Universal Methodology Development

GUIDELINES - WORKING WITH STORIES

STORYTELLER - EMPOWERMENT OF PERSONS UNDER RISK OF EXCLUSION THROUGH DEVELOPMENT OF A PROFESSIONAL STORYTELLING TRAINING IN UNDER-EQUIPPED EU COUNTRIES

AGREEMENT NUMBER
16-202-021567 (KA2-VET-5/16)
Editorial information:

These guidelines, representing the Intellectual output 'Universal methodology Development', have been developed by the ERASMUS+ project partnership 'Storyteller - Empowerment of persons under risk of exclusion through development of storytelling professional training in under-equipped EU Countries', coordinated by OZARA storitveno in invalidsko podjetje d.o.o.

Storybag (NL) was the lead organisation within the scope of work of this intellectual output with aggregated efforts of the partnership consortium:
BBRZ Österreich (A)
Ceres Europe Limited (NI)
EOLAS S.L. (ES)
OZARA storitveno in invalidsko podjetje d.o.o. (SLO)
UNIPOMS – Università Popolare Nuova Scuola Medica Salernitana (I)

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GUIDELINES – WORKING WITH STORIES

Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface – ‘People at Risk’</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with Stories – Some Fundamentals for Facilitating</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Introduction - Why Stories?</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: The Establishment of Trust – Group Dynamics</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: How Stories and Storytelling work</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Empathic Listening</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: The Narrative Approach</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6: Cultural and Contextual Sensitivity</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 7: Crafting New Stories</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix: The importance of proper questioning</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"We seem to confuse our problem with our purpose. You don’t solve your purpose and you don’t find your problem. We obsess about what gets in the way without noticing that we have a way (purpose/intention) that something seems to get in the way of. We sometimes lose the path but that is different from losing our way. If the object is to summit Everest, why devote your life to the avalanche?" (Paul Andrew Costello, StoryWise)

FOREWORD

Dear (future) story worker,
As you are reading this, it means that you believe that ‘working with stories’ is one of the approaches that can support and help others (and specifically people at risk) with creating new possibilities and solutions, in order to future life stories of resilience and pride and concrete actions towards that.

These guidelines are particularly written and edited for those who follow STORYTELLER’s course curriculum ‘Working with stories’. The curriculum content and the activities in the units are meant to combine effectiveness, ease of facilitation and acceptability to participants / clients. Effectiveness refers to providing (narrative) experiences that may help to enhance self-awareness and result in personal change. The STORTYERLLER curriculum will also introduce you to ethical considerations concerning the (emotional) safety of clients when collecting stories from them or when working with them on their stories.

To facilitate these experiences presumably does not require therapeutic training demanded by deeper psychological approaches like narrative therapy, although we borrow insights, methods and tools from those.

The activities we are offering are selected for a broad spectrum of participants, from (fairly experienced) volunteers to professionals who work with people at risk. The course curriculum will not train you to become a (psycho) therapist. However, therapists can profit from this curriculum as a specific additional (narrative) practice.

In these guidelines we intend to provide you with the necessary theoretical and practical background knowledge based on prior and current work by researchers and practitioners.

We are aware that they cannot replace your specific knowledge of a national / regional / local situation. We also can only guess your present experience skills and experiences.

The resources included in these guidelines refer to the most current literature by mainly practitioners and are intended to inspire you to further reading and deepening of your knowledge and practices.

The STORYTELLER team
PREFACE

‘PEOPLE AT RISK’

In STORYTELLER we call the people we want to facilitate, support and help with story work ‘people at risk’. We have to be aware that this is an all-purpose term for many groups in society who suffer from or are threatened by (social) exclusion due to different causes and reasons, like poverty, illiteracy, age, sexual preference, a range of traumatic experiences (e.g. politics, family, detention, profession) and general (global) economical and societal changes. Because of the causes that led to their present situation, individuals in these groups (or cohorts) obviously require different approaches, and thus also different narrative approaches.

DUALITIES

The STORYTELLER curriculum draws from the idea that there are two sides to every story.

‘My Story, Your Story’

When we look at it closer we can discover (and explore) the dualities. It is not only about the good of sharing stories with others and listening with respect. It is also about the effect certain stories can have on individual lives and society in general: ‘my story, your story’ can turn into ‘me/we and ‘the other’-stories and thus to friction between individuals and groups.

In these guidelines we will draw attention to these ‘story’ phenomena that can lead either to inclusion or exclusion. The latter, including limiting beliefs and self-perception and dominating social discourses, is the main topic of our project and curriculum and these guidelines.

If we (want to) work with stories of individuals, we should be aware of different contexts within the human condition in general, communities and societies and the role story, identity, image etc play in those, for individuals and groups.

METHODOLOGY

STORYTELLER’s curriculum aspires to offer a set of methods and (useful) practices from the knowledge and experiences of the partners in this consortium as well as literature references where theoretically appropriate and supporting the proposed method and/or activity. In these guidelines the partners have done an effort to gather all possible resources (basic universal skills, knowledge, methods, activities/exercises, tools and techniques) to empower professionals within the scope of their work with disadvantaged individuals and groups. They have proven their universal worth in different countries and cultures and have for a part been implemented in European contexts.¹

¹ For an overview, see RSRC handbook: http://www.rsre.eu/outputs.html
FUNDAMENTAL ASPECTS

We would like to stress that our curriculum does not require therapeutic training, although we also borrow ideas and methods from practices and/or approaches as Narrative Therapy (White & Epston, 1989; White, 2007), Solution Focused Therapy (De Shazer, 1985), Collaborative Therapy (Anderson, 1997) and Participatory Narrative Inquiry (Kurtz, 2014). These practices share some basic concepts about relationships with clients. Tarragona (2008) proposes 11 (shared) attributes that we also see as fundamental aspects within our curriculum:

1. TRANSDISCIPLINARY INSPIRATION: Much of the theoretical grounding of these therapies is inspired by ideas that come from disciplines outside psychology. They are based in the work of philosophers, anthropologists, historians, linguists, and literary theorists. The transdisciplinary attitude is also an important aspect of our curriculum.

2. SOCIAL OR INTERPERSONAL VIEW OF KNOWLEDGE AND IDENTITY: Narrative Therapy, Solution Focused Therapy, and Collaborative Therapy coincide in that our experience of reality or the meaning that we give to our experiences is constructed through our interactions with other people. Our curriculum is strongly based on the idea that life stories are crafted by a cooperative sharing of meanings among people.

3. ATTENTION TO CONTEXT: These approaches can be considered as ‘systemic’ in the broadest sense of the word: thinking about people in context, be it the context of their culture, their interactions with other persons in their close relationships, or the conversational systems in which they participate. Our curriculum asks you to analyse and approach to the group you are working with in a systemic way, considering the dynamics of communication and language among the participants and between them and you as the facilitator.

4. LANGUAGE AS A CENTRAL CONCEPT: Postmodern approaches conceptualize helping relationship as a conversational process and believe that dialogue and conversation generate meaning. They propose that the way people think and narrate about their problem and/or issue (stories) may contribute to analysing them or being able to contemplate new possibilities. Our curriculum can also be seen as a way to help people change and/or improve their vocabulary, starting from the idea that language affects the way we think (Gumperz & Levinson, 1996).

5. HELPING RELATIONSHIP AS A PARTNERSHIP: Helping relationships are not considered as something that is done to somebody, but something done with somebody. Clients and helpers are partners in a dialogue, building solutions, or developing new stories and identities. Our curriculum aims to help you developing a position of curiosity and respect in addressing the elements of your clients’ stories, co-constructing with them new narratives based on their own words and, by doing that, improving their vocabulary.

6. VALUING MULTIPLICITY OF PERSPECTIVES OR VOICES: A recurrent idea is that there are many voices or human realities. According to this idea, people may have different opinions not just about politics or religious beliefs but also about basic issues such as personal identity (Andersen, 1991). By focusing on people’s stories, our curriculum gives values to the way each person
constructs his/her own reality and gives meaning to his/her own life experiences.

7. VALUING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE: This has to do with the questioning of explanations that are meant to be applicable to all people. The work we intend is not based on meta-narratives (e.g., a personality theory), but is rather centred on the client’s (or group’s) own ideas and the new ideas that are generated throughout the conversations. Our curriculum in fact is focused on local knowledge (Geertz, 2000). It relies more on working with clients’ lives from the clients’ point of view than from the perspective of some theoretical assumption. It helps you to take advantage of everything clients know about their lives—their problems, stories, possible solutions, and goals. This leads you to adopt a position of curiosity and promotes a relationship of respect and collaboration.

8. CLIENTS AS STARS: Your clients are the stars of the ‘Working with Stories’ curriculum. They are considered as the experts of their own life, they define their life situation and the goals they want to achieve. Consequently, you as a (professional) helper are required to develop a ‘not knowing’ position (Anderson, 1995; De Jong and Berg, 2002). This means that you should approach your clients with curiosity and willingness to be informed, trying to leave aside preconceptions and to avoid arriving to conclusions too soon (White, 2000).

9. BEING PUBLIC OR TRANSPARENT: By applying our curriculum, you will learn that all people, including you and your clients, understand things from a certain perspective. Working with Stories helps you to keep your prejudices at bay when you meet your clients. But because it is impossible not to have personal values, opinions, or preferences, we ask you to be open about these when they are relevant for work. In Narrative Therapy, this is called transparency (Freedman & Combs, 1996), while in it is referred to as being public about ideas and sharing internal dialogues with the clients (Anderson, 1997, 2006).

10. INTEREST IN WHAT WORKS WELL: Many authors point out that (psycho)therapy is frequently seen as a technology to fix defective persons. Postmodern therapeutic practices share these concerns about the excessive emphasis on deficit. For this reason, our curriculum emphasizes what is working well in people’s lives and what clients consider important and valuable.

11. PERSONAL AGENCY: Personal agency refers to people being able to make decisions and take action in their life. This idea is shared by postmodern practices and affected the way we conceptualized Working with Stories curriculum. Our aim is to help you helping people at risk “being in the driver’s seat of their lives” (White & Epston, 1990).
WORKING WITH STORIES – SOME FUNDAMENTALS FOR FACILITATING

I. ENVIRONMENT & MATERIALS

Try to work in a neutral environment, so maybe better not a school or office unless you can turn those into a place where people can feel at ease and not have the feeling that they are going to school or to work. Imagine of where you would feel comfortable to meet with someone for an intimate conversation (e.g. a library, a cosy neighbourhood café or meeting place).

If you work with groups, there should be enough space to create a circle of chairs and eventually work in small groups without being distracted by the others.

The room should also have at least one empty wall to be able to attach drawings / post-its to it. It will also make the room more colourful and inspiring.

Depending on the individual (adult, child...) or group you work with, prepare enough material to work with: (colour) pens, paper, post-its, puppets, textile, tape etc.

Make sure that there is enough to drink and provide small snacks / sweets to make your participant(s) feel welcome.

II. GROUP COMPOSITION

When working with a group, we suggest to choose participants with a similar background and (in the case of more than one nationality) the ability to converse in the same language.

Preferably, the number of participants should not exceed 15, to be able to give appropriate attention and enough chance for everyone to be heard during and after the activities we propose in these guidelines and in the curriculum.

III. LENGTH OF SESSION

In the STORYTELLER curriculum

The (teaching & learning) units in the curriculum are based on 6-8 hour sessions per level. Some units require one, others two levels. The sessions are based on a maximum of 15 participants, given the (sometimes emotional) context a number one experienced facilitator can handle and give proper attention to. Considering our previous experiences, a group can be composed of a maximum of 25 participants, with two facilitators.

In daily (professional) practice

As this is outside the curriculum’s scope, this would be context related, very much depending on the group and/or single client’s needs. In addition, it will be dependable on private financial capacity and/or public and insurance policies and compensations.

IV. CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FACILITATOR

Much of this paragraph is based on the practical experience and research of authors as Kurtz (2014) and Chambers (2002). We have highlighted some important and helpful aspects but would like to encourage you to further reading.
As a facilitator...
... DON’T rush, lecture, criticize, interrupt, dominate, sabotage, and don’t take yourself too seriously.
As a facilitators you should:
Show respect, establish rapport, abandon preconceptions, hand over the stick, watch, listen, learn; learn from mistakes, be self-critical and self-aware, be flexible, support and share, and be honest.

Before you start
1: Arrangements for seating
Arrange seating and tables / chairs in advance.

(with tables and chairs)

Classroom
Similar to lecture theatre, an angled classroom is possible. Tip: Ask those in odd rows to turn around, stand or kneel on their seats and talk to those behind them. The effect can be electrifying.

Hollow Square / Hollow U
Beware that here eye contact with others is at distance; the formality of tables can feel intervening. It can lead to letting people rehearse and listen less; those who are further from facilitator seem ‘marginalized’. Facilitator feels dominant.
Tip: To create more awareness and interaction, use the space in between for activities

Fishbone
Similar to angled classroom. Tables invite to group discussions.

Banquet
Centres even more on the tables (often pairs of tables put together) for group conversations. Good for small participatory workshops

Table Threes
Worth considering. The angle is pointing to the head. The threes are good for buzzes / putting heads together. Tables can be easily amalgamated to make sixes.
(only chairs)

**School assembly**
Chairs are normally moveable, so small groups can be formed after ‘formal’ activities.

**Circles**
- **Half circles**
  Favourable. The facilitator is placed well, eye contact with everyone. Good flexibility for moving to other arrangements, good central space.

**Single circles** are often adopted as democratic and participatory, but they can also intimidate when there are large numbers. The facilitator can still dominate.

**Open circles (clams)** seem to be more democratic, with two arcs facing each other. They also allow entrance from both sides and provide greater freedom of movement. The facilitator can choose any position.

**Group with facilitator**
The facilitator initiates a conversation and then gradually withdraws. This is a classical pattern for a focus group or otherwise a story circle (where the only activity of the facilitator would be keeping the telling going). You will find more about the use of (story) circles in the course of these guidelines.

**Buzzing Clusters**
Many patterns possible. Facilitator can decentralise himself and/or move around. Context friendly to shy talkers. Plenary conversations after buzzes are possible.

**Group sizes**
- pairs for instant short buzzes (max 100 seconds)
- pairs or at most threes for discussions and sharing that are personal and reflective
- four / at most fives for group work (e.g. brainstorm, listening exercises)
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- larger group where only a few have relevant experience or knowledge of the topic and where some participants may keep quiet

**Duration of group**
Some groups 'click' well and work quickly, others can be tense or awkward, especially with dominators. Listen and observe well, shuffling may be necessary. We will elaborate a more on ‘dominators and shy’ further on.

**Before you start 2:**
**Welcoming the group to the session**
We suggest the following:
- Put up welcome notices.
- Be participatory from the start. Invite early comers to help.
- Ask early comers to welcome others and give themselves nametags.
- Go for a relaxed start (e.g. warming up, icebreakers)
- Make late arrivals welcome. Ask others to brief them.

**Expectations, hopes and fears**
Offer post it cards to participants to write down expectations, hopes and fears (including humorous fears).
Let them display these on wall under their name and add hobbies end eventually a personal symbol (something that symbolizes them).

**Hopes to learn and contribute**
Invite participants to write on post its (including their name) what they hope to learn and what they (think they) have to contribute. Take serious note of what they hope to learn.

**Objectives**
During the ‘Working with Stories’ curriculum the (learning) objectives and outcomes are already established. Present the objectives.

In general, objectives can be outlined before the start of each unit, and sometimes objectives can be adapted or determined by the group. Use expectations to check on objectives, and discuss and prioritize them. Try to summarize a consensus.
If that seems not possible let a small group discuss further and make recommendations.
At all times, be aware that in a good process objectives can change.

**V. POWER AND PROCESS**
**Power and power relations**
There has been a lot of research and writing about power. We will not go too deep in this topic but we should be aware of its influence on behaviour and well-being.
One of the founders of sociology, Max Weber, defined power as “the ability of an individual or group to achieve their own goals or aims when others are trying to prevent them from realising them”.²
From this Weber identified power as being either authoritative or coercive. Nowadays this looks like a one-dimensional view, suggesting that power is

² [Link](https://sociologytwynham.com/2013/06/04/webers-definition-of-power/)
always negative and that a person needs to be present in order to influence their power.

There are other – more positive - views possible: ‘power’ is not only negative (in the above sense), it can also make things possible. One has also the power to act compassionate and empathetic (Keltner, 2017), it is a choice...

On a societal and cultural level there is also the idea of the panopticon (also Foucault, cited in Felluga, 2018). Imagine someone in a tower watching you while you cannot see him but you know he is watching. You might feel urged to control your behaviour even if you are not physically forced. Think of laws, dominant societal / religious discourses, group (pressure)... It can lead to self-regulation in both ways: in a more positive sense to feeling a ‘good’, abiding citizen / group member, in negative sense to detachment and/or anxiety.

**Power relationships in a participatory context**

In many participatory processes there is a progressive shift of power, with a sequence from control to empowerment, from plenary to individual to group, from centred to dispersed (Chambers, 2002).

A (process) sequence could be:

- plenary briefing
- individual reflection and noting
- small group sharing and discussion
- groups feedback to plenary
- plenary discussion

**Disempower yourself**

Chambers (2002) explains that facilitators and trainers can tend to dominate and lecture. They stand while others sit, there is a board, a screen, which give authority; there can be a table between the facilitator and ‘him/her’ or ‘them’. Most there is too much talk, too much control.

Facilitating others means to talk less, to control less, and facilitate others’ stories and analyses by disempowering yourself, handing over the stick, leading by withdrawing.

**A few tips:**

- Decentre, move away from the focus of authority;
- Sit down;
- Shut up;
- Initiate self-organizing processes;
- Ask for others’ contribution;
- Start individual reflection, buzzes or small groups;
- Let volunteers facilitate a feedback session;

You will experience that this often works better, ownership is spread, and last but not least, you can get a rest...

**Empower individuals**

Whatever activity you have planned, start by asking each person to reflect in silence and note or list for themselves, without sharing it with others. This starts everyone thinking and realizing that they know something already about the subject. Their notes give something to share, and it leads to more democratic group discussions where each person has something to say.

**Empower groups**
Give tasks to groups, we have already mentioned sorts and sizes. The best analyses are made in small groups of three to five.

The empowering aspects are that people participate and share, and learn by talking and sharing; that there is more knowledge to tap from; confidence is building up; synergy and enthusiasm; group analysis often goes beyond individual analysis; special (tacit) knowledge can be shared.

Beware of dominant group members, of conversations that get off the subject, and of unrepresentative views by rapporteurs.

**The Dominators and the Shy**

It is best to talk about this issue at the beginning. Explain that there is a common ‘issue’: there are people who tend to dominate people who show shyness. But, whether you are a ‘natural’ self-confident talker or ‘naturally’ modest, no one should feel threatened or rejected. We learn as much from listening as we learn from talking. However, we need to work towards equity in talking time and listening time.

In addition, some are more fluent in their (or a foreign) language than others.

*Some tips to prevent (or deal with) dominance issues (Chambers 2002):*

**Self-scoring.**

Put the numbers 0-10 on the floor. Ask participants to reflect first of how they would score themselves on a scale for a relevant characteristic, e.g. talkativeness, assertiveness, ability to listen, understanding another’s point of view... and then stand there.

Invite to conversation with neighbours. Ask them to move where they would like to be, and then invite to what they would need to get there.

**Give turns**

Say politely ‘you have already spoken, let us hear from somebody else’, or ‘Who has not yet had a chance?’

**Hold the stick**

Use any object as a ‘talking stick’ that gives authority to speak. Only the person who holds it may talk. When finished he/she hands it over to someone else. Promotes the idea of taking turns, concentrated listening, and give confidence to the otherwise shy or reluctant.

**Give a responsible role**

Give dominators responsible roles: make big talkers observers and recorders; let them take notes of what goes on (interaction, who talks most/least; and give (objective) reflections (not opinions!) at the end of the session.

**Take out**

Invite the talker out of the group. Ask him/her about his/her special knowledge. Empower him/her to have this knowledge and views recorded (by you).

**Ration: e.g. matchsticks**

For each group session each counts out five matchsticks (or beans, pebbles...). Each time a person speaks they out one of their stocks in the centre. When they have none left, they cannot say any more.

**Regroup**
After a buzz of or group discussion, ask each group to rank its members by how much they have talked. Form new groups of high talkers together, medium talkers together and low talkers together.

Have you ever?
Ask for raised hands, or small buzz conversation, on:
‘Have you ever had something done to you? How did it feel like?’
And then ‘Have you ever done it to someone else? In what context?’

Useful resources:
Chambers R. (2002), Participatory workshops, Earthscan/Routledge
Kurtz C. (2014), Working with Stories, Kurtz-Fernhout Publishing

Working in and with the curriculum units
Each of the curriculum units has activities and/or exercises that are based on practical knowledge and experience and supporting theoretical resources. In the following chapters you will find the necessary backup. Each chapter also includes a list of resources for further reading for those who are interested to explore further.

What to show, what to tell
At the end of each chapter in these supporting guidelines we will advise you which theoretical texts and images you could / can show and tell prior or after an exercise to underpin the (practical) benefit of this specific exercise.

Practical tips from practitioners
You will also find practical tips - based on the experiences of facilitators - for situations that might need attention while working with individuals and groups in that specific unit.
1. INTRODUCTION - WHY STORIES?

It all starts with how we experience the environment around us: nature and its phenomena, the animal world, our relationship with others – and how we interpret and understand it. All of it is data, and the sheer number of data (and their impact) can be confusing. So we have a need to structure it to master it.

First we made drawings and when we had language and words we were able to verbalize and express our thoughts. Stories are a purely human phenomenon, stories have many functions, with stories we can communicate different intentions, and they can be told in many different ways. This chapter introduces you to the evolution of story, story structures (and the why of those), and to helpful models and tools (like metaphors) to tell them to varying audiences. You will also learn why stories are so crucial in connecting people and creating cohesion in groups and society at large. And how they can disconnect and dominate...

The evolutionary road

Play

Boyd (2009) points to the evolutionary benefits of story in his ‘On the Origin of Stories’. It starts with play.

Play evolved through the advantages of flexibility; the amount of play in a species correlates with its flexibility of action. Behaviours like escape and pursuit, attack and defence, and social give-and-take can make life-or-death differences. They contribute to recognition and assessment of context and thus anticipation and flexibility in acting. Play is therefore highly rewarding.

Information

The next step is our appetite for information, especially for information that falls into meaningful arrays from which we can make rich inferences: we call these structures and patterns. We actively pursue patterns, especially those that yield the richest inferences to our minds, in our most valuable information systems, the senses of sight and sound, and in our most crucial domain, social information. Patterns, repetition, and rhythm. Why are we so fascinated by that and why do we have this need to describe or visualize that if it was not rewarding?

Art

Boyd: “A work of art acts like a play (and training) ground for the mind. Like play, it succeeds by engaging and rewarding attention.

Art generates a confidence that we can transform the world to suit our own preferences, that we need not accept the given but can work to modify it in ways we choose; and it supplies skills and models we can refine and recombine.

From words to stories

It started with (cave) drawings, figurative and symbolic. Then words and language came into being. Science is still not unanimous how that started, but whichever way one looks at it, there was a moment when we had the words to utter and give names to things, natural phenomena and emotions.
Looking back to play, information, structure and art, it all comes together when we look at stories. The anticipation and flexibility in thinking, the social give-and-take, the recognition of structure and patterns and the understanding of context: our stories - and even more so, fictional stories - are a cognitive playground as well. We love to play with possibilities and find solutions.

We are the ‘storytelling species’. Storytelling has become a functional part of our nature. Without it we would be less able to adapt to changes, in our environment and in ourselves.

Meaning, sense, change, and the importance of language
There was a moment when we became conscious of mortality, of life and death. There came a time when we could consciously connect memories, when memory could explain effects from causes (‘Where do we come from? Why do we die? Who controls the forces of nature?’). We also became aware of morality, (power) relationships and ethics (‘Why is he more powerful than I am? Why is he/she hurting me?) and our personal lives (‘Who am I? Why am I failing?’). These are just a few existential questions out of many more.

Stories originate from different needs and experiences, but foremost from our need for meaning and sense. Meaning-making is how we construct, understand and make sense of events, relationships and the self.

Frankl (1946) stated that the primary motivation of a person is to discover meaning in life. He insisted that meaning could be discovered even in the most tragic experience. People can discover meaning through simply ‘doing’, experiencing values, and experiencing hardship.

According to Postman & Weingartner (1969) meaning-making can also be seen as a metaphor for teaching and learning. In their own words “it stresses a process view of minding (the moulding of the mind), where ‘minding’ is undergoing a constant change. “Meaning-making” also forces us to focus on the individuality and the uniqueness of the meaning maker... There is no limitation to his/her learning process. He continues to create new meanings.”

Dennet (2017) also offers some interesting thoughts on meaning, context, and language. He states that our conscience is indebted to language. Language arose because sounds (and after appointing them to e.g. our environment and emotions: WORDS) came to us; they did not emerge because we invented them. That growing and still unconscious but more and more useful verbal competence primarily led people to think first about what they were going to say. The meaning we give to countless information / data – as we have said earlier – is also dependent on

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context and the ‘useful’ information elements (‘memes’) that help us to understand quicker.

All suggests that individuals are potentially able to understand (contexts) and cope with/learn from change, act upon it and create anew. Working with stories and narratives (which provide contexts) can be functional and/or practical in multiple circumstances.

UNIVERSAL FUNCTIONS OF STORIES

When we look at the constructive functions and qualities of stories, what comes to mind? To name a few: inspiration, imagination, memory retention, knowledge- and information transfer, connecting people, consolation, healing, entertainment, engagement, (creation of) mutual respect, taking perception (empathy), (creation of) values (value systems), action (initiative), planning, strategy, anticipation (of events, actions).

In our cognitions, every ‘up’ has a ‘down’, where there is light there is dark. Stories also have a dark side; destructive traits like hate, envy, discrimination, stigmatization, domination, manipulation etc.

Looking at the above enumerations, you will realize that many of the functions of stories could also be interpreted as intentions. Stories are never ‘innocent’. There is always an intention behind a story. Consider this when you tell a story or listen to a story. We will elaborate on this in chapter 3.

So, what is ‘storytelling’ and what do we call a ‘narrative’?

We choose to use the term storytelling to describe the more conscious and planned acts of storytelling, where stories are told for certain purposes - e.g. to inspire change, to entertain, to share knowledge etc.

We mostly use the term narrative when talking about the everyday accounts we have of our life, trying to make meaning out of what has happened and why it has happened, and in doing so drawing upon different discourses.

WHAT STORIES? – About Story Structures

So, how do we dress up and structure facts and experiences?

One of the most striking features of story is its structure. We do not realize it consciously, but as mentioned before, stories answer to our need for organizing information into meaningful structures.

Universal Story structures
We would like to introduce you to the three most common universal structures. Probably the best known is the Folk Tale Structure. The model we present is the version story researcher and -worker Cynthia Kurtz (2014) offers.

1. Context – introduction of the setting and characters, explanation of the state of affairs
2. Turning point – the dilemma or problem or initiating event that starts the story rolling
3. Action – how the people in the story respond to the dilemma or problem
4. Reversal – complications, further difficulties, challenges, things going wrong
5. Resolution – the outcome of the story and reactions to it

If you look at it you may already think of familiar fairy tales like Cinderella or Little Red Riding Hood but also the average successful Hollywood movie. Folk tales come in many disguises, for instance as fables (Aesop), nursery tales (Peter Pan), trickster tales (e.g. The fox Reynard, Till Eulenspiegel), noodle tales (dumb and dumber) or (modern) urban myths and legends. But most importantly, many personal stories follow the same structure, as they do in the next universal model.

The Hero’s Journey
This is a universal model narrative that has been quite influential. It is related to another type of narratives called the magical stories: their structures go as far back as the hunter-gatherers and often start with a crisis and the journey of the protagonist / hero to solve the crisis (material or spiritual), often helped by his perseverance, gods or a mentor of some kind. One of the oldest examples is probably the story of Gilgamesh.

The circular model of the Hero’s Journey, derived from Joseph Campbell’s
monomyth, ‘The Hero with a Thousand faces’ (1949), resembles these narratives.

Many epics (e.g. the Odyssey) and teaching episodic stories (e.g., about Buddha, Jesus) have been analysed and compared through this model, which describes the typical adventure of The Hero, the person who goes out and achieves great deeds on behalf of the group, tribe, or civilization.

The Actant Model

The actant model is a tool used to analyse the action that takes place in a story, whether real or fictional. This model reveals the structural roles typically performed in storytelling. The Actant Model includes 6 actants: subject (hero), object of quest, e.g., sender (benefactor who initiates the quest), receiver (beneficiary), helper (of hero, person or tool) and opponent (adversary, villain).

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The Actant Model

Each of these roles fulfills an integral component of the story. Without the contribution of each actant, the story may be incomplete. Thus, an "actant" is not simply a character in a story, but an integral structural element upon which the narrative revolves.

An often used example is Little Red Riding Hood: the sender/benefactor is Little Red Riding Hood’s mother, the object is the food basket (for grandma), the beneficiary/receiver is grandma, the hero is Little Red Riding Hood, the adversary / villain is the wolf and the helper is the hunter/ lumberjack (depending on the version of the story).

An interesting (and creative) application of the model is 'perspective taking': the teller can choose to tell the story from the perspective (and experiences and feelings) of the different actants and even jump from one perspective to the other for 'interest's' and/or communication objective's sake'.

When we look at it, it can be a helpful tool when we look at problems that come from discourses, as for instance in Clan or Tribe Stories.

Clan / Tribe Stories and Dominant Narratives

Moving from the individual to groups, the clan or tribe stories’ structure can be the same as in the prior examples but the content may vary.

Transformations are possible, that is to say: the hero can have different (or differing) qualities: the same story / event can be told differently by rivaling clans.

In one story the same person could then be the hero, in the other version the villain, and vice versa, very much as we have suggested in the Actant Model when we talked about the story told from different actors’ perspectives.

Think of events in organizations: (groups of) individuals can have differing perceptions of the same event and/or of each other and each other’s roles. Or think of witnesses of an accident, the same phenomenon can occur here (Frühmann et al., 2016).

In one and the same event violence could be initiated by 'the other' and vice versa. The moment a group believes the story is ‘true’, it (or its hero) become a myth (a popular belief), and sometimes these myths become dominant narratives in society: we call them dominant discourses. In chapter 3 we will elaborate on dominant narratives on the individual-, group- and societal level.

Metaphors

When we facilitate conversations and listen to stories we should be aware of this phenomenon. Metaphors are connected to our cognitions and conceptual thinking and therefore are a part of how we experience and explain the world to ourselves and how we express ourselves; in daily conversations but also in stories.

Conceptual / Cognitive Metaphor

Metaphors are deeply rooted in our conceptual thinking. Lakoff & Johnson
(1980/2003) tried to demonstrate it in their Cognitive (or Conceptual) Metaphor Theory: what we say or write are the verbal metaphors, but inside our minds we are busy with the context we are in – the setting, environment, conversations with others et cetera. When we tell stories we use – unconsciously and consciously – these intrinsic skills. When we are in a conversation, we use more unconsciously than consciously words or statements that illustrate the context and our feelings within that context. According to Lakoff & Johnson, a metaphor is the description of an abstract domain (the target domain) in terms of another (concretely appointed) domain – the source domain. Both are conceptual domains. For example, life, argument, love, theories, ideas, social organizations and other (abstract) concepts are target domains, while journeys, war, buildings, food, plants and others are source domains. The target domain is the domain that we try to understand through the use of the source domain.

ARGUMENT  ←  WAR

TARGET  ←  SOURCE

Metaphor domains
The classical example that Lakoff & Johnson offer is ARGUMENT < WAR. You attack someone’s opinion, you feel pushed into defending yourself, and your opponent has all guns blazing... That’s how we apparently experience it in our culture. Or take this example: LOVE < JOURNEY. Whenever JOURNEY is mapped onto LOVE, the two domains correspond to each other in a way which enables us to interpret LOVE as a JOURNEY. Metaphor – as a cognitive and conceptual skill – can be a powerful tool to stir and inspire imagination. Just to give you an impression, we present the five most often used source domains and a few examples to illustrate abstract concepts. You will probably recognize most of them and be able to add some more, also from your own language.

The Human Body - *The head of our organisation*
Artefacts - *The wheels of justice*
Living Things - *Our movement is growing*
Human Activities - *He had a battle plan*
Environment / natural phenomena - *It hit me like lightning*

And finally, to round it up: The Benefits of Working With Stories
- facilitate exchange
- examine and analyse together
- find out meaning and sense together
- ask (critical) questions to stories together
- understand relationship of past-present- and futures stories
- find onset for alternative / better / future stories together
- empower each other
- become resilient (to dominant discourses)
- become able to cope with change
- become able to make plans and act upon them
- become successful
What to show, what to tell in UNIT 1

Level 1
After the portrait circle show in your Powerpoint the evolutionary model by Brian Boyd and explain the steps from Play to Story. You can also show this video by Brian Boyd to support the model: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MB3jbRPX9Xw. Also quote the first paragraph of ‘Meaning, sense, change, and importance of language’. The functions / purposes of stories can first be ‘guessed’ by the participants, after that show and tell ‘Universal functions of stories’ (constructive and intentional). When you come to ‘personal stories’ in that unit, pick one story that meets a universal structure (preferably the Folk Story or Hero’s Journey) and explain the structures with the illustrations in the Powerpoint. After that show / explain the Actant Model – the opportunity to tell a story from a different actor’s perspective: “walking in the shoes of an other”.

Level 2
The checking-in exercise is an upbeat to a short presentation of metaphor. Explain that the natural world (in this case ‘animals’) is a metaphor domain. In your Powerpoint, explain the Cognitive Metaphor, show the image ‘Target – Source’ to illustrate that, and the let participants play a bit with target and source domains (e.g. human body, artefacts…). These domains can be useful when you continue with stories of change and the introduction to future stories. Round up with an interactive plenary discussion on the benefits of working with stories (show in Powerpoint after that).

Literature resources:


Dennet D.C. (2017), From Bacteria to Bach and back – The Evolution of Minds, Allen Lane


(from Wikipedia):


(Internet)
2. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF TRUST / GROUP DYNAMICS

The intentions of stories are many: entertainment, connection, cohesion, healing, consolation, manipulation, influence, transferring knowledge, information, discrimination and many more. This chapter will look deeper in the trust building qualities of storytelling. We are a social species and so we are living in groups of different shapes and sizes. So, how are groups formed, what are the criteria that let people in groups co-exist and for how long? Which dynamics are important in groups, and which in teams? How vulnerable is an individual within a group and how does the group handle vulnerability? Shame and disengagement can lead to exclusion. We will look into how we could show that vulnerability is strength and not a weakness. Stories play an important role in that.

In the exercises in unit 1 you probably already have experienced how it feels to tell and to listen to a story. You have done it in a relatively safe environment with your participating clients. They will probably have overcome some shame ("I'm not a storyteller), they will have shown themselves (unconsciously) vulnerable by sharing personal events and/or stories. And you have hopefully started to establish trust among your participants.

It’s all about connection.
And you know (or you are starting to realize) that establishing trust is paramount when you start to work with (and connect with) those in need with and on their stories. It can be useful to give thought to a few very human issues that – consciously and unconsciously - play a role in building trust.

GROUPS AND TEAMS

What kind of groups do you know? Of which groups are you a member of, and which groups attract you and which do you find repulsive? And when you are in a team, is that the same as a group?

Groups
A group has something / some things in common. It is a number of individuals forming a unit for a reason or cause. (study.com, 2018)

Group formation
From a purely social perspective, a group is a critical source of information about individual identity.
In short, an individual’s identity (or self-concept) has two components: personal identity and social identity (or collective self). One’s personal identity is defined by more individual qualities and attributes. In contrast, one’s social identity is defined by his or her group membership, and the general characteristics (or prototypes) that define the group and differentiate it from others.

In a different definition, group formation starts with a psychological bond between individuals.

- The social cohesion approach suggests that group formation comes out of bonds of interpersonal attraction. (Hogg, Williams, 2000)
- In contrast, the social identity approach suggests that a group starts when a collection of individuals perceive that they share some social category
This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication [communication] reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

(smokers, nurses, students, hockey players), and that interpersonal attraction only secondarily enhances the connection between individuals. (Hogg, Williams, 2000)

- There is also the phenomenon of emerging groups. They arise from a relatively spontaneous process of group formation. For example, in response to a natural disaster, an emergent response group may form. These groups are characterized as having no pre-existing structure (e.g. group membership, allocated roles) or prior experience working together. Yet, these groups still express high levels of interdependence and coordinate knowledge, resources, and tasks (Majchrzak et al., 2007).

**Group examples** (in these guidelines we present examples from Forsyth, 2006)

**Primary groups**
Primary groups are characterized by relatively small, long-lasting groups of individuals who share personally meaningful relationships. (e.g. family)

**Social groups**
A social group is characterized by a formally organized group of individuals who are not as emotionally involved with each other as those in a primary group. These groups tend to be larger, with shorter memberships compared to primary groups. Further, social groups do not have as stable memberships, since members are able to leave their social group and join new groups. The goals of social groups are often task-oriented as opposed to relationship-oriented. Examples of social groups include co-workers, clubs, and sports teams.

**Collectives**
Collectives are characterized by large groups of individuals who display similar actions or outlooks. They are loosely formed, spontaneous, and brief. Examples of collectives include a flash mob, an audience at a movie, and a crowd watching a building burn.

**Categories**
Categories are characterized by a collection of individuals who are similar in some way. Categories become groups when their similarities have social implications. For example, when people treat others differently because of their race, this creates groups of different races.

**Group structure**
A group's structure is the internal framework that defines members' relations to one another over time. Aspects that play a part in that are:

* **Roles:** They can be defined as a tendency to behave, contribute and interrelate with others in a particular way. Roles may be assigned formally, but more often are defined through the process of role differentiation.

* **Norms:** are the informal rules that groups adopt to regulate members' behaviour. Norms refer to what should be done and represent value judgments about appropriate behaviour in certain (social) situations.
**Inter-member relations:** These are the connections among the members of a group, or the social network within a group.

**Values:** They stand for the goals or ideas that serve as guiding principles for the group. Like norms, values may be communicated either explicitly or on an ad hoc basis.

**Communication patterns:** They describe the flow of information within the group and they are typically described as either centralized (standardized, rigid, chain-of-command) or decentralized (free, room for improvisation and innovation, flexible).

**Status differentials** are the relative differences in status among group members. When a group is first formed the members may all be on an equal level, but over time certain members may acquire status and authority within the group; this can create what is known as a pecking order within a group.

**Teams**

*A team is a group of individuals working together (collaborating) to achieve a common goal.*

A group does not necessarily constitute a team. Teams normally have members with complementary skills and generate synergy through a coordinated effort, which allows each member to maximize their strengths and minimize their weaknesses. Naresh Jain (2009) claims:

Team members need to learn how to help one another, help other team members realize their true potential, and create an environment that allows everyone to go beyond his or her limitations. Teams can be broken down into from a huge team or one big group of people, even if these smaller secondary teams are temporary. A team becomes more than just a collection of people when a strong sense of mutual commitment creates synergy, thus generating performance greater than the sum of the performance of its individual members.

Roughly, groups develop into teams in four stages:

1. Dependency and inclusion
2. Counter dependency and fighting
3. Trust and structure
4. Work (creation / productivity)

When we look at these four steps, we realize that for both - but especially for groups – there can be an emotional burden for individual members, in many different ways.

For this curriculum we want to point out trust, vulnerability, shame, comparison, disengagement and vulnerability.

**TRUST**

Try to answer this question: “How do I now if I can trust someone enough to be vulnerable?”

You will realize that trust is a slow-building, layered process that happens over time (Brown, 2012). We generally trust the ones who keep our secrets; the ones who share their secrets; the ones who remember our name / birthday / last conversation; the ones who make us sure we’re included in ‘fun’ things; who when
we’re sad ask us why; the ones who’ve got our back; the ones who devote time and effort to a relationship. You might be able to think of more examples.

Trust can be established on a one-on-one basis but also within a group of people whether or not with the same (cultural) background. In the curriculum we offer some activities reflecting the narrative approach related to the above mentioned topics. If you would like to know more we invite you to consult the RSRC manual.

A word of warning
Once we are talking of trust we have to be aware of its enemy: betrayal. In any relationship there is a possibility of connecting with your partner or turning away. The real betrayal is disengagement, the most corrosive behaviour: not caring, letting the connection go, not being willing to devote time and effort to the relationship (Brown, 2012). Establishing trust comes with responsibilities...

VULNERABILITY

In establishing trust we should also be aware of ‘vulnerability’, the fact that someone can be, act or is perceived as vulnerable. Vulnerability is often associated with fear, shame, grief, sadness and disappointment (Brown, 2012). Brown defines it as uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure and stresses that the same definition could be given for ‘love’. Is love something to be ashamed of or a sign of weakness?

Try and fill in yourself and let others fill in “Vulnerability is ………….” and you’ll be surprised by the answers. You will realize that vulnerability is no weakness but something others see as courage.

Brown (2012) also offers an interesting, linguistic view: in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary we can find a definition of vulnerability, coming from the Latin ‘vulnerare’. It includes ‘capable of being wounded’, ‘open to attack or damage’. ‘Weakness’ is defined as ‘inability to withstand attack or wounding’, an interesting psychological implication.

When we perceive vulnerability as weakness we are losing our tolerance for emotion and we are losing our tolerance for vulnerability. At that point we are starting to confuse feeling with failing and emotions with liabilities (Brown, 2012) Accepting the vulnerability of others means understanding that they need support. Nobody can ‘go it alone’. Let them know they have a right – the right to ask for support.

As a story worker / care giver / social worker showing yourself, offering and sharing personal stories can start building trust in your integrity. People need to feel trust in order to be vulnerable and vice versa.

Listening to personal stories and asking questions to and about these stories can lead to further (joint) exploration, can help to extract meaning and sense (Frühmann et al., 2016).

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6 Read more in in Frühmann P., Hamilton N., Broer Y., Mogensen L., Frezza L., Hamilton J. (2016), Raising Strong and Resilient Communities. A narrative and story approach to empower cooperation, cohesion and change in communities through non-formal education. Pp. 20–21
SHAME, COMPARISON, DISENGAGEMENT

Brown (2012) points to these three important components that play roles in every culture.

**Shame** can be fear of ridicule and belittling; unworthiness tied to achievement, productivity, or compliance; of being 'not good enough' (for this society); being blamed or pointed at; being called names, etc.

**Comparison** can lead to overt and covert ranking; suffocation of creativity; being held to a narrow standard and not acknowledged for talents and skills; being measured for your worth, etc.

**Disengagement** can be the cause of anxiety to take risks or to try new things; of keeping quite instead of sharing experiences and ideas; it can be created by a feeling of not being listened to, not to be heard or seen, etc.

Within the context of the larger culture we have to realize that it is always applying some kind of pressure with its values, norms and dominant discourses. And these obviously vary from culture to culture.

FINALLY, KNOWLEDGE OF CULTURE

People in need can come from the same culture as yours, but in your work / profession you might encounter individuals from other cultures, sometimes even groups consisting of different cultures. It would be asked too much of you to know everything about their culture (history, laws, art, etc.), but you will have to work with their stories.

What are the messages and expectations that define cultures, and how does culture influence behaviour? Brown (2012) offers an opening for story workers: read (and collect) stories from other cultures and compare them (open-minded) to stories from your (Western) culture as a preparation for acquaintance and first conversations. Brown advises to read also stories based on personal experiences.

We will cover more about cultural contexts in chapter 6.

What to show, what to tell in UNIT 2

After opening exercise(s) ‘Definition of a group and team’ have an exchange on how culture influences behaviour? Use the information as given above in the ‘Knowledge of Culture’ paragraph. This paragraph can also be repeated upbeat to ‘The Story Crafting Method’.

After ‘Two Truth’s and a Lie’ use the paragraph about ‘Trust’ for a conversation about the establishment of trust (“How do I know...?”) and its connection to vulnerability (“What does vulnerability mean to you?”). Explain and discuss about 'Shame, comparison, disengagement' and their definitions.

Literature resources


Internet:


3. HOW STORIES AND STORYTELLING WORK

What is the difference between a story and a narrative, or storytelling and narratives? It will be essential to know the difference that when we want to grasp how humans make up stories to understand and explain their world to themselves and others, and how they explain their lives to themselves. In this context it will also be interesting to learn about the impact of stories on our brain, not only neurologically, but also emotionally. What happens to an audience when we tell a story? The impact can show in the development (and sometimes) acceptation of dominant stories and discourses, the stories that cause exclusion and trauma. What are the factors that can support change for the better? We will try and answer all that in this chapter.

NARRATIVE AND STORYTELLING - DEFINITIONS

As there sometimes is confusion about the concepts ‘narrative’ and ‘story’ as being the same or similar, we propose these definitions to establish the distinction necessary within these guidelines and the course curriculum.

Definition Narrative:
Narrative can be seen as how we are talking about everyday accounts we have of our life (some of which can be events / stories), trying to make meaning out of what has happened, and in doing so drawing upon different discourses.

Definition Storytelling:
The conscious and more planned acts of storytelling, where stories are told for certain purposes or with a certain intention – e.g. to inspire change, to convince, to entertain, to share knowledge, to console etc.

THE IMPACT OF STORIES

Neurological impact
We have talked about the evolutionary benefits of stories and the meaning- and sense giving qualities. As to the first, we should realize what happens our brains
when we listen to data as opposed to (data implemented in) a story.

What else happens when we tell and hear a story

The word ‘storytelling’ alone does not really cover the subject because on its own it does not reveal the distinction between the teller, the story and the listener. It does not say a thing about the (active) role of the listener and the importance of the dialogue between teller and listener.

1. Storyteller and audience, the storyteller starts the story
2. The storyteller becomes the story
3. The audience (each individual) becomes engaged / involved in the story
4. The audience (each individual and his/her associations and emotions) is part of the story.
5. The story ends... The story (enriched with all the associations, memories, emotions) is between the teller and the audience

Now (5) you can work with the story (have a conversation about the story, about its meaning and sense); this will or can elicit other stories (by individuals).
IDENTITY, NARRATIVES AND STORIES

Our identity is always a tension between concurring with and distancing ourselves from the other, from the very start of our lives. In addition to this first process of identification ('mirroring') there is always a second process at work: the pursuit of autonomy and uniqueness (Verhaeghe, 2013).

Narrative identity and the individual

According to the theory of narrative identity (McAdams, 2001), in that process we form an identity by integrating our life experiences (past, present) into an internalized, evolving narrative of the self that provides us with a sense of unity and purpose (present, future) in life. It includes episodes (events/stories), characters, settings, plots, and themes. It is ever evolving, narrative sophistication increases with age (McAdams, McLean, 2013).

Narrative therapy (Morgan, 2000; White, 2007) teaches us that it can happen that a problem story (trauma, failure) takes too much power over the life of an individual (a 'dominating' narrative), leaving him/her with a feeling of failure and/or limited agency and can also lead to a feeling of exclusion. (see also table 1 and table 2).

Narrative identity and the group

Most of us grow up with stories of certain family members, the stories of their successes and the stories of their failures and even 'family secrets'. The stories and images from our family and relatives, the social class we belong to, the culture we are part of, all contribute to the Big Story, the narrative whole that is shared by a broader group, resulting in a more or less shared identity.

More or less, because the moment we enlarge or decrease a group (family, village, region, nation...) the identity will shift. The basis, however, will always be a 'real' story whose embedding can become more and more vague and mythical. And yet, these stories give colour and power to our identities. They tell us about values and how to live together.

Identity, Image, Dominant Narratives and Dominant Discourses

These narratives allow us to develop different identities, depending on neighbourhood and social class or - in current times – social media in which we are presenting ourselves, as individuals and as communities. Here we enter in the borderland between identity and image, of how we want to be perceived and how we are perceived, and how we perceive others.

We enter the duality of 'we' and the 'other' and the dividing stories and narratives connected to that: the dominant discourses.

The term discourse as used within the narrative approach is inspired by Michel Foucault's work (e.g. Foucault 1982). A discourse is the result of the repetitive ways that people talk about the social world, norms and taken-for granted

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2 Read more in in Frühmann P., Hamilton N., Broer Y., Mogensen L., Frezza L., Hamilton J. (2016), Raising Strong and Resilient Communities. A narrative and story approach to empower cooperation, cohesion and change in communities through non-formal education. Pp. 50–53
understandings within a given social group. Examples can be statements such as: it is important to be healthy, eat vegetables and exercise regularly; unconditional love and loyalty in a family is important; a child needs a mother and a father to grow up as a healthy human being; a man should be the head of the household etc.

The most interesting aspects of the work of Foucault are his ideas on power. Foucault talks about power that is shaped by dominating discourses. Dominating discourses define boundaries between what is "normal" and desired and what are "not-normal" and un-desired identities such as poor, mad, homosexual etc.

All leads to unwelcome causes and effects that we show in table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Society</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My Story / Personal Story (ies)</td>
<td>Your Story / Story (ies) about you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IDENTITY</strong></td>
<td><strong>IMAGE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CAUSES:</strong></td>
<td><strong>CAUSES:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>Economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual preference (LGBT)</td>
<td>Migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upbringing</td>
<td>Sexual preference (taboos)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traumas (family, war, rape, bullying etc)</td>
<td>Xenophobia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Nationalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion (also potentially traumatic)</td>
<td>'Culture'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy (low / illiterate)</td>
<td>Political agendas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age...</td>
<td>General knowledge of public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EFFECTS ➔ DOMINANT NARRATIVES:</strong></td>
<td><strong>EFFECTS ➔ DOMINANT DISCOURSES:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success</td>
<td>Opinions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure</td>
<td>Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winner</td>
<td>Failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loser</td>
<td>Winner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misfit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs</td>
<td>Hate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopes</td>
<td>Fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desires</td>
<td>Shame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shame</td>
<td>Blame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>Exclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling of exclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FACTS (interpreted by teller) ➔ FICTIONS</td>
<td>FICTIONS (‘alternative facts’ based on (invented) traditions and norms)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1

"It is vital to take seriously and ‘opponent’s story. One of the narrative principles we teach is to say unless we have the ‘others’ story out of which they’re acting, then we don’t have the full story." (Paul Costello, November 2011, Los Angeles Times (article no longer available))

**Change and change facilitators**

An important aspect in this (for both extremes) is the aspect of connecting past to present to future. There is still a dominance of the past (experiences, beliefs about the past, education and possibly out-dated / obsolete norms) over the presence / current society. This dominance can have a smothering effect on being open to...
change and new possibilities and solutions and yes, alternative (and future) narratives supported by stories. As story workers / change facilitators we have to respect both sides and their stories. As much as the story worker may be educated / an expert in approaches, methods and techniques, the client is ‘the expert’ in and of his stories. Change should therefore not come from a problem solving approach but from a solution-focused approach, ‘merely’ facilitated by the story worker / facilitator. By this the individual (and or group) will arrive at a solution he ‘owns’ and can continue with. Table 2 shows the possible positive effects of an intervention through working with stories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual change</th>
<th>Society / ‘Other' change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of dominant narrative</td>
<td>(Critical) Awareness of dominant discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-perception</td>
<td>Perception of other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confidence (take leave from past /</td>
<td>Respect for other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dominant narrative)</td>
<td>Accept other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Finding) Alternative (future) stories</td>
<td>Action readiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive attitude</td>
<td>(Active) Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>INCLUSION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCLUSION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

What to show, what to tell in unit 3

**Level 1**

When you ask your participants about possible applications of story work, have this list of application fields ready in your Powerpoint or Prezi:

- education
- coaching
- health care
- personal development
- marketing
- (personal) leadership

After drawing the ‘emotional histograms’ ('data’), show the ‘brain on data’ and ‘brain on story’ illustrations to explain the effect that stories have on the listener’s brain activity. Then proceed to the stories behind the histogram.

After sharing show the ‘what happens when we tell a story’ illustration and explain the benefits of being able to ask questions to a story.

Take ample time to have a conversation on the impacts of stories for tellers AND listeners. At least these should show up. Prepare this list for your Powerpoint or Prezi:

- Fosters language development in speech and writing / language development in reading and listening
- Stories are memorable and support retention (e.g. of knowledge), through e.g. repetition, use of metaphors
- Critical thinking skills (e.g. questioning the story): open for (creative) interpretation and exploration
- Igniting curiosity, exploring content; understanding (of meaning), social (interpersonal) skills and assessment skills (contextual understanding) are improved
- Evoking engagement and empathy
Level 2
After the animal metaphor-exercise (about self-perception and personal characteristics) invite participants to a conversation about identity. It should at least reveal these definitions (prepare on Powerpoint or Prezi to show after conversation):

Identity
- is always a tension between concurring with and distancing ourselves from the other, from the beginning of our lives
- in addition to this a second (identity) process is at work: the pursuit of autonomy and uniqueness
- identity (and multiple identities) are indeed unique we become a unique combination of everything we are and have been given from the beginning, from our environment and from our educators
- also means we are more or less ‘identical’ to some extent: we identify with different groups or particular cultures
For the ‘interview’ don’t forget to brief the pairs and hand out the facilitating questions.

Although it might look like a repetition from unit 1, show (in Powerpoint or Prezi) the definitions of storytelling and (dominant) narratives (illustration) once more to highlight the intentional character of storytelling and its influence on dominant patterns, habits and (dominant) narratives that come from that. These can be highly influencing individual self-perception, self-awareness and self-esteem. Example: a ‘failing’ pattern because of (intentional) ‘excuse’ stories ("It’s not my fault, it’s...", “I’m shy, that’s why...")

Resources:


(Internet)
4. EMPATHIC LISTENING COMPETENCES

Listening is as important as telling. Questions that can elicit stories are also important. Questions that keep the other's story going (and respecting the other's story) can be not only helpful but can also help revealing important details. This chapter does not only introduce the importance of all that, it will also confront you with your own ways of listening: how can you be sure you are really listening? How can you help another person by listening? Some academic researchers and professional practitioners will show us how.

TELLING, LISTENING (AND QUESTIONING YOUR LISTENING)

Let us be very clear: there is a difference between hearing and listening. Hearing (like taste, touch, vision) is one of our natural senses. We always hear something, it does not necessarily require special attention. Listening, however, requires focus and attention. Listening is intentional (indeed, like telling) and to a single ‘message’ (e.g. a story, music).

We could also state that we are born with hearing but that we develop listening by learning in (social) contexts. Our listening skills and competences (or the lack) are already developed during our early years (e.g. family).

Some say that listening can even have a survival value: by listening to the experiences of others we are also learning. It ‘pays’ to listen.

Others explain that listening is more than an activity of a passive receiver. Costello (2017) defines listening as a co-created reality.

“Effective story listening will always reveal the power of joining, or identifying in with the speaker, and making someone feel that they are not alone, that they are not isolated in their experience of need, and out of that sharing comes a team, a support network, etc.” (Costello, 2017)

So how can it be safe for the teller to speak and how does the listener win listening rights? We would have to adopt the approach of a learner rather than an expert approach, and also communicate intent.

Listening can be an act of generosity and a gift we donate to the teller (Costello, 2017). So how can we train ourselves to become a listener the teller can trust? And vice versa, how can we be a trustworthy teller?

Let us first have a look from the perspectives (and intentions!) of both, teller and listener.

A. THE FOUR SIDES / FOUR EARS MODEL OF COMMUNICATION (from Schulz von Thun, 2012)

Illustration from Wikipedia (public domain)
This communication square describes the multi-layered structure of human communication. The idea is that messages can be sent and received multiple-sided. For the sake of these course’s guidelines we rename ‘sender’ to ‘teller’ and ‘receiver’ to ‘listener’.

According to this model the teller’s message has four facets though not the same emphasis might be put on each all the time. The four sides are: factual information, self-revelation, relationship, appeal.

The listener on the other hand is supposed to have four ears with which he is able to receive and interpret the message. Depending on which of the four ears the listener gives priority, the conversation can take different directions. The listener can often be unaware that he has switched off some of his ears, and thereby sets the course for the interpersonal events.

**Factual information** or “what am I informing about”
This ‘matter’ layer contains statements about data and/or facts. It is the task of the teller to send this information clearly and understandably.

With the **matter ear** the listener seeks to understand the subject of matter and examines if the message fulfils the criteria of truth (true/untrue) or relevance (relevant/irrelevant), and completeness (satisfying/something has to be added).

**Self-revelation** (self-disclosure) or “what do I reveal about myself”
The teller says something about himself, e.g. his motives, values, emotions. This message consists of conscious (intentional) self-expression as well as unintended self-revelation. Therefore each statement is a small sample of the teller’s personality.

The teller may try to show himself from his best side and may use all sorts of techniques, from self-promotion to hiding to silence.

*Impression techniques:*
- Content: tell about events that make him/her look good;
- Form: using language that lifts him above the crowd

*Facade techniques:*
- Hide or disguise the negatively perceived parts of one's own personality;
- Silence is the most consistent form; nothing personal or emotions are shown;
- Asking questions to avoid expressing one's opinion but find out about the other's.

The **self-revealing ear** of the listener perceives which information about the sender is hidden in the message. As soon as he examines the message, he is involved in personal diagnostics ("Who is that guy?" Or "What's wrong with him right now?").

**Dangers** of listening only with the self-revealing ear:
- Immunization: In extreme cases, the listener can let go of any concern by the exclusively listening with the self-revelation ear. The teller is degraded to a diagnosed object.
- Psychologizing is a similar abuse. A statement of a fact is only interpreted after psychological reasoning.

**Chances**: active listening
The self-revealing ear is indeed specially trained, but not using diagnosis or
debunking ("This is who you are..."). Rather, one should empathize with the feelings and thoughts of the teller in a non-judgmental way and thus let him be himself.

**Relationship** or "what I think about you" (you-statement) and "how we relate to each other" (we-statement)
Two messages are contained in the relationship-layer, specifically what the teller thinks of the listener, and how he sees the relationship between himself and the listener. If the listener does not agree with this relationship definition, problems can arise.

Within the relationship-layer, the recipient is personally affected ("How is the teller act towards me, what does he think of me, who does he think he has in front of him, how do I feel treated?").

The kind of relationship is often shown in the chosen articulation, intonation and body language. Therefore the behaviour of the teller expresses e.g. respect, esteem, sympathy, indifference, or total disinterest.

Depending on which message the listener hears with the relationship ear, he may feel either depressed or accepted, or patronized. Good communication is distinguished by mutual appreciation.

**Appeal** or "what I want you to do"
This side contains the desire, advice, instruction and effects that the teller is looking for. This may come close to the aforementioned 'intention'.

When someone says something, he usually wants an effect or impact. There is hardly a message where the teller does not intend to influence the listener: the one, who states something, will also affect something. The purpose of the appeal-message is to make the listener do or refrain from doing, thinking, or feeling certain things. The attempt to influence someone can be less or more open (e.g. advise, inform) or hidden (manipulation).

With the appeal ear the listener asks himself: "What should I do, think or feel now?"
Finally, the evaluation of the appeal leads to the question "Where does he want to take me? Why this story?" Or with regard to the use of information "What should I do best, now that I know this?"

The desire to make everything all right, and to meet the unspoken expectations of the other, leads to an oversized appeal ear in many a listener. He is usually self-conscious, has no "antenna" for his own feelings and needs. The perception of a soft appeal automatically triggers the appropriate reaction that overshadows one's own personality.

**B. CHECKLIST FOR LISTENERS** (from Senova, 2017)

In the beginning of this chapter we mentioned co-created realities and the listener’s ‘power of joining the teller, or identifying with the speaker’ (Costello, 2017). In an attempt to make us even better listeners in that sense, Senova (2017) offers a very useful ‘channelled’ checklist when it comes to tuning into your (empathic) listening:
3. QUESTIONS: to elicit stories, to ask to stories; when you want to listen more than talk

When it comes to eliciting stories from others and story collecting, it all starts with asking the right questions. When we look at the already presented background of stories, story categories and narrative approaches and applications, we realize how important questions are in the (social) realm of stories. They are at the basis of every story, either told or listened to.

Questions are almost never innocent. As stories, questions are intentional; they serve a purpose, just like the answer and/or stories that you will receive as a response to your question. Questions not only have the power to elicit stories but also the power to direct and manipulate stories or even disempower people’s stories. It is precisely these questions we have to be aware of.

Questions can control because there is a strong social pressure for the other person...
to answer the question. It can degenerate into power play, and on the other hand others can evade questions or bounce them back (“Interesting...”) and give you a story that’s beside the point. They can be persuasive can be dubious because they can influence others’ thinking and answering in different ways. With the right question you can discover all kinds of useful information that can help you and the teller to achieve later goals.

Questions are also good when you want to listen more than talk. Open questions are particularly useful. Active listening (see above) also helps. It can reveal personal details about the other person and will give you the opportunity to empathize, for example by showing that you had similar experiences.

*Ask questions whose answers are stories*: stories and answers to questions about them reinforce each other and provide a richer base of meaning than either can alone (Kurtz, 2014).
Find the language and words that work for the individual (or homogenous group).

**Some examples of open questions in different contexts** (Kurtz, 2014):

**Asking to recall a point in time**

*Examples on basis of general memorability:*
What was the most *memorable* hour of your [......]?
What moment of your visit to [......] was most *exciting* to you?

*Examples on basis of emotions:*
Could you describe the moment when you *struggled* most in your work?
Can you tell me about your proudest hour as a [...........]?
Was there a day you really felt *frustrated*?

**Asking to recall an event**

*Examples on basis of general memorability:*
What event *stands out* in your mind from four years living / working in this [.........]?
Can you describe a situation you remember as *important* for your [..................]?

*Examples on basis of emotions:*
Can you tell us about moment when you felt really *proud* about your [...........]
Can you tell me about a time when you felt too *worn out* to go to work?
What did you *feel* when you witnessed [...............]?

*Examples on basis of the issues you / your organisation or community cares about:*
When you think of *change*, which event of the past year stands out most in your mind?
Can you recall an occasion when you felt a *stranger* in [.................]?
Could you tell us about a situation where *inequality* was obvious to you?

**Asking to recall an extreme**
This is asking for exceptional experiences, especially when ‘everyday’ stories (which often are not more than descriptions or linear narratives) are the answers. And these might not contain the information we are looking for. And even questions that are about extremes can be responded with yes or no or a dry description. Again, the “What happened?” question will help.
Examples on basis of emotions:
When did you feel most frustrated during the last two months?
Can you remember the happiest you felt in [--------------------]?
What was the nicest thing you heard about [----------]?

Gather interpretations, not opinions
Direct their attention to the story and away from themselves. Make sure your questions keep people engaged in interpretation and not wander over to opinions.

Tip:
Don’t ask “In this story what did you need to solve a problem?”
Ask: “In this story what did the main person need to solve a problem?”
Don’t ask: “Who is this story about?”
Ask: “How do you feel about this story?”

And always remember: Keep the teller in the story (Kurtz, 2014)
More information about questions and questioning can be found in the Appendix.

What to show, what to tell in unit 4
After the hearing-listening exercise, and following that the ‘not listening’ exercise, emphasize empathic listening and explain empathy by showing Brené Brown’s video on empathy and sympathy. Also point at the questioning of the sympathizing animal (Closed question, like “It’s bad, um?”). Show the evolution of empathy by de Waal (the Russian doll) Continue with the twice-told story and then ask “With which ear have you listened?” Explain and show the four ears model and then show and explain Senova’s listening stages. Stress that it is good to allow silences when the teller hesitates or needs to ‘regroup’ after an emotional moment.
Conclude with the ‘listening with the heart’ exercise, and allow a good plenary session about the experiences of this and compare it to the prior exercises.

Resources:
Senova M. (2017) – This Human, BIS Publishers, Amsterdam
Illustration 4-ears model from Wikipedia (public domain): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four-sides_model
5. THE NARRATIVE APPROACH

This chapter introduces you to the background of the current narrative practices and how narratives are very much entangled with our identity, and our multiple identities. It also introduces you to the beginnings of narrative therapy and how we can use insights from that to offer activities to individual clients and to groups to understand what we call (hindering, weakening) ‘dominant narratives (or discourse) and get rid of them, either totally or finding an alternative story that can replace the dominant and offers a positive (future) narrative or story.

IDENTITY AS A NARRATIVE

The theoretical foundation of Working with a story curriculum can be identified in postmodernism, social-constructionism and post-structuralism.

Postmodern thought “[…] moves toward knowledge as a discursive practice, toward a plurality of narratives that are more ‘local’, contextual, and fluid; it moves toward a multiplicity of approaches to the analysis of subjects such as knowledge, truth, language, history, self, and power. It emphasizes the relational nature of knowledge and the generative nature of language” (Anderson, 1997, p. 36).

Social-constructionism emphasizes that knowledge, meaning, and identity are constructed through interaction with others (Tarragona, 2008).

Post-structuralism is a movement in philosophy that can be defined as “a theory of group of theories, concerning the relationship between human beings, the world, and the practice of making and reproducing meanings” (Belsey, 2002, p. 5). Arising from literary theory, post-structuralism proposes that the meaning of a text is not the text, inherent in what is written, but that meaning emerges or is produced as the reader interacts with the text (Grenz, 1996; Sarup, 1993).

Working with Stories essentially focuses on people’s identities. From a postmodern social-constructionist and post-structuralist point of view, identities can be considered as situated performances (Thorne, 2006): people tell and enact as many different kinds of stories in social life as there are social situations within which to tell and enact them (Gergen, 1991). Moreover, personal narratives reveal multiple and conflicting self-expressions. Thus, identity is akin to a polyphonic novel that is authored by many different voices within the person, all of whom engage in dialogue with each other and with flesh-and-blood characters in the external world (Hermans, 1996).

Considering the identity as a narrative gives us to focus on six important principles (McAdams, 2008):

1. The Self is storied

Human beings are storytellers by nature (Bruner, 1986), and stories are the best vehicle to conveying how (and why) a human agent, endowed with consciousness and motivated by intention, enacts desires and strives for goals over time (Ricoeur, 1984). The Self encompasses a subjective storytelling – the “I” – whose stories about personal experience become part and parcel of a storied “Me”. The Self is both the storyteller and the stories that are told (James, 1892/1963).
2. **Stories integrate lives**
Stories bring together into an understandable frame disparate ideas, characters, happenings, and other elements of life that were previously set apart. In other words, stories contribute to the formulation of an integrative narrative identity.

3. **Stories are told in social relationships**
People tell stories to other people. As such, stories are social phenomena, told in accord with societal expectations and norms. The self as a narrative cannot be understood outside the context of its assumed listener or audience, with respect to which the story is designed to make a point or produce a desired effect (Pasupathi, 2001). People narrate personal events in different ways for different listeners, and they may switch back and forth between different models of telling.

4. **Stories change over time**
Autobiographical memory is unstable. People accumulate more experiences over time, some of which may prove to be so important as to make their way into narrative identity. As people’s motivations, goals, personal concerns, priorities and social positions change, their memories of important events in their life and the meanings they attribute to those events may also change (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000).

5. **Stories are cultural texts**
Life stories mirror the culture wherein the story is created and told (McAdams, 2006). Stories are born, grow, proliferate and die according to the norms, rules and traditions that prevail in a given society, according to a society’s implicit understanding of what counts as a ‘tellable’ life (Rosenwald, 1992).

6. **Some stories are better than others**
MacIntyre (1981) argues that a life story always suggests a moral perspective, in that human characters are intentional, moral agents whose actions can always be construed from the standpoint of what is “good” and what is “bad” in a given society. Furthermore, stories themselves can be evaluated as relatively good or bad from a psychological standpoint, though these evaluations also suggest moral perspectives and reflect the values and norms of the society within which a story is evaluated.

**Dominant narrative**
The illustration on the next page (adapted from Morgan, 2000) shows how complex life is and how it consists of seemingly unrelated events. In this illustration some of the events are given emphasis and put into a coherent narrative of e.g. ‘being slow’. The events/stories might be from work situations, relations with family or friends, and memories of school. This narrative can become dominant, supported by selective memory and perception. Events disconfirming are left unnoticed or untold as insignificant. It can also be supported by similar stories by family, friends and colleagues. Notice that it can work both ways: the intention of the narrative’s teller can influence the perception of his or her environment (Frühmann et al., 2016).
What it shows foremost is that potential narratives (and identities) are ruled out, and that the dominant narrative can be limiting and blocking alternatives, now and in the future, for the individual, groups and whole societies.

The narrative approach
We could state that life as it is lived is richer than life than it is told. There are always events not confirming the dominant and self-evident ideas. Life is multi-storied, there are many different narratives (and stories) depending on perspectives, individuals, and groups. We have many potential identities and thus futures. The narrative approach aims to make dominant narratives visible and to deconstructing them, to see them as just ideas... not ‘truths’. Externalization of the problem, visualizing it, describing its voice and strategies, helps to make the problem ‘the problem’. At a certain point it becomes manageable for the individual, be it through counterstrategies or even bid it farewell (White, 2007).

In the long run, narrative practices enable individuals, groups and communities to construct alternative, preferred and achievable (future) narratives. These can empower people to take action and get to grips with life’s challenges. Preferred narratives are grounded in life as well, as they draw upon real events / stories not fitting the dominant one and connect these into a new, alternative narrative.

Some activities
Find below some narrative approach-related activities that can be employed in this phase, connected to life stories and experiences through time, by individuals as well as groups. More exercises can be found in the ‘Raising Strong and Resilient Communities’ handbook, in which you will also find references to many other sources.
Life Stories

The Tree of Life

The Tree of Life is a hopeful and inspiring approach to working with children, young people and adults in many different contexts, including groups of refugees and immigrants; people whose community has suffered from a natural disaster; groups of young people who have been expelled from school; women who have been subject to domestic violence etc.


Provide paper and coloured pencils, felt markers, ask participants to draw a tree and add words / expressions to the different parts. (see example).

When everyone has made his individual tree, there can be an exhibition of the ‘Forest of Life’ and stories can be shared and reflected on. This is moving from the individual to the collective (‘unity in diversity’).
Meaning- and sense making (with individuals in groups)

**Timeline** (Frühmann, 2014)

**Purpose**
Finding extreme stories and insights to start conversations around topics.

**Guidelines**
Draw a horizontal line on a big sheet of paper and divide it in twelve parts (one for each month of the year). Hand out three types of question papers (see examples). Let everyone state in a few short sentences what a lesser or really good experience has been. They also fill in the month in which that experience had occurred. Note: a lesser experience could be in a different month than the great experience.

Also hand out a question about one really great insight they had in a certain month. The facilitator collects all papers and groups them according to the months. Then he/she assigns ‘months’ to participants. So, ‘January’ will start reading out the January quotes and place them on the timeline, then ‘February’ and so on.

a. “The least experience was when...”, add month of the year
b. “The best experience was when...”, add month of the year
c. “Suddenly I realised that...” (idea, insight, wish), add month of the year.

After all the quotes have been read out loud (participants can note which notes resonated, stood out), questions about the background can be asked to the authors of the notes, and stories will emerge. For every quote there was a cause that resulted in a change (effect) and thus a story.

**Metaphors for ‘externalizing’**
Metaphors can be of help in describing a current situation, a self-perception and an analysis of that. Think of the question “What is your biggest monster nowadays?”.

This can be a problematic habit, a pattern, a fear, and so on. A drawing of that monster can be done to help to describe its features. The next phase could be finding out about the characteristics of that ‘monster’ (when does it appear, does it have a voice, can you communicate with it etc.).
These are already steps in externalizing the inhibiting ‘monster’, getting it literally out of the system (“You are not the problem; the problem is the problem”)\(^8\). Thinking about the tactics / strategies of ‘taming’ the monster (or sending it away) can help to make a drawing of the (tamed) monster: how would it look like when you succeed?

**Some important considerations**

**Re-traumatization**
Sometimes our brain cannot distinguish between a re-imagined event and an event occurring in real time. The Hollywood Homeless Youth Partnership (HHYP, 2017) points out that when we tell a powerful story about the past, the emotions and sensations associated with that event may confirm themselves. In the case of traumatic stories this can lead to re-traumatization, which can derail the healing process.

**Growth over hardship**
In connection with the above it can sometimes help to ask the storyteller what part of the story they are most eager to share and make that the centrepiece of the story (HHYP, 2017). This maybe in contradiction with the idea that hardship and pain are ‘ingredients’ that will provoke empathy in an audience. It may seem effective but it can be exhausting for the teller and also quite unethical. Stories of hope, growth and progress are evenly powerful and will uplift both storyteller and audience (HHYP, 2017).

All that requires contextual sensitivity from the facilitator / story practitioner.

We will work with these aspects – sensitivity, ethics, and crafting and then telling a story - in the following chapters.

**What to show, what to tell in unit 5**
Start explaining the ‘Identity as Narrative’, using / showing the six principles McAdams offers (if required, explain the social-constructivist view). Then show the illustration of (the development of) the dominant narrative and move on to the narrative approach, showing the illustration with the alternative narrative. Depending on the group (or individual) and eventual need, choose one or more approach-activities. Allow plenary discussion and individual and collective insights on the effect of the activities.

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In the context of working with individuals and groups at risk stress the necessary prudence when re-traumatization lurks, and how stories of hope and growth can be an alternative route.

Resources:


(Internet)

6. CULTURAL AND CONTEXTUAL SENSITIVITY

As everything is happening in a context (e.g. family, school, work) it is important to understand it, and also the sensitivities that come with that, we will look at important aspects connected to that. The authors we have consulted for that are themselves collectors of the work of valued peers. We will emphasize the necessary attitude of the facilitator / story worker, the essence and variety of power relationships and – being aware of that - the necessary ethical considerations and how to deal with them.

As we wrote in chapter 2, individuals and groups can come from the same culture as yours, but in your work you might encounter individuals from other cultures, sometimes even groups consisting of different cultures. It would be asked too much of you to know everything about their culture (history, laws, art, etc.), but you will have to work with their stories. Having said that, consider gender, literacy, education, religion, profession, age... and – when you work in groups – a possible mixture of all that.

In our introduction we already pointed out ‘power’ and ‘power relationships’ and their influences on he behaviour and well-being of individuals. We also explained what a facilitator / story worker can do (and/or should not do) in different contexts.

Before we shine a different light on power relationships, on ethics and transparency when working with stories of individuals and groups we would like to share two definitions of cultural sensitivity and contextual sensitivity.

Cultural sensitivity
Cultural sensitivity is being aware that cultural differences and similarities between people exist without assigning them a value – positive or negative, better or worse, right or wrong.
It means that one is aware that people are not all the same and that one recognizes that his/her culture is no better than any other culture. In private-, societal and work environments there can be situations where there is a dominant and a secondary culture.
Cultural sensitivity implies that groups understand and respect each other’s characteristics. This can be a challenge for members of dominant cultures.

Contextual sensitivity
The domain of contextual sensitivity implies that people are sensitive to stereotypes and try to unconditionally accept others at face value. We can add qualities like perspective taking, to see the world the way in which others view and perceive things; a tolerance for ambiguity, where people show the ability to accept multiple interpretations of the same situation. And finally, alertness to premature ultimatums: being able and willing to accept ideas or concepts, which inspire further conversations / dialogues.
Contextually sensitive people are able to pick up on emotionally charged language, as well as emotional meanings and implications. They refrain from using manipulative language like cons, double talk and jargon. They do not influence or twist viewpoints or opinions with misleading language, or words and phrases that manipulatively generate a highly emotional appeal for acceptance.
Concluding from that, the most important necessary qualities of a helper/facilitator are:

**Respect**
Respect means stepping back enough to place yourself as an equal towards the other / your audience.

**Humility**
Respecting the other means being humble. Humility is our defense against fear, prejudice and hasty decisions. Humility enables us to listen openly and thoroughly to others, becoming aware of our limits.

**Empathy**
Comparing the own perspective with that of the other – determining what could be of help for the other – is the foundation of higher developed empathy. Empathic listening means disempowering yourself, exercising humility, empowering the other, as we already have pointed out in chapter 4.

**Power relationships revisited**
When working with individuals in (or with a) community, you need be aware that due to the characteristics of your target group (people at risk) there is a big chance a power relationship exists, in which you have a certain level of power over the persons in your community. This can be due to the fact that you have certain information regarding the storytelling activity and its purpose, or due to the fact that you have the power to take decisions that directly affect their lives and well-being.

With regards to the power of information you could potentially give them the following types of information, which is helpful (or not) depending on the situation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YOUR INTEREST</th>
<th>BENEFIT</th>
<th>POWER DIFFERNETIAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HIGH</td>
<td>HIGH</td>
<td>LOW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOW</td>
<td>LOW</td>
<td>HIGH</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Low and high narrative distance**
In short, narrative distance is about making meaning and sense.

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* From Kurtz C. (2014), Working with Stories, Kurtz-Fernhout Publishing

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication [communication] reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.
Low narrative distance is being able to compress information meaningfully, or re-expand compressed information meaningfully. The greater the narrative distance in a story event (or given information), the lesser meaningful the re-expansion will be, meaning that interpretation errors or rejection of your story or information can occur.

**Low and high value perception**
Will you work with people who feel they have to be obeyed or feel ignored? With people who are used to having authority you will have to prove your worthiness. With people who feel ignored or are afraid of letting themselves heard you may have to convince that you really do want to hear their voices.
Some people may not think your work is not as important as you think it is. You may have to sell your work (or project) to draw them in through entertainment and engagement (activities) and creating a sense of purpose.

**Low and high power differential**
How do your participants or clients perceive you? As a friendly helper or a hostile force? Do they feel safe when you ask them to share stories? What about their privacy? Don’t assume that they already know, ask, because people might be more wary than you think.
Also, if you will be talking to two groups (or individuals) and one is more concerned than the other, you might want to use two different methods to talk to them (Kurtz, 2014, p.96-102).\(^\text{10}\)

**Other ethical considerations (HHYP, 2017), and some warnings**
Some people may assume that they earn ‘special status’ in exchange of sharing their story with you or the organization you work for. It can create a clash of expectations and lead to feelings of anger, or even betrayal.

Sometime people can feel implicit pressure to share stories on behalf of an organization. It can jeopardize the relationship between the storyteller and the service you want to provide.

People may have the feeling that they have no longer control of their story once it has been shared, or recorded or even distributed. It may also lead to feeling ‘trapped’ and/or tied to that story, even when it later does not reflect reality.

Be aware of letting a storyteller tell (and share personal information) in an unfamiliar environment. It may provoke unanticipated reactions from the audience and can be harmful to the teller.

Sharing stories via (social) media can be a challenge and a threat. Once it is out there, it will be there in the future as well. People move on in their lives, and being tied to and connected with old stories will not reflect their reality.

**Asking consent**
Be sure you have offered and received consent to ensure the storyteller understands their rights and the potential; impact of sharing their story.

\(^{10}\text{For more details, read Kurtz C. (2014), Working with Stories, Kurtz-Fernhout Publishing.}\)
In storytelling sessions
Create a safe space for the teller to process their experiences after sharing (the story does not end here) and give support to any emotions that may rise. And always: be sure to have a trained facilitator present at all story telling and story collecting sessions.

Examples of how to map power relationships

The left illustration is an example of a ‘Chapati diagram’ and depicts the importance of all involved in a community and their (power) relationships. You can find more examples of mapping in the RSRC manual (Frühmann et al., 2016, p. 99). The illustration to the right depicts a personal map, meaning that an individual (who in this case can be a story worker) maps his/her environment for potential helpers in storytelling / story-collecting projects or those who might slow down the progress.

WHERE TO MEET

As we already pointed out in the introduction chapter, it is important for find a proper place to meet the people you are going to work with. It’s important to find a place / venue that contributes to connection, fosters trust building between individuals, highlights common ground and can generate (new) values. Some call that the third place:

Third places are “anchors” of community life and facilitate and foster broader, more creative interaction. All societies already have informal meeting places; what is new in modern times is the intentionality of seeking them out as vital to current societal needs.

Oldenburg (1989, 1991) suggests the following hallmarks of a true "third place":

- Free or inexpensive
- Food and drink, while not essential, are important
- Highly accessible: proximate for many (walking distance)
- Involving regulars – those who habitually congregate there
- Welcoming and comfortable

WHEN YOU MEET

Finding a common language
Selecting the right tools for working with stories with your community especially when they belong to different cultural groups or different educational backgrounds is important. Based upon these traits the tools selected for collecting stories are different, e.g. drawing is appropriate for those who have low literacy skills, using photo stories is not appropriate if they do not have access to a camera, etc. Highlighted tools and their purpose are (see appendix for handouts).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diary</strong></td>
<td>Personal and group: Discovering stories in daily life, reflect on and connect to topic / issues. 'There is a story in everything.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Four Buckets</strong></td>
<td>Personal and group: Presenting oneself and building trust and connection. Also discovering similarities and patterns within community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Letters and Conversations</strong></td>
<td>In intercultural and inter-communal settings. Read stories first before judging and start a conversation from there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Story Circle</strong></td>
<td>Explore and share individual and collective experiences that had or will have impact on the community. 'Food for thought' for sensemaking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appreciative Stories</strong></td>
<td>Collect stories of success and best practices. ‘Food for thought’ for sensemaking, but also for future actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tree of Life</strong></td>
<td>Enables to let people speak about their lives in ways that make them stronger. A strong approach that works in different contexts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Photo Story</strong></td>
<td>Document your community through photos to identify concerns and stories connected to those.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, the use of music or pantomime can be helpful to overcome communication problems related to language and can be used as alternatives for drawing an important moment e.g. explain an important moment through a song or music that reflects what one felt at the moment, or ask to use pantomime to express their feelings.

**The importance of proper questioning**
As we explained in chapter 4, eliciting stories from others and story collecting starts with asking questions, they are the basis of every story, told or listened to. Questions serve a purpose, in the same sense as the answer does, and therefore they have the power to direct, manipulate or disempower people's stories. It is therefore of utmost importance to find the proper way of asking questions, i.e. asking them in such a way that they do not exercise the aforementioned power over someone’s story.

There are different types of questions relevant in your interaction with your beneficiaries. You can find them in the appendix.

**What to show, what to tell in unit 6**
It is important to highlight the aspects of contextual and cultural sensitivity, respect, humility, empathy and power relationships, narrative distance and value perception first (include short definitions in Powerpoint / Prezi) before you show the Ethics and Transparency table (Powerpoint / Prezi).
Before starting the interviews / witnessing sessions explain (and hand out) the tools table and hand out the question table to facilitate the session.

**Resources:**
(Internet)

7. CRAFTING NEW STORIES

This chapter concludes the course curriculum. Now you should be ready to start working with your client(s) on an alternative narrative and/or a feasible and positive future story. In chapter 1 we have introduced you a number of possible (universal) story structures. Now we will introduce other helpful structures and tools to help you – or better: your client(s) - to tell and craft new narratives and stories. Anticipation, planning and strategy will be important elements in this (last) phase.

The elements of a story - a reminder
In the universal structures - like the folk story, the Hero's Journey, and the Actant Model – you will remember that every story needs actors. We can give them different descriptions: the hero, the protagonist; the adversary, competitor, enemy, antagonist; the helpers, collaborators; the benefactors, promoters; the beneficiaries, the clients.
We also need ‘landscapes’ for the actions, the ‘where’s, the directions, places and (final) destinations.
Time is another element: ‘when’ did it happen, how much time in and between actions, or do we travel in time (back and forth)?
Tools (to handle) or devices (to inform, travel etc.) are other elements to consider.
Emotions and feelings (love, hate, fear, joy, doubts etc.) of the actors should also be taken in consideration.

Perspective taking
There are at least two sides to perspective taking. Considering those can help you in preparing your story, and maybe also the choice of where you will tell that story.

1. As we have learned from the Actant Model, we can choose to tell a story from the perspective of the teller / onlooker. Or choose the perspective of one of the actors (first person), even the perspective of an object... In all those cases this would require a certain amount of compassion or empathy (feeling what the actor must be experiencing / feeling).

2. Another aspect is your audience. When you tell a story you could also consider the composition of your audience and imagine how they would experience and/or perceive your version and expression of the story. How would you tell the same story to small children, adolescent, elderly, all female, politicians, business people, low literate or a blind audiences? It will influence your use of language, your choice of words and how complex or simple you choose to tell.

Working on future stories
Remember the overview of story functions we have given, e.g. connecting, informing, consoling, inspiring...
When it comes to future stories obviously all functions / purposes of a story play a part, but we would like to emphasize some a bit more.

Anticipation
In our introduction we were talking about the ‘element of play' in stories, and specifically ‘anticipation': we try to think ahead in certain situations, among other things to be prepared for unexpected changes, either in the behaviour of others, changes in the environment or – for example – defects in devices or tools.
Planning
In anticipation of that we (or the hero) have to make plans: what is our desired state or final destination (our goal / objective)? When do we want to arrive? What will be our milestones on the way, when do we want to arrive there, and what could be obstacles and/or adversaries on our way? Who could be our helpers?

Strategy
When we have a plan, we should start mapping the necessary actions to achieve our milestones, hurdle obstacles and defeat adversaries. How will we recruit helpers? As we know, stories (and quests) sometimes keep surprises in store – think of bifurcations and thus unexpected events and choices. Do we have at least one alternative strategy?

Visualising your story
Visualising not only helps to develop richer descriptions, during development it also helps to mark the essential waypoints in a story, remember: setting, actors, crisis, action, change, transformation, and resolution.
It also helps in the case of low literate or illiterate clients or groups, because nothing has to be written. Everybody can draw more or less, we are not making ‘pieces of art’.
Visualising milestones (illustrations, photos, videos) will also help when you have to tell that future story, to any audience. And by visualising we don’t mean texts, bullets and histograms, if really necessary keep those for hand-outs after your story.

FUTURE STORY STRUCTURING AND BUILDING AIDS
In the following we offer you a few reliable options that have been applied over and over by professionals in the story telling and -working field.

The Story Spine (Hutchens, 2015)\(^1\)
This is more or less the ‘Hollywood scenario’ formula.
  a. (setting) Once upon a time.../ Every day...
  b. (catalyst event / crisis) But one day...
  c. (action from that) Because of that.../ And because of that.../ And then...
  d. (climax / moment of change / transformation) Until finally...
  e. (key learning / resolution / desired state / new world) And that is why / when...

Story skeleton
Story skeletons help breaking the story down into easily remembered chunks with important elements (moments of change) of the story. Remember, you can also draw these elements to help you describe richer.
The 5-part skeleton resembles very much the folk story structure:
Opening (setting) – rising action (the theme / formulation of desired state) – climax (change) – falling action (the real transformation) – ending (conclusion, resolution, desired state achieved).

\(^1\) Hutchens D. (2015), The Circle of the Nine Muses, p. 165
**Bottom up story**
Take a large sheet of paper and enough colour pens.
Look at what you want to achieve first and put it on top of the sheet. Then start working upwards. Where are you now, what do you need, who can help, what could be obstacles and/or adversaries, how (and with whom) can you tackle them. Define the necessary actions and look where the moment will be where the change sets in or the transformation takes place.

Use also illustrations (as good as you can), they can help in telling the story.
On the basis of that, write stories for yourself and each other and let the person whose story it will be choose the story he or she thinks fits best to achieve his or her purpose. It could be the story she has crafted herself, it can also be the story someone else has crafted for her. Then try to tell that story to your group in your own words until you have made it your own.
Then test it on the bigger group.

**What to show, what to tell in unit 7**
Start with a warming up by repeating the story structures and through the exercises create the feeling again of structuring and telling a story. Then offer the story-crafting methods. Depending on the group, let them form sub-groups or work individually on a story, which can be a (new) culture story, an alternative story, a future story, a solution story etc.
For the bottom-up story show the video from the PowerPoint.
Groups / individuals share the stories plenary, every story should be celebrated by all. Make it a Story Feast!

**Resources:**

Internet)

APPENDIX

The importance of proper questioning
Eliciting stories from others and story collecting starts with asking questions, they are the basis of every story, told or listened to. Questions serve a purpose, in the same sense as the answer does, and therefore they have the power to direct, manipulate or disempower people’s stories. It is therefore of utmost importance to find the proper way of asking questions, i.e. asking them in such a way that they do not exercise the aforementioned power over someone’s story.

There are different types of questions relevant in your interaction with your beneficiaries; the table below gives a short overview:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of question</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Situations in which they are useful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Closed questions</td>
<td>• Can be answered with a single word or short phrase;</td>
<td>• Opening a conversation: e.g. Where do you live?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Gives facts;</td>
<td>• To test understanding: e.g. So, you want to move in with us?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Are easy and quick to answer;</td>
<td>• Setting up a desired frame of mind (positive or negative): e.g. Are you happy with your current job?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• You keep control of the conversation with the questions</td>
<td>• To achieve closure of a persuasion: If I deliver this tomorrow, will you sign now?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open questions</td>
<td>• Begins with <em>what, why, how, describe.</em></td>
<td>• Follow-up of a closed question: e.g. What do you like about the place where you live?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Deliberately seeks a long answer (and is likely to get one);</td>
<td>• To find out more about a person: e.g. What is keeping you awake these days?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Asks the respondent to think and reflect;</td>
<td>• To get people to realise the extent of a problem: e.g. What would happen if your customers complained even more?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Gives opinions and feelings;</td>
<td>• To show that you are concerned: e.g. How have you been after your hospitalisation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Hands control of the conversation to the respondent.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directed questions</td>
<td>• Directly asks someone about a topic/issue</td>
<td>Examples:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undirected question</td>
<td>• Asks about experiences;</td>
<td>• Was there a time when you were surprised how connected you were to the community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Slight similarity with open questions;</td>
<td>• Did you ever wonder about the reasons for this reorganisation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mostly delivers emotions and honest reflections;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Answers can only be partly about topics relevant to the project/activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication [communication] reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.
Dealing with opinions

When working with your beneficiaries, you might get opinions rather than stories. It is the stories on how they reached this opinion that are of interest. Thus, when someone expresses an opinion, questioning (using the types of questions above or a combination of them) will allow you to gain interesting insights to reflect upon.

Questions that elicit a story in this case can be: “Tell us about the time when you first understood about the effects of ……?”; “Did you have another view at another point in time and when did it change?”; “Yes that is your opinion, but what would be an example?”.

The following question can elicit a story when an opinion is stated: “Yes, that’s your opinion, but what would be an example?” And for more concrete questions, Paul Andrew Costello (2015, Worldwide Storywork) offers alternatives like:

• Tell us about the time when you first understood about how ...... effects ......?
• Who has helped to shape your opinion on ...... and how / when / where did this happen?
• Have you always felt this way?
• Was there a time when you had a different view and when did it change?