

The Power of Storytelling

Explore the power of storytelling for building trust, exploring our situations, expressing our assets and strengths.



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2009 AAISA Provincial Conference
Enhancing Client Centered Services in Challenging Times
October 22 - 23

Story Telling Tools

Introduction

Storytelling is universal and is the great equalizer in that experience or ideas can be communicated in a very simple manner. As we share our stories we are able to explore our situation, build bridges with others and communicate our story in a safe and empowering way.

Story telling can used in multiple ways and can be:

1. Inclusion of both the person telling the story and the ones listening. The story teller is able to include her/himself even if shy for her/his focus is about having the story unfold. Listeners are included as they participate.
2. Explanatory – Stories allow the listener to get the information easier. A story is embedded with unspoken information that the listener is able to not through the contextual nature of the story. Through the same method complex information can be given simply through a story.
3. Creative – Stories access both the language and creative centers of the brain. Stories allow most people to receive more varied and detailed information through this means.
4. Stories can be informal or structured and any variation of the two. Stories are unlimited in how they can be used. By changing the perimeters in which the story is presented, the shared information can be focused into varied or different result.

Storytelling as a tool can be used in a wide range of applications, such as:

- Employment programs
 - ✓ Assessment process – storytelling allows the counsellor to ask questions of the client in such a way that the client relates their background in a way that helps them recognize the transferable skills they have from previous experience to use in making a successful transition to a new culture.
 - ✓ Exploration of workplace skills – allows clients to investigate successes they have had in the past, workplace achievements and what they are most proud of in their work
 - ✓ Preparation for Behavioural Descriptive Interview Process – this process is basically a story telling process and is an excellent technique for the newcomer or immigrant to explain to the employer what they did and the results they obtained in their work in their home countries in a way that the employer can relate to
- Life skills and other training programs
 - ✓ Builds trust and creates a common bond so that clients can safely learn new skills in a strange and new culture
 - ✓ Learn different storytelling techniques that are appropriate for the situation. When clients tell their story with their own story telling technique they are more open to learning how to reframe the story so that it is appropriate for the situation. Story telling in employment is different than story telling in counseling, etc.
 - ✓ Reaffirms the skills that people bring with them to help them analysis new situations, develop actions plans and learn new communication skills and problem solving skills

- Settlement services
 - ✓ Reaffirms for clients the positive reasons they have chosen to settle in a new country and the strengths they bring to survive and thrive in a new country
 - ✓ Allows clients to put a context to the loss and change process they go through when settling in a new country
- Language programs
 - ✓ Provide a safe mechanism for practicing a new language
 - ✓ Builds confidence and improves language acquisition and vocabulary

In the presentation we will explore three types of storytelling and their possible benefits. These as well as a few other examples are given in the handouts.

There are no limits to the ways storytelling can be used to bring about desired results. Be creative, enjoy the process and see the learning that can occur.

Storytelling Tools

Behavioural Descriptive Interviewing

Lorraine Moulding

Purpose: Story telling in interviewing is a powerful tool that lets the employer know what skills and experience a candidate has and how the candidate can contribute to the bottom line. There is a formal interview process called Behavioural Descriptive Interviewing that incorporates storytelling. This technique is based on the theory that how we behave in the past is how we will behave in the future. Therefore as an employer if I ask the potential candidate to tell me how they did something in the past or give me examples from their previous work experience I can determine if they have the skills and experience I am looking for and more importantly if they are a fit for the job and my company.

This is an excellent interviewing technique for newcomers to use. They are telling their employment story in a format and a way that the employer relates to and transitions their international experience into a context that the Canadian employer can understand.

Objective: To be able as a facilitator to reformat a client's story about their previous work experience into the behavioural descriptive format and demonstrate to the client how to do this for themselves.

Behavioural Interviewing Format:

1. *Situation/problem*
2. *Action taken*
3. *Results obtained*

Process: Two ways to prepare for this format might be:

1. Look back on your work history and think of stories that reflect accomplishments, results or things that you are proud of, or that your friends or colleagues have told you that you do well. Then write then down using the format:
 - ✓ What was the situation or problem I was solving,
 - ✓ What were the actions I took to solve the situation/problem and
 - ✓ What were the results
2. Review job postings that you are interested in and think of stories from your past work history that demonstrate you have done that particular job requirement. Then write the stories down using the same format.

Example:

Situation: *At my last position my boss asked me to take on a special account costing project that needed to be completed in two weeks. This was a very tight timeline as I also needed to continue with my current projects.*

Action Taken: *I reviewed my current project schedule to see if I could make any changes in the scheduling without negative impact. I was able to move one project forward. Then I met with my boss and reviewed the scope of the project I was asked to take on and also what resources were available for me to manage it. I developed a project schedule to keep me on task and on time. I e-mailed all disciplines involved in the project to request information that I needed to complete the costing.*

Result: *I was able to complete the account costing within the deadline without any negative impact on my other projects.*

Storytelling Tools

PATH – Planning Alternate Tomorrows with Hope

Maria Mora

I have found the PATH method successful with most clients I have worked with and language is not an issue. Our newcomers are focused in that idea of the Canadian experience and forget their skills. Somehow the Canadian experience is a big block and they are stuck. When I start talking about the positive and recognizing when you planned to come to Canada, you came with the dream and then got stuck. This helps remove the barrier.

Touch the dream (1)

Every newcomer comes with a dream. In the dream there are no barriers, you are speaking the language, and you are working in that dream job that you want to do. You are vacationing and visiting with relatives. You are in the comfortable stage that you have overcome. You have adapted into your new home which is Canada. In this process you **celebrate your end success, your dream.**

Sense the goal (2)

This starts with planning, a lot of dedication, doing the **homework**. What does it take to be there, what skills? What do you need? Asking yourself if you can do it all alone or are you going to be looking for support. Some people have families and there are immigrant serving agencies or other agencies – where you can see Career Practitioners, Settlement Practitioners or others that will help you in your path and the steps to achieve that dream.

Ground it in the now (3) and Identify people to enrol (4)

It goes back to right now. **You are here.** Find out as much as you can about information on settling, your community, where your community centre is, and what kinds of programs do they offer. Can you volunteer and what are the benefits?

Then you will **meet others** that might be in the same stage as you or even longer in Canada than you and they are someone you can ask questions to. I always add that if you don't ask then you will always be with a doubt that you don't know.

Recognize ways to build strength (5)

Write down your **strengths**, all the positive skills. You are dedicated, punctual, etc.

On the other side of the paper write what do you need to learn? Maybe leadership, speaking skills, or writing skills... what do you really need? Recognizing this is what you are lacking and will do to reach your dream/goals.

Chart action for the next few months (6) and Commit to the first step (7)

Do you need to do it immediately, or will it take time. **Begin to work** on those skills you can and do not forget to plan long term goals.

Once you identify your primary needs then **commit your time** to that investigation because this is your new home and you will find you need to find ways to adapt to be successful here.

Story Telling Tools

Sharing Stories of Self and Others in Similar Situations

Hayat Amer

As a settlement practitioner and meeting with newcomers, my own experience is the lack of extended family and friends. Newcomers come looking for somebody to talk out their problems with. As a settlement practitioner my goal is to listen and to build the trust with these clients. I start sharing my own stories and our newcomers' stories to comfort them to pave the message **you are not alone**. Then they start feeling confident in sharing their own story.

During their story I repeat some key words so they can hear it back from me – how it sounds and that I understand the situation correctly. Most of them are not looking for someone to solve their problems. They are seeking for a good listener and understanding person. Because most immigrants and people grow up with what happened inside stays inside. We don't have professional counsellors in some cultures we have extended family and seniors – we consider them wise people and to take their advice. They simply need to trust and talk it out!

Most of the time they thank me for listening to them. At first I didn't feel that I added value to them but they say they are grateful to feel comfortable and to understand what is bothering them, especially related to family issues. Now I know the value is great.

Sharing is appropriate at *all times* as long as personal information is disguised to have identity remain confidential. In group settings people say this is an example instead of this is my problem. Listening without judgment is crucial.

They benefit by rebuilding their self esteem and knowing their lives have to go on. Examples of others who have experienced the same problem or same situation and move on with their lives and participate in society and is a good example.

Benefits:

- To build trust – they are not alone
- Rebuild self esteem
- Build friendship/s
- Open eyes to what is available
- Find ways to meet their needs
- Network
- Connecting with the community
- Become aware of resources and services

Possible Situations:

- Mismanagement of finances
- Family abuse
- Family violence
- Trying to get pregnant
- Etc.

The Picture Tells the Story

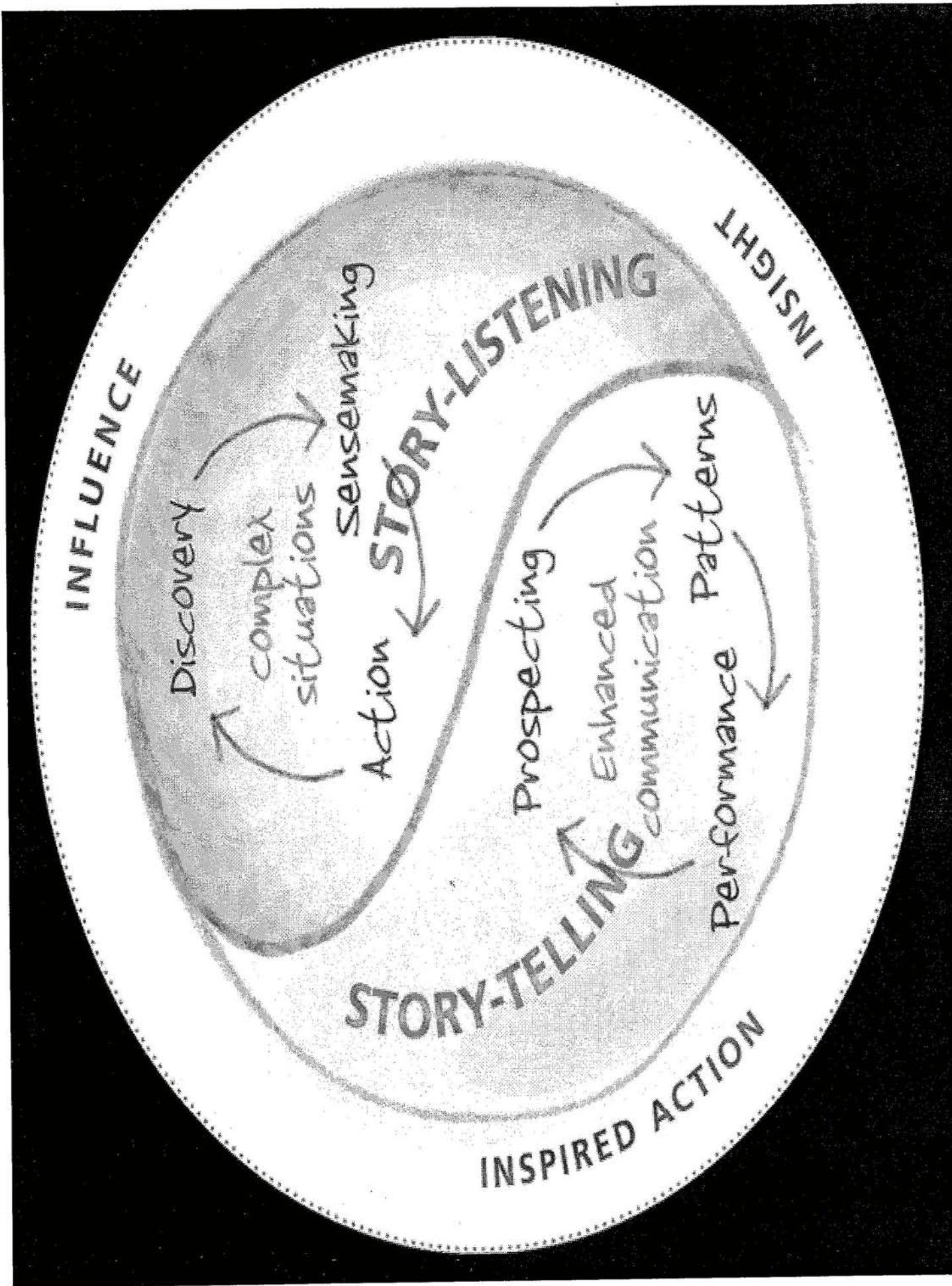
Purpose: Story telling is a powerful way to generate discussion about an issue or when doing community development work. Sometimes people may be reluctant to share their ideas or just not know how to get started. Drawing a picture of what they want the end result to look like is a quick and easy way to engage people in a lively discussion.

Objective: To be able as a facilitator to generate discussion quickly and in a way that people feel safe sharing their thoughts and feelings.

Process:

1. To do this exercise you need large sheets of paper for people to draw on and lots of different coloured markers. They should ideally be in groups of about 5 to 8 people around a table so they can share the pictures they draw. Once everyone is around a table and each person has a piece of paper and markers introduce the topic. Then tell them they have one minute to draw a picture of what it would look like if the issue was solved. It is important that they do this quickly as the quicker they do it the more ideas they will come up with. This activity taps into the right side of the brain and is very creative. Emphasis that we are not interested in how good the picture looks we are only looking for ideas. You will need to keep track of the time and urge people to work quickly. You may end up giving them two to three minutes to complete their picture. The one minute rule is to get them to work quickly and focus on their ideas not their drawing.
2. Once their picture is done each person shares their picture with everyone else around the table. Have a recorder keep track of major themes that emerge and other ideas.
3. Then have the recorder report to all the other tables about the major themes and other ideas that emerged from their table.
4. As facilitator you should be recording the main themes that are emerging and any other ideas.
5. The whole process should take from half an hour to 45 minutes to complete.

Example: *You may be facilitating a group of moms who are gathered to discuss their childcare needs. If you have more than 8 people divide them up into groups of from 5 to 8 people, with each group around a table. Give everyone a large piece of paper and lots of markers. Explain that you are gathered here today to discuss their concerns with childcare and what they would like to see done about their concerns. Ask them to think about what it would look like if all their childcare needs were solved. Then say “You have one minute to draw a picture of this on the paper in front of you. Don’t worry about costs or who is going to do the work. Just draw a picture of what it would look like if you had no childcare concerns and your children were well cared for. And you have one minute to do this. Please start now.” Give them a couple of minutes to complete their drawing and then ask them to share their drawing with the people at their table. Then if it is a big enough group do steps 3 and 4 from above.*



INFLUENCE

INSIGHT

Discovery

complex situations

Sensemaking

Action

STORY-LISTENING

Prospecting

Enhanced communication

Patterns

Performance

STORY-TELLING

INSPIRED ACTION

With Thanks to Shawn Callahan