowledge between the learner and teacher. All too often it becomes the consumption by students of defined knowledge presented by the teacher in a transmission model (Gonzalez, 2001). Students should be encouraged to actively participate in their learning (Weimer, 2002). I did this by handing over to my students responsibility for creating or finding and telling stories, although I continue to tell stories in the first two weeks of the semester to provide a model of the standard that is expected and show how the stories work in accounting.

In 2006, I divided the students into groups of six or seven students. Topics were randomly assigned. Subsequently, students have chosen their own groups based on interests and when an accounting topic will be taught *vis-à-vis* when assessments are due in other subjects. Not all students are able to get their preferred time or group but this has not been a significant source of complaint. Groups can discuss their stories with me or their tutor at any stage and most do so on numerous occasions. Their commitment initially made me feel guilty that the task was not assessed. Student feedback consistently indicates a different view. Although the stories *per se* are not assessed, the students' understanding of accounting is, and the stories enhance that understanding.

Each group workshops a story and presentation ideas and one tutorial is allocated to helping them 'get started', which involves helping the students develop ideas, planning time or group management, assistance to more effectively search library resources or suggestions about creative presentation techniques. Reaching agreement on a story is not always easy. One group reported that while deciding, they had engaged in a heated argument that almost came to blows. Students regularly tell me that they enjoy the chance to be creative in accounting. I reply that accounting is an extremely creative discipline, as evidenced by the number of choices accountants made.

Now, I introduce a topic in lectures knowing that at least one group is already familiar with it. I have changed my teaching style to allow students to share this knowledge in the classroom in addition to sharing their story. This has changed the classroom dynamic. Students ask accounting questions of the group presenting the story. My role is no longer didactic. The students have changed from being passive consumers of accounting knowledge to participants in knowledge creation, a change many have described to me as empowering.

Student reaction to student stories

From 2006 to 2008, surveys with both Likert scale and open-ended questions were the main forms of formal student feedback used. We use standard feedback questionnaires, which cannot be tailored to capture feedback on the storytelling project. Although I seek separate formal and informal feedback each year, I do not want my students to feel 'over-surveyed'. However, there are often more effective and immediate ways of gauging student interest; engaged students ask questions, have body language consistent with active listening and are rarely reluctant to express their opinion.

Most students undertaking accounting express their surprise at enjoying it. The most common reasons are its relevance to other studies, the opportunity the stories provided to make a unique input that is valued and the classroom atmosphere. There is what various students have described as a 'buzz', a 'great vibe' and a 'feeling of expectation and excitement' (student comments, 2008) in accounting classes. I see the

storytelling project as a work in progress. Each year it is tweaked in response to student comments, but it continues to engage students.

I am always concerned about quieter students. Are they quiet because they are not engaged? Is listening their main learning style or are they unable to get a word in when my more vocal students start talking? In 2008, I specifically asked about this in an anonymous open-ended questionnaire. I asked about my concerns and gave the students an opportunity to add their own concerns, suggestions or comments. The most common response was that there was nothing wrong with the storytelling project (79%). The second most common comment did not even pertain to accounting: it was that other subjects did not use something similar (18%). Although I remain aware of the quieter students, I respect their right to choose their level of involvement in all activities we undertake in class.

In 2008, students indicated in feedback and discussions that once they understand what is expected, they prefer to generate the stories themselves because it forces them to learn a topic thoroughly. The following email comments summarise common responses from students:

When I hear other students tell stories, I feel like I can do it to [sic]. It makes me think accounting is going to be something I can manage. It gives me more confidence. (name withheld, May 2007)

The stories are fun to listen to. When you see other students getting really excited about telling their story and about talking of some topic in accounting, you want to work out why they think accounting is such fun and that makes you want to study it. (name withheld, 4 April 2008)

Students have mixed reactions to working in groups but the groups have an important role. They allow students to explore a new topic with others and commence a dialogue in the safety of a small group. Some students approach me about working alone but I always refuse their request because learning to work in a group is an important workplace skill. Sometimes, the students most resistant to working in a group are the students who later tell me how beneficial the experience was. Of course, others continue to rail against it. Students often comment that the process of becoming familiar with a topic and developing a story has tested their research skills but they are seldom sure whether this is a good or bad thing, which may reflect the fact that they are first-year students and unfamiliar with the researched teaching environment of a university. The main negative comments involved the time taken to find the stories and frustration about arguments within groups concerning which story to present.

Since storytelling was introduced, the mean for accounting has escalated steadily from 62.3 with a standard deviation of 8.4 to a mean of 71.9 with a standard deviation of 6.6. There is no evidence to show the extent to which the storytelling project led to this increase but both marks and feedback have improved considerably since the introduction of stories. Student numbers in accounting have steadily increased. In 2005, I taught accounting to approximately 25% of first year student on our campus but now I teach almost half. I do not attribute this solely to the storytelling project but it is a campus where word-of-mouth influences student choices and I believe the storytelling project is a contributing factor that explains why the number of students electing to do accounting, when it is not required for their degree, is climbing each year. In addition, an elective in management accounting is now offered in response to student demand.

Lessons from the storytelling project

A student survey in March 2005 indicated that a significant majority of my students viewed accounting as an intrusion into their 'real studies'. They did not understand why it was compulsory in their degree program. The storytelling project was a direct response to these survey results. Since its inception, student surveys on completion of accounting have indicated that an average of 97% of students between 2005 and 2008 have found the stories important for engaging in accounting and made accounting more accessible and relevant. An average of 78% of students thought the storytelling project gave them a deeper understanding of their main discipline of study. The research literature states that students are more likely to venture into terrain when it is first made familiar and desirable by taking them there in their imaginations (Denning, 2004). This is consistent with student feedback. Students do not appear to differentiate between stories that are fact and those that are fiction. Both help them to create links in their imagination that assist them to understand accounting and become motivated about it.

I assumed that like me, my students would still recall many stories heard as children. This assumption proved incorrect; all students knew the plots of movies seen in childhood but many were unfamiliar with even the most well-known fairy tales. Initially I wondered how students used to receiving stories through visual media would respond to spoken stories. At first, this made me cautious about overusing the storytelling technique. I wanted my students to become motivated about accounting but perhaps spoken stories were too dated for the net generation and would further alienate my students. Also, I was concerned that I had made a decision to teach less technical accounting content to make room for the stories. Was it the right decision?

I had under-estimated the power of stories. The students enjoyed them and immediately started engaging in vocal and often passionate debate about their relevance and application to accounting, arguing about accounting meanings with vigour. Even my quieter students sometimes joined the fray. At times I felt like I was refereeing a sporting event. As students started to bring unique perspectives from their main study area and experiences, it changed my perspective on teaching them. I had been too quick to blame them for their lack of enthusiasm rather than firstly reviewing what I was doing. Normally, when I develop a course, I think *inter alia* about my assumptions concerning the students group and what I know about them. The storytelling project has led me to question everything I assumed about my students. Each year of the project, similar feedback comments have appeared: the students tell me bluntly that they developed an interest in accounting because the stories made them look at accounting through a familiar lens. I assumed students compartmentalise their study into different disciplines but the students have taught me that they look for links across subjects to try to make sense of their learning holistically. They complain that if teachers do not show them how new disciplines link to familiar ones, they assume that links do not exist. Perhaps it is not students who compartmentalise their learning but teachers who compartmentalise their teaching.

I thought that my role included developing critical thinking skills in students. The students disagree. They see themselves as critical thinkers who needed to be motivated and challenged to exercise those skills and it does seem that when challenged, they are able to think critically. Instead of thinking about what I do that develops my students, I am now reflecting on what I do that constrains or inhibits them. This is not

easy because it is much nicer to think about what one does well rather than what one does badly.

I realise with the clear vision of hindsight that I had to feel confident incorporating stories before I could go a step further and lessen my control, allowing the students to create the stories. When I did, my students really began to engage with accounting, taking ownership of their learning. Do we underestimate our students' capabilities? This was also when teaching the students became fun because we seemed to be more equal contributors to the learning process. I knew accounting but they knew the other disciplines in which the stories were based. Thus, they saw analogies in the stories that I missed. My interpretation of the stories was coloured by my experiences and knowledge just as much as theirs was.

The use of stories was an attempt to enthuse a group of students who ranged in their reaction from apathetic to antagonistic about accounting. Using stories appealed to me because I enjoy oral history research in accounting: collecting other people's stories and working out what they tell that adds to and cannot be seen from official accounting records. The storytelling project has taught me that student learning is enhanced when they are part of the knowledge creation process. This has led me to incorporate some of my oral history research into the course, so students see that I try to add to the creation of knowledge in accounting. In creating stories, the students make a personal investment of time and effort that is part of the knowledge creation process. There can be a sense of power in being a knowledge creator but we can also become protective of the knowledge we create, valuing it most highly, as these student comments from November 2006 indicate:

The other stories were OK. I mean, they were relevant. But they were not as relevant as our stories. I think we understood the accounting better.

I liked all the stories but I feel that we had researched the topic better so our story was more pertinent.

Our story was a better illustration of the accounting technique than the others stories were. Theirs were interesting but we really understood the topic.

I thought my group should have used my story. It was clearly the best but they used another one. I think this was a mistake.

The topic of the story did not seem to be critical to engaging students. There have been stories from fields including geography, politics, sport, religion, science and history. There have also been stories based on a student's personal experience. The essential element for the stories to engage listeners does not seem to be that the story is intrinsically interesting but that finding the link is challenging. With accounting-specific stories, by comparison, the students seemed to expect an interesting story but found the link to obvious to become engaged by the story. This has been the opposite of my experience when I have told accounting stories to students enrolled in an accounting degree, who want to know more about the profession they have chosen. Although there have been no adverse comments about the storytelling project, two-to-four students each year have remained indifferent to the stories.

With the benefit of hindsight, I should have used the university's Learning Management System as a repository so the stories would be available to subsequent student cohorts. I am currently examining the use of wikis to facilitate this and the writing process.

Conclusion

There has always been a place in teaching for a good story. It can change the pace in a class, adding a fresh dimension to engage students. But in this case, the use of storytelling went much further. Students telling non-accounting stories they had found or created and allowing other students to draw an analogy to accounting became an integral part of a process of student-led teaching in accounting. It had the desired effect, which was to motivate students to engage in accounting, a discipline new to all of the students. As they became involved in storytelling, the students became reflective learners who took responsibility for their own learning and were able to have an input into the reflective learning of their peers. I had thought that I had to motivate my students but the storytelling project has shown that students will self-motivate if an activity is sufficiently challenging and relevant.

Just as storytelling can be used in any discipline, any discipline can use stories from other disciplines to draw analogies. If those disciplines are ones with which the students are familiar, their interest is likely to be piqued. It is a testament to the power of the storytelling technique that it has been able to alter positively student perceptions about accounting.

The success of the stories surprised me. They became a critical tool in developing students' interest in accounting and in giving the students the mental space to construct their own meanings in accounting. In using non-accounting stories and linking them to accounting, the students implicitly learnt that domains of knowledge do not operate in isolation but may use similar ideas in different ways or use different jargon to explain similar concepts. Perhaps I should not have been surprised by the success of the story-telling technique. A good story is a good story, as evidenced by the myriad of adults who can still recount their favourite childhood fairy tales. Stories have always been used to help us understand our world. The non-accounting stories provided a familiar lens through which students could view a new discipline, providing a powerful learning tool.

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