

The Power of Storytelling: Fostering Connection in a Polarized World

Productive Dialogue in a Polarized World
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“Stories Change Hearts and Hearts Change Minds.”
-- Anonymous

Why Storytelling?

- **Meaning making**
Basic human strategy for coming to terms with fundamental elements of our experience
- **Humanization and the potential for social change**
Relationship between humanization and structural change
- **The individual as the universal**
Particular individual circumstances can be “so common and so powerful”
- **Social bonding in a complex world**
Community cohesion



Use of Storytelling in Northern Ireland

- In lieu of a formal truth recovery process
- As a tool for bridging divides
- As a catalyst for innovation within the peace process
- To create grassroots infrastructure for change processes



Who participated

- Ex-combatants
- Security forces
- Those injured or bereaved by conflict-related violence
- “Lesser known” stories
 - Families of those “on the run”
 - First responders
 - Clergy
 - Mediators, peacebuilders and community workers
- “Hard to reach” populations
 - Protestant paramilitaries
 - Men

Case Studies

Impact of narrative approaches in:

- promoting understanding in cases of deep division
- creating new community narratives in cases of intractable conflict.





Storytelling Approaches

- Encounter-based workshops
- Creative tools processes
- Oral / life history projects
- Public processes (i.e. Ten x 9)



Significance of storytelling in developing empathy

- Re-framing from issues to human experience
- Acknowledgement of impact
- Deepening understanding of personal perspectives, but also history, culture, politics, ideologies, etc.
- Potential for healing
- Commitment to mutual transformation



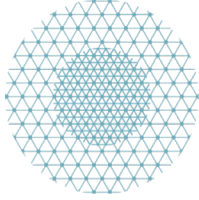
Guiding principles for storytelling work

- Ethical underpinnings and safer space
 - Do no harm
 - Consider trauma-informed practices
- Effective preparation and facilitation
 - Informed consent
 - Representative facilitation
 - Equality of voice
- Guiding principles/contracting
 - Self-determination
 - Respect for right to share lived experience
 - Speaking for yourself
 - Lack of interruption
 - Confidentiality
- Focused follow-up and support
- Continued meaning making

Listening exercise

“Inquiry-based listening”

- Invite the group to move into pairs.
- Invite the first person to share a story/thoughts on a particular theme for 10 minutes.
- Invite the second person to reply with:
 1. A statement of affirmation or support
 2. A question for clarity or deeper learning
- Switch and repeat the process.



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Questions and follow-up:

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