

Stories as Catalysts for Reflection, Perspective, and Growth

The Research Foundations Behind the ITT Media Story Experience

Ginger G. Malin, Ph.D. | August 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ITT Media is built on a deceptively simple premise: a story is not merely content to be consumed. It can become a shared experience through which people recognize themselves, reflect on what matters, encounter other perspectives, imagine new possibilities, and decide what they want to carry forward.

That design philosophy aligns with established scholarship in reader-response theory, social constructivism, literature discussion, perspective-taking, and possible-selves theory. The research does not imply that every story experience produces a predetermined outcome. Rather, it helps explain why ITT's combination of story, reflection, conversation, and intentional follow-through can create conditions for personally meaningful learning and, over time, changes in how people communicate, relate, mentor, lead, and participate in organizations.

1. The ITT Premise: Meaning Is Created Through Interaction

ITT Media's philosophy begins with the observation that people do not experience stories passively. They interpret them through memory, experience, relationships, values, emotion, perspective, and cultural context. They may connect a story to their own lives, discuss it with others, revisit it later, and use it to imagine choices or futures they had not previously considered. In ITT's formulation, "meaning is not simply delivered to people. It is created through interaction."

The ITT Experience Framework™ translates that premise into a progression: Story → Recognition → Reflection → Conversation → Shared Understanding → Expanded Possibilities → Carry It Forward™ → Growth → Personal Impact. The framework is not presented as a clinical or therapeutic intervention, nor as a claim that stories automatically change behavior. It is an experience-design model: stories open a door; structured reflection and social interpretation help participants decide what, if anything, is meaningful enough to carry forward.

This distinction matters. Traditional training often begins with information, instruction, or a desired conclusion. ITT begins with a story and protects room for interpretation. The objective is not to tell participants what the story means, but to create conditions in which they can discover what it means to them and hear what it means to others. That orientation has strong parallels in several bodies of educational and psychological research.

2. Reader Response Theory: The Reader Helps Create Meaning

One of the clearest theoretical foundations for ITT is Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading. Rosenblatt argued that the literary experience emerges through a transaction between reader and text rather than through the extraction of one fixed meaning. What a reader notices and evokes from a text is shaped by the reader's attention, prior experience, feelings, and purposes. In this view, the reader is an active participant in meaning-making, not simply a receiver of an author's message (Rosenblatt, 1978).

This maps closely to ITT's design. Participants may respond DIFFERENTLY TO characters, tensions, decisions, or moments in the same story. The variation is not noise to be eliminated; it is part of the value of the experience. A well-designed conversation can make those differences visible, allowing participants to articulate why a moment mattered to them and to recognize interpretations they might not have reached alone.

For ITT, this supports an important product principle: reflection prompts should invite interpretation rather than test comprehension or force a lesson. The story remains the work of art; the experience around it creates space for recognition, reflection, and exchange.

3. Constructivism and Shared Meaning-Making

ITT also reflects a constructivist view of learning: people build understanding by connecting new experiences and ideas to what they already know, believe, question, and have lived. Vygotsky's work placed particular emphasis on the social dimension of learning and the role of interaction in the development of higher psychological processes (Vygotsky, 1978).

From this perspective, conversation is not simply an add-on after an individual learning event; social exchange can itself be part of how understanding develops.

Research on literature discussion provides a particularly relevant bridge between educational theory and ITT's group experience. Eeds and Wells (1989), studying literature groups, found participants articulating and revising constructions of meaning as they encountered alternate views, while also sharing personal experiences prompted by the text. That finding is consistent with the ITT philosophy that "conversation expands interpretation" and that meaning can become richer through shared interpretation.

This has practical implications for Gatherings, mentorship programs, leadership discussions, conferences, and professional communities. A common story creates a shared reference point without requiring participants to begin by disclosing a personal problem or debating an abstract principle. Participants can first talk about the narrative, then move—at their own discretion—toward what it illuminates in their own experience. The story can therefore function as both common ground and a degree of psychological distance.

4. Perspective-Taking: Stories as Simulations of Human Experience

Narrative fiction also gives readers access to characters' intentions, relationships, misunderstandings, choices, and consequences. Researchers have proposed that engaging with fictional social worlds can exercise processes related to understanding people in the real world. Mar and colleagues found an association between fiction exposure and measures of social ability, and later work found that fiction exposure predicted performance on an empathy task even after accounting for several individual differences (Mar et al., 2006; Mar, Oatley, & Peterson, 2009).

These findings should be interpreted carefully: they do not establish that a single story discussion will make a participant more empathic, nor do they turn ITT into an empathy-training program. They do, however, support the broader proposition that narrative engagement is meaningfully connected to how people simulate, interpret, and think about social experience.

ITT builds on that possibility by adding reflection and conversation. A participant can notice a character's motivation, recognize an assumption in their own reaction, and then hear another participant interpret the same event differently. That sequence can widen the field of view around leadership, communication, mentoring, conflict, relationships, and other human situations without prescribing a single "correct" conclusion.

5. Possible Selves: From New Perspective to New Possibility

ITT's emphasis on "expanded possibilities" has a direct conceptual parallel in Hazel Markus and Paula Nurius's theory of possible selves. Possible selves are representations of what people might become, would like to become, or fear becoming. They connect self-concept with motivation by giving hopes, goals, fears, and threats a personally meaningful future form (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Stories are especially well suited to this process because they allow people to encounter choices and consequences at a distance. A reader may recognize part of themselves in a character, see a familiar challenge handled differently, or imagine a future response that had not previously felt available. Markus and Nurius also emphasized that possible selves draw from socially available models, images, and symbols—making narrative a plausible source of new material for imagining the self.

This provides a research-informed rationale for ITT's movement from reflection toward Carry It Forward™. The experience does not prescribe an action. Instead, it asks participants to identify what they want to carry into their own lives. The mechanism is therefore personal: expanded perspective can make a new possibility visible; a personally meaningful possibility can, in turn, become relevant to motivation and choice.

6. From Individual Experience to Organizational Impact

The ITT Impact Framework™ extends the experience beyond the discussion itself: Individual Actions → Behavior Changes → Organizational Outcomes → Organizational Impact. This is best understood as a theory of contribution rather than a promise of causation. A story experience may prompt a participant to listen differently, initiate a conversation, reconsider a habit, mentor more intentionally, or approach a colleague with greater curiosity. When such actions become repeated practices, they can influence the quality of communication, collaboration, leadership, engagement, and community participation.

The product opportunity for ITT Media is therefore broader than a digital book club and more focused than generic content. Its differentiated value lies in designing a repeatable experience around story: an intentional welcome, a shared encounter with the narrative, individual reflection, facilitated conversation, and a Carry It Forward™ moment that connects insight to the participant's own life. The underlying research supports the architecture of that experience while leaving interpretation and agency with the participant.

STORY + REFLECTION	CONVERSATION	CARRY IT FORWARD™
Recognition and personal meaning	Shared interpretation and perspective	Possibility, intention, and action

Conclusion

ITT Media's philosophy is consistent with a substantial research tradition: readers actively participate in the meaning of stories; understanding is constructed through experience and social interaction; literature discussion can deepen and revise interpretation; narrative engagement is associated with perspective-taking and social cognition; and imagined future selves can connect new possibilities to motivation. Together, these ideas provide a coherent foundation for ITT's central belief that stories can be catalysts—not because they deliver predetermined lessons, but because they invite people to see, reflect, connect, imagine, and choose.

That is the distinctive promise of the ITT Story Experience™: preserve the integrity of the story, create a thoughtful environment around it, and help people discover possibilities worth carrying forward.

References

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