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The Power of Story - The Story Paradigm

In the field of co-intelligence, stories are more than dramas people tell or read. Story, as a pattern, is a powerful way of organizing and sharing individual experience and exploring and co-creating shared realities. It forms one of the *underlying structures of reality*, comprehensible and responsive to those who possess what we call *narrative intelligence*. Our psyches and cultures are filled with narrative fields of influence, or *story fields*, which shape the awareness and behavior of the individuals and collectives associated with them.

Story-reality is the reality that we see when we recognize that every person, every being, every thing has a story and contains stories -- and, in fact, is a story -- and that all of these stories interconnect, that we are, in fact, surrounded by stories, embedded in stories and made of stories. When poet Murial Rukeyser tells us "the universe is made of stories, not atoms," she's describing story-reality. Ultimately, story-reality includes any and all actual events and realities, *but experienced as stories*, not as the more usual patterns -- objects-and-actions; matter, energy, space, time; patterns of probability; etc. Story-reality is made up of *lived stories*.

Lived stories are those real-life, actual stories that are happening in the real world all around us all the time. The actual unfolding events relating to any one actual entity or subject comprise that entity's or subject's lived story. Everything that exists has, embodies and participates in many lived stories. The way to co-intelligently engage in story-reality is to become sensitive to lived stories... to learn about the lived stories of people, places, things... to share our own lived stories... to discover how all these stories intersect, who or what is in the foreground and background of each other's lived stories. Ultimately, this provides the guidance we need to find our own most meaningful place in the universal story.

While analysis is good for control and prediction, story-sensibility is good for understanding meaning and role.

Narrative intelligence is the ability (or tendency) to perceive, know, think, feel, explain one's experience and influence reality through the use of stories and narrative forms.

It includes:

- the ability and tendency to organize experience and ideas using stories and narrative patterns (an excellent example of this is the use of myth, which defines and discusses concepts -- such as archetypes -- in narrative form)
- the tendency to understand things better when they are presented in the form of a story (and sometimes to have trouble understanding things when they aren't presented as stories)
- the capacity to sense the importance of context, character, history, etc., in any explanation -- and dissatisfaction when these are omitted
- dissatisfaction with isolated events and abstract ideas, out of context
- an ability to sense or imagine the stories of people, objects, places; the ability to accurately guess where something (or someone) comes from, what has happened to it, where it is going, what it means
- curiosity about the stories behind things, and an ability to investigate such stories
- a tendency to make up stories, plausible or fantastic, to illustrate a point
- the ability to maintain a repertoire of stories (real and imaginary) to convey meanings; the ability to access that repertoire
- the ability to sort out and describe what has happened to oneself or others, often with a richness of context and detail, and often with great relish

- the ability to place and remember events in sequence
- the ability to envision chains and webs of causation
- the tendency to build scenarios (stories of possibilities); an ability to plan and think strategically
- a love of stories
- the ability and tendency to see people, places and things in terms of their function in a story (very helpful for novelists picking up tidbits from the lives around them for use in their creative work)
- resonance with the stories of others; the ability to see another's viewpoint when presented with the stories which underlie or embody that viewpoint
- the ability to discover themes in the events of a life or story
- the ability to recognize (or select) certain elements as significant, as embodying certain meanings that "make sense of things"
- the ability to build a story out of randomly-selected items
- the ability to use stories as memory-enhancing devices (such as remembering a phone number by making the digits into characters and weaving them into a story).

Story fields are fields of influence or patterns of dynamic potential that permeate psycho-social space and influence the lives of those connected to them. They are made up of many mutually-reinforcing stories (myths, news, soap operas, lives, memories) and story-like phenomena (roles, metaphors, archetypes, images). A story field paints a particular picture of how life is or should be, and shapes the life within its range into its image.

The American Way of Life is a powerful story field, which includes everything from principles like freedom and the pursuit of happiness, to stories of cowboys and rags-to-riches heroes, to metaphors like the melting pot and the safety net, to images like the Statue of Liberty and the flag. It is communicated by movies, men in business suits, advertisements, college catalogues, and mall displays -- among many, many other things. It takes immense effort to resist or change it. Anyone or anything which doesn't live within this story-sea and move with its currents doesn't seem quite American.

Psychological, organizational or social transformation is usually preceded or accompanied by a change in the story field governing that system. It is therefore usually non-productive to try to change forms and habits without changing the story fields that hold them in place. Once the story field is changed, subsidiary patterns tend to realign rapidly. (This process is part of what has been called a paradigm shift.)

Co-intelligent cultural transformation necessarily includes the co-generation of co-intelligent story fields. This would include examples of co-intelligence in action, visions of how things could be more co-intelligent, biographies of co-intelligent people, fiction illustrating the dynamics of co-intelligence, co-intelligent myths and poems, academic reframing of numerous other subjects in terms of co-intelligence, people actually living co-intelligently, the clarification and use of special roles (like elder and partner) associated with co-intelligence, etc.

[An interesting effort to consciously shift the story field of modern culture is The New Story a.k.a. The Great Story. [Connie Barlow](#) and [Michael Dowd](#) are among the most creative of those developing this story field for those interested in sustainability, conservation biology, creation spirituality, evolutionary consciousness, the new cosmology, deep ecology, bioregionalism, or the marriage of science and religion for personal and planetary wellbeing.]

See also

[Story](#)

[Storytelling Animals](#) - by James R. Elkins (from "[An Archaeology of Myth](#)")

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