

Research Briefs: Writing Stories in the Sciences

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Research Briefs

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Writing Stories in the Sciences

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Abstract

Writing stories is advocated as an excellent means to learning the process of science; however, little is understood about students' experiences of engaging in story writing in postsecondary science courses. Our study was designed to improve the practice of using stories in the sciences by examining students' lived experience through interviews, surveys, observations, and document analysis. Students perceived the learning goal as public outreach and networking with the science community rather than learning the process of science; and they reported difficulty blending science into narratives and requested structured guidance throughout the process, without which some found it difficult to engage in this autonomous, non-traditional assignment. We

integrated students' suggestions into the next implementation while keeping some elements open-ended. Narrative writing holds potential for gaining more hands-on knowledge of the processes of science and communicating scientific findings to a general audience as well as enhancing self-knowledge about academic interests.

Practical Application

You may wonder how science and writing stories go together. Previous research has shown that writing narrative stories about scientific research is an effective way of learning science. For example, a student may write a story about a scientist's research project starting with how theory informed the research, how data were collected and analyzed, how research findings were vetted, and what obstacles the scientist faced and how they were overcome. Writing stories affords an opportunity for students to interview scientists, to vicariously experience how research is actually conducted in the real world, to explore careers related to science, and to network with professionals. In order to enhance students' motivation and engagement, science educators attempting this novel pedagogical approach should provide students with (a) a rationale for why narrative writing can be an effective way to learn science, (b) assistance in identifying a topic, blending science into a story, and how to write for the general public; and (c) an authentic venue to publish their narratives.

Citation

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