

Applying the Design of Narrative Distance in Instruction

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The field of instructional design has a history of exploring the possibilities of narrative in instruction. One aspect of narrative that has not received significant attention is the relationship between the indirect nature of narrative (narrative distance) and its power to create powerful transformative experiences. This article builds upon Taeger and Yanchar's (2019) qualitative study of storytelling experts by offering practical applications of the indirect nature of story into instruction. Numerous examples and design patterns are offered in order to illustrate how instructional designers (IDs) can use the potentially transformative effect of narrative distance.

Introduction

Humans are storytelling creatures. Not only do we engage and understand the world through narrative (Bruner, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988; Young & Saver, 2001), we can be invited to change in significant ways through stories (Green & Brock, 2000; Kaufman & Libby, 2012). The effects of incorporating elements of narrative into instructional design have been explored in a variety of ways. For instance, the use of narrative or storytelling techniques have been discussed in contexts such as online learning (Hirumi et al., 2012; Lindgren & McDaniel, 2012), storification (Akkerman et al., 2009), interactive storytelling (Baldwin & Ching, 2017), the creation of design stories (Parrish, 2006), audio instruction (Carter, 2012), narrative-centered learning environments (Rowe et al., 2011) and problem solving (Dickey, 2006; Jonassen & Hernandez-Serrano, 2002).

One way that narrative may inform instructional design is creating what Wilson and Parrish (2011) call transformative learning experiences. According to Wilson and Parrish, a transformative learning experience (TLE) “results from an especially meaningful engagement with the world that leaves a lasting impact on a person’s sense of themselves and their relationship to a subject matter” (p. 12). In this article, TLEs are understood to occur in varying degrees; they could be as small as helping learners become more patient with coworkers or as large as inspiring learners to be more environmentally conscious. Taeger (2019) argues that narrative distance or “the cognitive or emotional space afforded

by indirect communication” (p. 2) can facilitate transformative learning experiences (Brothers, 2003). This effect is similar to the experience of being challenged by a piece of literature, movie, or play to make significant changes in one’s life. A central feature of narrative distance is its indirectness; the author (or director, etc.) does not directly ask readers to reconsider their beliefs and behaviors. Rather, the messages and invitations are inherent to the story itself. Since the story is indirect, the listener is less defensive (Warner, 2001) and is free to decide how to incorporate the message of the story into his or her own life (Craddock, 2002).

Designing for Narrative Distance

To better understand the affordances created by narrative distance, I participated in performing a qualitative study (Taeger & Yanchar, 2019) interviewing six storytelling experts in different fields. This study reveals a variety of principles and practices that help incorporate narrative distance into instruction that is designed to create transformative learning experiences. In this article, I will expand further on the implementation of narrative distance in instructional design by offering practical design principles and fictional examples based on Taeger and Yanchar’s work that are intended to help designers use narrative distance in practice. In addition, most of the examples I discuss illustrate narrative distance in online learning settings. The headings and subheadings below are quoted from the themes and ideas presented in Taeger and Yanchar’s research.

Cognitive Space

Granting a learner cognitive space allows the student to interpret aspects of the learning material for themselves. As one participant in Taeger and Yanchar’s (2019) study said, “[d]on’t teach me a lesson. Tell me a story, and if there’s a lesson in it, that’ll seep in” (p. 170). This insight mainly applies to learning content meant to create TLEs as opposed to material that students need to learn more directly (e.g., operating heavy machinery or memorizing physics formulas). It should be noted that granting cognitive space is not primarily expressed in learning activities, but in the learning content itself. For example, asking students to answer questions about a case study is not necessarily using cognitive space because the case study may have been written in a way that did not invite much room for interpretation.

Use Concrete Material Without Abstract Moralizing

One of the ways to maintain cognitive space is to avoid using language that contains abstract morals, values, or principles during the portions of instruction intended to use narrative distance. For example, a corporate sales training would avoid phrases such as, “working your hardest always brings the best results” or “effective salespeople are organized and diligent.” Although these phrases may be helpful on some level, they do not fit well with material designed to create narrative distance because the learner is not given space for interpretation. This principle is based on the assumption that to be inspired to change, one must feel some sort of ownership in that process. Simply offering vivid and compelling concrete examples of salespeople who are diligent, organized, and hardworking in training material without abstract moralizing allows for more depth in interpretation (Allen, 2008) and the cognitive space for the learner to apply the content to themselves. This does not necessarily mean that instruction should contain a series of loosely related anecdotes or images. Rather, concrete material can be strategically placed alongside more traditional instruction.

For example, suppose an online course contains five principles for becoming a better leader in the workplace. These five principles are not simply techniques, but they stretch and challenge learners in potentially transformative ways. In typical instructional fashion, the course contains definitions, examples, opportunities for practice, and assessments. However, at the end of the online course, a video appears of actors depicting all five of the principles just discussed in the training. Instead of the online training indicating that the learner should look for the five principles in the video or that the learner will be tested on how the five principles were manifested in the video (assuming that adequate assessment has already occurred), simply presenting the video at the end of the training invites the listener to discover the principles for himself or herself. A quality feature film does not warn a viewer what he or she should look for in a scene, but it assumes that the viewer can make sense of what is depicted. Since the learner is not told how to interpret

this final scene in the training, the learner is invited to do so. As Craddock (2002) argues, “[t]he hearer is free, and yet the response permitted is a response demanded” (p. 106).

A design pattern for implementing this aspect of narrative distance is to (a) identify ways learners could change; (b) create or find concrete illustrations of those changes; (c) refrain from abstract moralizing during this portion of instruction; and (d) insert these concrete illustrations in strategic places where learners will be able to make intended connections without explicit instructions to do so.

Use the Behavior of Characters to Communicate Meaning

In the last section, I contended that explicitly stating the message of an illustration or concrete example can limit cognitive space. Presumably, this moralizing would occur before or after an illustration is offered. Incorporating the technique of using the behavior of characters to communicate meaning helps prevent an instructional designer (ID) from creating an illustration that would inherently violate a learner’s cognitive space. In other words, some instructional stories or illustrations so obviously contain a message that the learner is not given the opportunity or motivation to interpret the story.

Suppose a university learning center creates an online training for adjunct professors to introduce them to the various responsibilities associated with working in a higher educational setting. The IDs use direct instruction to explain the university’s learning management system, parking instructions, and grading procedures. However, some of the material is designed to be more transformative in its approach because it is intended to inspire the adjunct professors to act professionally as they interact with students. In order to reach this learning objective, the IDs decide to utilize narrative distance by inserting two stories using the same fictional characters at both the beginning and end of this section in the online training module. The fictional example consists of a meeting between an adjunct professor (Dr. Thompson) and a student (Ashley) to review a recently administered exam. As students watch this fictional example, there are no instructions to look for ways that the adjunct professor could have treated the student more professionally (those principles will be covered during the traditional instruction using different examples). Furthermore, cognitive space is also maintained throughout the example because the IDs have the characters communicate indirectly through their behavior. In other words, rather than having a narrator say, “As Ashley entered Dr. Thompson’s office, she noticed that he didn’t treat her with much respect or kindness.” Rather, the narrator says, “As Ashley entered the office, Dr. Thomas said, ‘Hello, how are you today?’ as he continued to type on his computer.” Later in the example, instead of the narrator saying, “Dr. Thompson was obviously not listening very intently,” the narrator mentions that Dr. Thompson kept glancing at his computer while Ashley was speaking. Since the message is communicated indirectly by showing how Dr. Thompson was acting, the learners have the cognitive space to make sense of this behavior for themselves.

The design pattern for using this aspect of narrative distance consists of (a) asking which attributes, behaviors, or values the learner could acquire; (b) identifying the behaviors that someone with those attributes manifests; (c) finding or creating examples where the characters demonstrate or fail to exhibit those behaviors; and (d) refraining from any material (such as narration, description, etc.) that would describe those attributes in any other way besides behaviorally.

Use Moral Ambiguity

When a character or portion of instruction contains a mixture of moral viewpoints it is morally ambiguous. For example, an adjunct professor who welcomes a student with a smile into his office, but also keeps glancing at his computer, depicts a complex human being with both admirable and less than commendable characteristics. The previous section emphasized using behavior to communicate meaning to maintain cognitive space. Without using moral ambiguity, however, the behaviors manifested by the character would appear simplistic, and the message would become as obvious as if the narrator said, “Consider how Dr. Thompson treats his student unprofessionally.” Moral ambiguity keeps a learner guessing (Lowry, 2001) and invites him or her to make a potentially transformative decision about their own moral framework.

Suppose an ID creates an online course intended for middle school students. The course includes an immersive narrative learning environment (Dettori & Paiva, 2009) in which students can control an avatar through a typical week at

school. At various points during the week, the learner encounters other students inviting him or her to participate in undesirable behavior (e.g., underage drinking, cheating, bullying, etc.) and then is trained on how to handle such situations. However, throughout the online training module, these fellow students the learner encounters also demonstrate admirable qualities. For example, the peer who invites the learner to participate in underage drinking is a good student, is a loyal friend, and is genuinely funny. In this example, not only are the students taught various techniques and principles for handling difficult situations, they also are given enough cognitive space to make a decision about the behaviors they are invited to participate in. The moral ambiguity demonstrated by the characters in the training prevents the learner from easily deciding if the characters' behaviors are always acceptable.

The design pattern for using moral ambiguity to create narrative distance could be described as (a) identifying the specific ways that learners could change; (b) finding or creating concrete examples that manifest the change; and (c) highlighting or giving characteristics to these characters that are also admirable in the eyes of the learner.

Emotional Space

Whereas cognitive space allows someone to decide how to make sense of learning material, emotional space is an aspect of narrative distance that gives someone the room to decide how they will experience the material. As opposed to feeling manipulated, the learner feels "respected, valued, safe, and understood" (Taeger & Yanchar, 2019, p. 172). This aspect of narrative distance is important in creating TLEs because learners are less likely to be influenced if they are pressed upon emotionally (Craddock, 2002). As one of the participants in Taeger and Yanchar (2019) said:

[T]he word that most people use is "manipulative." You're just trying to manipulate me . . . if we try to take shortcuts . . . then it's the same thing as just using a lot of violins in a musical soundtrack. Sweeping violins to create an emotion that's not really being represented. (p. 173)

Use Authentic Material

McDonald (2009) states, "[a]uthenticity helps viewers feel empathy for characters, and recognize themselves (their emotions and their reactions) in those characters" (p. 117). Goldsworthy and Honebein (2010) also argue that learners can only connect with instructional stories that seem authentic. Inauthentic stories are less likely to influence learners because they appear manipulative. For example, if a character in a safety training movie acts in ways that do not seem authentic, the student can sense that the creators of the film are trying to get a message across as opposed to offering a compelling story.

Although Taeger and Yanchar (2019) suggest multiple principles related to narrative distance that can help IDs create authentic learning material, only three are emphasized here: (a) "avoid simplifying human conflict"; (b) "avoid expressing emotion through dialogue"; and (c) avoid changing "how a character would act in order to serve the story" (p. 178). This section will further explore these three principles for the purpose of illustrating how to create authentic learning material that allows for emotional space during instruction.

Suppose the training department for a large organization is assigned the responsibility to implement an online training regarding new environmental regulations. The IDs not only want to explain the new environmental policies the company has decided to adopt, they also want to help create a culture of environmental responsibility, and thus they need to construct a training that is transformative. In order to take advantage of the affordances of narrative distance, IDs decide to weave a story consisting of still photos and narration throughout the online training. The story is designed to both illustrate the learning material and inspire the employees to become more environmentally conscious. As the story unfolds, learners are never directly invited to make connections. Instead, they are given the space to make sense of the story for their own situations.

Avoid Simplifying Human Conflict

In order to maintain narrative distance so that the learners are not emotionally "taken out" of the story by the obviousness of the message, the IDs seek to use principles of authentic storytelling. For example, one of the scenes depicts two employees standing by a copy machine. The narrator says that one of these employees has noticed over a

period of time that the other employee is wasteful in the amount of copies he or she produces. The IDs avoid simplifying the conflict in the story by depicting the nuances involved in asking a coworker to abide by certain work policies. These IDs do not add narration that says something like, “although it was hard for Jessica to ask Miranda to stop making so many copies, she worked up the courage and asked her.” Instead, the narrator describes how Jessica does not want to appear demanding or how she unsuccessfully tried to hint her concern to Miranda in the past. Perhaps the IDs could even have Miranda verbally agree to change, but then fail to reflect that change in her behavior. Regardless of how the IDs eventually show the resolution to this encounter, they should first show some of the difficult facets to human conflict so that the story feels more authentic. As mentioned above, without that authenticity, it is difficult for learners to be emotionally open enough to be influenced by a story.

Avoid Expressing Emotion Through Dialogue

Continuing with the previous example, it might be difficult for learners to consider the story authentic if Jessica had said, “I become really upset when you make so many copies,” or if Miranda had responded by saying, “I’m so angry because you are telling me what to do.” As argued above, meaning is often communicated most effectively through the behaviors of the characters in a story.

Do Not Change How a Character Would Act in Order to Serve the Story

When stories are used to teach, instructors might feel a need to have the characters act in ways that express the message of the story. This can lead to characters behaving in ways that do not seem consistent with how they should act, and thus the story appears inauthentic. Parrish (2007) argues that “while plot is primary, plot must arise from character and not merely be imposed on characters” (p. 521). If the scene with Jessica and Miranda ended with Miranda saying something like, “Okay, I’ve learned my lesson. I’ll try to be more environmentally conscious,” the learner probably would not have considered the dialogue realistic. Instead, perhaps Miranda would have complied with Jessica’s suggestion, but only reluctantly after administrative pressure. Of course, characters in instructional stories often need to learn lessons, but it should happen in ways that reflect how the characters in the story would authentically change.

A simple design formula for this kind of authentic character change is to (a) identify which lessons a character needs to learn that reflect learning objectives; (b) consider which types of factors (i.e., logic, experience, social influence, authority, etc.) would invite that character to change; and (c) find ways to naturally include those changes to elements in the story.

Avoid Unearned Emotion

Some participants in Taeger and Yanchar (2019) spoke of emotional experience in a story as needing to be “earned” (p. 173). Occasionally, stories attempt to create an emotional experience without enough context for the experience to feel natural. IDs can avoid this problem by giving learners enough time and background to invest in a character and the character’s associated struggles (Rollings & Adams, 2003). When attempting to design an instructional story in this way, it is helpful to remember to keep other aspects of narrative distance central to the design process because context itself will not be enough to prevent a potential moment of unearned emotion.

Suppose IDs for a government agency are developing an online training that instructs new employees regarding their responsibilities in helping those in lower socioeconomic situations apply for and receive government housing. The IDs want the training to cover more than just teaching the new employees the process of obtaining the right information and documents from those needing government assistance. The IDs want the training to be a transformative learning experience. In order to do this, they strategically place documentary style video clips throughout the training of an immigrant family who first struggle to find employment and then eventually receive assistance for government housing. The clips follow the same family throughout the module so that learners have time to invest in the family’s struggles and the complexities the family faces by coming to a new country, seeking employment, learning a new language, and so forth. When the training is completed, the learners watch a clip of the family entering into new government housing.

Since the learners know how meaningful this would have been to this particular family, they have the emotional space to experience this event as they watch the family gratefully occupy the new residence for the first time.

To design for this kind of experience, IDs can (a) identify moments during instruction that are intended to create a powerful emotional effect; (b) identify what necessary background information learners need to fully invest in a story or topic; and (c) locate strategic places where to include this kind of information in earlier portions of the instruction.

Invite Change

For narrative distance to help create transformative learning experiences, cognitive and emotional space should be blended with aspects of instruction that also invite the learner to make changes. In this section, I will continue to draw upon Taeger and Yanchar (2019) to offer three ways to invite learners to change that align with the indirect nature of narrative distance.

Help Learners Change Vicariously Along with Characters

Kaufman and Libby (2012) demonstrate how readers can change their behavior to match that of a character in a story if the readers have vicarious experiences with a particular narrative. Similarity, as one of the participants said in Taeger and Yanchar's (2019) study, "in a novel, the character is the one who changes and the reader changes vicariously with that character" (p. 175). IDs can tap into this transformative aspect of narrative distance by creating or using stories in which characters move from one set of beliefs or values to new ones. When learners are invited to transform in this way, two aspects of narrative distance are manifested alongside the invitation to change. First, learners are given the cognitive space to decide how they will identify with characters. Second, learners are granted emotional space because the characters (real or fiction) first manifest the beliefs or values of the learners and then come to new discoveries or insights. In other words, learners feel understood as they encounter characters who hold their same beliefs, but learners are also invited to change as those characters shift in values.

For example, suppose a consulting company asks a group of IDs to help update an online time management seminar. They use narrative distance by first inserting a video of a former student of the time management seminar emphasizing how poorly he or she previously managed their time. However, rather than just briefly stating how hard it was to organize time, the former student also takes a few minutes to explain different attempts he or she made to improve their time management skills. Furthermore, the student explains the stress that was associated with always being behind in his or her work, the difficulty of losing track of tasks, and the sense that he or she consistently spent time on things that were not valuable. In addition, the IDs ask the former student to emphasize the details of any personal reservations that he or she may have had prior to planning on a regular basis. These reservations could include believing that planning regularly would stifle individual freedom or that it would waste valuable time that could be used working. After the student describes these previous views, the student also begins to describe the process of coming to believe that planning regularly has positive benefits that outweigh any negatives. As learners listen to this first-person narrative, they are invited to vicariously join the interviewee in shifting their own views on the subject.

A simple design pattern for creating vicarious change is to (a) identify what learners currently believe about a given issue; (b) identify what new beliefs or values the learners could adopt; and (c) create or identify an instructional story where a character shifts from the old viewpoints to the new ones.

Define the Learner in a Way That Connects Them to a Larger Narrative

Besides using a specific story to invite change in learners, another indirect way to invite change is by naming or defining learners within a larger narrative. By larger narrative I mean a series of connected stories, events, rituals, or myths that grow out of past historical events that inform one's identity. For example, someone indirectly identifies himself or herself within a larger narrative when he or she says "I am American," or "I am an impressionist painter," or "I am a Boston Red Sox fan." Each of these terms can imply a larger set of historical cultural practices, stories, and values. IDs can indirectly invite learners to change by naming learners as members of these larger narratives.

Suppose a corporation asks its training department to create a small online training explaining how members of the company can donate to a local charity. After demonstrating the procedures for donating, the online training includes a section that explains how the company has had a long and unique history of donating to charitable causes in ways that exceed the norm. For example, the training depicts an employee saying, "In company x, we do things differently. One of our first priorities is to use our resources to help those who need it most." The employee (in this fictional example) used a declarative statement as opposed to an imperative one (Taeger & Yanchar, 2019). She did not say, "You should give to this charity because you are a member of this company." Instead, she simply described what members of that company have had a history of doing. This is an indirect way of inviting learners to see themselves as participants in this corporation's larger narrative.

It should be noted that learners should want to identify with these larger narratives. This technique will most likely work when the history and tradition of larger narratives matter in meaningful ways to the learners. For example, it may or may not mean very much to a professor to be identified with the history and culture of the university where she works. A design pattern for using this aspect of narrative distance is to (a) identify which larger narrative learners could be given an opportunity to identify with; (b) decide if that larger narrative is already meaningful to learners; (c) if it is not meaningful, seek to find ways to help the larger narrative become meaningful and attractive to learners; and (d) use declarative statements as opposed to imperative ones in giving learners a chance to identify with a larger narrative.

Meaningful Content

Meaningful content is learning material that matters significantly to the student. Without this, narrative distance will not lead to a TLE because learners will not interpret indirect invitations to change as something that is connected to their world.

Create Identification

Identification means that learners see their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors reflected in the learning material. In addition, identification is connected to the "emotional proximity" one feels towards characters (Dickey, 2006 p. 251). When combined with narrative distance (emotional and cognitive space), identification can occur indirectly (Craddock, 2002).

The following illustration from Warner (1986) about self-deception demonstrates how a story can contain poignant moments of identification which invite students to see themselves in the learning material. The illustration describes the true story of a husband awakened in the middle of the night by his crying baby:

At that moment, I had a fleeting feeling, a feeling that if I got up quickly I might be able to see what was wrong before my wife would have to wake up. I don't think it was even a thought because it went too fast for me to say it out in my mind. It was a feeling that this was something I really ought to do. But I didn't do it. I didn't go right back to sleep either. It bugged me that my wife wasn't waking up. I kept thinking it was her job. She has her work and I have mine. Mine starts early. She can sleep in. Besides, I was exhausted. Besides that, I never really know how to handle the baby. Maybe she was lying there waiting for me to get up. Why did I have to feel guilty when I'm only trying to get some sleep so I can do well on the job? She was the one who wanted to have this kid in the first place. (p. 39)

When an illustration genuinely reflects the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of learners, there is no need to directly point out ways they should connect with the learning material. In order to better echo the thoughts and feelings of learners, IDs can use methods of learner analysis that increase their ability to empathize with the learner (for more on these methods, see Parrish, 2006). A simple design pattern for creating identification that maintains narrative distance is to (a) empathize with how learners genuinely think, feel, and act and (b) find ways to indirectly reflect these thoughts, feelings, and behaviors through stories, anecdotes, characters, descriptions, etc.

Do Not Change the Characters with Whom Learners Are Intended to Identify

If it is intended that learners identify with learning content, it can be helpful to have them identify with just one character. Of course, it may be effective to use a story that contains multiple lessons to be learned from various characters in the same story. However, focusing mainly on just one character or viewpoint allows learners to become fully invested in that character and thus can produce a more meaningful emotional or experiential pay off later in instruction. As one participant said in Taeger and Yanchar's (2019) study, "A good film story is about one person . . . because if it's only about one person that gets you to identify emotionally, much more intensively" (p. 176).

Suppose administrators at a hospital hire an instructional design team to create an online training about hospital security. Beyond describing basic security procedures, the IDs also want to create a transformative learning experience that will inspire the employees to catch the vision of the importance of hospital security. Therefore, the IDs decide to interview different exemplary employees about their security practices. However, to create meaningful instruction, they decide to follow one employee closely over a period of time to get many interviews and shots of this particular employee at work. Although the training will ultimately contain different video clips from a variety of employees, the training focuses on weaving one central employee throughout the online learning modules. Ideally, this will invite learners to connect to one central character and thus create a more meaningful experience. A simple design pattern to create this effect is to (a) identify characters or people that are compelling enough to be a central focus of instruction and (b) seek to use this one character to illustrate as many of the learning objectives as possible.

Narrative Distance in a Variety of Settings

Although this article focuses mainly on using narrative distance in online learning settings, it might be helpful to briefly discuss how narrative distance can be used effectively in face to face, synchronous, and blended learning environments. The basic principles for using narrative distance with any delivery method include giving students time to ponder the learning material for themselves and minimizing student opportunities to hear other interpretations of content meant to create narrative distance.

For example, in face to face environments, it might be effective to not have regular classroom discussions on the portions of instruction that contain narrative distance. If students know that other classmates or the teacher will do the hard work of clarifying and applying the learning material, they may feel less motivated to do so themselves (Taeger, 2019). This may be difficult for some IDs because it takes a certain amount of trust that the benefits associated with narrative distance are working. However, if IDs feel that the students should have more time to consider or think deeply about certain portions of instruction containing narrative distance, they can assign individual writing assignments or journal entries. These kinds of activities create some of the benefits of discussion without losing the affordances of narrative distance. In synchronous environments, the use of narrative distance will be very similar to that of face to face settings. Perhaps chat boxes should be turned off during portions of the lesson that contain narrative distance so that students do not prevent one another from interpreting the learning material for themselves through discussion.

Blended learning environments provide unique opportunities for the use of narrative distance. IDs can use moments of narrative distance during in person class time that students can then discuss online. This allows students time to ponder the learning material for themselves and also gives learners the benefits of formal reflection through a writing activity. In addition, if students are not allowed to see each other's comments until their comments are posted, this makes it more likely that the students will interpret the material individually. Moreover, it will also allow students to compare and contrast their thoughts with other students.

Conclusion

This paper sought to build upon Taeger and Yanchar's (2019) inquiry on designing for narrative distance by further illustrating the use of these principles in instructional design practice. These principles were discussed in order to illustrate how one can better create transformative learning experiences (Wilson & Parrish, 2011). Further research into

the effectiveness of the principles mentioned above could help IDs understand how to better incorporate narrative distance into instruction. Creating instruments that measure student perception of cognitive space, perception of emotional space, the invitation to change, and the level of meaningfulness in instruction would also help IDs know which methods are best creating narrative distance. Simple qualitative longitudinal studies based on the TLE framework offered in Wilson and Parrish could also indicate how transformative the instructional experience was over the long term.

When narrative distance is used for the purpose of creating TLEs, it can mimic the experience of a profound film or inspiring piece of literature (Taeger, 2019). The ideas offered here represent a limited number of ways to design for narrative distance; there are many more potential avenues for creating this effect in instruction. Not all instruction can be transformative, but when learning objectives call for that purpose, narrative distance can help IDs move toward that direction.

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